

Women within International Sports Federations: Contemporary Challenges

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Introduction: gender balance and equality in sport

Considerable progress towards gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in sport can be observed over the past century. The participation of women in the Olympic Games has increased steadily since their first appearance in 1900, where they comprised only 2.2 per cent of the athletes. More than a century later, every National Olympic Committee (NOC) sent at least one female athlete to the London 2012 Olympic Games. At the Rio 2016 Olympic Games, women outnumbered men in the delegations of several countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia or China. With 4,700 out of 10,500 athletes, female athlete representation approached 50 per cent. And finally, the Buenos Aires 2018 Youth Olympic Games are the first in the history of the Olympic Games to have a sports programme with complete gender equality amongst athletes.

The positive evolution of female participation and representation in elite sport reflects general social changes such as mothers working (not solely to gain income) and women's ascension to leadership positions.¹ The extent and impact of opportunities for women in sport at every level varies considerably depending on a nation's culture, context and history. In several countries, legal interventions have proved to be useful tools as they have resulted in increasing numbers of girls and women playing sports: in the US, Title IX of the Education

¹ Jose Carbajal, "Women and Work: Ascending to Leadership Positions," *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 28, no. 1(2018): 12–27.

Amendments of 1972 aimed at preventing gender discrimination in sport participation.² In 2013, France made the implementation of a feminization action plan mandatory for every national federation, thus asserting the willingness of the government to promote the development of women's sport.³ Norway can be considered a pioneer in fostering gender equity in sport through legal interventions. In 1984, the Norwegian Olympic and Paralympic Committee and Confederation of Sports (NIF) appointed its first Women's Commission. This development was triggered by the Norwegian Governance Act on Gender Equality of 1979, and the addition of an article in 1981 stipulating the presence of a minimum 4 per cent of each sex on public bodies' committees, governing boards and councils with four or more members. During the 1987 NIF General Assembly, the same quota system was adopted.⁴ At an international level, in 1995 the International Olympic Committee (IOC) created the Women in Sport Commission, which has the objective of promoting the inclusion of women in, and their benefiting from, sport and physical activity. As a final example, the Olympic Agenda 2020, the strategic roadmap for the Olympic Movement, also reaffirms the commitment towards gender balance in sport.⁵

Although progress in the participation of women in sport, and particularly in elite sport, is undeniable, women's representation in the governance of sport is still lagging behind. In 1981

² Lisa Rubin and Nancy Lough, "Perspectives of the Title IX Pioneers: Equity, Equality, and Need," *Journal of Intercollegiate Sport* 8, no. 2 (2015): 109–30.

³ Ministère des droits des femmes, de la ville, de la jeunesse et des sports. Panorama sur les plans de féminisation des fédérations sportives, accessed October 28, 2018, <http://www.sports.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/planfem.pdf>

⁴ Mari Kristin Sisjord, Kari Fasting and Svela Trond Sand. "The Impact of Gender Quotas in Leadership in Norwegian Organised Sport." *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics* 9, no. 3 (2017): 505–19.

⁵ Accessed October 29, 2018, https://stillmed.olympic.org/Documents/Olympic_Agenda_2020/Olympic_Agenda_2020-20-20_Recommendations-ENG.pdf

the first two women, Ms Flor Isava-Fonseca (representing Venezuela) and Ms Pirjo Haeggman (representing Finland), were co-opted as IOC Members.⁶ It took another nine years until the first woman, Ms Flor Isava Fonseca, was elected as a full member of the IOC Executive Commission in 1990.⁷ Despite these first concessions at the highest level of international sport governance, it was the first World Conference on Women and Sport, a conference by women for women held in Brighton in 1994, that laid the foundation of international mobilization towards gender equity in sports governance. With regard to the inclusion of women in decision-making and the management of sport, the Brighton Declaration stated that “those responsible for [leadership and decision-making in all sport and sport-related organizations] should develop policies and programs and design structures which increase the number of women coaches, advisers, decision makers, officials, administrators and sports personnel at all levels with special attention given to recruitment, development and retention.”⁸ As sports scholar Johanna Adriaanse⁹ notes, “underlying this principle was the assumption that when more women assume leadership positions, they have a voice in shaping policy, allocating resources and developing programmes, and in this way accelerate gender equity in sport.” The conference on Women and Sport in Sydney in 2010 showed that progress towards more women in key sport leadership positions had stagnated. To tackle this stagnation, the Sydney Scoreboard was created, a global index that tracks women’s representation in sport governance and

⁶ Accessed October 29, 2018, <https://www.olympic.org/women-in-sport/background/key-dates>

⁷ Accessed October 29, 2018, <https://www.olympic.org/women-in-sport/background/key-dates>

⁸ International Working Group on Women and Sport (IWG). Brighton Declaration on Women and Sport. Accessed October 2018:

<http://iwg-gti.org/index.php/iwg-content/cid/117/the-brighton-declaration-on-women-and-sport/>

⁹ Johanna Adriaanse, “Europe in World Perspective: the Sydney Scoreboard Global Index for Women in Sport Leadership.” In Agnes Elling, Jorid Hovden and Annelies Knoppers (eds.), *Gender Diversity in European Sport Governance* (London: Routledge, 2018): 12.

management.¹⁰ The Brighton Declaration was also updated in 2014 to the Brighton Plus Helsinki Declaration that recommends urging the international sporting community to take immediate and concrete actions in order to accelerate positive change.¹¹

