



EXPLORING CLUB ORGANISATION STRUCTURES IN EUROPEAN WOMEN'S FOOTBALL



Faculty of Health Sciences and Sport
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**Exploring club organisation structures
in European women's football**

Final Report

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by

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report outlines the results of a study selected by the UEFA Research Grant Jury to investigate aspects related to the development of women's club football in Europe. Specifically, the study seeks to: (a) identify and map organisational and managerial practices of women's football clubs, and (b) explore integration between men's and women's football clubs.

Two concrete research questions are formulated for this study:

1. What are the different forms and profiles of club organisation structure in European women's football?
2. Why do professional men's football clubs support the integration of a women's football section?

In answering these research questions, the study pursues two underpinning objectives:

1. To engage in a consultation with women's football clubs to enable the collection of information about their management and organisational practices, and study the factors influencing club integration.
2. To provide UEFA and National Associations (NAs) with insights into the most appropriate approaches to support the sustainability and long-term development of women's club football.

The review of academic literature on women's football highlights the limited attention that has been dedicated to studying the women's game from managerial and economic perspectives. Also, although the phenomenon of club integration in football is growing in the European context and both European and national football governing bodies have acknowledged the potential for close cooperation between the two sectors of the game, there is still scarce empirical and conceptual evidence regarding the notion of club integration in football. Previous studies have considered a comparable situation in basketball, namely the collaboration between men's and women's franchises competing in the National Basketball Association (NBA) and the Women's NBA (WNBA). This has led some authors to discuss that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) could be one of the underpinning elements to guide executive decision-making about the WNBA. Given the fragile financial set-up of women's football, club integration in this sport might also be considered as a form of CSR or strategic philanthropy as in the case of the WNBA.

A mixed methodological approach is employed to facilitate the achievement of research objectives comprising both quantitative and qualitative elements. The quantitative aspect of the study involves a survey of women's football clubs competing in UEFA member countries. This is based on eight components identified as key for the management of women's football clubs: (1) human and financial resources; (2) budget and finance;



(3) infrastructure and training facilities; (4) women's football academy; (5) media, marketing and match day; (6) club organisation and legal structure; (7) connection(s) between women's and men's football; and (8) women's football development and challenges. The qualitative element consists of interviews with a selected number of clubs that have an integrated organisational structure. Each interview is based on the connection between men's and women's football sections and explores the rationale behind the club's involvement in women's football.

507 women's football clubs from 55 UEFA National Associations (NAs) in 2017/18 were contacted. Of these, 69 clubs located in 28 UEFA member countries returned completed surveys (13.6% response rate). In terms of organisational structure, these clubs follow the two most common forms currently present in European women's football. More specifically, 21 of these run a women's team on an autonomous basis (i.e. independent clubs), while 48 have to some extent developed a collaboration with a men's football club (i.e. integrated clubs). Survey responses assist profiling of management and organisational practices in women's football clubs. Findings of this study show that each club has on average 21 first team players. Of these, almost 48.9% are not paid by their clubs, while 15.5% have a full-time contract and 35.6% receive expenses or are in a part-time agreement. In general, women are underrepresented in technical and coaching positions with over 75% of coaches being men, while there is a more balanced gender ratio for medical staff and professionals working at managerial levels. Reflective of the possibility to rely on larger financial resources, working conditions are usually more stable for professionals that are employed by integrated clubs.

Figures of clubs' overall budgets show heterogeneity amongst the sample. In sum, 43.7% of the clubs spend less than €100,000 per year; about a third (37.5%) of the clubs have a budget ranging between €100,001-€500,000; while 18.8% have a budget that is greater than half a million Euros per year (of these, 83% are integrated). Also, findings of this research confirm the fragile financial conditions of women's clubs as only 12.7% of the surveyed clubs report a profit, while 52.4% reach a break-even position. 34.9% of clubs indicate a loss at the end of previous season (2017/18). In light of the challenges of achieving financial sustainability in women's football, only 13% of clubs expect their financial situation to become better in the next season (i.e. from loss to break-even position or from break-even position to profit). The revenue mix is predominantly affected by the direct contribution of the owner or of the parent club in the case of integrated clubs (31%). Other club incomes consist of sponsorships, grants and subventions from various stakeholders coupled with prize money derived from the team's sporting performance. On the other side, a third of club expenditures is spent on players' and staff salaries, while facilities and transport to away games absorb another third of club costs.



In terms of infrastructure and training facilities, independent clubs have, on average, 1.3 pitches available for their first teams' training, while 1.6 pitches are accessible by integrated clubs. The most frequently used surface for trainings is artificial grass (55%).

Out of the 69 clubs that took part in the survey, 47 have an academy for the development of young girls. Regardless of their club structure, fewer than 70% of women's clubs focus on the development of youth football. Of note, most clubs focus on the age range between U12 and U15. From a financial point of view, more than two in three clubs invest €75,000 or less every year (of these, 62% are integrated clubs); while clubs that spend more than €100,000 on their academy (22.2%) are all integrated within the structure of a professional men's club.

The marketing strategy of almost all women's clubs includes a Facebook page, an account on Instagram and a dedicated official website. However, there are substantial differences in the average audience following independent and integrated clubs. For instance, integrated clubs present an average of 240,000 subscribers to their social media channels dedicated to women's football, while independent clubs engage 5,600 users. A similar trend is seen in respect of viewership for games that are either aired or streamed on TV / online: an average of 4,511 viewers follow independent clubs while 72,101 watch games of integrated clubs. In contrast, the average numbers of spectators attending live matches at the stadium are relatively closer (308 for integrated clubs and 206 for independent clubs). Ticket prices range from 0 to more than 10 Euros. Interestingly, all clubs that let supporters free of charge are integrated, while independent clubs necessitate of at least a minimal contribution from gate receipts to sustain their business.

From a legal point of view, the most frequently used structure is association (e.g. amateur, voluntary sport clubs or charities). All independent clubs but two are organised as association, with the remaining two being limited companies. Similarly, most integrated clubs operate as associations. However, 15 integrated clubs follow the same business structure as their men's counterpart (8 limited companies; 5 joint stock companies; and 2 listed companies).

Of the 48 clubs that are associated with a men's club, 19 describe their relationship as being fully integrated within the structure of their men's counterpart; 9 are part of the same entity as the men's club but have independent organisational structures; while the remaining 20 clubs present different degrees of involvement with a men's club (ranging from 'very little involvement' to 'strong involvement') but remain separate entities. Collaboration between men's and women's clubs often includes, but it is not limited to, having the same brand and identity, developing marketing and communication strategies, sharing training facilities and having the same executive board. The great majority (89.5%) of women's integrated teams stated that their collaboration with a



men's club is 'advantageous'. In particular, they rate 'access to facilities', 'professional environment' and 'visibility and marketing attractiveness' as the most important advantages which can be derived from integration with a professional men's club.

In relation to the factors and rationale influencing the decision of integrating a women's section, interviews were conducted with 13 senior executives of 8 clubs located in 6 UEFA countries. These discussed that the decision of professional men's football clubs to start a women's section is influenced by factors such as institutional pressures (e.g. from local governments), the need to comply with regulation standards (e.g. licensing criteria), instrumental motives (e.g. opportunity to increase financial and non-financial performances), normative considerations (e.g. sense of responsibility and duty) and internal capabilities (e.g. slack resources and organisational values).

In terms of outcomes, senior executives perceive that the club benefits from having a women's football sections in various ways. These include enhanced image and reputation and increased attractiveness to new investors. Moreover, incorporating a women's team that plays under the same name and with the same colours as the parent club offers these integrated clubs the opportunity to attract an audience that otherwise would not be interested in their men's football activities. This can have consequences for their brand strength and open different market opportunities. In addition, as a result of club integration, senior executives indicate improvements in the club's organisational capabilities and individual employees' development. Another important aspect that emerged from interviews was the opportunity to reduce risks related to possible changes in the requirements to participate in men's international competitions. More precisely, clubs that have started a process of integration consider their initiative as an effective strategy in case in future international football governing bodies impose the integration of a women's football team as a necessary condition to partake in their competitions. Finally, senior executives believe that introducing a women's football section in an organisation whose traditional purpose has been to manage a men's team acts to raise awareness among both playing and non-playing members about gender issues.

Two pitfalls were identified in the approach adopted by men's clubs to manage their women's football initiative: one related to (the absence of) monitoring systems to track the impact of the women's section initiative; and one related to the possibility of the club continuing to invest in the future (i.e. defining exit options). To track the impact of their women's football initiative, some integrated clubs referred to increases in the number of spectators at the stadium or in the number of sponsors approaching the club, while others acknowledged the complete absence of objective metrics to evaluate the positioning and effects of the women's section. Related to this, most senior executives explicitly identified the lack of financial returns as the greatest risk to continuing



their women's football initiative. In view of that, there is a crucial need for football and football clubs to objectively measure the effects of initiatives that go beyond sporting and/or financial dimensions. In fact, while fan interest and media attention are growing in women's football, its current financial set-up demonstrates that the traditional model based on commercial revenues and TV rights might need some time before it becomes sustainable. Therefore, providing these clubs with practical instruments which can be used to evaluate their social impact might help them follow alternative routes to become sustainable. Demonstrating how football clubs contribute to improve broader societal aspects can help strengthening inter-connections with social and governmental institutions that work on similar issues. For example, encouraging higher participation of women in sport can be one of the common goals for both football clubs and governing bodies.

The consultation with women's football clubs has enabled a comprehensive picture about the perspectives of executives and managers on the development and challenges that European women's club football currently faces. These include the lack of commercial revenues, business sustainability and interest from spectators. However, there are differences in the way these are perceived by independent and integrated clubs. This might be due to the fact that being part of a professional men's club can help those with an integrated structure to perceive certain problems as less prominent (e.g. access to facilities, women's football popularity and support from NA). Other specific issues were discussed during interviews. For example, clubs identified overlaps between international and domestic calendars, the need for reformulations of competition formats and the lack of training compensation mechanisms as some of the challenges that are intrinsically related to the general problems of sustaining a women's section.

Overall, information collected for this research helps to monitor the situation of the women's game from the perspective of clubs. The results of this study contribute to advancing knowledge about forms of club organisation and management practices adopted in European elite women's football. Also, for the first time this research gains critical insights about the views that decision-makers working at men's and women's clubs have regarding club integration.



2. INTRODUCTION

The development of women's football is a key objective for UEFA. This has led National Associations (NAs) to dedicate higher levels of resources towards the growth of the women's game in their respective countries. In line with this, several changes have occurred in the European football scene, with the rapid evolution of women's club football being at the forefront. A great illustration of this growth is expressed by the increasingly large crowds gather to attend women's football matches, with two recent examples being Juventus-Fiorentina in Italy and Atlético Madrid-Barcelona in Spain.

The increasing attention of men's clubs towards investing in the women's game has contributed to different scenarios regarding the legal, organisational, managerial and financial aspects of women's club football. This has stimulated the creation of an integrated form of club organisation in women's football. As such, two forms of club organisation are now common in the European context: (1) independent clubs; and (2) integrated clubs. Independent clubs manage a women's team on an autonomous basis, while integrated clubs are usually linked or associated to a larger entity whose original purpose was to run a men's football team.

Two of the challenges that women's football clubs currently face are the needs for business sustainability and professionalization. In view of that, integration with a professional men's club can represent an opportunity for a women's team to grow, as this can provide its women's side with potential to draw on various pre-existing business functions (e.g. administration, player recruitment, academy, infrastructure, finance, marketing, media, sponsorship, match day) (Aoki, Crumbach, Naicker, Schmitter & Smith, 2010; Welford, 2013). Similarly, as discussed with the Italian Football Association's (FIGC) Executive Office and Women's Football Division, collaborations between women's and men's clubs can represent a vehicle for the promotion of women's football. For FIGC the integration between women's activity and men's professional football represents one of the pillars of the Women's Football Development Programme launched in 2015. This has led to 8 of the 12 Italian Women's First Division clubs to be supported by a professional men's side. Also, this perspective is shared by the European Club Association (ECA, 2014), which recommended its affiliated clubs' men's section to increase their support towards women's football, recognising the potential for close cooperation between the two sectors.

