

EWSE

EMPOWERING WOMEN
FOR SPORT EVENTS IN EUROPE



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The current situation of women sport festivals and events in Europe

The outcomes of our investigation around the current state of art in sport events in Europe outlined a general sexist and male dominated scenario when it comes to big sport events. If some more space for creating something new outside this general situation is recognized to “minor” sport events where the will of single organizers interested in creating something different, when it comes to most popular sports and not local sport events (meaning national dimension), a general struggle in reaching the desired impact in terms of audience, visibility and investment clearly emerged.

Most of the participants in the analysis, when asked about their opinion and experience on equal opportunities between genders to get involved in sports events, whether as a competitor, a volunteer and/or an organizer, underlined the gap that is still evident within the sport events sector. As Caroline, an Irish Paratriathlon athlete interviewed by IWA, put it: “...I’d like to say yes, but I don’t believe so. (...) generally girls move away from sports. And probably their next involvement is when their children are participating in sports.” Therefore, it is more likely that boys and men stay who involved in the sport system, as the dropout rates are far less relevant than girls, having the connections to the events and to other organizational and management aspects associated with sports.

The perception that investing in women’s sport events represents a risk rather than an opportunity is still very common among media and sponsors. The 2019 Women Football World Cup has been mentioned often and clearly represents a milestone in women’s sports events showing how it is possible to reach greater impact and high professional levels in the women’s sport sector when it comes to sporting events. Still, clearly it was not enough to push towards a real change in the amount and the capacity of attracting investments, media attention and audience that women sporting events in general can count on. The difficulties have arisen on engaging sponsors and the media during the organisation of a Women’s Tour de France, emerged during the focus group organized by Alice Milliat Foundation, drawing a clear picture of the actual state of art.

Recommendations emerged

Under-representation of women in sport leadership

The main keyword when it comes to navigate the unequal gender representation in sport leadership is visibility. All participants in the analysis mentioned actions and initiatives aimed at increasing the visibility of women in leadership roles in sport to create a positive change towards equality and inspiring more and more girls and women to take on the organization of sport events.

The possibility of creating organized training opportunities for women leadership in sport emerged as a request and a recommendation from participants of involved countries with the lower level of women in leadership positions in sport, as Italy for example, where the coordinator of the project, ASSIST, is launching an online school for female leaders in sport, LEA, just after organizing the EWSE focus group where it clearly emerged from all the participants the need to increase the number of women in sport leadership by offering training and mentoring to girls and women.

Gender quotas, as well as having consequences for not being equal when applying for public funds were mentioned by several participants as incentives that should be promoted and supported by public sport authorities and bodies.

Most representatives of sport organizations mentioned their own examples, agreeing that establishing a culture within the sport organization of being equal, as well as being progressive and inclusive among their staff, represents a great sign that could favor a bottom-up change in sport leadership. As concrete examples, mainstream measures to promote gender equality in organizations came up, such as support for maternity leave, constant training and upskilling, smart working and flexible organization of work.

Reaching equal visibility in media

Representation in the media is crucial. Changing the image of female athletes, who should be represented as powerful, strong, not as “less” performing or “victims” of discriminations, showing the skills rather than the gender are some of the most common wishes and wills emerged among the participants. Push the image of female sports as to be attractive to audiences, reaching a wider audience through the digital world, having more space in television and media schedules would help shifting the perspective of women’s sport as less professional, still common among sport media, sport fans and audience and, therefore, reflected to potential sponsors. To tackle the lack of TV coverage for women’s sports some participants mentioned the possibility of introducing mandatory quotas for broadcasters across Europe. However, this proposal encour-

tered many different reactions, as some participants think it might prove unworkable and even counter-productive to an image of equality. Many participants underlined that for sports events to be successful, they need to generate excitement. Every EU country has at least a couple of household names of female athletes capable of galvanising large audiences and they have to be valorized to reach a wider audience. Yet, if the respective sports organisations do not design a sustainable long-term strategy for their women's events, the public's interest may not last long.

One way of setting up such a strategy is through forging partnerships with broadcasters and the wider media to generate excitement and gain momentum around women's sports events. Storytelling emerged as a good element to keep in mind when designing a communication strategy to increase interest in sports media, much more than for men's events. "We didn't sell an event, we sold a story, a cause", underlined one of the leaders who took part in the French focus group.