Parallel to social changes, legal interventions and measures were made at the highest decision-making levels (state, ministries, IOC) and different initiatives were taken by sports organizations, showing their concern with the question of low female representation in sport governing bodies. One popular action was the creation of women / gender / equality commissions by national and international sports organizations as well as the implementation of gender quotas and targets.¹² In 1997, the IOC established gender targets for NOCs, international federations (IF) and national federations (NF) affiliated to the Olympic movement. Those sports organizations were supposed to count at least 10 per cent of women at their respective decision-making level by 2001 and 20 per cent by 2005. In 2009, 56 per cent of the NOCs and 63 per cent of the IFs declared that they had adopted a formal equity policy.¹³ However, the proportion of women within the executive committees in both NOCs and IFs was only at approximately 18 per cent. Consequently, the minimum target of 20 per cent recommended by the IOC had not been reached. According to the Sydney Scoreboard and based on data from 76 IFs, the average percentage of women directors increased from 12 per cent in 2012 to 13 per cent in 2014. At a national level, the average percentage of women directors

¹⁰ Accessed October 2018, <http://www.sydneyscoreboard.com/>

¹¹ Accessed October 2018, <https://iwg--gti-org/bin.directo.fi/@Bin/4b98ee03a2a7902c2a0783231add9010/1540914904/application/pdf/373320/Helsinki%20calls%20the%20world%20of%20sport%20to%20LEAD%20THE%20CHANGE,%20BE%20THE%20CHANGE.pdf>

¹² Johanna Adriaanse and Toni Schofield, "The Impact of Gender Quotas on Gender Equality in Sport Governance," *Journal of Sport Management* 28, no. 5 (2014): 485–97.

¹³ Ian Henry and Leigh Robinson, *Gender Equity and Leadership in Olympic Bodies* (Loughborough University and the IOC, 2010).

increased from 19.7 per cent in 2010 to 20.7 per cent in 2014. Though the number of women on sports governing bodies has visibly increased, it has done so at a slower rate compared to the numbers of elite female athletes and the change remains small. Despite these improvements, women are still heavily under-represented in sport governance. In terms of gendered cultural practices, sport used to be and still is one of the most hegemonic institutions.¹⁴

Gender policies in sports organizations

This section gives an overview of studies that have examined whether initiatives taken by sports organizations, such as embedding formal policies in their statutes, contribute to a positive change towards greater gender equity. Examples of formal policies include the creation of Women and Sport Commissions and quotas. In 2009, 75 per cent of the NOCs and 50 per cent of the IFs had established a “Women in Sport Commission” or a similar body.¹⁵ While this is generally a positive trend, it is also due to the pressure put on these organizations to align with IOC guidelines. The creation of those commissions further bears a specific risk: the work of Women in Sport Commissions may be perceived as being solely or predominantly a set of tasks undertaken by women for women.¹⁶ Henry and Robinson¹⁷ therefore recommend “rebranding” those commissions as “Equity Commissions” in order to encourage men to be equally involved

¹⁴ Moran Betzer-Tayar, Sima Zach, Yair Galily, and Ian Henry, “Barriers to Women’s Access to Decision-making Positions in Sport Organizations: the Case of Establishing a Girls’ Volleyball Academy in Israel,” *Journal of Gender Studies* 26, no. 4 (2017): 418–31; Georges Cunningham, *Diversity in Sport Organizations* (London: Routledge, 2010); Sally Shaw and Wendy Frisby, “Can Gender Equity Be More Equitable?: Promoting an Alternative Frame for Sport Management Research, Education, and Practice,” *Journal of Sport Management*, 20 (2006): 483–509.

¹⁵ Henry and Robinson, “*Gender Equity and Leadership*.”

¹⁶ Henry and Robinson, “*Gender Equity and Leadership*.”

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

in and concerned with achieving greater gender diversity in sports organizations.

Quotas or representation rules for committees and boards represent another initiative implemented by several sports organizations. Previous studies suggest that quotas and representation rules constitute efficient tools to enforce change or redistribution within an organization.¹⁸ Sotiriadou, De Haan and Knoppers¹⁹ see in these formal policies not only a means to make a shift towards equal representation of women and men in terms of numbers. Quotas and representation rules also move past practices of ideological lip service to actual equality. Their findings are in accordance with a study by Ottesen, Skirstad, Pfister, and Habermann²⁰ showing that equal opportunity plans in Sweden and quota schemes in Norway had a positive impact not only on gender ratios (that is the percentage share of women in leadership positions) but also on attitudes towards equal opportunities (that is equal chances for both genders to be hired) in sports organizations. A question that remains unanswered at this point is whether quotas and targets to involve more women in sports organizations represent a long-term solution. As Henry et al.²¹ reveal, the adoption of minimum targets had a clear impact on the numbers of women but the benefits were often short-lived because women who left the organization were not necessarily replaced by other women.

¹⁸ See for example: Siri Terjesen, Ruth Aguilera and Ruth Lorenz, “Legislating a Woman’s Seat on the Board: Institutional Factors Driving Gender Quotas for Boards of Directors,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 128, no. 2 (2015): 233–51.

¹⁹ Popi Sotiriadou, Donna De Haan and Annelies Knoppers, *Understanding and Redefining the Role of Men in Achieving Gender Equity in Sport Leadership* (Final Report for the IOC Olympic Studies Center, 2017).

²⁰ Laila Ottesen, Berit Skirstad, Gertrud Pfister and Ulla Habermann, “Gender Relations in Scandinavian Sport Organisations: A Comparison of the Situation and Policies in Denmark, Norway and Sweden,” *Sport in Society* 13, no. 4 (2010): 657–75.

²¹ Ian Henry, Wirdati Radzi, Emma Rich, Chris Shelton, Eleni Theodoraki and Anita White, *Women, Leadership and the Olympic Movement* (Loughborough: Institute of Sport and Leisure Policy, Loughborough University and the IOC, 2004).