Yet, there is limited evidence about the organisational structures of women's clubs and their collaboration with men's football. In particular, the literature on the women's football industry says little about club integration and how this should be interpreted from a football business perspective. In view of that, this study collects detailed information about different areas of club management and presents a comprehensive survey of club organisational structures in women's football. In addition, it focuses more closely on clubs with an integrated structure, exploring some of the aspects that lead to club integration in UEFA member countries.



3. AIMS, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND OBJECTIVES

This study has two principal aims. First, it examines the ownership, and legal and management aspects of both independent and integrated clubs. This will help to systematically map and identify trends/profiles of management and organisational practices in European women's football. Second, this research explores the integration between men's and women's football clubs, with the purpose to:

- (a) investigate to what extent integrated men's and women's clubs collaborate with each other;
- (b) understand how integration differs and is interpreted across contexts; and
- (c) analyse the underlying reasons that lead to club integration in women's football.

Two concrete research questions are formulated to facilitate the fulfilment of the proposed aims:

1. What are the different forms and profiles of club organisation structure in European women's football?
2. Why do professional men's football clubs support the integration of a women's football section?

In answering these research questions, the study pursues two underpinning objectives:

1. To engage in a consultation with women's football clubs to enable the collection of information about their management and organisational practices, and study the factors influencing club integration.
2. To provide UEFA and National Associations (NAs) with insights into the most appropriate approaches to support the sustainability and long-term development of women's club football.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

To date academic contributions on women's football have been mainly concerned with socio-political and historical aspects of the sport, while comparatively less attention has been dedicated to studying the women's game from managerial and economic perspectives (Valenti, Scelles & Morrow, 2018). More precisely, only a few studies have focussed on the organisation of European women's football clubs (Aoki et al., 2010; Welford, 2013), while a general debate on the overall positioning of the women's game and its potential for professionalization and sustainability has emerged in the United States (Allison, 2016; Edelman & Masterson, 2009; Hellborg, 2013; Southall, Nagel & LeGrande, 2005). In recent years, European football stakeholders such as UEFA and ECA have monitored the evolving situation of women's football, gathering information about organisational and managerial aspects of NAs and women's clubs (ECA, 2014; UEFA, 2017). Overall, these



works have served to delineate profiles of women's clubs and to enhance understanding of women's football leagues and their financial context across countries. However, literature on women's football still shows conceptual and empirical gaps with regards to the notion of club integration.

At the conceptual level, the phenomenon of club integration in women's football has not been examined, while some authors have studied a comparable situation in basketball, namely the collaboration between men's and women's franchises competing in the National Basketball Association (NBA) and the Women's NBA (WNBA) (e.g. Anthony, Caudil & Mixon, 2012; Edelman & Harrison, 2010; Walker, Sartorie & MacIntosh, 2012). Of note, Walker et al. (2012) argued that Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) could be one of the underpinning elements to guide executive decision-making about the WNBA. Likewise, club integration in football might be considered as a form of CSR or strategic philanthropy.

Organisational scholars have been theorising about CSR for over three decades (Carroll, 1979; Margolis & Walsh, 2003; McWilliams & Siegel, 2000). Although definitions of CSR differ according to context, the key components of CSR have remained constant over time. For example, CSR definitions address "societal relationship" (Wood, 1991, p. 693) and the "expectations that society has of organisations" (Carroll, 1979, p. 500). McWilliams and Siegel (2000) argued that CSR comprises a set of actions aimed to further some social good that goes beyond the explicit pecuniary interests of an organisation. Related areas of inquiry explored whether firms adopt CSR initiatives as a strategic response to external pressures (Hess, Rogovsky & Dunfee, 2002). Also, Belliveau, Cottrill and O'Neill (1994) proposed a model that predicts an organisation's social responsiveness based on factors such as institutional variables (e.g. legal requirements, competitors' behaviour), economic variables (e.g. level of concentration, market share), and managerial variables (e.g. openness to innovation). Similarly, Aguinis and Galvas (2012) reviewed the academic literature on CSR and outlined predictors, underlying mechanisms and outcomes of CSR actions, synthesising these through three levels of analysis: institutional, organisational and individual.

In the case of women's football, institutional factors can be linked to the societal and political pressures and/or the introduction of regulatory frameworks to support the development of the women's game. At the organisational level, collaboration with a women's club can be associated to an instrumentally viable action that men's clubs conduct in an attempt to improve their reputation and image. Professional men's football clubs face the challenge to reconciling their financial and business activities with their role as social institutions (Morrow, 2003). As such, their investment in women's football might be perceived as fulfilling that need. At the individual level, integration between men's and women's football might be explained by the level of awareness that managers of a men's club have with regards to broader societal objectives such as gender equality and the



representation of woman. Moreover, alternative explanations might be that men's clubs consider the development of a women's section as a financially attractive investment in the long-term, particularly due to ever-increasing media attention and the growing levels of participation in the women's game.

At the empirical level, there are still very few studies that examine club integration in women's football. For instance, Aoki et al. (2010) discussed how the relationship between men's and women's football clubs can ultimately affect women's clubs' access to facilities, and to financial and human resources, arguing that integrated women's clubs can gain an advantage over their competitors with an independent structure. Furthermore, Welford (2013) created a women's club categorisation spectrum that ranges from 'completely independent' to 'fully integrated' or 'partnership', indicating that degrees of involvement between men's and women's sides often differ depending on club-specific circumstances.

There is growing evidence of, and interest in, professional sports organisations partaking in CSR type activities (e.g. Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Hamil & Morrow, 2011). Nonetheless, the literature about CSR in sports organisations has not taken into account initiatives such as the integration of a women's football team within a men's club structure (Walzel, Robertson & Anagnostopoulos, 2018). This might be due to the lack of available data about women's football clubs (Valenti et al., 2018). Therefore, this study will seek to collect primary information from European elite women's football clubs. Based on this, this research will explore how football clubs' senior executives perceive the integration of women's football and discuss where women's club integration is situated in respect of its attributes and characteristics.

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research design and strategy

Exploration is the preferred methodological approach when a group, process, activity, or situation has received little or no systematic empirical scrutiny (Stebbins, 2001). In this research, exploration includes gathering of primary information about a group (i.e. women's clubs) and their activities (i.e. organisational and managerial practices). A mixed methodological approach is employed to meet the principal aims of this study. To this end, the research strategy involves a two-stage data collection comprising both quantitative and qualitative elements. The quantitative aspect of the study includes a survey of women's football clubs competing in UEFA member countries. The qualitative element consists of interviews with a selected number of women's clubs that have to some extent developed a connection with a men's club.



The rationale for selecting a mixed-method approach is two-fold. First, mixed-methods ensure that answers can be provided for both research questions, which are inherently different in nature. Based on this, the quantitative survey is better equipped to address the *what* question (i.e., what are the different forms and profiles of club organisation in European women's football?), while the qualitative interviews contribute to answer the *why* question (i.e. why do professional men's football clubs support the integration of a women's football section?). Second, mixed-method approaches facilitate sampling procedures. In this study, the quantitative findings (i.e. survey) are used to screen potential participants in respect of follow-up interviewing in the second stage of data collection, i.e. clubs that have both men's and women's sections.

5.2 Areas of analysis

The analysis of the management and organisational structures in football clubs is challenging. This is due to modern football clubs becoming increasingly complex and multi-faceted entities where divergent political, societal and commercial interests find a common platform to interact (Gammelsæter & Senaux, 2011). Nevertheless, in this study, eight areas are identified to assist profiling of women's clubs:

- Human and financial resources
- Budget and finance
- Infrastructure and training facilities
- Women's football academy
- Media, marketing and match day
- Club organisation and legal structure
- Connection(s) between women's and men's football
- Women's football development and challenges

These eight areas of analysis are chosen following a review of the agendas, reports and programmes on the development of women's football released by national and international football stakeholders (e.g. UEFA, ECA and various NAs). The selection of these areas is also influenced by a review of existing literature in the football industry and consultation with subject matter experts at UEFA, FIGC and the Scottish Football Association. While not exhaustive, these eight areas offer an opportunity to study important aspects of managerial and organisational practices relevant to women's football clubs.



5.3 Sample and contact with clubs

628 women's clubs competing in the women's national leagues of the 55 UEFA members were identified as potential candidates to take part in the study. Suitable respondents for each club include executives and/or decision-makers (e.g. board members, chairs, directors, general managers, secretaries) who have access to financial and operational information about the club. Identification of the right contact person within each club was carried out in collaboration with either the respective NA or UEFA. When these governing bodies could not provide such information, contacts were manually searched online through clubs' official websites or social media pages. For 121 clubs, a representative person or contact details could not be identified. Overall, 507 women's football clubs were contacted. A total of 69 clubs from 28 countries returned completed questionnaires. Of these, 8 clubs from 6 countries were selected for further interviewing.

5.4 Quantitative part: surveying women's football clubs

The first stage of data collection consisted of a survey comprising 140 questions. All questions related to the eight areas of analysis, which were further divided into sub-sections. For example, questions within the *Human and financial resources* section involved information about the technical (e.g. coaches, players, scouts), medical (e.g. doctors, physiotherapists) and administrative (e.g. executives, managers) areas of the club. Access to the survey was made available online via private URLs. In order to maximise response rate, a letter of support signed by Thomas Junod (UEFA Head of National Associations Education and Research) and Nadine Kessler (UEFA Head of Women's Football) was attached to the original message of invitation. Further, Francesca Sanzone (FIGC Deputy Chief Executive Officer and UEFA Women's Football Committee Member), invited representatives of the NAs in the Committee to encourage participation of clubs from their respective countries. The language used for the survey was English. However, given the potential language barriers for clubs based in non-English speaking countries, all questions required participants to input relatively straight forward information about the club they represent. Moreover, to facilitate understanding and completion of the survey, 131 items were designed for closed/pre-coded responses, 7 were based on a pre-coded scale and 2 were open questions. Participants were given the option to answer the two open questions in their original language. At the end of the survey, women's clubs that were partially associated or fully integrated with a men's club were asked whether they would be available to take part in the follow-up interview.



5.5 Qualitative part: interviews with partially associated or fully integrated clubs

The second stage of data collection includes semi-structured interviews regarding the *Connection(s) between women's and men's football*. Clubs were selected based on the following criteria: a) the existence of some form of link with a men's club; b) confirmed availability to partake in the follow-up; c) the men's section being professional and playing in their respective national top-tier; d) the women's section receiving financial contributions from the club; e) the women's section operating either at a loss or at break-even. Representatives for both the women's and the men's sections of each selected club were invited to take part in the interview. However, for some clubs, representatives of the men's section were unable to participate. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 13 senior executives from 8 different clubs located in 6 nations. Each interview ranged from between 30 to 90 minutes. Participants answered questions pertaining to the rationale behind their club's involvement in women's football. Each interview was based on the second research question of the study: "Why do professional men's football clubs support the integration of a women's football section?" Interviewees were then further questioned concerning their club's decision to invest in women's football, their expectations and which stakeholders placed these expectations on them. Respondents were encouraged to discuss the benefits, challenges, and barriers that they perceived regarding the integration of a women's football section. In addition, the interviews allowed for in-depth understanding of the participants' perspectives concerning the development of women's football. The interviews were audiotaped, transcribed verbatim, reviewed by the author and finally checked by the participants themselves for accuracy and clarity.

6. KEY FINDINGS

This section presents results derived from the analysis of the survey responses and interview transcriptions. The final response rate for the questionnaire was 13.6%. Of those clubs that returned completed questionnaires, 75.3% compete in their respective women's national top division, while 24.7% play in the second tier. Over 75% of the surveys were completed by a member of the senior management of the club (general manager, 23.1%; chair or deputy chair, 21.7%; director, 14.5%; general secretary, 10.1%; administrative manager, 5.8%). The presentation of key findings is organised as follows: the next part traces profiles of organisational structure of all women's clubs. The attention is narrowed to integrated clubs in the subsequent section, where the different forms of integration and the reasons for support are presented. The final part focuses on some of the challenges and areas for development in women's football.



1. What are the different forms and profiles of club organisation structure in European women's football?

There are two common organisational forms in the European context, i.e. independent and integrated club. Table 1 presents a summary of clubs that participated in the survey based on their geographical location and club structure.

Table 1. Sample description based on geographical location and club structure.