Experts argue that this could be achieved by amending the Audiovisual Media Services Directive in order to promote a broader coverage of sports events, both in terms of content and gender, including not only live coverage but also deferred coverage, general news programmes, and reporting of sports events (e.g. by employing more female sports commentators). It is further suggested that the new rules could be modelled in line with existing articles aimed at the promotion of European films, such as using new media for greater exposure of women's sports events, or encouraging broadcasters to develop strategies for the promotion of women's sports. Finally, the EU could set up targets and report on progress.

Highlighting that 'equality means visibility', the previous UK Sports Minister, Mims Davies, recently called on major broadcasters to increase their coverage of women's sports events and ensure that they are no longer treated like a 'novelty'. Similar reactions have been voiced in France and Spain, to name a few.

The Ireland Sport 20x20 campaign introduced by our partner IWA and mentioned by several participants from Ireland has emerged as a clear example of good practices in this field: the 20x20 was about creating a cultural shift in our perception of girls and women in sport. A meaningful motto of the campaign says: "There is so much to celebrate when it comes to women's sport in Ireland, but there isn't enough noise". The three targets to reach by the end of 2020 are: 20% more media coverage of women in sport; 20% more female participation at player, coach, referee & administrative level; 20% more attendance at women's games and events.

Attracting funds and sponsors

The capacity to keep expanding relations and networks to support their events is acknowledged as one of the most important skills for organizers. A suggestion that emerged related to networks is to involve representatives from different networks, as networks that represent people and athletes with disabilities or from minorities, in order to have a wider representation of diverse groups in sport and to use the empathy that usually emerge when promoting support for people who have a different range of abilities and that can triggers positive dynamics of collaboration and support also on the financial and economic side. Some participants highlighted how an active role of coordination and support of national organized sport bodies (as Sport Ireland for example) creates

networking opportunities within the sector, and it is considered hugely beneficial particularly for minority groups, since public bodies are generally more driven by principles of equality and have access to a wider group of stakeholders.

To increase the capacity of attracting funds and sponsorships, the possibility of having a mentor to lead girls and women that start organizing women sport events has been mentioned more than once among participants from those countries that have a higher rate of equality in sport leadership and in leadership in general. That proves how having the possibility to see and reach more women in leadership positions can have a positive impact on the capacity to generate funds for women's sport events, not only through mentors and examples for the organizers, but also building trust in the perception that sponsors and donors might have of women leaders in sport.

In terms of sustainability of sponsors, not many examples emerged, proving that it is difficult for women's sport to keep stable sponsorships. One innovative example of partnership emerged from a disability officer from Cork, who mentioned the agreement signed with a national company that supports the sport event that she contributes to providing training and updates for the staff involved in the organization of the event. This not only contributes to making the event stable and able to grow and innovate, but also increases its capacity to attract volunteers and staff ensuring an opportunity for personal and professional growth acquiring skills spendable in different sectors of life. Providing for personal opportunities increases the participation in the organization of the event year by year. Again, another example provided promoted the collaboration between companies that support the event financially, having in return event's staff engaged in the community as tutor or providing for sport and leisure activities to the company's staff. These examples show that being creative and innovative in finding resources and support for the events is essential for women sport.

Role models & families

Some of the participants in the analysis pointed out the key role of parents in encouraging their daughters and sons to be equally engaged in participating and organizing sport competitions: specifically, some participants pointed out the great role of mothers who in the last years have increased their active participation in their daughters' sport activities, taking on active roles of leadership in the sport clubs or associations and therefore acting as a model of inspirations and encouragement for the young girls and daughters in assuming these leading roles. So even if most of leading positions are covered by men in most of the mapped organizations, this proactive role of women and specifically mothers in sport organizations and events involving young athletes is increasing, even if often unwaveringly or not given credit for, as they actively advocate locally driven by a strong personal motivation and passion to create opportunities for their children that probably makes the difference in reaching their goals. Therefore, encouraging women, mothers, in taking on leading positions awarely in sport clubs and organizations, valorising this passion related to their daughters and kids' sport development, has emerged as a way to build a more inclusive and accessible sport environment also when it comes to sport events, as engaging parents (mothers in this specific case) who are directly and personally involved in creating sport competitions that can fully accept and support their children can create a positive impact on the whole sport environment.