The discussion and implementation of gender policies within sports organizations over recent decades demonstrates that gender equality in sport has gained exponential support worldwide. This evolution is part of a broader societal context in which gender equity has become an important topic of debate, as shown in the fact that many Western countries (88 countries in 2002) have adopted quota policies for women in the political sphere. The willingness to work towards greater gender diversity in sport governance is claimed by many sports organizations. Results seem particularly visible at a national and international level, but the impact of gender policies seems low at a local level.²² Moreover, important differences can be observed between countries, with four countries obtaining a minimum of 30 per cent of women directors on their national sport organizations' boards (Sweden, Fiji, Norway and the Cook Islands) and, on the opposite side, six countries having less than 10 per cent women directors (Czech Republic, San Marino, Poland, Croatia, Japan, and Bangladesh).²³ Overall, it seems that the situation has improved over the last decade, however, and that gender equity is not any longer 'at the bottom of the list'²⁴ for sports organizations.

Social and individual barriers to gender equity in sports organizations

A number of researchers directly relate prevailing social practices to low numbers of women in sports governance and leadership positions. By conducting a literature review on organizational processes and discourse to understand why there are so few women in leadership positions

²² Sisjord, Fasting and Sand. "The Impact of Gender Quotas."

²³ Johanna Adriaanse, "Gender Diversity in the Governance of Sport Associations: The Sydney Scoreboard Global Index of Participation," *Journal of Business Ethics* 137, no. 1 (2016): 149–60.

²⁴ Larena Hoerber, "'It's somewhere on the list but maybe it's one of the bottom one's': Examining Gender Equity as an Organization Value in a Sport Organization," *International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing* 2, no. 4 (2007): 362–78.

within sport, Burton²⁵ concludes that sport is a domain of constructed and institutionalized masculinity. With masculinity being perceived as the operating principle²⁶, the construction of the ideal leader of sports organizations as being “a highly-educated, middle-aged man in full-time employment”²⁷ is hardly surprising. To be accepted by their male colleagues and access influential positions, women – particularly pioneers – often tend to adopt male characteristics and “manage like a man²⁸” by adopting masculine characteristics.²⁹ Such assimilation is not specific to particular sports. Le Feuvre³⁰ made similar observations about female academics. However, in both cases women’s behaviour itself reinforces male hegemony.

While institutionalized masculinity, masculine hegemony and stereotyped leadership are forms of general social barriers, lack of self-confidence and emotional and cognitive processes specific to women may represent forms of individual barriers. Burton³¹ and Pfister³² refer to these as self-limiting behaviours. Strong leaders are expected to have a high degree of

²⁵ Laura Burton, “Underrepresentation of Women in Sport Leadership: A Review of Research,” *Sport Management Review* 18, no. 2 (2014): 155–65.

²⁶ Shaw and Frisby, “Can Gender Equity Be More Equitable?”

²⁷ Gertrud Pfister, “Women and Leadership Positions – Theoretical Reflections.” In Gudrun Doll-Tepper, Gertrud Pfister and Sabine Radtke (eds.), *Progress Towards Leadership: Biographies and Career Paths of Male and Female Leaders in German Sports Organisations* (Köln: Sportverlag Strauss, 2006): 9–53, here 30.

²⁸ Adriaanse and Schofield, “The Impact of Gender Quotas.”

²⁹ Moran Betzer-Tayar, Sima Zach, Galily Yair and Ian Henry, “Barriers to Women’s Access to Decision-making Positions in Sport Organizations: the Case of Establishing a Girls’ Volleyball Academy in Israel,” *Journal of Gender Studies* 26, no. 4 (2017): 418–31.

³⁰ Nicky Le Feuvre, “Exploring Women’s Academic Careers in Cross-national Perspective: Lessons for Equal Opportunity Policies,” *Equal Opportunities International* 28, no. 1 (2009): 9–23.

³¹ Burton, “Underrepresentation of Women in Sport Leadership.”

³² Pfister, “Women and Leadership Positions.”

self-confidence.³³ While male leadership is often associated with an aggressive and dominant style, women are more likely to adopt a democratic and transformative leadership style.³⁴ The latter is characterized by a collaborative approach to decision-making, a team-oriented ethos, an open communication style, empathy and high standards of work ethics. To make women more “fit” for leading positions in sport organizations, several researchers suggest specific training, coaching or mentoring for women. At the same time, Burton³⁵ points out that access to social capital including networks and mentors is more difficult for women than men. While all these findings certainly enhance our understanding of gender issues in sport organizations, it seems equally important to “avoid simplistic divisions between feminine and masculine styles.”³⁶ Little is indeed known about how women in leadership positions shape the organizational culture of and decision-making in sports organizations and ultimately the institutionalized masculinity that has traditionally prevailed in many international sports federations.

Men’s passive behaviour regarding gender equity processes represents another barrier to gender equity in sport governance. In her study, Pfister³⁷ explains the weak support of men of the inclusion of women in executive positions in Danish sport organizations through two beliefs: one is that gender neutrality has already been achieved; the other that gender hierarchies are the result of women’s individual choices and decisions, therefore achieving gender equity

³³ Gertrud Pfister, and Sabien Radtke, “Sport, Women, and Leadership: Results of a Project on Executives in German Sports Organizations,” *European Journal of Sport Science* 9, no. 4 (2009): 229–43.

³⁴ Sue Brown and Richard Light, “Women’s Sport Leadership Styles as the Result of Interaction between Feminine and Masculine Approaches,” *Asia-Pacific Journal of Health, Sport, and Physical Education* 3, no. 3 (2012):185–98.

³⁵ Burton, “Underrepresentation of Women in Sport Leadership.”

³⁶ Brown and Light, “Women’s Sport Leadership Styles.”