<i>Country</i>	<i>Independent</i>	<i>Integrated</i>	<i>Total</i>
Albania (ALB)	1	2	3 (25%)
Austria (AUT)	1	0	1 (10%)
Belgium (BEL)	0	2	2 (33.3%)
Bosnia and Herzegovina (BIH)	0	1	1 (12.5%)
Croatia (CRO)	0	2	2 (25%)
Denmark (DEN)	2	2	4 (23.6%)
England (ENG)	0	2	2 (9%)
Estonia (EST)	0	1	1 (12.5%)
Faroe Islands (FRO)	0	2	2 (33.3%)
Finland (FIN)	1	0	1 (16.6%)
Germany (GER)	0	4	4 (18.2%)
Republic of Ireland (IRL)	1	2	3 (37.5%)
Israel (ISR)	1	0	1 (11.1%)
Italy (ITA)	3	5	8 (33.3%)
Kazakhstan (KAZ)	0	1	1 (20%)
Lithuania (LTU)	1	0	1 (20%)
Luxembourg (LUX)	0	1	1 (8.3%)
Malta (MLT)	0	1	1 (12.5%)
Netherlands (NED)	0	3	3 (33.3%)
Northern Ireland (NIR)	0	2	2 (28.6%)
Poland (POL)	1	0	1 (8.3%)
Portugal (POR)	0	2	2 (16.6%)
Scotland (SCO)	3	2	5 (35.7%)
Slovenia (SVN)	1	1	2 (25%)
Spain (ESP)	1	10	11 (9.2%)
Sweden (SWE)	2	0	2 (8.3%)
Switzerland (SUI)	1	0	1 (12.5%)
Wales (WAL)	1	0	1 (10%)
Total	21	48	69

Note: In parentheses the percentage of clubs covered for each individual country.



Human and financial resources

Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5 offer a snapshot of the characteristics of those operating in women's football. These include descriptive statistics for women and men in playing and non-playing positions.

Table 2. Women's football first team players in numbers.

	<i>N</i>	<i>Per club</i>	<i>Mean age</i>	<i>% FT</i>	<i>% PT</i>	<i>% Volunt.</i>
First team players	1,479	21.4	21.9	15.5	35.6	48.9
<i>Independent</i>	451	21.4	21.4	15.3	35.3	49.4
<i>Integrated</i>	1,028	21.4	22.1	15.7	35.7	48.7

Note: Abbreviations: FT stands for Full time; PT stands for Part time; Volunt. stands for Volunteers.

Reflective of the often unstable financial conditions of the women's game, almost half of first team players are not paid by their clubs. This is in line with figures reported by FIFPro (2017) in their study about working conditions in women's football. Also, on average, clubs present 11.7% foreign players (10.4% in integrated clubs; 14.5% in independent clubs). This low percentage of foreign players might be due to the low level of revenues generated by women's football, which results in limited player mobility and few international transfers (FIFA, 2018).

Table 3. Women's football technical staff in numbers.

	<i>N</i>	<i>Per club</i>	<i>Mean age</i>	<i>% Men</i>	<i>% Women</i>	<i>% FT</i>	<i>% PT</i>	<i>% Volunt.</i>
Coaches: Technical	255	3.7	37.6	76.1	23.9	29	52.2	18.8
<i>Independent</i>	79	3.7	37.7	71.4	28.6	18.6	63.2	18.1
<i>Integrated</i>	176	3.6	37.6	78.1	21.9	33.6	47.3	19.1
Coaches: S & Cond	99	1.4	33.3	79.4	20.6	21.5	63.8	14.7
<i>Independent</i>	37	1.8	35.5	82.4	17.6	6.7	76.7	16.7
<i>Integrated</i>	62	1.3	32.4	78.3	21.7	27.6	58.5	13.9
Scouts	46	0.6	35.8	70.2	29.8	13.3	58.6	28.1
<i>Independent</i>	9	0.4	33.7	91.7	8.3	0.0	50.0	50.0
<i>Integrated</i>	37	0.7	36.6	61.7	38.3	17.7	61.5	20.8

Note: Abbreviations: FT stands for Full time; PT stands for Part time; Volunt. stands for Volunteers; S & Cond stands for Strength and conditioning coaches.

Although recent evidence shows that the gender of the coach is not a significant determinant of team performance in football (Gomez-Gonzalez, Dietl & Nessler, 2018), women are underrepresented in technical positions with over 75% of coaches being men. Similarly, 70.2% of scouts are men. In terms of contracts, most coaches are either part-time or full-time, while the position of scouts is more unstable. Of note is the difference in percentage of full-time working technical staff between independent and integrated clubs. This might indicate that technical positions are more likely to be occupied by more professionalised individuals in integrated clubs



(also due to their collaboration/sharing of coaches with professional men's clubs). Figure 1 denotes that in 72% of cases the highest qualified coach holds a UEFA coaching badge.

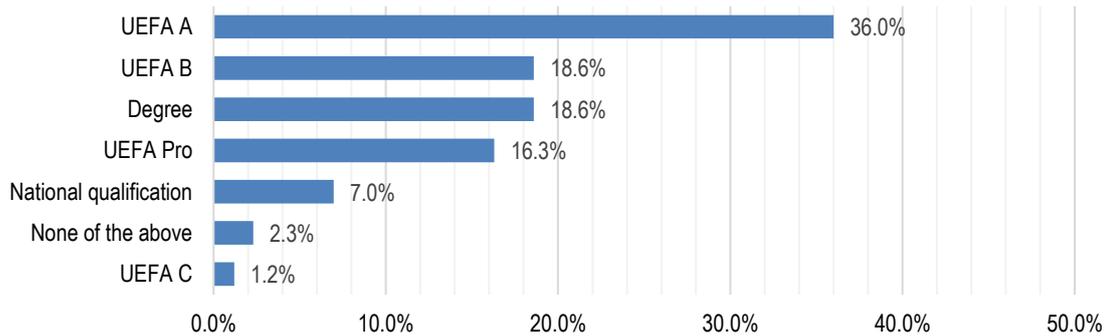


Figure 1. Highest qualified coaches in women's football.

Table 4. Women's football medical staff in numbers.

	N	Per club	Mean age	% Men	% Women	% FT	% PT	% Volunt.
Medical staff	114	1.6	35.9	54.3	45.7	26.7	56.5	16.9
<i>Independent</i>	34	1.6	37.4	65.4	34.6	12.5	64.6	22.9
<i>Integrated</i>	80	1.6	35.4	49.9	50.1	32.3	53.2	14.4

Note: Abbreviations: FT stands for Full time; PT stands for Part time; Volunt. stands for Volunteers.

Similar to technical positions, medical staff of integrated clubs benefit from more stable working conditions. The gender ratio is more balanced for medical professionals, although the proportion of women in independent clubs is lower than 35%. Overall, 68.1% of women's clubs have an in-house medical department. Of these, 72.3% are integrated clubs. Clubs that do not have an internal medical unit source medical support from local hospitals and private clinics.

Table 5. Women's football management and admin staff in numbers.

	N	Per club	Mean age	% Men	% Women	% FT	% PT	% Volunt.
Board members	407	5.9	43.6	59.1	40.9	10.4	9.4	79.0
<i>Independent</i>	163	7.7	43.8	51.2	48.8	6.3	13.7	80.0
<i>Integrated</i>	244	5.1	43.4	63.4	36.6	12.7	7.0	78.5
Managers and admins	225	3.2	40.7	49.4	50.6	29.8	18.3	50.1
<i>Independent</i>	68	3.2	43.6	42.7	57.3	10.2	12.5	71.8
<i>Integrated</i>	157	3.2	39.3	53.0	47.0	39.1	21.0	39.8

Note: Abbreviations: FT stands for Full time; PT stands for Part time; Volunt. stands for Volunteers.



Management positions are more evenly split between men and women, despite only about a third of club board members in integrated clubs being women. This may be related to the pre-existence of these football clubs as organisations principally concentrated on men’s activities. While most club boards consist of volunteer members, a discrepancy in the percentage of full-time managers working for independent and integrated clubs can be noticed in favour of the latter.

In general, in terms of age diversity, all actors involved in women’s football tend to be relatively young. While the ratio between men and women occupying technical positions is skewed towards men, medical and managerial positions present a more balanced gender proportion. The chart below shows how much on average women’s football clubs dedicate to each of these components. More detailed information about women’s clubs’ finance is displayed in the next section.

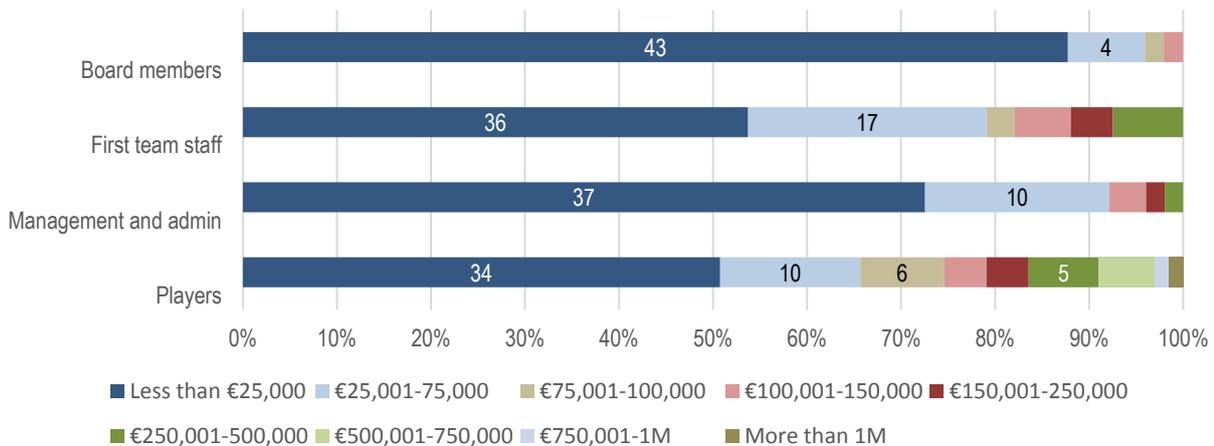


Figure 2. Breakdown of average per club expenditure for technical, medical and managerial resources.

Note: Data labels displayed only for percentages ≥ 4



Budget and finance

Figure 3 displays the overall budget that clubs allocate per year. This shows heterogeneity amongst clubs with regards to their financial situation: 43.7% of the clubs spend less than €100,000 per year; 37.5% of the clubs have a budget ranging between €100,001-€500,000; while 18.8% have a budget that is greater than half a million Euros per year (of these, 83% are integrated).

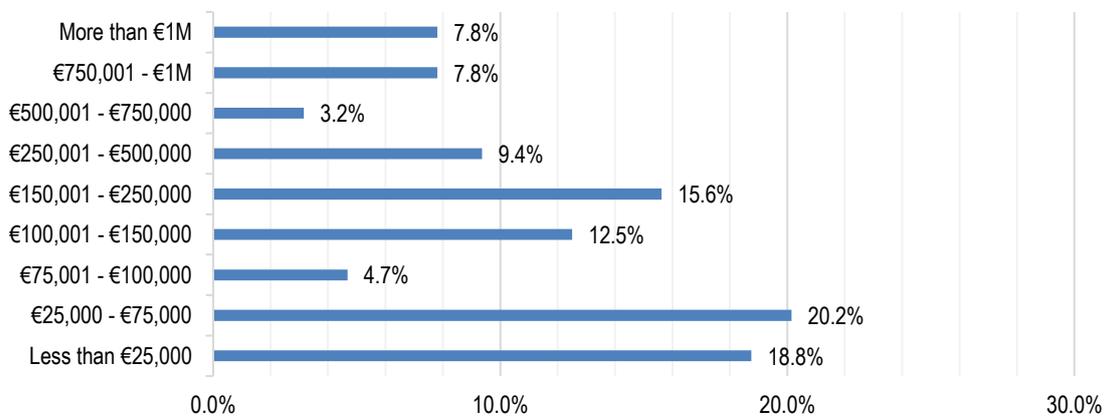


Figure 3. Overall budget.

Note: information available for 64 of 69 clubs (2 N/A; 3 'Prefer not to say')

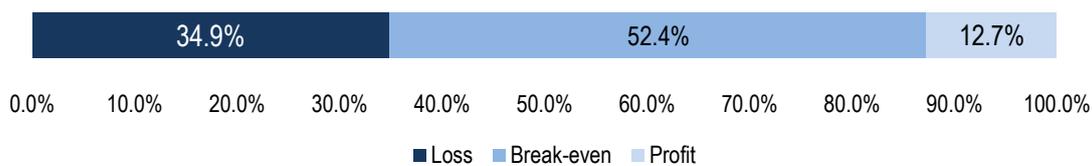


Figure 4. Financial statements at the end of previous season (2017/18).

