

# What role can men play in facilitating gender equity in Football Governance?

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# Executive Summary

## ***Importance of the present study***

Football has endured a long standing issue of a lack of diversity within its governance structure. Across many sectors, research shows that governance is strengthened when different voices are included in debates and the decision-making process. Furthermore these voices should reflect the members of the broader organization / sport. One aspect of diversity is gender representation. The increasing number of women participating in football reflects an important growth opportunity for the sport. Yet women remain underrepresented within decision-making position and within the governance structures of football. Men currently numerically dominate these positions in Football Associations (FAs) across Europe, and can therefore play an essential role in enabling gender equity. However, relatively little is known about the role men play in advancing gender equity in sport governance.

## ***Significance of the present study for UEFA***

This study and the first of its kind at this level of European football provides UEFA with rich, in-depth data from the highest levels of governance in a sample of European Football Associations. The study centralises the key role that different groups of men play in driving the agenda of equity, and provides tangible examples of good practice that can be shared with UEFA to address the long-standing, persistent issue of women being absent in its football leadership. The research moves beyond a focus on numbers to provide insights into individuals lived experience within football organizations. Data may then be used to facilitate future training and development initiatives that look to improve diverse leadership opportunities across all UEFA member associations.

## ***Method***

For this study a qualitative methodological approach was taken in order to answer the research question ‘what role can men play in facilitating gender equity in football governance?’. The aims of the research were to examine the ways that men have contributed to improvements towards gender equity; how women experienced those changes; and to offer recommendations to promote gender equity. Data were collected via 34 semi-structured interviews with men and women in decision-making positions across 7 Associations. Findings were analysed using Johnson and Scholes’ notion of the organisational cultural web (1999) and Schein’s (2004) model of organizational culture.

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## ***Findings***

Three key themes emerged from the data analysis as to how the context and structure of football either constrains or enables men's advocacy in gender equity: 1) The culture of football; 2) The value placed on women in football; and 3) structure and relationships both inter-personally and organisationally.

## ***Recommendations***

To engage a greater number of men in gender equity agendas in football and thus, increase the likelihood of women's recruitment and progression into decision-making roles, key recommendations include:

- For men to play a greater role in advocating for, and advancing gender equity, they must value women IN football and the organization.
- Interventions to improve gender equity in football must be contextualised; a thorough consideration of broader societal culture within a particular country must go hand in hand with any football-focused strategy or initiative.
- Men in decision-making positions, such as those involved in recruitment, need to be aware of their unconscious bias.
- National associations and UEFA should readdress their vision of success. Success should be redefined to 'inclusive football' to challenge the rhetoric of women for women's football and thereby opening more opportunities for women to work across the sport (not just in the 'women's game').
- Modelling of gender equitable working practices needs to come from the highest echelons of UEFA and national associations who take leadership of this agenda. Accountability strategies with national associations must also be in place to monitor, evaluate, and shift ownership of improving gender equity.
- Relationships are key to improving women's representation, both at an inter-personal level, the national associations should also engage with clubs to drive a more holistic gender equity agenda.
- Having a critical mass of women in the football association is crucial but these women also need to be in positions of influence and decision-making, and they need to be at all levels of the organisational structure.

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# Introduction

In a study on equality in sport leadership, Sotiriadou, de Haan and Knoppers (2017) noted that those in leadership positions, believed women board members helped represent the needs of women members associated with their sports. Six of the 55 football associations in Europe have no women committee members and of the 7119 staff employed across the associations, only 5.6% are women in managerial positions (UEFA 2017). The lack of women in leadership positions in football has been addressed in UEFA's recently launched dedicated women's football strategy. It commits UEFA to a five-year strategic framework with the aim of supporting, guiding and lifting both women's football and the position of women in football across Europe by 2024 (UEFA 2019).

A common approach adopted within sport to increase the number of women board members have included the creation of target / quotas and formation of women's groups and / or committees. There are five specific goals in UEFA's Women's Football Strategy, four relating directly to women playing football and one to women in football: Double female representation on all UEFA bodies (UEFA 2019). Of the 55 national associations, 41 include a Women's Committee (UEFA 2019). However these committees may not necessarily create an opportunity for women to engage in decision-making in football. Data from the 2019 report does not specify membership of the Women's Committees but the 2017 report on Women's football across the national associations 2016/17 highlighted 44 national associations had Women's Committees and four of these had no women members. In short women are currently underrepresented in decision-making positions in football in Europe.

In the brochure for the Women in Football Leadership Programme (WFLP), the UEFA General Secretary, Theodore Theodoridis, highlights that:

'studies have shown that organizations with mixed senior management teams tend to outperform those with no women in positions of power. Football has traditionally been dominated by men, but gradually more women are moving into leadership roles. Still, more work needs to be done. UEFA understands that there is a real need for more balanced representation of women and men in key positions. Furthermore, UEFA acknowledges its responsibility to encourage and facilitate this shift...'

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Henry and Robinson (2010) argued, gender equity is a matter of good governance and thus the responsibility of everyone in an organization rather than only the responsibility of a women's committee or women more generally. This finding suggests that it is not only women that need to be concerned with gender balance in leadership positions but men too. Indeed, in the context of this research, we consider that gender is a relational concept. With this thinking, coupled with the understanding that the overwhelming majority of decision-making positions in football in Europe are held by men, we argue that the engagement of men is crucial to drive gender-equal developments in football governance (Scambor, Bergmann, & Wojnicka et al, 2014). However, because gender equity has long been thought of as a 'women's issue' and indeed, that women have largely driven this agenda in sport, the experiences and role of men as potential advocates, have been ignored (Scambor et al, 2014).

This study therefore aims to answer the question: **What role can men play in facilitating gender equity in Football governance?** Furthermore, the objectives of this study are:

- To identify ways men have facilitated shifts towards gender equity in leadership and governance in European Football Associations.
- To understand how women experience attempts by their male colleagues to facilitate gender equity in the governance of European Football.
- To offer recommendations that promote gender equity in the governance of football to UEFA and their member associations.

The in-depth data that foregrounds men and women's voices and experiences, preserved within the different contexts of the sampled national associations will not only benefit the associations directly involved but will also be instrumental in forming realistic evidence-based recommendations that can be shared across all UEFA member associations. Insight will be gathered that may be used to facilitate future training and development initiatives that look to improve women's leadership opportunities across all UEFA member associations.

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# Literature Review

Practitioners and scholars alike from an array of different domains have long discussed the issue of gender inequality in sport governing organizations (Council of Europe, 2012; EIGE, 2016; Henry & Robinson, 2010). Compelling evidence suggests that boards with three or more women have scored better in implementing corporate strategy, conflict of interest rules, and a code of conduct (Geeraert, Alm & Groll, 2017). Fondas and Salsalos (2000) also note that corporate governance is strengthened when different voices are included in debates and the decision-making process. The prevailing approach used to address gender imbalance in sport boards has been reflected in policy changes such as gender targets / quotas or the formation of women's groups / commissions (e.g. Sotiriadou et al., 2017; Strittmatter & Skirstad, 2017). Ahn and Cunningham (2020) also highlight that many sport organizations are offering leadership programmes designed to increase the number of women in leadership positions. Whilst these approaches can help facilitate the appointment of skilled, educated and committed individuals, sport organizations often view the targets as a ceiling to be attained rather than a base on which to build (Sotiriadou et al., 2017).

We argue that while policy interventions are useful tools to 'kick start' organizations towards becoming more active in pursuing an equity agenda, such initiatives will not be sufficiently deep to create cultural change. It is at the cultural levels of an organization in which patterns of inclusion / exclusion are created and sustained, and thus, it is this level that we need to target in order to have the longer-lasting transformations in how organizations operate to overturn women's underrepresentation in decision-making positions and as leaders. King (2020) explains that for years women have been told that in order to succeed at work they have to change themselves, develop confidence, take leadership courses, build a network and so on, she refers to this as the 'fix the women' approach. She argues however that the reality is that the organizations in which women are trying to work are gendered as they were designed by men for men. In order to facilitate change with regard to equality in the workplace, King (2020) argues we need to stop trying to 'fix the women' and instead 'fix the organization'.