³⁷ Pfister, “Women and Leadership Positions.”

is their own responsibility. Her findings are congruent with a study by Shaw and Penney³⁸ who observed that most individuals in English national governing bodies of sport felt that gender equity policies were futile, as they perceived their organizations as being already equitable. However, as Adriaanse and Claringbould³⁹ note, “gender equality cannot be achieved by women alone. Men need to be engaged because they often control the resources that are required.”

Another barrier relates to unquestioned homosocial reproduction⁴⁰ such as preferential treatment and greater access opportunities given by men to men. As long as men dominate board rooms and select members in their own image, it will be more difficult for women than for men to access leadership positions. A masculine management style (based on competitive, confrontational, rational and pragmatic behaviour), ethic (such as fewer family responsibilities) and discourse (for example aggressive expressions) are still considered as being the norm for leadership positions.⁴¹ For the process of female empowerment to be solid and far-reaching, Sotiriadou, De Haan and Knoppers⁴² insist on the need to change the governance culture within sports organizations and on the fundamental role that men (should) play in order to achieve this objective.

³⁸ Sally Shaw and Dawn Penney, “Gender Equity Policies in National Governing Bodies: An Oxymoron or a Vehicle for Change?” *European Sport Management Quarterly* 3 (2003): 78–102.

³⁹ Adriaanse and Schofield, “The Impact of Gender Quotas.”

⁴⁰ Johanna Adriaanse and Toni Schofield, “Analysing Gender Dynamics in Sport Governance: A New Regimes-based Approach,” *Sport Management Review* 16, no. 4 (2013): 498–513; Burton, “Underrepresentation of Women in Sport Leadership.”

⁴¹ Betzer-Tayar et al., “Barriers to Women’s Access to Decision-making Positions,” in Brown and Richard, “Women’s Sport Leadership Styles.” Jorid Hovden, “‘Heavyweight’ Men and Younger Women?: The Gendering of Selection Processes in Norwegian Sports Organizations,” *Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 8, no. 1 (2000): 17–32.

⁴² Sotiriadou et al, “Understanding and Redefining the Role of Men.”

Research questions

There is a growing number of studies on women's under-representation in sport organizations. However, most of them focus on the national level and only few on international sport organizations. Elling, Hovden and Knoppers' recent book⁴³ on gender diversity in European sport governance provides for instance a comparative analysis of how various European regions and countries have addressed this lack of gender diversity. But they do not analyse the case of IFs. This is both surprising and comprehensible. Surprising because many IFs are part of the Olympic movement (more than 70 IFs including winter and summer Olympic IFs, and IOC-recognized IFs), which is headed by the IOC. Over the past decade, the IOC has continuously worked on advancing awareness and actions towards greater gender equality on and off the field of play. IFs in the Olympic movement as well as those that want to become members are expected to follow IOC recommendations and guidelines on gender equality to secure their place on the Olympic programme. Thus, one might think that policies and actions towards greater gender equality emerge top-down. It is therefore surprising that researchers have not taken greater interest in IFs to understand how gender policies and actions emerge at this level and how they are implemented down the line. The lack of research on gender diversity in IFs is also comprehensible. In most countries, national sports federations rely upon government funding. Through institutional pressure (for instance reducing subsidies), governments may ensure that funded organizations a) follow specific requirements (for example targets/quotas for women) and b) report on their activities. As a result, there is generally more data available on national than on international sport organizations. Although pressure on IFs to foster gender diversity has increased in recent years, and although some general numbers on the evolution of the number of female members in IFs' governance exist, little empirical data from a more

⁴³ Elling et al, "Gender Diversity in European Sport Governance."

sociological perspective of these evolutions has been provided so far.

Against this background, the present contribution proposes to explore the gender diversity at the governance level of international sports federations. More specifically, it analyses the gender distribution within the leadership duo president/director and the gender distribution on the boards of 28 summer Olympic IFs over the past decade. Our aim is to determine to what extent those positions of power are gender balanced and if a critical mass of women has been reached. Beyond this quantitative overview, the study also seeks to provide a better sociological understanding of the logics that explain variations in the representation of women in leadership positions among IFs. Three main questions guide this research. To what extent does the historical gender orientation of a sport and the evolution of the federation's organizational structure impact the gender ratio at governance level? What impact has the implementation of formal gender policies had on federations and how is it perceived? Is the institutionalization of female representation in the federation's status a necessity to ensure a certain representation of women?

Research design

Theoretical framework

This study draws primarily on Kanter's⁴⁴ pioneering work on the concept of gender dynamics in organizations. According to her, many of women's negative job experiences can be attributed to their "token" status and their low proportion in a workplace dominated by men. As tokens these women are highly visible and constantly observed by their male colleagues. They tend to be judged on the basis of societal stereotypes and are regarded as representatives of their gender category. Kanter suggested that women's position in male-dominated organizations will

⁴⁴ Rosabeth Kanter, *Men and Women of the Corporation* (New York: Basic Books, 1997).

improve if their proportion is substantially increased and their token status eliminated. According to her, gender diversity risks having no or even a negative influence on the performance of organizations in which women represent less than 30 per cent. The present study builds on Kanter's perspective and particularly proposes to analyse the gender ratios on the boards of several IFs and questions how a critical mass of female representation has been reached or not.