Note: information available for 63 of 69 clubs (1 N/A; 5 'Prefer not to say')

Figure 4 refers to the results of clubs' financial statements for the previous season (2017/18). Over half of the clubs (52.4%) achieved a break-even position (of these, 75.8% are integrated), while more than a third of the clubs (34.9%) reported a loss (of these, 68.2% are integrated). A small number of clubs have generated a profit (12.7%, of these 37.5% are integrated). In addition, in light of the challenges of achieving financial sustainability in women's football, only 13% of clubs expect their financial situation to become better in the next season (i.e. from loss to break-even position or from break-even position to profit).

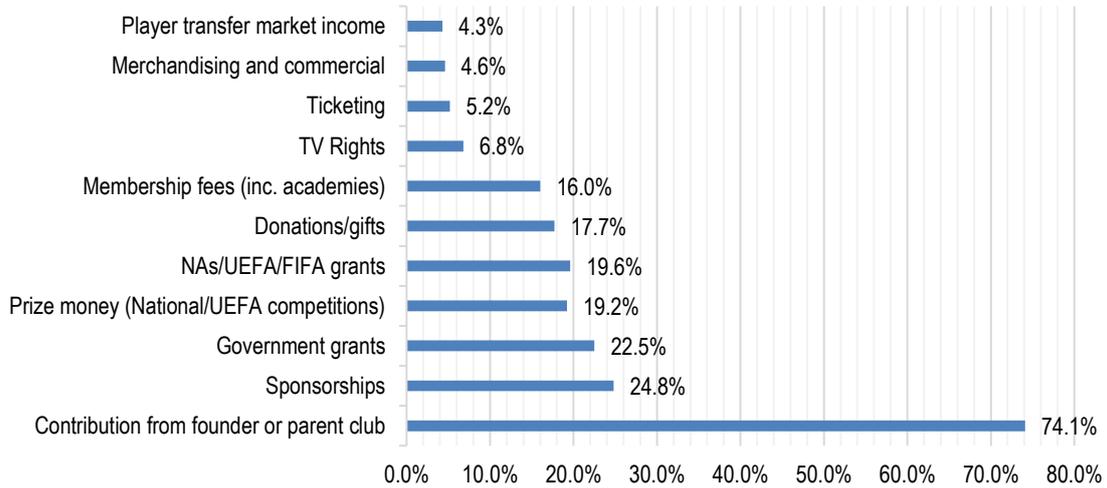


Figure 5. Breakdown of average per club revenue by revenue stream.

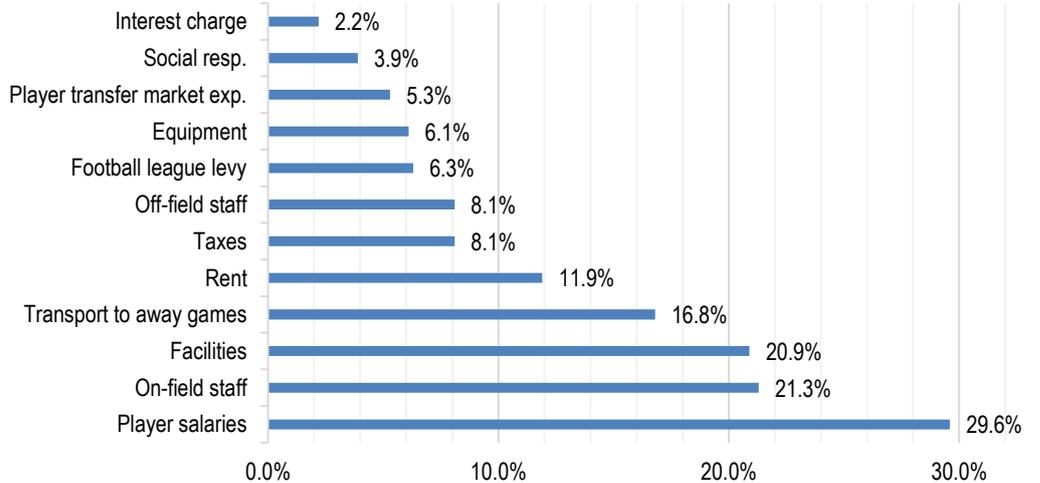


Figure 6. Breakdown of average per club expense by expense stream.

The two charts above portray the average financial situation of women's clubs. Starting with revenues, it is clear that women's football is some distance from reaching self-sustainability as most clubs rely on their respective owners or parent clubs to inject resources in order to support the team. The revenue mix is also affected by sponsorships, grants and subvention from various stakeholders and the team's sporting performance (via prize money). On the other side, a third of club expenditures is spent on players' and staff salaries, while facilities and transport to away games absorb another third of club costs.



Infrastructure and training facilities

On average clubs' first teams train 4.3 times per week. Independent clubs have, on average, 1.3 pitches available for their first teams' training, while 1.6 pitches are accessible by integrated clubs. The most frequently used surface for trainings is artificial grass (55%).

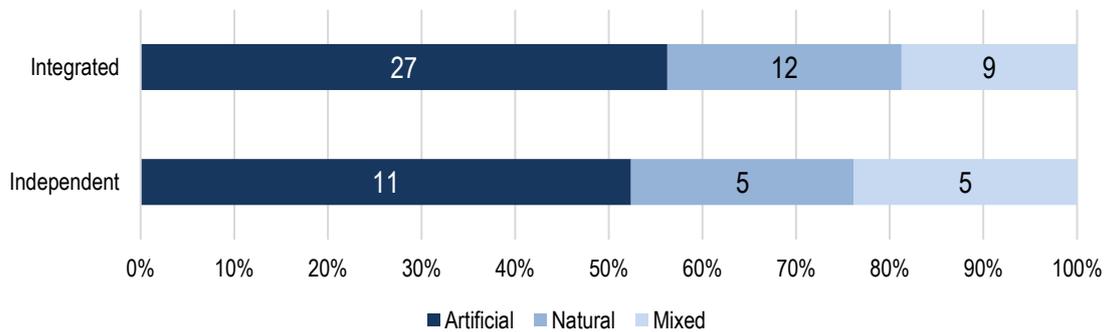


Figure 7. Training pitch surface for first team training.

In addition to this, 49 out of the 69 training facilities have a refreshment area, of which 71% belong to integrated clubs. Of those clubs that have a women's football academy (see next section for more details), 74% share training facilities between the first team and the academy teams.

Women's football academy

Out of the 69 clubs that took part in the survey, 47 have an academy for the development of young girls. Regardless of their club structure, fewer than 70% of women's clubs focus on the development of youth football.

Table 6. Academy for independent and integrated clubs.

	Yes	No
<i>Independent</i>	16	5
<i>Integrated</i>	31	17
Total	47	22

No major differences are observed between clubs with independent and integrated structures in relation to individuals working in the academy. In addition to what is presented in Table 7, information from surveys shows that there is a typical ratio of 1 coach per 9 players and that each age-specific team has about 16 girls.



Table 7. Women's football academies in numbers.

	N	Per club
Players	3,636	77.3
<i>Independent</i>	1,102	78.7
<i>Integrated</i>	2,534	76.7
Teams	225	4.7
<i>Independent</i>	65	4.6
<i>Integrated</i>	160	4.8
Coaches	406	8.6
<i>Independent</i>	125	8.9
<i>Integrated</i>	281	8.5

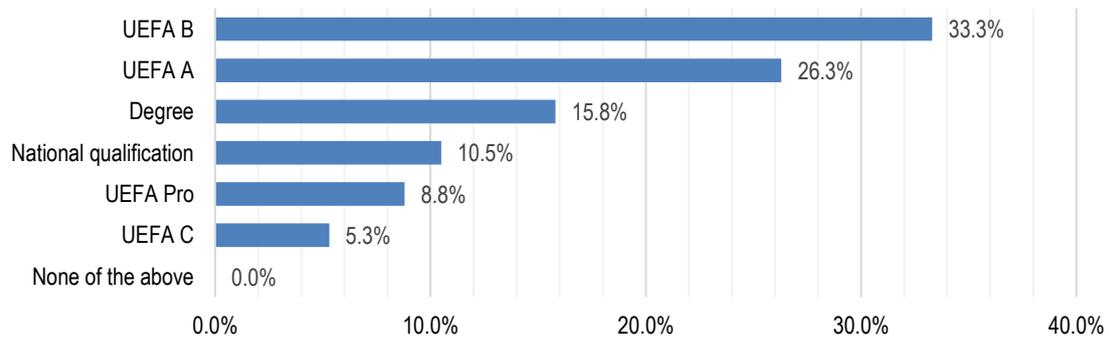


Figure 8. Highest qualified coaches in women's football academies.

Similar to coaches working with first teams, 73% of times the highest qualified academy coaches hold a UEFA badge. While clubs employ different paths to foster the development of their young girls, most clubs focus on the age range between U12 and U15.

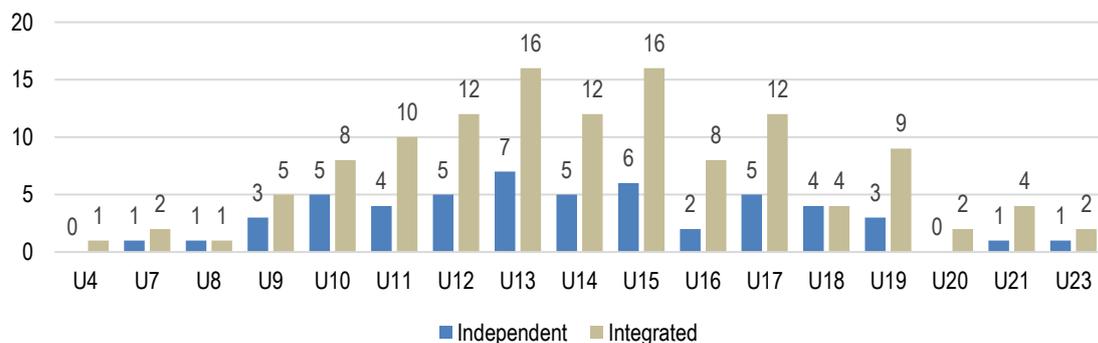


Figure 9. Number of academy teams per age range U4-U23.

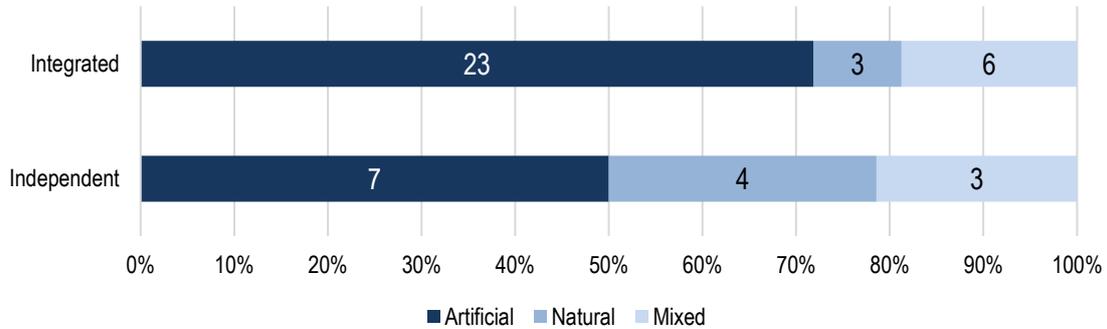


Figure 10. Training pitch surface for academy teams.

On average, clubs dedicate 2 football pitches for the practice of their academy teams. Similar to first teams, the most commonly used surface in women’s youth football is artificial grass (63%).