Reviewing the historical development of football clearly shows that this is a sport / industry / institution designed by men for men. For example, Caudwell (2011) highlighted that the 'normative femininity'

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engrained within football culture reduced and restricted women's relationships with football. To this end we highlight that many of the initiatives implemented by football governing bodies such as FIFA's Female Leadership Development Programme (FLDP) and UEFA's Women in Football Leadership Programme (WFLP) assume that the reason women are not progressing their careers into senior leadership positions is because they are lacking something (fix the women) approach. For example, after completing the Women in Football Leadership Programme, participants will have:

- developed a clear understanding of what skills are needed for leadership, and how these are reflected within their own professional characters;
- an increased level of self-awareness and an understanding of how this benefits their personal and professional goals;
- extended their network and created strong links with women working in positions of authority in football or ready to step into leadership roles;
- built additional confidence to set and pursue ambitious career goals and fulfil their potential.

A 'fix the women' only approach without a simultaneous 'fix the organization' approach will not facilitate systemic cultural change. Strittmater and Skirstad (2017) conducted a case study examining the representation of women in the executive committees of the national football associations of Germany and Norway. From their findings, the research indicated how a transition could be made towards improved gender equity through considering the outer and inner contexts which have helped women on their journeys towards governance positions within the national football associations. Clark (2011) previously supported this principle, highlighting that for change to occur in these contexts, pressure needed to be exerted at the national, regional, and local levels in order to facilitate the provision of further training, upskilling, and preparation for women to be recruited or elected into high or low-profile positions. Furthermore, through exploring these cultural contexts, Clark suggested that a key emphasis should be placed on the importance of having male allies with influence and power in the organization.

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In their case study of FIFA's gender initiatives, Ahn and Cunningham (2020) interview 16 participants of the Female Leadership Development Programme (FLDP). A nine-month programme launched in May 2015 which aimed to enhance gender diversity and inclusive decision-making practices while increasing the number of women leaders. They noted that their 16 participants all agreed that 'football is strongly rooted in the men-centered domain' (p. 129). They also describe the 'structural gendered trend that women are usually designated to work with regard to women's football while men work for both (p. 130). Football is not however the only sport to exhibit gender bias. Gender stereotype has been identified as a key aspect of bias in the context of leadership gaps in between men and women in different sport focussed organizations (Adriaanse, & Schofield, 2013; Claringbould & Knoppers, 2008). Schein (2001) explained gender stereotypes in organizational culture by presenting a 'think manager-think male' association. In a sport context Burton, Barr, Fink and Bruening (2009) extended this to 'think athletic director-think masculine'.

With this in mind, we focus on the thinking (images and values) and doing (practices) of both men and women in decision-making positions, and how this is underpinned by the organizational culture they work within. Clark (2011) evidenced that for change to happen, it must occur within the hierarchical structures of the organizations; to promote and develop women into positions of authority leadership, and power; whether in conjunction with men or independently. To this end, this study therefore introduces a different way of conducting research into the underrepresentation of women in football governance.

The majority of research to date has focused on the status quo to explain the underrepresentation of women in sport governance. Little attention has been paid to the roles that individuals, and especially men, since they are in the majority of decision-making positions, could or do play in facilitating and sustaining a change in gender equitable working practices. Some exceptions to this are evidenced through the successful and influential 'Male Champions of Change' initiative led by Elizabeth Broderick, which focuses on getting men of influence (CEOs of leading Australian companies) involved in the discussion and being champions of the change needed. And the United Nations 'HeforShe' campaign that has increased awareness of the role men can play in gender equity.

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Alongside these practical campaigns there is a small emerging body of gender research that focuses on the role of men in advancing or obstructing gender equality in sport governance (e.g., Claringbould & Knoppers, 2008; Henry & Robinson, 2010; Sotiriadou et al., 2017). Adriaanse and Schofield (2013) found for example, that relations of support and collaboration between men and women on sport boards impacted gender equity in governance. Sotiriadou et al's (2017) noted that in sports with a proactive approach to gender diversity, male board members were focused on creating gender equality. They were proactive in the recruitment of women members and felt their boards should be representative of their broader membership. Women board members were more likely to apply for board positions when they felt supported by male mentors/sponsors rather than simply asked by women colleagues. However, the women respondents argued more active involvement of men was needed to enable a transformation from gender equality to gender equity (Sotiriadou et al., 2017).

It has been well-established that gender is a social construction (see Butler & Geiss, 1990) and football often acts as a 'sphere of life' in which the concept of gender is strongly experienced (Kaelberer, 2019). These experiences are likely to be constructed differently in different cultural spaces. For example, in Germany, Kaelberer (2019) suggested a presence of 'hegemonic masculinity' in football; this refers to 'a configuration of gender practices that legitimizes the dominance of men and the subordination of women and lesser forms of masculinity' (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 846). Furthermore, Kaelberer (2019) contended that this expression of masculinity in football has been more resistant to change than in other areas of German society. These findings implicate the potential difficulties for women in football and can be further evidenced in different settings. For example, Peeters, Elling, and Sterkenburg, (2019) shared that women football experts in the Netherlands (i.e., pundits, journalists) were expected to focus on furthering incorporate dominant discourses and harnessing a greater visibility for economic opportunity. Despite this, these women experts decided on a more positive, personal, and humanistic approach – with critical reflections on the institutional developments surrounding women's football. This was often met with criticism and was regarded as not 'newsworthy enough' (Knoppers & Elling, 2001). In the USA, where women's football has seen greater interest, it has been identified that diversity not only stimulates economic progress, but also facilitates social progress – which is suggestive of greater trust in women in football (Painter & Price, 2019). However, as we discuss shortly, the recent conflict between the US women's national team and the national federation,

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highlights how this relationship and trust can break down. In Sweden, Andersson and Barker (2019) found that women who enjoyed being involved in football could develop meaningful career horizons which allowed them to see ways of strategically developing a future in football. These explanations of the different ways in which gender is negotiated show us that the ‘masculinity culture’ in football differs according to the context and background of which the sport is nested within. As such Ahn and Cunningham (2020) suggest that gender-related initiatives in football might be achieved differently under their unique circumstances.

To frame our understanding of this ‘masculinity culture’ within different contexts and to explore how men could shift towards facilitating gender equity within football governance, one cultural theoretical lens that has been widely-used and applied within academia (e.g., Cacciattolo, 2014; McDonald & Foster, 2013) is the ‘cultural web’ framework (see Johnson & Scholes, 1999, p74). The ‘cultural web’ enables an understanding and individualised focus on the structural, symbolic, and political aspects of an organization: in order to guide strategy development and to pinpoint a culture within an organization (Sun, 2008). At the centre of the web lies the core beliefs and values of the organization, which is surrounded by seven elements which are ever-developing throughout the time-span of an organization: routine, rituals, stories, symbols, control systems, power structures, and organizational structure (Johnson & Scholes, 1999).

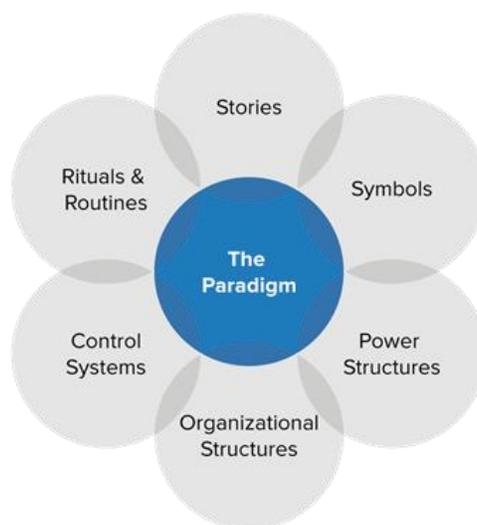


Figure 1 - Johnson and Scholes (1999) ‘Cultural Web’ Framework.