Quantitative data collection

To investigate gender balance/diversity at the governance level of IFs, this study first uses a quantitative approach. Evidence on IFs' board composition in 2008 and 2012 was gathered from the IOC document *Rio 2016 Olympic Games – International Federations Report/Olympic Programme Commission – September 2013*.⁴⁵ The report is based on multiple sources of information: a questionnaire sent in electronic format to all 28 summer Olympic IFs by the Olympic Programme Commission, IOC experts' knowledge, IOC-commissioned studies (broadcast, press and digital media coverage) and information gathered through the IOC Olympic Studies Centre. For numbers of women on IFs' boards during 2013–14 and 2016–17, the Sydney Scoreboard⁴⁶ was consulted. The Sydney Scoreboard provides a global index of women in leadership positions at both national (NFs) and international level (IFs). It is an internet-based measurement tool that aims at regularly assessing the evolution of female representation on NF and IF boards and in leadership positions. The most recent data on IFs' board composition from May 2018 is directly extracted from IFs' websites. All 28 summer Olympic IFs publish at least the names of their board members. Data on IFs' leadership duo

⁴⁵ Accessed October 2018. https://library.olympic.org/Default/doc/SYRACUSE/67854/rio-2016-olympic-games-international-federations-report-international-olympic-committee-olympic-prog?_lg=en-GB

⁴⁶ Accessed October 2018, <http://www.sydney scoreboard.com/scoreboard/international-federations/>

president/director general was also collected through IFs' websites. While IF presidents are elected by the General Assembly or by voting delegates, directors general are appointed by the board and are thus staff members. Directors general are responsible for the federation's operational activities. Information on the adoption and use of formal policies to foster gender diversity is based on IFs' statutes/constitution. All 28 summer Olympic IFs publish their statutes/constitution on their website.

One of the main challenges during the data collection process was the heterogeneous use of terms for "board" ranging from bureau, council, board of administration, management committee to executive board. Data from both the *IOC International Federations Report* and the *Sydney Scoreboard* give rise to the assumption that, in some cases, the wrong data was collected due to a misunderstanding regarding the terminology used for the decision-making body. For instance, in the *IOC International Federations Report* the *International Federation for Equestrian Sports (FEI)* indicated that its board was composed of five members in 2008 and six in 2012. The 2013–14 assessment of the *Sydney Scoreboard* comes to the same conclusion, while the 2016–17 assessment lists 18 members, as does the 2018 assessment which has been gathered directly from the FEI website by the authors. Numbers until 2016 seem to refer to the FEI Executive Board (seven members in 2018) instead of referring to the FEI Bureau, which is the FEI's actual decision-making body. This example illustrates that misunderstandings seem to occur with the term "board." In some IFs, the term "board" is used without necessarily referring to the federation's decision-making body. The use of incorrect data may produce a more favourable image of the federation than if the IF had provided correct data for the actual board (taking the example of FEI: 33 per cent of female representation on the Executive Board instead of 17 per cent in the Bureau). Such blatant misunderstanding demonstrates that there is a need to a) use a clear and homogenous terminology and b) for researchers and practitioners to understand IFs' governance structures to avoid such errors.

Exploratory study at the International Cycling Union (UCI)

In a second step, we have conducted an exploratory study, which consisted of a case study on the International Cycling Union (UCI) based in Aigle (Switzerland). Cycling as a sport has traditionally been and still is under male dominance, which is further reflected in the governance structure of the UCI. However, with the appointment of the first woman to the role of UCI Director General in 2018, the UCI seems to show some efforts to foster gender equity at the federation's governance level.

Between June and September 2018, we conducted nine semi-structured interviews: five with women and four with men from different hierarchical levels (president, directors, heads/chiefs of department, managers, coordinators). Interviews were conducted by the two authors and followed a pre-established interview guide that focused on the socio-educational and socio-economic status of the interviewee, his/her demographic profile including early socialization, his/her work experiences and work-family balance, his/her perceptions regarding the organization's policies in terms of gender issues, feminization of occupations and leadership ascension. Interviews lasted about one hour each and were recorded with the permission of participants. In order to preserve anonymity, names of the interviewees have been changed. Data from this exploratory study will be used to highlight some tendencies that emerge from the quantitative analyses and to better understand some mechanisms of the (non)-participation of women in the governance of *IFs*.

Results

Gender distribution of the presidents and chief officers of IFs

The lack of female representation in the leadership duo (president/director general) is remarkable. As can be seen in Table 12.1, among the 28 *IFs* only the International Triathlon

Union (ITU) has a female president (4 per cent) and four IFs (14 per cent) have a female director general: the FEI (equestrian), FIFA (football), the IHF (handball) and the UCI (cycling). Consequently, the large majority of IFs have an all-male leadership team (86 per cent) and none of the 28 IFs has an all-female leadership team.⁴⁷ In the past, only the triathlon IF had an all-female leadership team (2012 to 2016).

Gender distribution on boards of 28 summer Olympic International Federations

Table 12.2 indicates the average and median representation of women on 28 IF boards between 2008 and 2018. It shows that women held on average 14 per cent of the board seats in 2008 and 17 per cent in 2018. The median representation, which excludes extreme cases in terms of IFs' gender distribution and therefore indicates a more accurate tendency, is 14 per cent in 2008 and 16 per cent in 2018. Thus, we can observe an overall, though weak, increase in the number of women on IF boards. However, women clearly remain under-represented.

Please insert table 12.1 here

Table 12.1 Gender distribution on 28 summer Olympic international federations

Please insert table 12.2 here

Table 12.2. Average and median representation of women on 28 summer Olympic international federations' board

Table 12.1 provides an overview of the board composition of the 28 summer Olympic IFs over a period of ten years. It confirms that the number of women on IF boards has increased

⁴⁷ Laura Burton, "Underrepresentation of Women in Sport Leadership: a Review of Research," *Sport Management Review* 18, no. 2 (2014); Maureen Smith and Alison Wrynn, "Women in the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games: an Analysis of Participation and Leadership Opportunities," Accessed October 2018, <http://www.womenssportfoundation.org/en/home/research/sharp-center>

over the last ten years in the majority of IFs. However, this is not the case for ten of them: boxing (AIBA), equestrian (FEI), basketball (FIBA), aquatics (FINA), canoe (ICF), golf (IGF), judo (IJF), sailing (ISAF), shooting (ISSF) and table tennis (ITTF). IFs have seen the number of their female board members decrease since 2008. Thus, the overall positive evolution of female representation on IF boards is not uniform, nor can we speak of a general trend.