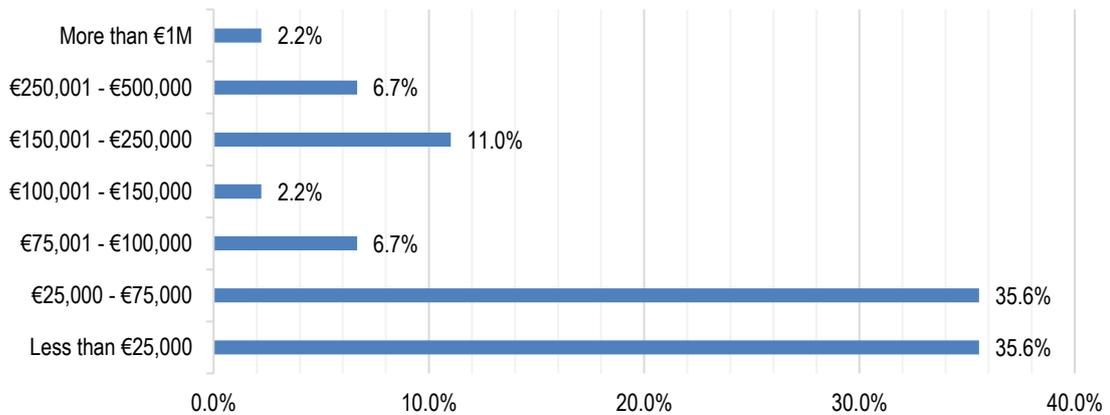


Figure 11. Academy budget.

Note: Information available for 45 of 69 clubs (22 do not have an Academy; 2 ‘Prefer not to say’). No clubs within €250,001 to 1M range.

Figure 11 presents how much on average clubs dedicate to their academy. More than two in three clubs invest €75,000 or less every year (of these, 62% are integrated clubs). Clubs that spend more than €100,000 on their academy (22.2%) are all integrated within the structure of a professional men’s football club.



Media, marketing and match day

Only 44 clubs have an individual dedicated to marketing (68% of these are integrated) and 20 have a marketing department (85% integrated). Figure 11 displays the platforms that women's clubs utilise to promote themselves.

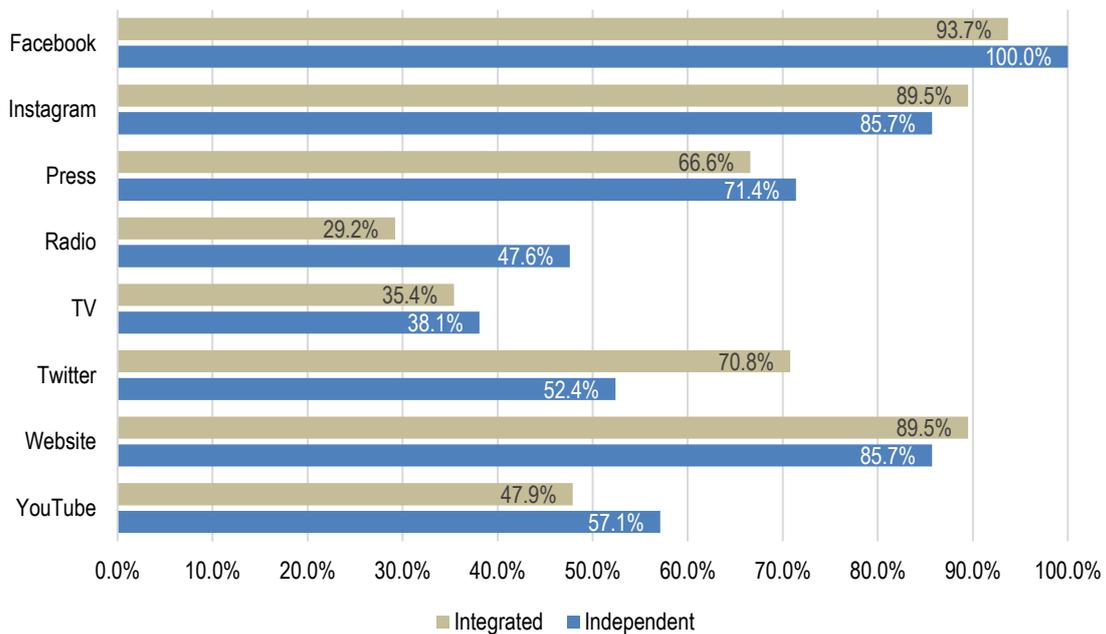


Figure 12. The most utilised platforms.

Almost all women's football clubs have a dedicated Facebook page. The second most utilised platforms are Instagram and the official website. An average audience of about 240,000 followers/subscribers to social media channels is found for integrated clubs, while 5,600 users on average engage with independent clubs on social networks. 44 out of 69 clubs have a jersey sponsor (of these, 75% are integrated clubs). The retail industry is the most widely represented jersey sponsor in women's football (Figure 13). On average jersey sponsorship contracts have a duration of 3 years. Average income from jersey sponsorships for most clubs (72.7%) is less than €75,000 per annum (Figure 14).

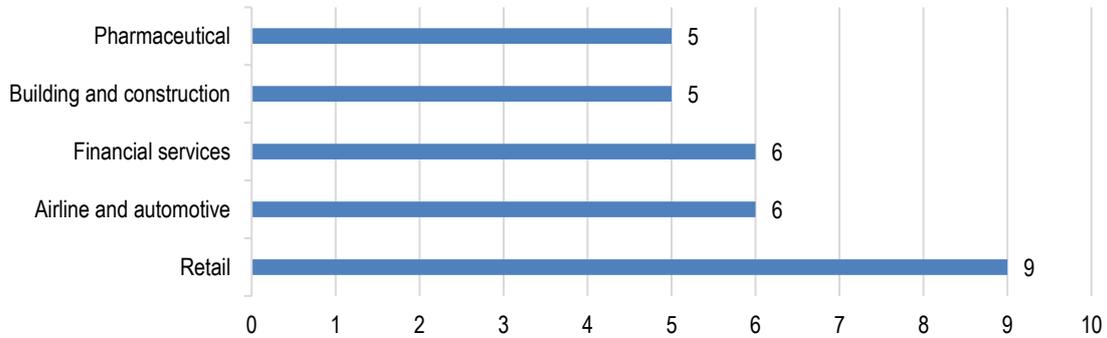


Figure 13. The most represented industries in jersey sponsors.

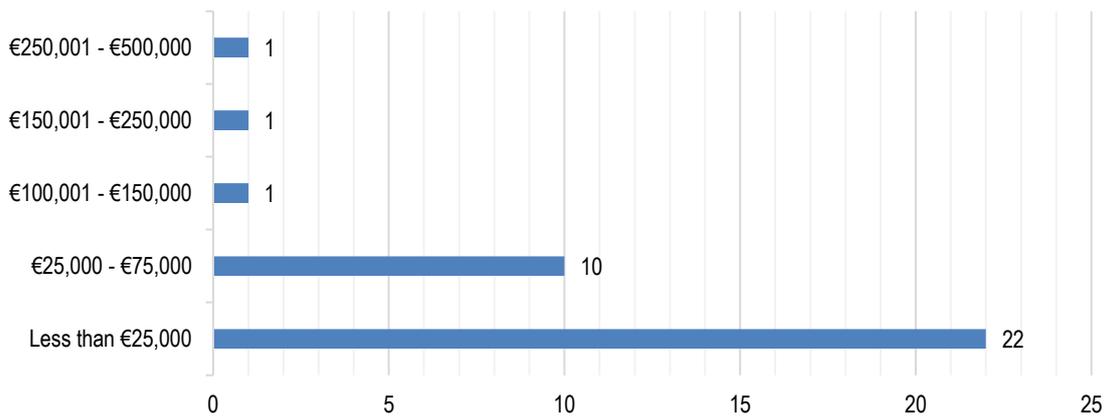


Figure 14. Income from jersey sponsorships.

Note: Information available for 35 of 69 clubs (17 do not have a jersey sponsor; 6 'Prefer not to say'; 11 N/A).

Women's football clubs play on average 26 competitive games each season. The average capacity of facilities (e.g. stadiums, training centres) where these games are played is 2,117. Integrated clubs play in slightly larger stadiums (average capacity: 2,401), while independent clubs have available facilities with an average capacity of 1,465. 19 out of 69 clubs (of these, 84% are integrated) own the facility where they play their competitive games. The average number of spectators attending the stadium for all clubs is 277. More specifically, integrated clubs report an average of 308 spectators, while typical attendance for independent clubs is of about 206. An average stadium load percentage of over 20% is reported by both independent (21%) and integrated (22.8%) clubs.

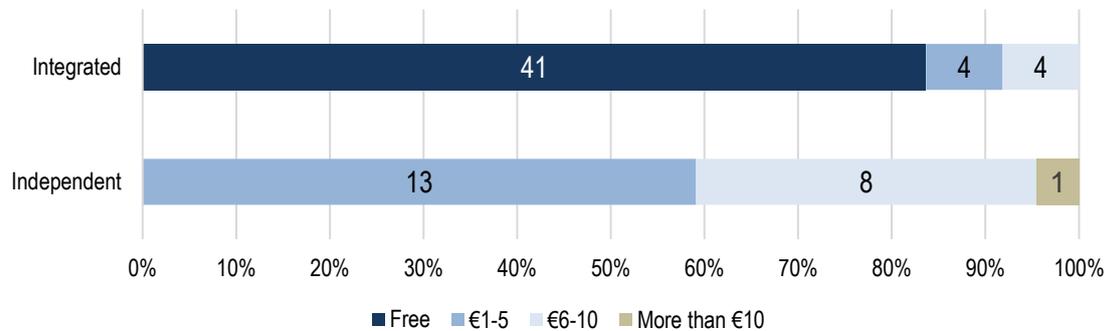


Figure 15. Average ticket prices.

To attend their matches the majority of clubs apply a free-of-charge admission policy (59.4%), while 24% of clubs charge 5 Euros or less. 17.3% of clubs have an average ticket price ranging between €6-10. Only one club charges more than 10 Euros (Figure 15). Of note, all clubs that let supporters in for free are integrated. This highlights a substantial difference in the needs between independent and integrated clubs. On the one hand, independent clubs necessitate gate receipts in order to sustain their business. On the other hand, women's clubs with an integrated structure can afford to let spectators attend their games without a direct financial payment in return. In addition to stadium attendance, 32 clubs (59.3% of these are integrated) indicate that their games are streamed either online or on TV. They report an average audience of 34,927 spectators. However, independent clubs have an audience of 4,511, while the average spectatorship for integrated clubs is 72,101. Overall, these figures contribute to provide interesting insights on the potential for clubs with integrated and independent structures to generate and enhance visibility for women's football matches. In general, professional men's football clubs with a recognisable brand that invest in a women's section seem likely to produce a spillover effect. In other words, it might be that an integrated club's brand strength is 'transferrable' from the men's to the women's section as supporters might associate the brand of a men's club with its integrated women's side.



Club organisation and legal structure

As noted in Table 8, the majority of women's clubs are organised as associations. These include amateur and voluntary sport clubs as well as charities. More specifically, all but two independent clubs are organised as associations. The remaining two are limited companies. Most of those with an integrated structure are associations. However, 15 integrated clubs follow the same business structure as their men's counterpart (8 limited companies; 5 joint stock companies; and 2 listed companies).

Table 8. Women's clubs' legal structure

	Association	Limited company	Joint stock company	Listed company
<i>Independent</i>	16	2	0	0
<i>Integrated</i>	30	8	5	2
Total	46	10	5	2

Note: Information available for 63 of 69 clubs (6 N/A).

Connection(s) between women's and men's football

The majority of clubs that participated in the survey are associated with a men's football club (69.5%). However, there are different levels of involvement between men's and women's clubs. Following the club categorisation spectrum developed by Welford (2013), the results of the survey show that the connection that women's clubs have developed with men's clubs varies according to six distinct types of organisation structure (see Table 9).

Table 9. Forms of club organisation and integration in European women's football.

Club organisation structure	Frequency	%
Completely independent	21	30.4
Two separate entities, very little connection or involvement with the men's club	4	5.8
Collaboration with the men's club but remain two separate entities	7	10.1
Strong involvement with the men's club but remain two separate entities	9	13.1
Part of the same entity but independent organisational structures	9	13.1
Integrated at all levels, joint organisational structures, run as one club	19	27.5

Of the 48 clubs that are associated with a men's club, 19 (39.5%) describe their organisation as being completely integrated with a men's club ("*Integrated at all levels, joint organisational structures, run as one club*"). The remaining 60.5% of clubs display various degrees of involvement or integration with the men's club. Table 10 presents the distribution of clubs for each type of integrated structure across countries.