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In using the cultural web (figure 1) as a framework, this study can fully investigate the various principles within the web which could underpin the presence of this 'masculine culture'. As Kaelberer (2019) highlighted, this 'masculinity culture' that is present within football (e.g., Clark, 2011; Peeters et al., 2019) shows resistance to the changes which diversity can bring to the table. Such changes can not only have cultural benefits, but also potential for economic and social progress (Painter & Price, 2019). Within football, these central beliefs and values at the core of a web are commonly established by leaders of the organization nested within the top of the organizational hierarchy. Which in football is frequently occupied by men. These positions hold 'hierarchical accountability' which refers to the power that superiors have over subordinates within an organization to hire and fire employees (i.e., President, General Secretary) (Piekle, 2013). Furthermore, those accountable can create a powerful set of deep, stable, and broad cultural forces; which result in mapping out a schema of behaviours to employees of what is acceptable or unacceptable organizational behaviour (Sun, 2008). In particular, this can reflect the 'power structures' within the organization which deal with the power adopted in an association, those in charge of decision-making, and how broadly power is diffused in the organization (Johnson, 2000).

This can extend to the structure of hierarchies, inter- and intra- organisational relationships with staff and clients, and the 'symbols' presented by an organization (Johnson, 2000). In addition, Gagliardi (1992) argued that these 'symbols' present in an organization can refer to the visible elements which influence how employees make sense of events. Examples of these visible symbolic elements could firstly include the use of gender pronouns to differentiate between the various world cups. A second example could be the difference in prize money between the UEFA Champions league in men's football and women's football. Thirdly, a contemporary example in football includes the debate between the United States Soccer Federation and their players over the pay gap between men's and women's football.

Thus, it is pivotal that to comprehend the role of men in facilitating gender equity in football governance, we consider these cultural aspects (organizational and power structures, rituals and routines, symbols). In exploring this, this research intends to harness the 'stories' component of the cultural web as a way of gathering anecdotal evidence (Johnson, 2000) to describe how men (can)

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promote gender equity and how women perceive these leadership behaviours. As previously discussed there is currently little research which focusses on the role men can play in promoting gender equity in sport federations. In a seminal study in this area, Claringbould and Knoppers, (2008) found that men could play a significant role in the undoing of current gendered images, symbolism, and practices in sport governance. This study provided a shift in the focus of research in gender equality, from ways men may obstruct gender equality to a focus on ways they can advance gender equity, possibly by using their position of power and privilege to bring about change. As Clarke (2011, p. 839) noted following her review of the FIFA World Cup in South Africa in 2010, “some men are committed to promoting women’s issues and are essential in creating opportunities for women to be recognized and represented”.

Thus, as guided by the literature, this research aims to further explore the role men can play in facilitating gender equity in football governance. From using the cultural web (Johnson & Scholes, 1999) as our theoretical compass, and through drawing upon the ‘stories’ element of employees within the framework; this study will identify the ways in which males in decision-making positions have acted as gatekeepers for gender equity. The study will further seek to understand women’s experiences of their male colleagues as facilitators to their career progress. From these experiences, this study aims to offer guidance to European football governing bodies as to how to harness their cultural potential as a federation to promote gender equity in football.

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# Research Design & Strategy

## Research Design

For this study a qualitative methodological approach has been taken in order to explore the issue of gender equity in football governance; the team has many years of combined experience in this type of research, and in this particular field of expertise. As outlined in more detail elsewhere in this report the study had three core concepts which the research team aimed to investigate. Those concepts were, in brief: to ask about the ways that men have contributed to shifts towards gender equity; and how women experienced those shifts; and to offer recommendations to promote gender equity. Qualitative research is suitable for a study such as this because it has flexible ways of collecting, analysing and presenting rich, complex data. The 'richness' is gained through the nuanced exploration of ideas, experiences, perspectives and situations. For example, relevant to this study is cultural influence (the values and norms of groups and institutions) and how it impacts on equality and equity through policies and leadership. Qualitative research is typically used in studies of sensitive or complex topics and differs to quantitative research in its focus on the subjective, individual experiences of participants in order to understand an issue. Please see the Introduction section for the research question and the objectives of the research project.

To investigate gender equity across football associations in Europe, this study uses a 'comparative case study' approach, across seven European football associations. The countries identified in the planning stages were The Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Slovenia, Croatia, Russian and England. They were identified as being appropriate, relevant and useful to the research because of their positions in governance, policy making, development, and leadership, and because they would show both similarities *and* contrasts to each other. Specifically, the study uses in-depth semi-structured interviews, using the same interview schedule across all countries (see Appendix 1). Semi-structured interviews are those which are designed to examine particular themes and concerns, but also have within them the flexibility to accommodate other related issues which the interviewees may wish to introduce. Interviews were conducted with men and women board members of the selected national associations, heads of departments, and individuals in other relevant roles that involved a level of influence and decision-making within the association (e.g. secretary generals). As a measurement

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approach interviews offer a way to gain a deeper understanding of a topic or problem, and qualitative measurement is particularly useful for understanding the context of issues or problems and how they impact on groups and organisations.

Alongside the textual data from the interviews the researchers all kept field diaries in which they wrote observational notes during the data collection. The field diaries were shared amongst the research team to offer context and background to the different case studies, in preparation for the analysis stage. We discuss the interviews and the sample in more detail in the next section.

## Sample

No other part of the research process is more important for ensuring credible data than by identifying an adequate sample. By that we mean, enough data to ensure rigour, in order to reach data saturation (i.e. the point where the data set is complete because of data replication). The research sample (here called the interviewees or the participants) comprised of a total of 34 participants, from different football associations in different countries across Europe. Interviews were successfully arranged and conducted in all seven of the proposed countries and took place between December 2019 and February 2020. The interviews were conducted by one interviewer, in a private room or space, in conditions which were suitable for recording. There were three interviewers in total.

During the planning stages the team aimed to conduct interviews during the board meetings of the individual associations; this ensured that the members were available to the interviewers, was efficient in terms of time management for both interviewees and interviews, and ensured value for money in that the interviewer had to travel to only one location. For example, in Croatia all the interviews were conducted on the same day; whereas in Russia the interviews were carried out over a three day period. Ultimately the interviews were conducted in each country, within the expected three months' time-frame.

Of the 34 participants 24 were men and 10 were women. This gender imbalance was anticipated by the research team, and reflected the broader concerns of the research topic. Potential interviewees were contacted by email by the research team inviting them to take part, and giving an outline of the

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research project. The number of interviewees was suitable for a research project of this scale and scope because they are able to provide data drawing on a wide variety of culturally specific experience, knowledge, roles, and approaches. The quantity of data generated provides us with a representative sample of people with organisational and operational responsibilities. Most of the interviewees had some kind of football background, prior to their present role, from informally playing football to coaching or other more formal tasks or posts. The interviewees all operated in an organisational capacity from managers to committee members. Every association is structured differently which is why the researchers were unable to select participants with the same positions or titles across all seven organizations; but the interviewees were all in roles of a comparable level, and all were decision-makers. We are unable to be more specific about the particular individual posts held by interviewees because of the ethical requirements of confidentiality and anonymity. We discuss the ethical issues relevant to this report further, below. The research team worked closely with the football associations to identify participants who were comfortable to converse in English or, if required, a local translator was used. Eleven interviewees required an interpreter to be present. All interviews were therefore conducted in English. The interviews were digitally recorded with the permission of the interviewees and transcribed verbatim.