In 2018, women's representation on IF boards varies from 0 per cent (shooting) to 44 per cent (hockey). The shooting IF is the only one which has no female representative at all in 2018. In 2016, this was still the case for four IFs (judo, rugby, sailing and shooting), and in 2013 for six IFs (boxing, judo, rugby, sailing, tennis, table tennis). Thus, it appears clearly that the cases of total absence of female representatives have tended to steadily decrease.

In May 2018, only four out of 28 IFs achieved a critical mass defined by a minimum of 30 per cent women representation: FIG (gymnastics), FIH (hockey), FISA (rowing), ITU (triathlon). The gymnastics IF constantly maintained a representation of women of between 30 per cent and 33 per cent since at least 2008. Within the hockey IF, the number of women holding a position on the board has increased from 26 per cent in 2008 to 47 per cent in 2018. The rowing IF has constantly achieved a critical mass of 30 per cent or more since at least 2012. During the period 2012 to 2018, women held between 31 per cent and 40 per cent of the board seats of the triathlon IF, the youngest federation in this list. In 2018, the triathlon IF has had a woman as president and is therefore the only IF that has a female/male leadership team and a good representation of women on its board.

Discussion

The findings on the proportion of women on IF boards, gender distribution of the leadership team, and progress or lack thereof in gender representation confirmed observations of previous

studies regarding the underrepresentation of women in decision-making positions at the international level (IF) of sports. Despite a generally positive evolution, they remain underrepresented. However, significant differences between IFs can be observed.

The impact of traditional gender orientation of a sport on gender ratio

To understand differences between IFs, a first question arises about the influence of the historical gender orientation of a sport, especially in those sports with a high percentage of female athletes. One may assume that it is easier for women to gain acceptance among the governing bodies of sports that deal with historically feminine sports, where women as athletes are well presented and accepted. This would, in reverse, explain the poor representation of women in traditionally male-dominated sports, like shooting. However, this hypothesis cannot be strictly confirmed. Indeed, among the five IFs with female-male leadership teams (equestrian, football, handball, cycling and triathlon IFs), three of them deal with the governance of traditionally male-dominated sports – football, handball and cycling – where women athletes still remain underrepresented. However, they all have a woman as director general. On the contrary, equestrian sports have a high percentage of female athletes⁴⁸, yet this is not reflected in the number of women on the equestrian federation's board (only 17 per cent). In contrast, the triathlon federation seems to represent a congruent model in terms of gender parity. Women hold leadership positions at the head of the federation and on the board. The federation is one of the very few cases that has a critical mass of women at governance level. It reflects the participation of female athletes in triathlon: women represent 35 per cent of the total

⁴⁸ The equestrian IF does not give exact data regarding the gender distribution of its members. But one can assume that the French Federation (FFE), which is the biggest national equestrian federation in terms of the numbers of members, is to some extent representative of this gender distribution: 83.6 per cent of the FFE's members are women. Also, it is important to note that there is a cluster of women at amateur levels and a dearth at the professional level in equestrian sports.

triathlon IF race competitors and some countries present a bigger number of female elite athletes than male, like Bermuda (59 per cent women) or Canada and USA (45 per cent women)⁴⁹.

We can therefore assume that the historical gender orientation of a sport has a considerable influence on the representation of women in an IF's governance. However, other logics are obviously at stake and can explain, for example, that the number of women on the cycling IF (UCI) board increased from 0 per cent to 11 per cent during the last decade. In 2018, the UCI has also welcomed two women in key leadership positions: the Director General and the Head of the International Relations Department. During an interview, the UCI president proudly repeated several times that he has chosen two right-hand women. In the same logic, the brochure outlining the UCI's Agenda 2022 shows a picture of the UCI staff in the section dedicated to women in cycling. All the women are in the foreground of the picture and the men behind, giving reason to think that the staff has a good gender balance. This was further supported by the five women interviewed, as they all, like Lisa, mentioned that "Here at the UCI, there are a lot of women. We must be around 50 per cent – 50 per cent with men." If this is actually true, this figure hides a strong vertical segregation as only 22 per cent of the senior management positions are occupied by women while about 80 per cent of the assistant positions are occupied by women (March 2018). Nevertheless, these different elements (the staging in the picture, discourse of the president) reveal the willingness of the UCI to make its efforts in terms of gender equity visible. The creation of a women's cycling coordinator position in 2014 might also be part of this strategy as suggested by Carole's testimony: "We all call the women cycling coordinator position 'blush'. It reveals that the UCI feels that it has to deal with the

⁴⁹ Accessed September 22, 2018: https://www.triathlon.org/news/article/gender_balance_itu

gender question, but it stays blush.”⁵⁰ However, as a matter of fact, the federation’s Agenda 2022 includes a number of important structural initiatives concerning the sport governing body’s future role in gender equality within the sport, including the implementation of gender quotas. It is exactly the impact of the implementation of formal policies on the gender distribution of IFs that we shall question in the next section.

Female representation anchored in the federation’s statutes

To address the gender imbalance in sport leadership, ten IFs have established a minimum quota for female representatives on the board. Four of them have more women than stipulated in the statutes: hockey (currently has seven women on the board while their statutes recommend four); volleyball (currently has four women on the board while their statutes recommend two); athletics (currently has six women on the board while their statutes recommend five); triathlon (currently has five women on the board while their statutes recommend four). Three IFs have exactly the number of women on the board that their statutes recommend: basketball (five, representing 19 per cent), football (six, representing 16 per cent) and wrestling (three, representing 14 per cent).