Table 10. Number of clubs and level of integration across countries.

	ALB	BEL	BIH	CRO	DEN	ENG	ESP	EST	FRO	GER	IRL	ITA	KAZ	LUX	MLT	NED	NIR	POR	SCO	SVN
(1)		1		1			1					1								
(2)		1				1				1				1	1				1	1
(3)			1	1			2				1	2				1	1			
(4)					1	1	1			2	1	1				1	1			
(5)	2				1		6	1	2	1		1	1			1		2	1	

Note: (1) Two separate entities, very little connection or involvement with the men's club; (2) Collaboration with the men's club but remain two separate entities; (3) Strong involvement with the men's club but remain two separate entities; (4) Part of the same entity but independent organisational structures; (5) Integrated at all levels, joint organisational structures, run as one club.

Collaborations in integrated clubs occur in at least one managerial/organisational area of the club. Table 11 outlines the areas that women's and men's clubs most frequently share with each other.

Table 11. Shared areas between women's and men's sections.

<i>Club area</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>%</i>
Identity (e.g. name, colour, crest)	42	87.5
Marketing/communication department	34	70.8
Training facilities	33	68.8
Executive club board (i.e. women's section represented)	32	66.7
Part of the same legal entity	31	64.6
Stadium (at least sometimes)	30	62.5
Financial contribution for the first team	29	60.4
Medical staff	27	56.3
Financial contribution for the academy	19	39.6
Scouting staff	9	18.8
Coaching staff	7	14.6

Most integrated clubs (87.5%) share the same identity and brand, and can therefore be recognised 'universally', regardless of whether their teams are competing in men's or women's football. Also, this is complemented by collaboration in marketing and communication areas (70.8%), which clubs can exploit to reinforce their brand across both sectors of the game. At the same time, this is an area which can potentially help the women's side increase its visibility and contribute to fertilisation between fans of the two sections within the same club (see Guest & Luijten, 2018, for a discussion). 62.5% of women's teams that are integrated within



a professional men's club can benefit from accessing the same training and stadium facilities. Yet, a third of integrated clubs are not able to take strategic decisions in respect of the running of the women's section due to the fact that they are not represented in the executive board of the club. Based on this, women's teams that are integrated within a men's club structure might risk seeing their voice become undervalued in the decision-making process due to underrepresentation (Aoki et al., 2010; Welford, 2013). Financial contribution from the club to sustain the management of the women's first team occurs in 60.4% of the observed cases. Related to this, on average 49.1% of the total budget of integrated women's sections is covered by resources of the parent club. Other areas where men's and women's football teams collaborate include the medical staff (56.3%), financial contributions for the academy (39.6%), the scouting department (18.8%) and the coaching staff (14.6%).

The great majority (89.5%) of women's integrated teams stated that their collaboration with a men's club is 'advantageous'. In particular, on a 1-10 scale, they rated 'access to facilities' (mean = 7.78, SD = 2.45), 'professional environment' (mean = 7.35, SD = 2.65) and 'visibility and marketing attractiveness' (mean = 7.26, SD = 2.43) as the most important advantages which can be derived from integration with a professional men's club (Figure 16).

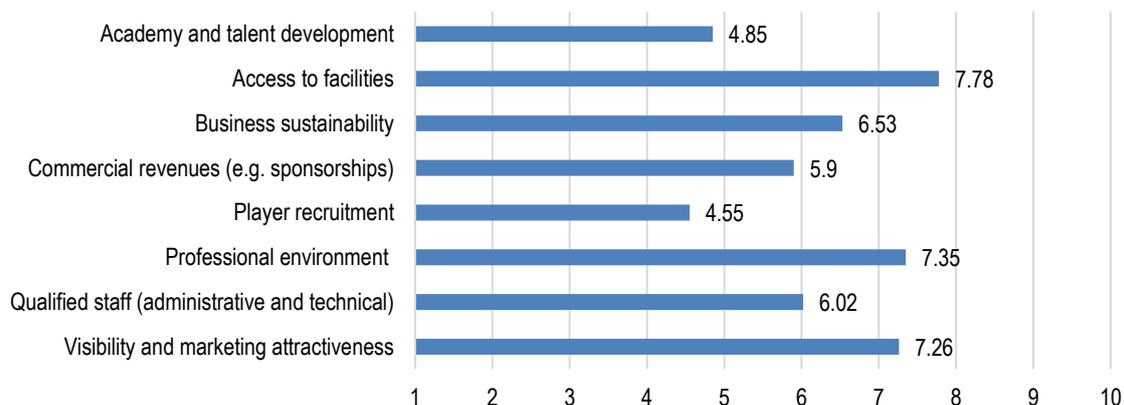


Figure 16. Advantages derived from club integration (women's section perspective).

These findings are in line with the works of Aoki et al. (2010) and Welford (2013). However, this research also aims to explore the counterparts' point of view regarding the process of club integration. This aspect of football club management was previously unexplored. Therefore, results of this research are new to the literature and contribute to expand understanding about the management of women's football clubs.



2. Why do professional men's football clubs support the integration of a women's football section?

This pivotal question, along with follow-up probes, facilitated the development of an understanding of the integration of a women's section in the structure of professional men's football clubs. The responses tended to fit into two main categories: one related to the decision to start a women's section (i.e. predictors); and one related to the perceived outcomes resulting from integration. Tables 12 and 13 present these two major themes, their sub-levels and representative quotations from the interviews with executives of integrated clubs.

As displayed in Table 12, the decision of professional men's football clubs to start a women's section is influenced by institutional pressures. According to Freeman (1984), organisations have to be attentive to groups that affect them or groups that could affect them. This aligns to the view that modern football clubs are complex entities which extend their influence beyond the direct stakeholders such as supporters to encompass other groups of interest such as local municipalities and governments. Other institutional-level predictors include the need to comply with regulations, standards and certifications demands. This highlights a debate around the effects of top-down policies which seek to foster the development of women's football in specific countries. In particular, in 2015 FIGC started to include a criterion in their Club Licensing regulations for men's professional clubs to either open a women's section or create a formal relationship with an already existing women's club. Identifying this as a predictor is important for future studies that are concerned with the strategic actions that organisations take in response to institutional pressures. For instance, on the one hand, Tenbrunsel et al. (2000) found that organisations might reduce their engagement with initiatives that do not produce a financial return and become principally concerned with symbolic activities that serve to comply minimally with requirements. On the other hand, Pedersen and Gwozdz (2014) argue that while conformance remains the dominant response to institutional pressures, increasing pressures stimulate organisations' opportunity-seeking behaviour at the expense of compliance. This has implications on the way NAs should address their policy actions for the development of women's club football. However, while this study offers information on how clubs have reacted to this type of requirements in the short-term, the effect of such policies and the clubs' actions in relation to regulations and other institutional pressures would benefit from being explored over a longer timeframe.

Table 12. Predictors for the creation of a women's section in professional men's football clubs: Levels, sub-themes and sample quotes.

Theme	Level	Sub-theme	Sample quotes
Predictors	Institutional	Institutional and stakeholder pressures	The men's team was building a new stadium and they needed some help from the city and the city was keen on having a women's team. So, after some political discussion, it was decided to start a women's team. At the time the club was struggling to make ends meet and couldn't afford the stadium anymore. So, what the local government said 'Okay, we'll buy this ground, but you have to start up a women's football team in return.' It was just top-down, 'You have to start it.' They said, 'Yes, we're going to do this.' To participate in the new women's national competition we had to be a member of a men's team which played at the highest level. So, we had to search for a companion to make it possible and so we were bought by the men's team.
		Regulations, standards and certification demands	We started to work with women's football when the NA imposed an obligation to have a women's section in the men's club licensing criteria. The club has a legal structure which gets fiscal benefits because there is a social part in the vision. Each year the club has to prove that it is still responding to that vision and the women's team contributes to achieve that. The club believes that women's football has the potential to become a commercial product.
	Organisational	Instrumental motives	What really helped us is that we had the women's national team in our stadium last year and it was sold out. That let some club board members think, 'Hey, we can actually make money out of it' or, 'We can actually have spectators come to the stadium and get data.' The board of our club now sees that also women's football could be attractive on the business level. The role of women in society is changing. This is clear in many situations of life, not only in sports – in politics, economics. It is the principle.
		Normative motives	It is almost a moral obligation. We do invest because it is the right thing to do. Football is increasingly supported by women at all levels. There is a shifting socio-cultural trend in our country and we wanted to embrace that. The club wants to make a point: football is for all.



(continued)

Theme	Level	Sub-theme	Sample quotes
		Internal resources and organisational values	The club thinks that having a women's section is possible because we have a good structure, we have good infrastructures and we have the financial capacity to improve it. Our club is one of the best in the country at the moment.
		External context and other competitors	<p>Our club has in its own DNA the willingness of being a pioneer. I believe that our club has this duty and feels like a forerunner in the country and in Europe. It has the opportunity to set the standards. We try to experiment philosophical structural situations that can generate growth for the whole system. The initial investments have been made with the aim to excel also in the women's sector from both managerial and sporting aspects.</p> <p>I believe that due to the fact that the top European football clubs have started to include a women's section, others will follow in an attempt to generate better competitions.</p> <p>One of the best publicity we had was when the men's team played the Champions League. I think it was two years ago. We were in a competition with one of the best European women's football club and their President invited the club managers to visit the women's part of their club. He showed off all the possibilities they have, how they invest and how it became important. So, that moment was a very lucky thing in our life as it helped us a lot. We were not aware of it, but we learned afterwards that that moment – I think a meeting of one or two hours – helped us more than the ten years of work.</p> <p>My boss, who is also on the board of the men's national league, says that they're talking to each other, they are saying to the other clubs, 'Start up a women's team, it's important, you have to do this and do your job within the community.' So, they are pushing like peer pressure between clubs.</p>





At the organisational level, there are indications to suggest that clubs invest in women's football instrumentally as they foresee an opportunity which is good for their business and likely to lead to increased non-financial performances (e.g. return on image and attractiveness to investors) (Bansal & Roth, 2000). Moreover, influenced by wider ethical considerations, senior executives of integrated clubs identify normative reasons to open a women's section such as the sense of responsibility and duty. This is in line with the argument put forward by Gammelsæter and Senaux (2011) that the recent development of women's football is due to the general shift towards a more 'gender neutral' society. Accordingly, football clubs are adopting an investment that contributes to align their mission and values with the current political and social sentiment about gender equality and the position of women in society, while, at the same time, seeking to benefit from their association with an increasingly popular sport like women's football. In this regard, it can be argued that stakeholders working to foster women's football should put emphasis on the social impact that the inception of a women's team can determine.

Furthermore, internal resources and organisational values are indicated here as factors that influence the decision of clubs to invest in women's football. Clubs that describe themselves as 'pioneers' and 'forerunners' take the path of developing a women's football section. This is also due to their ability to recognise and become aware of an increasing phenomenon as well as the opportunity to exploit available internal resources. Related to this, past literature identified slack resources (Bansal, 2003; Waddock & Graves, 1997) as a moderator of the relationship between organisations' CSR initiatives and outcomes. In a market such as women's football that offers few tangible financial returns, the behaviour of professional men's football clubs in respect of the creation of a women's section resembles that of organisations operating in other industries in respect of CSR initiatives. Based on this, it is likely that, due to the fragile financial set-up of the women's game, only professional men's clubs with larger (financial) capabilities (i.e. slack resources) have the chance to maintain their investments in the long run. From a financial point of view, the appearance of top European integrated clubs, coupled with the consequent rising costs associated with their participation, risks the women's game becoming a sport that is dominated by clubs that have the means to report continuous losses without any threat to their financial sustainability.

Among the outcomes (Table 13) that clubs perceive as positive results of their investment in women's football, there are intangible returns such as improved image and reputation and enhanced attractiveness to new investors. In essence, by associating their club brand to women's football, senior executives expect to leverage corporate reputation and market opportunities. This is consistent with the idea that brand image is a predominant concern for European football teams (Richelieu et al., 2008). In addition, it follows the argument of

Table 13. Perceived outcomes on the creation of a women's section in professional men's football clubs: Levels, sub-themes and sample quotes.