## Data Analysis

Thematic analysis is a valuable data analysis technique in qualitative research and is typically used in studies examining social phenomena; in this case, gender equity in male-dominated organisations. Knowledge is created and constructed by using a theme as a unit of analysis, through which researchers can make sense of the complexities and contexts of individual interviews with experts (the interviewees) in the field of the enquiry. The interview schedule was designed using four main sections (see appendix 1) and was designed to allow for this kind of flexibility for individual interviews, to provide increased authenticity and rigour at the analysis stage. The resulting data could then be effectively organised into codes and themes.

The research team met in the UK in February 2020 to discuss the data and to identify core concepts within the data. In this way, they could confirm the relationship of various codes to emerging themes and their importance to the research question(s). The aim was for the team to reach full agreement on

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each of the themes and the strategies they represented so that these themes and strategies could be presented and discussed in the final report. Research studies such as this generate a large amount of data but in an experienced research team, such as this, the researchers are familiar with handling large quantities of information.

Members of the research team read the interview transcripts to identify and agree on the emerging themes and codes relating to the focus of this study; that is, looking for patterns of meaning within the data. Specifically, data analysis began with the research team members initially sorting the data using axial coding, that is the breaking down of core themes during data analysis, to find the narrative arc/s within the interview transcripts. We axially coded the data again within each of Fraser's (1998) two strategical categories (i.e., redistribution and transformation) to determine the themes. Then we selectively coded the data by assigning quotes to themes (Boeije, 2010). The resulting theoretically informed interpretation of meaning offers both strength and significance of results because the theory created is empirically grounded; that is, it draws only upon real-world experience and knowledge to build theories and recommendations.

## Ethical issues

The key ethical issue for a research project such as this one is the practice of confidentiality and anonymity to protect the participants. There are particular challenges around these issues in a study such as this, when people within organizations know each other, and may be able to detect someone's participation based on very little identifying information. We have, therefore, endeavored to give as much relevant or necessary information as possible about the participants, and about the research sample as a whole, without giving away too many details. We realize that just by naming particular countries it may be possible for some colleagues to recognize the opinions or background of someone they know and this is always a potential problem in qualitative research of this nature. However, we have addressed these issues in the following ways:

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- No-one outside the research team knew who the interviews were arranged with (except, of course, any staff such as personal assistants who dealt with the participants' diaries).
  - Participants were assured that the data would be confidential and anonymous at the beginning of the interviews.
  - The interviews were sent to an external transcribing service which specializes in transcribing recorded data confidentially from Universities. Therefore, the transcriber 'cleaned' the transcriptions of names and any other identifying characteristics (for example, street names or names of football teams).
  - Only the research team have access to the recordings and transcripts, and both recordings and transcripts are stored securely. Data will be stored securely for the recommended length of time within higher education in the UK, which is five years, and then destroyed.
  - Within this report we have not been specific about roles and tasks, as this would be the main way that readers would be able to identify individuals who participated in the research.
  - Participants have been assigned numbers and these are used during the presentation and discussion of findings and recommendations in this report.

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# Research Findings

The primary aim of this study is to explore the role men can play in facilitating gender equity in football governance. In this section we present the results of the analysis of the 37 interviews conducted across seven associations, which resulted in the following three themes: 1) The culture of football; 2) The value placed on women in football; and 3) Structure and relationships. These themes recognise the key areas in which men in decision-making positions in football associations can influence gender equity within football governance. We will discuss the results in the context of Johnson and Scholes (1999) Cultural Web and Schein's (2004) model of organizational culture.

## The Culture of Football

According to Alvesson (2013), culture shapes organizational life, and the behaviour of the members is guided by values, ideas and beliefs that are accepted within their organization. Within the organizations that we worked with, there was a perception of a particular 'footballing culture' that underpinned the way the association operated and shaped the behaviours and beliefs of its employees. All of the participants spoke passionately at the need to understand and appreciate the sport, and that this was the driving criteria for whether an individual was 'accepted' within the walls of the association. A deep love and interest in the sport was deemed as the currency to succeed, as the following board member explicitly describes:

*For any job in the FA I don't think you need to have football experience... [but you] need to love this sport. **Participant 13, female.***

Schein (2004, p 17) defines culture as 'a pattern of shared basic assumptions that is learned by a group as it solves its problems and that is considered valid and is, therefore, taught to new members'. During the interviews, there appeared to be a 'footballing' culture across the associations, but in varying degrees. What this meant also varied. For some associations, a footballing culture unconsciously translated as a masculine culture, and was used to reinforce the exclusion of women from positions of power. For these associations, football equalled men and a sport of interest to men. In this way, women's invisibility in leadership roles was justified or assumed to be because they did not identify

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with the sport nor have an interest. It was therefore, 'common sense' that they were absent around the board table:

*There remains the fact that women are not so interested in football as a sport or in football in general. Maybe that's one of the reasons why we don't have so many women to select as candidates and future professionals for certain jobs either in administration or in leadership. At least the managing leadership positions cannot be held and done properly if you are not interested in the subject. **Participant 22, male.***

*From my point of view it's still strong 'man norm' of football in Country X...I think we have come rather far to develop women's football and also gender equality. But we still have a lot to do because it is still the norm of what the man do, and how the man works and how the man gets elected and how the man gets the position and things like that. **Participant 17, male.***

These views were of football associations located in wider, patriarchal societies and cultures. In other associations, football was not ascribed a gender and was seen more as a neutral sport, a common language and way of being that was shared between men and women:

*It's good we are getting the same thing for women as for men, and you know we're treating it more and more also at the European and the FIFA level; that it's not a separate sport. **Participant 1, male.***

The relationship between sport and society as reflections of one another is a common theme within the sport sociology literature. Football is no different, and that was apparent during the present study. The broader societal culture in which a national association was located, infiltrated and underpinned individual thinking towards gender and men and women's capabilities. This would also suggest that interventions to improve gender equity in football must be contextualised; a thorough consideration of broader societal culture within a particular country must go hand in hand with any football-focused strategy or initiative. Indeed, although football is a global game played by universal rules, we noted a relationship between the macro culture of a country and the organization culture with regards to the

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topic of gender equality. As we can see in the quotation from participant 20, the broader national culture is reflected in the position of women and women in football.

*Football is considered still as a man's game, and we have to overcome those prejudices...even if a female becomes a director or a CEO... everybody is questioning, 'what is going on', so they are used to the male directors of companies...people don't have experience of important female role models in society and politics. **Participant 20, male.***

Culture is often difficult to 'unpick' and identify because it is unconscious and deeply embedded in both societies and organizations. It becomes 'the way it is' and part of our common-sense thinking. If it is 'normal' within a societal culture to see men and women playing equitable roles in leadership, then this is more easily accepted at more micro levels such as in national football associations. The following male participant demonstrates his 'acceptance' of women in roles of power because it is the way it is in his broader society:

*The women participate in society and education in work, I mean for us I think it comes quite natural to think like this, even if you're male or female, and it has been like this for decades. **Participant 1, male.***

Within Schein's model of organizational culture, he suggests that the most accurate way of identifying a workplace culture is through examining basic underlying assumptions (Schein, 2004). That rather than examining symbols or artefacts within a workplace, or the espoused values that the organization may claim, the 'true' culture is felt in the underlying assumptions, i.e. beliefs that are taken for granted and rarely challenged (Schein, 2004). One type of assumption that forms the paradigm of an organization is about the 'right' way to relate to people, how roles and responsibilities are distributed, and what constitutes leadership (Schein, 2004). These assumptions are seldom conversed and are difficult to change (Elsmore, 2017). Whilst we will discuss issues of power and the concept of a glass ceiling in later themes, the following quotation summarises the assumption that for this participant, women do not have the experience or knowledge to become a president of a football association because only men can have a suitable background in football:

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*The position of general secretary or the president I find it almost impossible for a women to reach...not many women have this experience and knowledge, and this is very important to have a background for president of course, you have to have a background in football, but General Secretary I don't think it's so important. But I think tradition has a lot to do here. **Participant 11, female.***