Accessibility and inclusion

Multi-discriminations and intersectionality represent a key issue that we always need to remember when working on accessibility and inclusion in sport.

In order to increase concrete opportunities to participate in organizing and creating sport events for all women, including women with disabilities and coming from minorities affected from discriminations, visibility has emerged as one of the most important factors. For women dealing with these constraints and factors of further inequalities, being represented in key roles of sport events and initiatives is essential to break down stereotypes within their groups, as well as in the general sport audience and staff. Seeing a woman with disability organizing an event, especially dealing with leadership tasks, can have a greater impact on other women and girls, as well as on the general sport audience, than any other action to effectively encourage them to actively engage in sport events.

This is also proven by the different situations that emerged among the different countries involved in our analysis: there are countries where the number of women from minorities or women with disability involved as leaders and organizers in sport events are low (or almost equal to zero), compared to others where it is more common to find these examples of diversity in sport events organization.

In order to be able to create more accessible sport events, it is very important to carry out advocacy towards relevant authorities, whether local authorities as city and county councils and sport authorities, an element that clearly pairs up with the need to have strong networks and relations with different stakeholders also mentioned in relation to the capacity to attract funds and sponsorships for events.

As mentioned to increase support in attracting funds and sponsorship, participants also recommended to organizers of events to collaborate with representatives from the disability networks when planning the events, to be sure to take in consideration the needs of participants with disabilities from the start and also increase the possibilities for their participation through associations and networks that can easily reach them as audience, athletes or any other role in the event. This also increases the possibility of proposing parasport as well within the events. Some participants mentioned the collaboration with associations of sport for people with disabilities as a key factor to increase the accessibility of the events.

In a specific country situation, Ireland, it has also emerged that involving disability networks in planning and organizing sport events can also improve gender equality as the leaders in the disability service network are actually quite female dominated. This situation does not find findings in other countries involved in the analysis.

Environmental sustainability

Few of the organizers had knowledge from their professional background, but most of them confirm a lack of specific expertise to tackle this topic effectively. A respondent from France suggested that knowledge and ideas about reducing the impact on the environment when orga-

nizing sport events should be included as a mandatory part to apply for grants for events, as this would oblige the project leaders to study and consider effective and well prepared alternative solutions and proposals to improve the green impact of their events.

It has also emerged as networking and the capacity to create wide partnerships is an essential element also when it comes to environmental impact of the events: the mapped events and organizers that can count on corporate sponsors and wide partnerships generally have access to more resources and know how to address the impact of their events towards the environment.

A relevant part in trying to boost sustainability and reduce impact on the environment when organizing sport events is connected to sport facilities and structures. Using existing facilities as opposed to bringing additional amenities into space has been mentioned as a common practice by several participants.

Specific skills to organize events

As the next step of EWSE action will be designing a training programme tailored on the specific needs and expectations of girls and women who already organize sport events or willing to start this path, one of the point of the analysis was focused on understanding which areas of study and skills are considered more relevant to increase the capacity of impact, visibility, success in organizing women sport events.

Many participants in the analysis mentioned the possibility of using testimonials as a key element to attract more girls in organizing and supporting the events, as well as participating in training and preparation sessions before the events.

Also, besides training itself, some participants mentioned the need to strengthen the access and circulation of information for voluntary associations, that are often promoters of sport events, even if they are not classified as sport clubs, and therefore having less access to sport related information.

Summing up the main outcomes of the analysis when asking our participants about the main skills they consider relevant to organize sport events, these are the key items emerged:

- Empathy
- Technical preparation of supporting staff (referees, athletic preparators...)
- Leadership, and focus on an aware female leadership
- Time management
- Social competence
- Communication
- Self confidence
- Problem-solving

We think it is relevant to mention that more than one participant to the analysis, despite coming from different countries and situations, mentioned “the ability to suffer” as one of the main skills necessary for a woman who wants to organize women’s sports events.