Theme	Level	Sub-theme	Sample quotes
Outcomes	Institutional	Reputation and image	The return is not in money, it's in image and positioning the club differently.
			It's not direct euros but it is exposure of saying, "Hey, it's good that you have a women's team because we know the club is doing its job." So, the club is feeling it's not just bad or a waste of time and money, it's something that brings it to the table. So, now it's valued, and it's more and more.
			I think it's the image of the club. The associates in the city like the women's team, they support the women's team. They like the women's team and I think that results in a more communicable part of the club.
			It is the image. It's about showing we do think that women's football matters.
			It is always a good "publicity" for the club. You show that you are not anchored to certain preconceived stereotypes that are present in football.
			With women's football, the club can speak to a series of players on the commercial market who, with such a masculine and gendered approach, would probably not be able to attract. So, companies that have female-type products are a world that is being looked at with curiosity. The fan base increases and a new market for the sponsors has opened up.
			Supporting an all-women entity was so important for our club, as it opens completely new potential investment scenarios.
			It brings new figures and new people, who might not have come close to men's football. It increases the fan base of the club overall for sure.
			There are different fans, different people that want to see women's football instead of the men's football.
			We attract different stakeholders like kids, families etc. Our fan base in regards to social media is incredible. We have almost 6 million followers on our own channels who are interested in our women's team.
			We attract a number of girls who then maybe won't be able to play in the club but they are still fans and they are girls who will buy our products.



(continued)

Theme	Level	Sub-theme	Sample quotes
	Organisational	Attractiveness to new audience / investors / market Club's internal capabilities	<p>The market on the men's side is a little saturated, so we need to find new ways of having people coming to the stadium or having sponsorship. If we can provide the sponsors, saying: 'Hey, we have this big database, you can use this as well if you give us money.'</p> <p>Three years ago I knew absolutely nothing about this world. Now I must say that I know women's football in a fairly thorough manner, both from a sporting and management point of view.</p>
		Reduced risk	<p>I believe that initially this was certainly an activity that intrigued many even within the club. It is an activity that has given great energy to this environment.</p> <p>Our coaches expand their knowledge about men's and women's football. This is a positive aspect for the club.</p> <p>The club suspects that eventually UEFA and FIFA will make it mandatory for everybody to have a women's side so we want to start earlier.</p>
	Individual	Citizenship behaviour	<p>The club is taking a step ahead because I think it will be mandatory to have women's football in the future.</p> <p>Having an integrated structure makes the boys in the academy to see the girls playing. This is great to overcome cultural barriers in the future.</p> <p>I believe that seeing women's football as an integral part of our club is also an educational element towards our boys in the academy. In my opinion, on a cultural level and at an educational level, to follow this path certainly helps.</p>





Blumrodt et al. (2013) that spectators expect football clubs to be involved in activities that go beyond sporting performance such as community engagement and social commitment. At the same time, clubs report that integration of a women's section provides them with the opportunity to interact with a new audience. More specifically, senior executives identify increases in the fan base and the possibility to initiate relationships with new sponsors which otherwise would not be involved with the men's game. According to interviewees, there might be overlaps between supporters of the men's and women's sections. However, incorporating a women's team that plays under the same name and with the same colours as the parent club offers these integrated clubs the opportunity to attract individuals that are not interested in men's football. Therefore, integrated clubs have the possibility to promote their products to an audience that encompasses consumers with various interests, thus extending their reach and the possibility of becoming truly 'universal' brands. In line with this key finding, NAs and UEFA might approach men's clubs that have not yet invested in the women's game indicating that acting in the interest of women's football should not only be seen as a means to tackling issues of gender equality but also as a way of opening opportunities up which can reap further benefits for the entire football industry.

As a result of club integration, senior executives indicate improvements in the club's organisational capabilities and individual employees' development. Positive outcomes relate to the opportunity for both coaches and managers to discover and expand their knowledge about a part of the football industry which was previously ignored or overlooked. Knowledge transfer from the men's to the women's sector and vice versa permits sharing best practices and protocols within the club. In the opinion of senior executives, this can contribute to produce a stimulant and challenging environment for the members of the club.

Another important aspect that emerged from interviews was the opportunity for the integrated clubs to anticipate possible changes in the requirements to participate in international competitions. More precisely, clubs that have started a process of integration consider their initiative as a strategy to minimise risks in case in future international football governing bodies impose the integration of a women's football team as a necessary condition to partake in their competitions¹.

Finally, football itself represents a platform for the social construction and presentation of hegemonic masculinities (Pfister, 2015). This has historically ostracised the trajectory of development of women's football and contributed to the depiction of the women's game as a sport that is inherently linked with cultural barriers

¹ On this matter, some of the interviewed senior executives expressed their opinion in favour of making women's football mandatory for clubs that participate in UEFA competitions. This was supported in order for the movement to gain visibility and continue its advancement worldwide.



and gender inequality. As such, it is important to highlight that senior executives believe that introducing a women's football section in an organisation whose traditional purpose has been to manage a men's team acts to raise awareness among both playing and non-playing members about gender issues. In theory, working for an organisation that is socially responsible is associated with enhanced organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB) which, as a consequence, should positively influence overall organisational performance (Jones, 2010; Lin et al., 2010). Club integrations might therefore be viewed as a tactic to optimise this in the football setting.

Club integration as a form of strategic philanthropy: measuring the impact

Given the context, the overall positioning of women's football and the elements underpinning the decision-making process surrounding the integration of a women's section within the ownership structure of a professional men's football club, it can be argued that club integration in football has similar attributes and characteristics to those identified by Walker et al. (2012) for WNBA franchises. In line with this proposition, it has been observed that the strategic approach adopted by professional men's football clubs is guided by factors that are linked with organisational responsiveness and engagement that are typical of CSR initiatives. For instance, similar to what was discussed in this study, these include economic, institutional and managerial factors (Belliveau et al., 1994) and can be synthesised according to institutional, organisational and individual levels (Aguinis & Glavas, 2012).

However, taking into consideration the social and cultural impact that these clubs expect to have as a result of the integration of a women's section, it is also important that they adopt a concrete strategic approach to ensure these initiatives are effective in achieving the proposed aims (here referred as predictors). Bruch and Walter (2005) identify four typical mistakes in managing corporate philanthropy: (1) failure to implement an effective monitoring system; (2) undefined exit options; (3) unprofessional approach to running CSR initiatives; and (4) weak philanthropy-related communication. From the interviews with managers of the integrated clubs, it was possible to recognise two of these as additional themes that are associated with the strategic management of an integrated women's football section: one related to (the absence of) monitoring systems to track the impact of the women's section initiative; and one related to the possibility of the club continuing to invest in the future (i.e. defining exit options) (Table 14).

Tracking the impact of the initiative and specifying concrete strategic objectives for CSR activities are important steps to purposefully manage such actions. Interest in measuring their initiatives is largely based on the assumption that greater accountability enhances the overall performance and stature of the organisation

Table 14. Track the impact and Exit options: Themes and sample quotes.

Theme	Sample quotes
Track the impact	<p>The club is telling me, 'Hey, we want this to become more beneficial', so one of my targets is to make it more beneficial. That's one of the tasks that I do have, but it can also be in terms of not just getting cash but also getting a psychologist, getting a lift room that we can use.</p> <p>We do get some money but it's still just a small part. We expect that it will increase because there are more businesses that are interested. A couple of years ago there were no businesses interested, and now we can talk to these businesses, there is an increase.</p> <p>There is such a great change with women's football that we cannot give ourselves long-term objectives.</p> <p>It's about building a community. One of my targets was to get a second team, so now I'm getting a second team, making sure that's going to work, be more integrated within the club, so those kind of targets. I had this meeting with the entire board to ask for money for this under 19 team, and of course that's one of my arguments that I'm using, it's about giving back to the community, it's about making sure that talent is going to the first team and that we can eventually sell players.</p> <p>We do not use objective metrics to track the impact of our women's section.</p> <p>Rather than setting numbers as final goals, we expect to see at least a straight line that grows. Specifically we have no metrics. They fall into the sensibilities of colleagues who then have the various surveys at the global level of the brand. So within a screening there is no isolated value of the women's section within a total.</p> <p>Our indicator to measure the impact of the women's club is mainly the number of spectators. I don't have the feeling that within the club they are thinking, 'Oh, we're going to get rid of the women's section,' but you never know. If we're not going to become champion a couple of times or we're not going to qualify for Champions League and things are going bad, yes this can always happen. There is always this big thunder cloud above your head that you never know what's going to happen. But in a way it makes sense, because you're not making money.</p>
Exit options	<p>A lot depends on how much the club believes that women's football has possibilities to start generating revenues.</p>





(Clarkson, 1995). For instance, clubs need to have an evaluation system in place that helps to answer questions such as: How well does our women's football initiative meet our initial intentions to satisfy the expectations of core stakeholders? To what extent does our initiative advance the club's business? How does the women's football initiative contribute to our social responsibilities? In fact, football clubs arguably do not treat their investment in women's football as an asset that has the potential to generate an immediate financial surplus. Instead, they refer to benefits that are related to cultural and social capitals. In this regard, UEFA has included a criterion in the Club Licensing and Financial Fair Play regulations that permits the exclusion of expenditure on women's football from the calculation of the break-even result, underlining the importance of promoting the women's game as a vehicle to improve the 'football family' as a whole (UEFA, 2018). In view of this, understanding more about the approaches taken by football clubs to monitor and evaluate the impact of their women's football section remains central. However, literature on the evaluation of CSR actions demonstrates a lack of standardisation across different industries (e.g. Aguinis & Glavas, 2012; Walzel et al., 2018). In practice, interviews with senior executives of integrated football clubs reflect this limited understanding about the use of holistic approaches to evaluate CSR. For instance, some clubs referred to increases in the number of spectators at the stadium or in the number of sponsors approaching the club, while others acknowledged the complete absence of objective metrics to track the impact of the women's section. Vague expressions such as 'building a community' or 'being beneficial' remained common place.

As outlined in the introduction, professional men's football clubs often struggle to cope with their multifaceted nature, one that requires them to combine business activities with their social roles (Morrow, 2003). Results of this study confirm the challenge for managers of football clubs to distinguish and evaluate the impacts of initiatives that are not directly related to sporting or financial dimensions. For this reason, it is important that clubs are provided with practical instruments which can be used to objectively measure the effects of their social and community initiatives. For instance, Breitbarth, Hoverman and Walzel (2011) developed a model for measuring CSR in the context of professional football. This identifies both organisational and economic quantifiable factors, while also taking into account integrative-political and ethical-emotional measurements. However, as discussed by Blumrodt et al. (2010), sport managers might underrate the importance of measuring achievements that are based on objectives other than those related to financial and sporting results. Another example that football stakeholders might consider to help clubs measure these factors would be the formulation of an index similar to UEFA GROW. Related to this, the theme 'Exit option' further strengthens the need to systematically measure how football and football clubs can impact society, given that most senior executives explicitly identified the lack of financial returns as the greatest risk to continuing their women's football initiative.



In addition to this, it is also necessary that women's football stakeholders open discussions about the approaches to foster women's club football in terms of its business models. While fan interest and media attention are growing, the current financial set-up of women's football demonstrates that the traditional model based on commercial revenues and TV rights might need some time before it becomes sustainable. An alternative route to follow might be to strengthen inter-connections with social and governmental institutions that work to improve aspects of society on which women's football clubs can also contribute. For example, encouraging higher participation of women in sport can be one of the common goals for both football clubs and governing bodies (European Commission, 2018). One of the interviewed executives puts this into perspective more clearly:

'We have the community to send out this message, and it's about creating an image, and we want to create this image, and that's what also probably the Government is trying to do. So, why not help each other out in that? I think that women's football is a great platform to show cooperation, to send out this message of equality. Together we're going to expose our work to the community saying, "Hey, we have a very interesting region within this country and we are working together and we're both interesting brand names".'

Women's football development and challenges

The consultation with women's football clubs has enabled a comprehensive picture about the perspectives of executives and managers on the development and challenges that European women's club football faces. Information about these areas were collected via the survey. However, more specific issues were also discussed during interviews. Here the most prominent themes are elaborated.