'Tradition' was a term often heard in interviews with national associations situated within more patriarchal societies and that did not have more equitable distribution of men and women in their governance structures. It was a term unconsciously used by male participants to 'explain' or even defend the absence of women in decision-making roles within their organizations. This translation of football to mean 'men' and to belong to men also meant that former male players were ascribed the highest value and kudos. This presented a contradiction in some of the interviews with the participants. That on one hand, they deemed footballing experience to be unnecessary to succeed in roles of governance. Instead, just a passion and interest in the sport was needed. Nevertheless, former male players were often given esteemed roles because of the value attached to their status. For some participants, they considered that knowledge and experience of football stemmed from a (male) playing background. The following quotation gives the example of a high profile male player who was parachuted into a senior board position without prior board experience:

*We just got a new vice-president – and he didn't have any experience from the board. He came straight into the vice-president role, and I don't think that would have happened with a woman...He was an ex-player, a lot of national games, so he has a familiar face. **Participant 3, female.***

All the associations included in our study have a women's national team. But the value ascribed to these teams and to 'women's football' more generally, differed greatly across the seven countries. All seven were also at different stages of development in terms of their strategizing and support for women's football in their respective countries. While women's football, as a sport, has grown exponentially in recent years across Europe and is a key pillar of UEFA's broader football strategy, it is

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evident that this support and growth has not translated always to women IN football. This is an important distinction. And there are some sizeable challenges remaining to engage those football associations that are located within wider patriarchal societies to understand women's worth and value. Women's football is still relatively young in its growth. While it has the long historical roots, for most of this history, the sport has remained largely invisible and perceived as inferior. During one of the interviews in a more 'traditional' football association, one male participant explained that not everyone in decision-making positions is aware that women even play football, making it somewhat impossible for them to be seen as experienced or knowledgeable to even be considered for decision-making roles:

*There are a few of them [men in decision-making positions], they don't know that females play football, they don't have any interest [in women's football].* **Participant 19, male.**

Even in associations where women players were acknowledged, experience as a player was not perceived with the same value as their male counterparts, highlighting the different standards applied to men and women:

*...to promote a women in football, she has to possess a good professional knowledge, but not professional knowledge as a former football player... but in the sphere where she works.* **Participant 29, male.**

The common route for those women who are in football governance is either through their non-football, professional acumen (e.g. finance, law, human resources) which then means they are not appointed to technical-related decision-making roles (e.g. head of coaching or technical director). Or they find their route into a national association as high-profile, former players. The challenge with the second route is that these few women are competing for positions against former male players whose experience and knowledge is held in higher esteem. The linchpin of this are a set of beliefs surrounding masculinity and femininity. Men's natural fitness is for work, and women's natural fitness is for the family and domesticity. In sport, masculinity, and being a man, is linked to physical strength and technical skill which 'make' for ideal footballers. Ideas about femininity do not involve athleticism or

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physicality, and therefore, women are not deemed as skilful as players. In this context, this is the culture of football: that men are the superior athletes and thus, their performances are deemed of higher skill and capability. This affords them then 'automatically', the knowledge and experience of 'football' (read, men's football) to be able to govern the sport. While these ideas exist, the continuation of a pattern in which powerful positions remain the purview of men, will also thrive. These ideas mean women's football is not seen as credible as men's football and this leads to then issues with players making the transition into decision-making roles, as this woman found in her football association:

*I see a lot of females within our company; who are more on the technical and they have to struggle more. They have to struggle much more because my expertise [business] is something else, and I get my position very easily because I know more about these [business] topics than they do, but to work higher up on the professional football side; then you have to be an expert... then you have to be an old footballer, and that's what I discussed a lot with [others]. I don't think you have to be an old footballer... it's nice to have different perspectives, but the world is very closed in that part. **Participant 6, female.***

In practice, the assumptions, beliefs, and values at the center of an organization are largely set by leaders and present a powerful set of forces, which are deep, relatively stable, and far-reaching. Such cultures result in behaviours that serve as a guide to employees about what is considered appropriate or inappropriate behaviour in the organization. Recruitment is one such behavior. In football associations, leaders are white non-disabled men. In these organizations, there is a perpetual, unchallenged reinforcement that these men 'naturally' have the knowledge and experience required for leadership positions. Therefore, the recruitment processes in these organizations is likely to be influenced by what Martin (2006) called liminality. Liminality means that a person is unaware of cognitive processes and knowledge (which leads to cognitive bias), which might influence his or her actions and reactions towards those designated as 'other'. In the case of football, women are one of the groups positioned as other.

In the first quotation that follows, we get a sense of liminality in action. This way of recruitment is prevalent in football, and can account for the lack of women in leadership and coaching roles.

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Appointments are circulated and made based on membership of powerful networks, and often women are outside of these networks because their knowledge and experience are not deemed as valuable (Norman & McGoldrick, 2019). Whilst in the second quotation we hear from a participant who had recently undergone diversity and inclusion training (an intervention often used in organizations to interrupt cognitive bias in employees). Through this education, he was able to acknowledge his own unconscious bias and how that may perpetuate liminality in the recruitment process:

*I would mention this recruitment process for the committees [needs changing], I believe it is too much intention of the regional associations that they just nominate someone onto the committees that is.... let's say a friend of the president of the regional association... or somebody who is somehow connected just to make them a favour. But, they're not necessarily experts from certain domains. **Participant 14, male.***

*Yesterday [in our association] we talked about the comfort zones. That it is normal for a man to hire someone who is in the same comfort zone as them. So, for me for example, it would be easier for me to hire someone who I know through football, or who I played with, or someone within the team, so to hiring inland for something instead of looking wider and hiring someone who's not in my comfort zone. **Participant 8, male.***

Recruitment is a practical example of an organization's ritual and routine (Johnson & Scholes, 1999). Recruitment practices are useful windows into a culture of a football association. In the following quotations we are given an insight into the recruitment experience of one woman board member in an association that chose to recruit using an external head hunter:

*I said to the Head Hunter - I think I have the right profile; I think I can do this job because there were a lot of unorganised professionals... especially on the finance part...but they wanted somebody who can make it more professional, and I really had the feeling that this was my profile. So, I said to him; I think I am the right person for this job, but I understand the context of the field. There's never been a woman in that position, for me it's not a topic, but I can understand it is for them. He said 'well you're a wild horse'... that was a name I got, and if you*

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*looked at my resume when I got the job - it was a good fit, so I wasn't a wild horse. I was female that was the thing, but he said 'oh I will have 10 males and then I'll just put you in. **Participant 6, female.***

*I was expecting to be interviewed by white male middle-aged men with prejudice. That was what I was expecting, and that was what it was, because I got questions [that] I'm sure the 10 male candidates didn't get... like I have two sons... 'how are you going to combine work and your family' and all those things, and do you want to work part-time or do you want to work full time? I am sure they didn't ask the same questions of the male candidates, so it was all I expected, but I also realized this is a world that I'm getting into, so if I can't handle it because I'm getting annoyed by it; then I shouldn't do it. **Participant 6, female.***

Even though the association had used an external third party, a woman candidate for a non-technical position was still seen as an outsider or unlikely candidate in the recruitment process on the basis of her gender not her experience, qualifications or competencies. Through listening to participant 6's story we hear her expectations and experience of sexism. We note that the culture of football as demonstrated in the paradigms of these organizations reinforces norms and values that ascribe men as experts. We highlight the fact that in order to facilitate gender equity in football governance, men in decision-making positions, such as those involved in recruitment, need to be aware of their unconscious bias. Furthermore the rituals and routines of recruitment need to be reviewed to avoid prejudicial and discriminatory behaviours and outcomes.