Main highlights from a country-based perspective

Italy

- The sport events focused on women's sports that reach a national dimension are few, mostly run by volunteering / non-profit organizations with a small staff structure.
- There is a vibrant grassroots movement and a gap with the top sport institutions and public authorities when it comes to support and visibility of women's sport.
- The structural gender gap that characterizes Italian society, at economic, social, cultural level, obviously affects the sports environment as well: a multi-dimensional approach to tackle inequalities is essential to improve equal opportunities in the sport sector.
- A key competence to improve among the female sport sector seems to be the ability to engage private donors and profit enterprises, as women sports' sector still rely too much on public funding and no profit organizations support.

Ireland

- As a main feature of the analysis carried out with Irish stakeholders the 20x20 Campaign emerged as a clear action towards equality in sport and in sport events.
- The national authority tasked with the development of sport in Ireland, Sport Ireland, emerged as a key factor in supporting women's sports events, both politically and financially.
- From the interviews conducted, it was evident that the sports events organizers in Ireland had a strong supportive and positive network with other sporting organisations. This can be linked to the work of Sport Ireland who create a lot of networking opportunities within the sector.
- There was a common opinion that the media have increased visibility for women's sports events in recent years but still have a long way to go. Her Sport was mentioned on numerous occasions in the interviews. It is Ireland's only media platform dedicated to women in sport. This organisation highlights and publicizes all women's sports.
- Experts, Organizers and leaders had similar answers when asked about the skills and attitudes they possessed in their roles. Confidence and "backing themselves or their ability" was commonly mentioned along with delegation, organisation, communication and decision making.
- All interviewees indicated that their organisations were mindful of sustainability

to some degree but could implement more changes to the workplace. Some mentioned they were a lot more conscious of their “paper trail” from their experiences working from home due to Covid-19.

France

- Despite the huge visibility of the European Women Football Championship in 2019, it has emerged how for most stakeholders investing in women’s sport is still considered a risk, even when it comes to major women’s sports events. There are high expectations around the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris that should act as a real driving force to give visibility to women’s competitions in France and attract more media and brands to get involved in women’s sports and events. The huge hype and force of attraction of the Olympic games has the ability to play a crucial role in increasing the visibility and investments in women’s sports.
- The Paris 2024 Olympic and Paralympic Games will also aspire to set a “shining example in terms of environmental responsibility”, as stated in the Charter of the Comité national olympique et sportif français (CNOSF) “Sustainable Development, Sport is committed!”. There has been a groundswell of support with the organisers of major sporting events, operators of sports facilities and venues rallying to the cause through their signature of the Charter to show the dedication to a sustainable and community-oriented approach to sport.
- From the interviews conducted, it appeared that when a women’s public sport event is organized, there should always be a link to a charitable cause, such as breast cancer or violence against women. Whereas when a men’s sports event takes place, it is not a topic that is imposed. It is also an element that is likely to attract more funds than just organizing a women’s sport event “for fun”. On the other hand such a “norm” can also prevent men’s sport events from engaging in the promotion of causes as well because the organization of the event relies on a very different economical logic.
- The situation related to the Covid crisis saw an almost total disappearance related to the practice of women, there was no more competition and a total lack of information. However, men’s sport being mainly focused on sports events and revenues, unlike women’s sport, some participants pointed out the fact that it makes them more fragile especially in these times of crisis.
- One of the participant argued that women’s sports events should not imitate the economic and development model of men’s events: it is necessary to think about the social utility and social impact of future projects
- Several interviewees highlighted the fact that when developed at a smaller level, it was often to get some political support from a city, a department, etc...However there is a lack of political support at the level of the state.
- In terms of financial obstacles, it emerged that private funders have difficulties investing money in women’s sports because they consider that there is no profit in it. They need to be convinced and it can be very difficult.

Austria

- Combining sport events with awareness raising goals is an important factor for the participants, as in the case of the violence prevention and prevention for breast cancer that characterizes some events as the Mamanet event in Austria. This could be a key element in imaging a “new” model of sport events, designed by women valorising the good experiences that women have developed in this field.
- In all the participants in the analysis from Austria, while none of them represented sport clubs or organizations for women with disabilities (as in the case of Ireland), a general high attention and organization to accessibility to create accessible events for participants with mental or physical disabilities emerged, as a general stronger attention to ensure diversity in the events.

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