Three IFs have fewer women on the board than stipulated in their statutes: boxing (has currently one whereas their statutes recommend five); equestrian (has currently 17 per cent whereas their statutes recommend 20 per cent); fencing (has currently 27 per cent whereas their statutes recommend 30 per cent). The case of the boxing federation (AIBA) is interesting, because the representation of women on the executive committee is clearly lower than their statutes recommend. Yet, AIBA’s Congress passed a motion in June 2018 that will ensure that a minimum of six positions (out of the 28 council positions) will be held by women. This new

⁵⁰ ‘Blush’ refers to make-up, and, in this context, underlines the emphasis on and acceptance of femininity in a male-dominated sport.

policy should be in effect for the November 2018 AIBA Congress elections. Thus, the federation strengthens its formal policy towards gender equity, while it is already struggling to fulfil its current recommendations. Moreover, the only woman member of the board is the chairperson of the Women's Commission, a commission often held by women within IFs and which has little importance compared to more strategic ones like the Ethics Commission or the Athletes Commission. She has been appointed by the elected members of the executive committee, whereas most of the members are elected by the congress⁵¹ which is composed of all National Federation members. These elements show the willingness of federation leaders to show a political commitment towards better representation of women at the executive level. At the same time, it also shows the reluctance of the members of the *governing* bodies in sports that remain largely masculine. This example confirms Dahlerup and Freidenvall's observations⁵²; they noted that sanctions for non-compliance and rank order of candidates are very important for the implementation of quota provisions. Otherwise the measure risks being merely symbolic.

Finally, three IFs mention female representation, but without concrete numbers or in a very limited way: canoe (the constitution mentions that the federation "will actively strive to achieve equitable representation"); handball (constitution mentions that "In any IHF body, both genders shall be represented"); tennis (the statutes indicate a minimum of one of the two athlete representative board members should be a woman). These federations do not take concrete actions and have not reached a critical mass of a minimum of 30 per cent, having 16 per cent

⁵¹ The boxing IF's statutes indicate that its Executive Committee is composed of 28 members – 24 directly elected by the federation's Congress and 4 appointed by the elected members of the Executive Committee.

⁵² Drude Dahlerup and Lenita Freidenvall, "Quotas as a 'Fast Track' to Equal Representation for Women. Why Scandinavia is no Longer the Model", *International Feministe Journal of Politics* 7, no. 1 (2005): 26–48.

for canoe, 18 per cent for handball and 15 per cent for tennis IFs. Nevertheless, with 15 IFs mentioning some level of female representation in their statutes, more than half of the 28 IFs analysed demonstrate their concern with the representation of women in their governing bodies. The implementation of formal quotas seems a particularly popular trend. For example, the UCI will (2019–22) introduce concrete quotas in order to achieve a better representation of women in its governance⁵³. This solution is considered as inappropriate to tackle the problem of women being absent from decision-making positions by four of the female interviewees:

I feel that there is a trend to positive discrimination at the UCI and I do not think that it is a good solution. [...] I feel that with my male colleagues, it tenses the relationship. [...] For me, what's important, it's the competencies. We must choose people because of their competencies and not because they are a woman or a man (Anne).

Supporting the importance of competencies in the recruitment procedure is a way for Anne, who is in a top leadership position, to defend her position and reaffirm that her selection was not dependent on her being a woman. This is particularly true for her as she is rather young (early thirties) to hold a top position within the UCI and thus seems to feel all the more that she has to justify her promotion. Interestingly, several women interviewed for this study see positive discrimination, which brings more female employees into their federation, as a challenge, fearing it might devalue their position by making their career path more common. The UCI president puts forward that introducing a quota “was my idea. [...] We need to take the bull by the horns, otherwise nothing will change.” He has chosen the “fast track” to equal representation for women⁵⁴ within cycling's governance. He mentions his personal sensitivity

⁵³ Accessed November 2018 <http://www.uci.org/news/2018/uci-cycling-agenda-2022>

⁵⁴ See Dahlerup and Freidenvall, “Quotas as a ‘Fast Track’.”

to gender equity: “I have always worked with women. [...] I think that they bring something very valuable, because they really get into the cases they deal with.” Actors holding positions of power in IFs may influence – positively or negatively – decisions on gender diversity. In the case of the UCI president, a potential for personal interest in gender equity cannot be set aside, but the willingness of the UCI to make these efforts visible as mentioned previously show that the necessity to provide a positive image (being seen as a progressive federation and not an “old-boys club”) is also at stake. Finally, the necessity to comply with the IOC recommendations – which in 2000 established a 20 per cent minimum threshold for the inclusion of women in administrative structures to be achieved by 2005⁵⁵ – and IOC potential future sanctions has also been mentioned by the president: “We really took the IOC recommendations and we have reworked them according to our sport. We expect the IOC to put in place sanctions against IFs that do not comply with a minimum target and we do not want to wait without preparation.” This example shows that the implementation of formal policies on gender diversity stems from several interrelated logics.

Nevertheless, one may question whether quotas are essential or necessary to guarantee a good representation of women. Gymnastics and rowing IFs, both of which have constantly a minimum 30 per cent of female board members, have no quotas written into their statutes. This could lead to the assumption that, in federations where women’s representation is historically high, there is no need to establish quotas. This brings us to consider more specifically the influence of the federations’ structuration on the gender diversity in their governance.

The history of the IF’s structuration

Each IF has a specific evolution in terms of organizational structuration that affects the gender dynamics within the organization. Within the triathlon IF (ITU), which is the “youngest” of the

⁵⁵ Smith and Wrynn, “Women in the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.”