## The value ascribed to women in football

Stories can be a powerful tool in the establishment and retelling (to new members) of an organization's cultural norms and values (Freemantle, 2013). It is crucial therefore, that we gather and monitor the stories told within the corridors of our football associations. According to Brady and Haley (2013), an organization sometimes needs to update or add to a story in order for a culture to change. Although we did not include any questions specifically relating to women's football, we noted that the stories would most often be centred around women's football rather than women IN football. Furthermore,

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the lack of popularity of women's football in some countries was often presented as a reason for the lack of women IN football:

*If women's football advances and develops more, we will have more women represented in county associations, in county boards, and they will also come to the level of our Country X Football Federation. **Participant 21, male.***

Stories are important because they convey the organization's shared values or culture (Peters & Waterman 1982). These may reveal what is appreciated (or not) in an organization, for example:

*We could do better, but I don't think that in the moment, some of our people here in the FA have an interest to highlight women's football. **Participant 13, female.***

*The promotion of successful individuals may be also the players we have: the international referees that are women, we have match delegates and members of the UEFA committees. So, maybe to highlight their success, to maybe give opportunities, but also to be aware of the candidates to be, because I think many women say how do you work within football? How did you get there? There is no place for you there within this men's world, and they don't have the courage to show their capabilities. **Participant 10, female.***

In the following quotation we see how the success of the women's team changed the narrative:

*Everything was different with the females; they didn't get the name on the shirt because they have to return the shirts, so it could be washed and used again. Males got their own shirts with their name on it, the trophy of the male competitions is twice as big as the women's and of course the competition is on a different level, but this is about what you want people to see - do you want people to see equality or do you want to see a difference? All those discussions I had [with] other managers before the present one and they didn't get it. When the women started winning and becoming successful, then they listened. **Participant 6, female.***

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The lack of interest or visibility of women's football within the organization was reflected in the cultural symbols within the organizations. Even in associations that discussed positively the value of women's football, stories were shared that highlighted the symbolic absence of women:

*One example in the corridor here, the names of these rooms, they are the men's teams that have won the cup, so they have their room...So, there is some of these clubs here that maybe have won one championship, whereas you have women's teams who have won fifteen, and don't have a room. **Participant 3, female.***

*It would be very easy to have two pictures [In the FA] also from the women's first team. ... because now we're talking about it, I think to myself 'come on! We should put a few pictures of them up'. Now I'm starting to think if some ambitious woman passes by, she won't see any pictures here. She won't think that this is an environment for her. **Participant 7, male.***

The rituals of organizational life are the special events through which the organization emphasizes what is particularly important and reinforces "the way we do things around here".

*When you make your debut; you get a little pin... it's a tradition from way back. So, the little pin is quite important for an older player because you are in the competition. The pin was only there for males and we have females who played over 100 caps and they didn't get a pin. A pin cost €4 or something like that, but nobody cares about giving the same position to the woman... and that's why I'm sure if my position was filled by a male; that nobody would care. So we gave everybody a pin, there were people actually crying because they got the little pin, and it meant so much in equality... so small in money but the symbolism of it...and you have to have a few people in the organization who fight for that and think about it: 'hey that's strange why don't we do that'. **Participant 18, female.***

*...my first travel with the national team we got suitcases and things, and I get men's aftershave! and you can say okay I don't want aftershave or whatever, but I think for a lot of us; it is a symbol for something else. **Participant 18, female.***

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Such symbols provide an indication or marker of a football association's culture. The gift of men's aftershave to women, or the lack of pins given to women in the same way they are given to men, may appear to sound superficial or trivial. But such rituals belie a deeper set of entrenched norms and values within an organization. In this case, it is the trivialisation and lack of value ascribed to both women's football, and women IN football. The women interviewed in the research study often spoke of the battles and challenges that were years in the making to have some level of recognition or parity with their male counterparts. We suggest that in order to facilitate gender equity in football governance, men need to listen to these stories, acknowledge the impact the ascribe value of women's football and women IN football has on experience of women and make appropriate changes to address the imbalance.

## Structure and Relationships

Power structures in organizations refer to the departments, groups, or individuals that hold the greatest influence on decisions, operations, and strategy (Johnson 2000). Whilst all of our participants are in decision-making positions, including the women interviewed in the research, not all were board members. Yet, it is at the board level that power and influence is held in most football associations. Therefore, while it was evident (and lauded by some of the participant football associations) that women do occupy heads of departments in some associations, for them to possess the real power, they must sit on boards in influential roles. The following male participant illustrates the esteem he is held in through his board position:

*[People] challenge me in a different way because I'm a board member.... and I think it's....people want me on the board, so it's a privilege in that way... and of course being a board member gives you the power in decisions in the football world. **Participant 4, male.***

In terms of real power, this resided in the position of President of the football associations:

*The president [has power over decisions]. It is not under discussion. We have also very influential figures in the executive committee and they are heard always, but it's normal that the president has more power. **Participant 31, male.***

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For one football association, they had undergone a cultural shift in the last few years towards a more equitable way of working. This was attributed to the new President who was driving this shift. The change in culture meant fair and open discussions in board meetings were encouraged, women were endorsed in the workplace, non-inclusive language and perceptions were not deemed acceptable, and women's football became one of the football association's strategic priorities. This culture shift came from the 'top down', and the board were also then part of this drive.

It was commonly noted amongst many of the participants that the board had the power to implement protocols and make decisions which could positively affect women's opportunities in football and governance. Such power structures are then reflected in organizational structures. For some football associations, board selection is drawn from certain positions within the organization. Women were typically not found in these positions and instead were in more business and administrative roles that did not feed into the boards. Therefore, for many men, this gives the illusion that they are in more gender equitable working environments because women are represented in the organizations. But the board recruitment process is not challenged, and women's absence from the committees is explained by the process through which board members are selected (e.g. head of regional football associations rather than heads of finance or human resources). The following quotation highlights the implicit 'that's the way things are done around here' and the unequivocal acceptance of the board selection procedure that ultimately disadvantages women:

*Men have always been the sole members [of the board]. I don't know the reason. I don't know if you've heard about the selection process for the members of the board. They are proposed by their regional associations, and they're proposed as candidates, and from the list of candidates we select the members for the board plus chairman. So it's the ones who propose candidates. We never had any female candidates so far, so the board actually cannot choose whether the members are going to be male or female.- **Participant 22, male.***

Routines such as the board selection process were the reasons given for the absence of women at executive committee level. For those men who did champion women as leaders, they were powerless to overturn these seemingly objective practices. Slowly, some organizations are evolving and

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'reserving' places purposely for women. But this typically is equated as a place for a woman to work in 'women's football' and it is assumed she will be on the board to represent women's football. According to the UEFA (2017), across the 55 national associations, only 62 women hold positions on committees, 37% of these reside on the Women's Committee. This rhetoric of 'women for women's football' is limiting for those who want to work in men's football and not just be asked to speak on behalf of women. The following male participant was proud that his board will soon have a woman on the committee, seeing it as a sign of 'progress' and of equity. Nevertheless, the 'women for women's football' assumption was the reason for his acceptance:

*Currently, no [women on the board], but in accordance with the statutes there are four vacant posts and minimum one of them is reserved for a female. In June we will have elections, and on the suggestion of the president we will also elect one woman. It is most likely that it would be the today's head of women's football committee, but it will be decided by the president*  
**...Participant 24, male.**

In stark contrast, rather than just reserving one place on a board for woman to represent all of women's football in the organization, a more progressive association understood the need for *balance* and *equal* representation:

*...there is one rule that is and has been for a fairly long time is that the FA; the top board which I am a member of, should have a 50% representation between the sexes. Participant 1, male.*

Even in the associations with more progressive outlooks and structures that reflected such cultures, we noted the presence of glass ceilings and walls that limited where within the organization women could gain access (Puwar, 2004). Women occupied administrative roles, or in roles associated with women's football but few were seen in technical roles and there are no women presidents:

*...because my view on gender equality is that in administration, I think men and women are equal. So, it doesn't matter the gender and process of managing. It doesn't matter. But when*

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*you go to other levels so when you, if you take our President and our board I think it is a completely different situation so there's not room for a woman yet. **Participant 15, female.***

Whilst it was admitted by various male participants that there did appear to be a 'ceiling' in women accessing the leadership positions, many men were quick to give examples of women within influential positions:

*...I would like to say that at this point, I have to point out that our team manager of our senior male team is a woman... which is let's say a typical male function... **Participant 14, male.***

This quote highlights that not only is the number of women in powerful roles important, the distribution (*where*) of women in such positions is equally important. Having a critical mass of women in the football association is crucial but these women also need to be in positions of influence and decision-making.