When surveyed about the challenges faced in running their businesses, all clubs highlighted the lack of 'commercial revenues' (mean = 7.51, SD = 2.19), 'business sustainability' (mean = 7.25, SD = 2.57) and 'interest from spectators' (mean = 7.18, SD = 2.15) as the three major obstacles for future developments (Figure 17). In general, the importance of challenges to run a women's club are analogous between independent and integrated clubs. However, independent clubs tend to rate these items as more challenging than integrated clubs do. For instance, the greatest differences in perception between independent and integrated clubs are about the 'popularity of women's football in their country/region', 'access to facilities' and 'support from NA'. These differences in perception might be related to the fact that integrated clubs draw on the capabilities of a professional men's club. In particular, they might benefit from accessing state-of-the-art training facilities and exploit the visibility of their parent club's brand which perhaps let them perceive the problems of facilities and popularity of women's football as less prominent.

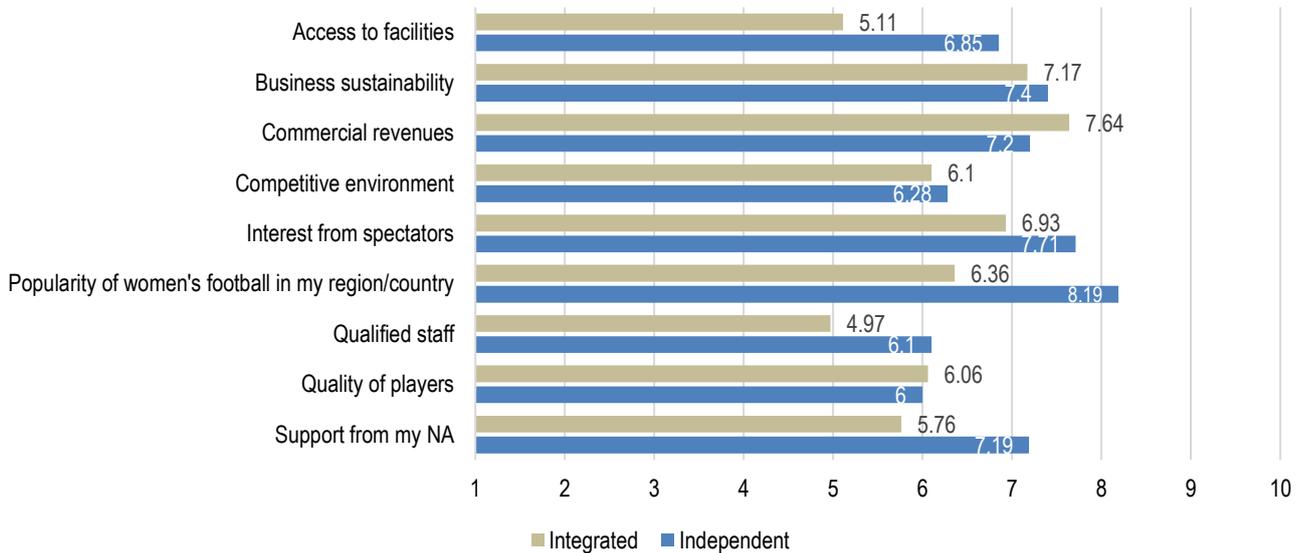


Figure 17. Challenges to run a women's club

With regards to 'support from NA', it was discussed with senior executives of integrated clubs that being part of a professional men's club can help the women's section to have a stronger voice. Here a sample quote exemplifies this:

'Having a men's team behind helps because they hear you more'.

This is also confirmed when comparing clubs' responses about their relationship with their NA and league organisers. On a scale 1-5 (5 indicating a strong relationship), independent clubs average 2.8 for NA and 2.7 for league organisers, while integrated clubs perceive a relatively healthier relationship with these two stakeholders: 3.4 for NA and 3.6 for league organisers.

More specific issues were indicated during interviews with senior executives of integrated clubs. Table 15 presents the most frequently discussed problems. These are intrinsically related with some of the challenges presented in Figure 17. For instance, interviewees explained in more details the issue of attracting spectators. At the same time, they discussed the potential for a spillover effect - due to their club's brand strength - as an opportunity to face this challenge. In addition, they observed other obstacles that hinder business sustainability, particularly for smaller clubs such as the lack of training compensation and solidarity mechanisms. Related to the problem of revenues, clubs exposed their opinions on national and UEFA competitions. This is in line with the recent discussions between ECA and UEFA about the reformulation of club competitions (ECA, 2018). Further, the overlaps between international and domestic calendars emerged as an issue that affects both the organisation of league matches and players' ability to train with the team.

Table 15. Development and challenges in women's football: Themes, sub-themes and sample quotes.

Theme	Sub-theme	Sample quotes
Fan demand	Lack of interest	We are in a limbo where we must have patience because we are not that big to fill a stadium but we are no longer even for a small field. In the middle there is a grey area where you try to find the solution that stands numerically. The theme of fan demand is very complicated at this time. We're up top, that hasn't happened since we've started the league, and still we're not attracting more spectators, and we're thinking, 'Why is this?' It's very frustrating. We are struggling to get fans into the stadium. It takes a lot of effort on game day to attract the fans.
	Spill over effect	At our away games, we attract a lot of fans. It's not about men's and women's football. It's about the brand. In the past years we haven't done as well as we are doing right now, but it was always, even when we were fifth last year it was always our club playing the biggest opponent: that was the big game. And it's because of the men's, that's how we are perceived. We haven't performed well but we were perceived as a top club because of the brand. We attract more fans when we play away. I think that this is due to the fans who are not able to attend our men's team's games. So, they come to see the women's playing.
International calendar		The NA is working on having a good national team but this means that there are a lot of breaks during the season. Weeks before and weeks after they break up the competition. This is not good on the level of image to our sponsors or even the fans and supporters. It's difficult because they have a calendar and we play four matches in three weeks or in two weeks and then it stops for two or three weeks and then starts again. So, that's also a very, very difficult thing. The international calendar today is still very much thought for national teams and little about clubs. In other words, our girls go 91 days with the national team. Males go for 56. In the past, when there were no professionals, the girls trained better with the national team. However, today the scenario has changed. You can probably start taking some days off of the international calendar. For 91 days, I don't have the girls. It means that we train less, it means that I also have three months less to use their image rights. If at that time I have an event, I can't send them to represent the club.



(continued)

Theme	Sub-theme	Sample quotes
Competition format		<p>Now in our league the first two make to the Champions League, then there's nothing left. Perhaps, it would be good to see that the next two compete for something like the Europa League as in the men's.</p> <p>If more teams, who are placed on 3rd or 4th places had the chance to qualify for Champions League or another European competition, as a smaller club, you directly have more visibility.</p> <p>The Champions League competition needs to be renewed: group stages, more teams qualifying for the competition. Playing a group stages would let even smaller teams having more games on a high level.</p> <p>In my opinion, UEFA should renew the Champions League format. A Champions League group stage clearly doubles the revenues of anyone who participates. Also, centralized TV rights could lead to extra money.</p> <p>I'm very upset with the fact that we are educating all these players and at one point they say, 'I don't want to extend the contract,' and they go abroad, and we're not going to get any fee for the development.</p> <p>Small clubs will stop developing players because those professional clubs can take them away in one afternoon. So the theme is training compensation. Clubs must be compensated if we want to continue the development of players.</p> <p>What's worrying me and what bothers me is that in the men's world you have somewhere the possibility to sell the education that you gave to youngsters. For the moment with women's football that is not possible, meaning that my youngsters will leave. I'm sure I have at the moment two or three youngsters in my team will end up in a higher competition, but I have to contract them year after year. So it's an amateur level and I can lose them very, very easily.</p>
Training compensation		





Finally, opinions of executives regarding the general development of women’s football were surveyed (Figure 18). Overall, independent and integrated clubs have similar feelings about the pace at which women’s football is progressing.

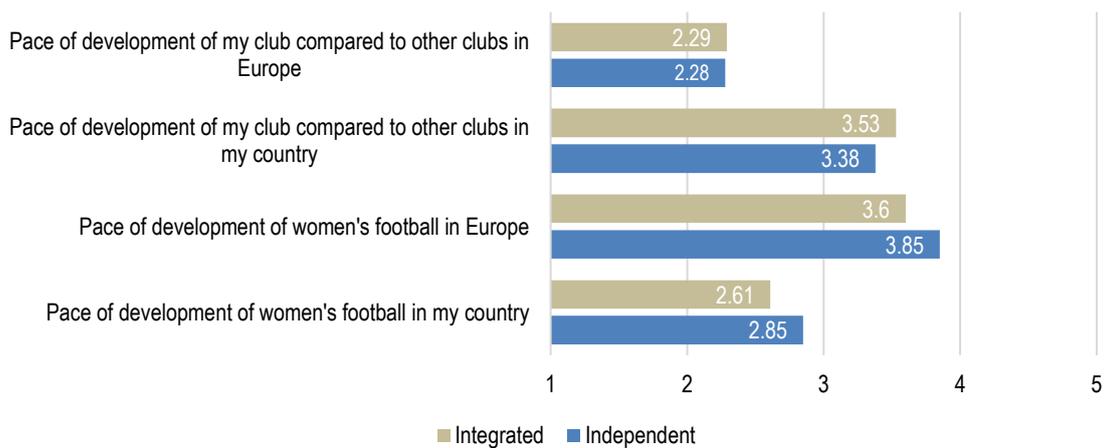


Figure 18. Perceived pace of development of women’s football and clubs.

7. LIMITATIONS

In the current study, there are two main limitations. First, despite the fact that clubs from all UEFA member countries were invited to participate in the study, the recruitment of participants proved challenging. For this reason, the final sample does not fully cover individual countries and does not provide information for clubs that are based in all UEFA countries. Thus, it is important to understand that while this research sheds some useful light on women’s club football and its development, it is limited to the contexts of those clubs that decided to voluntarily take part in the survey / interviews. Second, given the exploratory nature of this research and the inherent limitations of this approach, the final goal here is less oriented to generalizability and more to propositions that can help enhance knowledge and understanding of club organisation and club management in women’s football. One such proposition is that one of the factors underpinning integration between men’s and women’s clubs in football is its role as part of CSR and strategic philanthropy. To that end, this study provides a platform for the process of theory building rather than an attempt to confirm or verify an already existing model that conceptualises club management in women’s football.



8. CONTRIBUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study contributes to advancing knowledge about forms of club organisation and management practices adopted in European elite women's football. Also, this research provides important and novel information about the views that decision-makers working at men's and women's clubs have around club integration. Integrated clubs require careful evaluation due to these potentially being considered as an example of solidarity and cooperation between men's and women's football. In line with that, this study provides supplementary evidence in support of the development of the women's game as an area that helps promote the social and equity values of football. In more practical terms, findings of this research can help UEFA, NAs and leagues comprehend the benefits, obstacles and challenges encountered by women's football clubs, as well as providing baseline information for future measurements and comparison in respect of specific areas of women's football.

From the findings of this research, it can be concluded that:

(a) there is a considerable gender imbalance in favour of men occupying technical positions. As such, UEFA and NAs should continue in their attempts to encourage higher participation of women in football coaching and qualification courses;

(b) the entrance of integrated clubs in women's football contributes to enhanced visibility and professionalization of the women's game but, at the same time, this risks creating considerable disparities with independent clubs thus eventually leading to unbalances both from a financial and a sporting point of view;

(c) the decision adopted by professional men's football clubs to integrate a women's section is mainly guided by factors that are linked with organisational responsiveness and engagement that are typical of CSR initiatives. Therefore, NAs need to design programmes that target and incentivise investment in the women's game taking into account the fact that men's football clubs do not treat their investment as an asset to generate an immediate financial surplus. Instead, they refer to benefits that are related to cultural and social capitals. However, clubs need assistance to evaluate the impacts of their initiatives beyond sporting and financial dimensions;

(d) financial sustainability remains central to the long-term commitment of men's clubs and the overall development of the game. If the objective of women's football stakeholders is to encourage the entrance of these clubs in the women's game in order to facilitate marketing and visibility, a discussion should also be opened on the suitability for women's football clubs to rely on the traditional business model based on commercial revenues and TV rights;



(e) UEFA and NAs can draw upon the outcomes identified by clubs that have already integrated a women's section to encourage those that have not been involved in the women's game yet to initiate a collaboration with a women's side;

(f) alongside expressing general worries about financial sustainability and lack of commercial revenues, women's clubs also identify some practical solutions such as the implementation of solidarity mechanisms and revamped competition formats to gradually resolve some of the issues in women's football. Closer discussions with the different stakeholders operating in the women's game might determine further advancements in European women's football.



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