28 federations analysed in this study, women's equality has been an essential part of the federation's structure and governance since its creation in 1989⁵⁶. For example, the fundamental principle of equal prize money for men and women was immediately anchored in the ITU's constitutions. A year later (1990), the ITU Women's Commission was established (in comparison, the UCI established its Women's Commission 23 years later). In 1999 a resolution was passed to guarantee a minimum of 20 per cent of women within the Executive Board. In 2008, ITU elected its first female president and also its first female secretary general. In 2018, women have been elected as president of more than 10 NFs as well as of continental federations (such as European Triathlon Union, African Triathlon Union).

These elements illustrate the fact that the ITU can be considered a pioneer in terms of fostering gender equity in international sports organizations. It represents a federation that has been created at a time when gender equality has come to the forefront and thinking about women's inclusion in sport was already relevant. Consequently, the ITU has never been male dominated. Phelps and Kent⁵⁷ emphasize the important role of the ITU in establishing national federations in the years following the federation's creation, with the ITU leadership "acting like missionaries." The strong focus on gender equity and the missionary efforts of the ITU in establishing new NFs may explain the widespread positive growth in female representation throughout the system. Institutional pressures from the IOC certainly played a role in the ITU adopting an exemplary manner, for which admission to the Olympic Programme was of upmost importance. All these aspects together have contributed to the creation of a gender equal organizational culture. This may explain why the ITU, compared to older federations, has a

⁵⁶ http://en.olympic.cn/news/olympic_news/2009-03-10/1753377.html, accessed June 5, 2018 and https://www.triathlon.org/news/article/gender_balance_itu, accessed June 5, 2018.

⁵⁷ Aubrey Kent and Sean Phelps, "Isomorphism and Choice in the Creation and Development of an International Sports Federation: a Review of the International Triathlon Union," *International Journal of Sport Management and Marketing* 8, no. 3–4 (2010): 283.

fairly stable women's representation of 30 per cent and more. And this despite the fact that it combines three very traditional sports with low to moderate women's participation, such as cycling.

Indeed, the UCI board has only 11 per cent of women. However, the UCI has experienced a completely different structuring process. Created in 1900, it is among the oldest IFs and constitutes one of the founding sports of the first modern Olympic Games (1896). Cycling as a sport was at that time exclusively practiced by men and it was only at the 1984 Olympic Games that women cyclists could participate. It remains a male-dominated sport, with only 18 per cent of the licences being held by women across the world⁵⁸. UCI has to deal with a masculine culture and a very male-dominated heritage. Under the presidency of Brian Cookson (2013–14), the federation began to put a stronger focus on women's cycling: the position of a women's cycling coordinator was created (2014); the Women's Commission was set up (2013); equal prize money for UCI World Champions and UCI World Cups were decided; and efforts were made to increase the media coverage of female cycling events. For its Women's Cycling Strategy, the UCI received the 2017 Creative Sports Award, an award for outstanding creativity and contribution to the enrichment of sport⁵⁹. The UCI's efforts and actions taken to foster gender equity are fairly recent compared to what we can observe at the ITU. These were also taken in order to reinstall a balance as the lack of women both in the sports field and the governance of cycling was obvious. One may however wonder if the contemporary bad reputation of male cycling, due to several doping scandals, has encouraged the federation to boost female cycling as a way to showcase a more positive and credible image. And yet, despite these actions and the UCI's objective of involving more women in the

⁵⁸ <http://www.uci.org/news/2018/uci-cycling-agenda-2022>, accessed November 2018.

⁵⁹ <http://www.asoif.com/news/uci-wins-2017-creative-sports-award>, accessed June 4, 2018.

administration and management of cycling, current numbers – analysed previously – still show a different picture.

The ITU and the UCI illustrate two very different and indicative profiles of the way gender equity has been and is being dealt with by IFs. It appears that, to some extent, structural dimensions of the organizations – that have been shaped out of the history of the structuration of each federation – impact gender ratios in IFs. In that respect, one may suppose that gender awareness has a stronger impact on younger federations' distribution of leadership positions between men and women.

Conclusion

This study provides an analysis of gender diversity at the governance level of 28 international sports federations. It shows that women have taken up top leadership positions in some IFs, such as presidents and directors general, and they have also become more numerous on IF boards. Nevertheless, despite a generally positive evolution, it is still an exception when women hold positions of leadership in the governance of key sport organizations. At the time of research (May 2018), only four out of 28 IFs analysed had achieved a critical mass of women board members (defined by a minimum of 30 per cent women's representation). And with IF boards averaging 17 per cent women members, the situation is quite close to the gender distribution on NSF boards, where across 21 European countries women average 18 per cent of members⁶⁰. We can conclude that sports governance at the international level, as well as at the national level⁶¹, remains male dominated.

This study has also underlined the necessity to understand properly IF governance structure and the variation in the terminology used in different federations. This is essential to

⁶⁰ Adriaanse, "Europe in World Perspective," 17.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 17–18.

ensure correct data is collected on the representation of women on sports federations' boards and to avoid, as some research has not, errors when identifying key leadership positions within IFs.

Important variations between IFs could be observed in terms of women's participation in sport governance. The gender orientation of the sport as well as the history of the federation's structuration impact the gender ratio at the governance level. This also leads IFs to seek different solutions to women's underrepresentation in sports governance. At present, only half of them have implemented formal gender policies. The study further shows that decisions taken by some IFs regarding gender diversity are also taken in order to comply with the IOC recommendations and/or for reasons of image. Gender equality is an important contemporary issue and it might be strategic for some sports organizations to provide a positive image by showing willingness to have more women involved in leadership positions. These different logics are interrelated and explain the current implementation of formal policies of gender diversity in several IFs as well as the positive evolution observed with regard to women's representation in IF governance. Nevertheless, female sport leaders at the international level continue to struggle in terms of overall numbers and positions of power. Probably more than in other areas, women experience a difficult access to executive positions and a gendered division of tasks.

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