For men in powerful roles, they can act to create gateways and promote confidence in women's ability to be leaders in football. For the women interviewed who held powerful roles, they often cited enjoying positive relationships with key men (such as the secretary general or President) as the reason for their appointment. It again points to the need to engage those men at the highest levels of football governance to drive a gender equity agenda. This will be a model to men working in middle-level managerial roles within the football associations (such as technical directors) who are often the men 'on the ground' working alongside women. Modelling gender equity in terms of the endorsement of women is an important finding within the research. This has implications for UEFA to model and drive the support for women IN football, as well as those in senior positions at national association level. Many of our participants looked to those in positions of power to influence change:

*You know the president when he decided to appoint me here, I am quite sure that there were a lot of men standing in the line fighting for this position and I'm not sure, I don't think that he has decided to choose me to come because I'm a woman... but he decided on previous experience and his... let's say intuition and feeling...of the person. And I still have the great*

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*support of the president - this is great to know. Yes. He is very supportive. It doesn't matter, the president acts very professional. It does not matter whether you're a woman or a man; he just wants to see the results and work done well. He also gives a lot, also the relations are also important for him but maybe he's just not here every day and that makes him not aware of some problems. The conflicts we have and if you're not the kind of the person to go and talk about problems then he's not aware of the problems. **Participant 15, female.***

At an individual level, the sponsorship of women, rather than just mentoring, by men was found to be key:

*I think this is possible, I can identify some very good women who are the right type of people... We try to help them, for example from my area, I try to help the girls and all the women who have potential to be a future leader; that's very important, because that's what I see as our advantages. **Participant 12, male.***

*...there was a lot of people saying 'ah well she's a very good fit you know, I think we're not ready for a female yet' and then he came along, and he said 'we are going to do it because she's the best fit and it's time.' You need a sponsor at the point of... **Participant 6, female.***

So far, we have observed suggestions highlighting the importance of a “top-down approach” to gender equity and the role male leaders can play at an inter-personal level. Relationships was also found to be an important part of improving gender equity at an organizational level. That is, the relationship between football associations, their regional associations, and their clubs. While advocating women's value and importance within the national association was evident, what was less widespread was the endorsement of clubs in this agenda. This was often due to a disconnect or poor working relationships between associations and clubs, meaning messages of gender equity were not communicated. Strategic priorities differed and the national associations were often too removed to influence club policy or cultures:

*Members of the clubs are the ones who make the actual decisions. These are all except one... all male 45 years plus white males, they are traditional, they are not willing to change the procedure because they are elected, and we [the federation] wanted it to be suggested that...*

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*let's make this group more diverse because we think it's better to have a broader perspective. For example, age, gender, if we decided to make more mixed groups, and then people can vote within the groups. But no. They [the clubs] won't change, because the clubs are the ones who vote for these people; they are the ones who get the voting rights. **Participant 6, female.***

To conclude, power structures shape organizational structures which create the pathways through which members can move in the organization. In this case, the selection criteria for boards were often used as reasons to justify not selecting women to join committees or to justify their absence from leadership positions. In addition, relationships, both inter-personal and organizational, were key in either immobilising or mobilising women's progression into positions of power. Those women who were in decision-making roles often cited the relationship with a key, powerful male ally who endorsed their appointment. Equally, relationships between football associations and clubs were important in order to build the pipeline of women. Women were often absent in club roles, and due to the way board members were chosen at national executive levels (drawn from clubs and regional associations), there were little or no women in the pool to be considered. Gender and gendered patterns within organizations must be seen, especially by those men who have not had to question it, as this participant states in his honest reflection during one interview:

*The first things that we must do: encourage, support, give them [women] a space. We must do it. There's so many spaces for improvement, especially here, we must be honest... So definitely we must encourage, we must give spaces, and push. It is very good for all countries in this region that UEFA support and to be serious about it. **Participant 19, male.***

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# Limitations

In this section we present some limitations that will lead to improvements in future related-research. First, we note that whilst the depth and richness of the qualitative data provided fruitful discussions of participants working within the seven associations, we highlight a relationship between the culture of a country and the organization culture with regards to the topic of gender equality. This would suggest that interventions to improve gender equity in football must be contextualised; a thorough consideration of broader societal culture within a particular country must go hand in hand with any football-focused strategy or initiative. Secondly we draw attention to the lack of diversity within our sample beyond that of gender. For example, all the participants were white and did not report any physical disability. While this limits some of the implications of our findings, this is also a reflection of the typical identity of those in leadership roles within European football. This is an important note to consider when working to improve gender equity. We must take a more complex, intersectional lens when examining issues of identity and inclusion. Without this, we risk creating ‘blind-spots’ in both our research and interventions, and privileging dominant identity markers, such as Whiteness or ability.

A third complexity to be noted from the present study relates to issues of access, anonymity and confidentiality. Access to the national associations largely relied on existing relationships and connections by the research team. This can lead to difficulties for future research in the recruitment of participants if those relationships are not present. Additionally, due to the low representation of women in leadership roles, there is a greater risk to anonymity. Likewise, it can also be difficult to discuss findings from men in high-level leadership roles, such as Presidents or Technical Directors, if context is included (such as the country or at least, type of country – e.g. an Eastern European nation). Finally, we adopted a single-method approach. Although Crowe and colleagues (2011) argued that a case study approach is helpful for researchers to answer “why” and “how” questions, the interpretations and discussions are subject to researchers’ standpoints or methodological and theoretical considerations. Additional studies should consider using a multi-method approach. For example combining interviews with document analysis pertaining to recruitment policies or meeting minutes, or conducting observations such as taking ‘cultural walks’ around organisational buildings to understand the different layers of organisational culture beyond just the stories that employees may tell.

# Impact

In this final section we provide a broad overview of the contribution of the project in terms of its impact on the development of knowledge and theory in the field of gender equity in sport governance. We bring together key messages and signpost further areas of exploration and present key recommendations for UEFA and football.

## Conclusion

Type 'Women + UEFA' into a search engine and you need to scroll through two pages to find something on Women IN Football rather than Women's Football. Whilst women's football, as a sport, has grown exponentially in recent years across Europe and is a key pillar of UEFA's broader football strategy, it is evident that this support and growth has not translated to women IN football. Indeed one of the key findings of our study was 'think women-think women's football'. Even though we did not ask specific questions about women's football there was a reoccurring rhetoric of 'women for women's football'. Placed in an overriding cultural paradigm of 'think football-think male', culminates in a cultural web in which women are invisible (figure 2).



Figure 2: Cultural web of football associations in Europe

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We also note that the culture of football as demonstrated in the paradigms of these organizations reinforces norms and values that ascribe men as experts. This results in a double standard or hypocrisy that rejects women as experts in men's football but places men as expert's in women's football. Therefore the women for women's football space is not an exclusive space for women IN football. Our results show 'think women's football-think male and female'.

As discussed throughout this report, organizational culture is the deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organization that operate unconsciously and define, in a basic taken-for-granted fashion, an organization's view of itself and its environment. Whilst we noted some cultural differences within our sample population relating to gender equality, the overarching culture of 'think football-think male', affected the *rituals* of organizational life such as liminality in recruitment practices, the *stories* that are told which position men as experts in football, the *symbols* used and shared that highlight the value of men's football all of which reinforces "the way we do things around here". The gift of men's aftershave to women, or the lack of pins given to women in the same way they are given to men, may appear to sound superficial or trivial. But such rituals belie a deeper set of entrenched norms and values within an organization. In this case, it is the trivialisation and lack of value ascribed to both women's football, and women IN football.

If we are to pave the way for women to make advancements into the governance levels of football, we must address these systemic norms and values that shape the gendered nature of the footballing workplace (O'Neil & Hopkins, 2015). Often our work is aimed at the individual level, for example the provision of women's development or leadership programmes such as the Women in Football Leadership Programme (WFLP) offered by UEFA. However, this reinforces the culture of 'fix the women'. Instead, we must turn our attention to the cultural level and to the pervasive values and systemic issues that mean women are at a greater disadvantage in our footballing leadership structures. Rather than 'fix the women' by for example 'building additional confidence' which is one of the takeaways from the WFLP, we need to 'fix the organization' by for example sharing more positive stories promoting the value of women IN football.

Furthermore we conclude that simply adding more women to the organization is not enough to affect organizational culture. The distribution (*where*) of women is equally important. Having a critical mass

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of women in the football association is crucial but these women also need to be in positions of influence and decision-making. As Betzer-Tayar, Zach, Galily and Henry (2015) explained, “as long as women continue to be merely a significant minority at the top of the leadership ladder, their voices may be marginalized and their sociocultural status may be discursively constructed as the ‘other’, in relation to the norm for the male-dominated boards of executives” (p. 11). More needs to be done to interrogate the invisible, taken-for-granted practices within football associations that allow for the exclusion of women. We must make the unconscious, conscious and visible. It is up to men, who have been privileged by these systems, to have these conversations and take ownerships for changing these exclusionary practices.

For the women interviewed who held such influential roles, they often cited enjoying positive working relationships with key men (such as the secretary general or President) as the reason for their appointment. It again points to the need to engage those men at the highest levels of football governance to drive a gender equity agenda. This will be a model to men working a middle-level managerial roles within the football associations (such as technical directors) who are often the men ‘on the ground’ working alongside women. Modelling gender equity in terms of the endorsement of women is an important finding within the research. This has implications for UEFA to model and drive the support for women IN football, as well as those in senior positions at national association level.

Male allies for gender equality were identified as game changers in leadership roles in football. Their individual actions did make a difference within their organizations. However, for men to play a greater role in advocating for, and advancing gender equity, they must *value* women IN the sport and the organisation. Men must understand women’s worth and contribution in equal terms. To do this, we must *engage* men in gender equity initiatives and create a sense of ownership of this agenda. Most diversity and inclusion initiatives fail because they include an element of *control*. Rather, we need to engage men in the practice, such as asking them to be active in the process of recruiting and nurturing women leaders. It is up to the leadership levels of football, such as UEFA and presidents of national associations, to drive this agenda to win hearts and minds, rather than solely *instructing* football associations to promote women in football.

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## Recommendations

- For men to play a greater role in advocating for, and advancing gender equity, they must value women IN football and the organization.
- Interventions to improve gender equity in football must be contextualised; a thorough consideration of broader societal culture within a particular country must go hand in hand with any football-focused strategy or initiative.
- Men in decision-making positions, such as those involved in recruitment, need to be aware of their unconscious bias.
- National associations and UEFA should readdress their vision of success. Success should be redefined to ‘inclusive football’ to challenge the rhetoric of women for women’s football and thereby opening more opportunities for women to work across the sport (not just in the ‘women’s game’).
- Modelling of gender equitable working practices needs to come from the highest echelons of UEFA and national associations who take leadership of this agenda. Accountability strategies with national associations must also be in place to monitor, evaluate, and shift ownership of improving gender equity.
- Relationships are key to improving women’s representation, both at an inter-personal level, the national associations should also engage with clubs to drive a more holistic gender equity agenda.
- Having a critical mass of women in the football association is crucial but these women also need to be in positions of influence and decision-making, and they need to be at all levels of the organisational structure.

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# Appendix 1: Interview schedule

The interview schedule was designed using four main sections which were: Individual experience; recruitment/selection; culture; and equality. Questions were then asked which interrogated and explored aspects of those themes. However, there were opportunities for the interviewee to address their own concerns and expertise, and to tailor their replies to their own experiences. The interview schedule was designed to allow for this kind of flexibility for individual interviews, to provide increased authenticity and rigour at the analysis stage.

The first questions asked about their specific role, how long they had served in that role, their history or background in football or other relevant knowledge, and what was the least and most enjoyable aspects of the job. It is common to ask general questions such as these at the start of a qualitative interview of this kind, both to establish rapport and to collect basic background information about the interviewee. These questions resulted in some duplicated replies from all countries such as that the interviewee had a background in football, or sport; that they prioritised professional knowledge when recruiting staff; and that they found some of the operational responsibilities of their roles challenging but to be expected. The interviewer then went on to ask more detailed questions about the role, the board or committee, equality and equity in that organization, as perceived by the interviewee. For example, the questions covered how the participants were involved in everyday practices, such as recruitment and selection strategies in their organisation; the history of the board with respect to gender ratio, the assignment of tasks, managerial styles, meeting cultures, organization and timing of meetings, along with other such related topics. Interviewees were also asked to describe organizational relationships and networks and how they use them to facilitate gender balance (if they did), and individual experiences of selection and promotion opportunities. The interviewers also encouraged the interviewees to expand on the interview questions and/or introduce other topics they thought were relevant to gender equitable processes that bring, or have brought about, change in their organisations.

## **General introduction to the project**

The central purpose of this research is to understand the role that men can play in advancing gender equity at the highest governance levels of football associations. The goal is to have a discussion/exchange about the value that the association ascribes to having diverse and inclusive

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leadership, how the association tries to implement this, their strategies, and your (the interviewee's) specific role in this / experience of this. Below is a general overview of the topics to be covered including potential follow up questions:

### ***Individual experience on the board / in the association***

1. Please explain / describe your specific role
2. How long have you been in this position?
3. Do you enjoy this role?
4. What is the best part / worst part of this job? Why?
5. Do you have a background in football? How important is it to have a background in football?
6. On average, how much time does this role take?
7. Pay or honorarium?

### ***Recruitment / selection***

1. Can you tell me how you were recruited? Is this the same for everyone? Is this standard protocol?
2. Who is involved in the recruitment / selection process?
3. Do you think this process helps attract / recruit diverse members?
4. Would you change anything about this process?

### ***Culture***

1. Can you describe the culture of the association? What might I notice if I attended a meeting? (was a fly on the wall) Has it always been that way? (change? Why/how)
2. Is it a relaxed or formal culture?
3. How are meetings arranged? Does everyone always have to physically be at the meetings? Time / location / length etc
4. Would you describe the organizational culture as inclusive / diverse / equal? Can you give examples / explain why?
5. How are decisions made?
6. Is there a degree of consensus amongst group members? Is there room for disagreements?

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7. How does the culture of football in this country influence the way the association is run?
  8. Who has the real power in the association?

### ***Equality***

1. Does the association value having a diverse membership? How is this shown?
2. How many men and women are on the board? Why this number? Has it changed? Is this acceptable? Are there specific strategies in place relating to this?
3. What efforts (if any) have been put into creating a diverse board? What has driven this agenda? Who champions this on the board?
4. What are your own views on having a diverse and inclusive board?
5. What role have you or other people played in creating this?
6. Can you identify individuals within your FA or the broader football community who champion gender equality? Can you give me examples of what they do and how this makes a difference?

With regards to the general topic 'what role can men play in advancing gender equity at the football governance?' is there anything else that you would like to add?