

GENDER DIVERSITY IN SPORT GOVERNANCE: A PORTRAIT OF ITALY

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Abstract

During the recent thirty years, gender diversity represents the dimension most investigated above all regarding women in corporate boards of directors. Women are still underrepresented in leadership positions at all levels of any economic context, especially they represent a minority in corporate boards worldwide mostly in “male-dominated businesses”, such as the sport field. There are still few studies about the women underrepresentation in leadership positions in the sport industry.

This exploratory study aims to investigate the Italian sport context providing a brief portrayal of this country outlining the still existing gap also through a description of the current situation of women in leadership positions, above all in corporate boards, in the Italian sport setting. After a review of the existing contributions in the literature and the regulatory system on the issue, we exam the state of art of the Italian sport setting taking into account the regulatory system and the peculiarities of the field regarding the women representation in corporate boards.

At international, European and national level numerous regulations have been introduced with a concern of the gender equity in the corporate boards, in general in leadership positions for women in any economic businesses, including sport setting.

In this direction, significant and numerous interventions exist at international level, such as: In 1979, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, adopted in New York,

invited all the State Members to adopt effective measures to eliminate discrimination against women to ensure the same opportunities to actively participate in sport and physical education in order to apply the principles to gender inequality (Art. 10-13); in 1995 the Beijing Platform for Action was introduced at the end of the Fourth World Conference on Women; in 2005, the International Year of Sport confirmed the United Nations Organization (UNO) commitment against gender discrimination; in 2007, the Department of Economics and Social Affairs of the United Nations published the dossier "Women, gender equality and sport", to address systematically the issue of gender discrimination in sport.

At European level, "the European Union contributes to the promotion of European sporting profiles, taking into account the specificities, structures based on voluntary activity and the social and educational function of sport, and its action also aims to protect the physical and moral integrity of sportsmen and sportswomen, especially the youngest sport athletes", (TFEU, art. 165 as result of an evolutionary process started with "Libro Bianco sullo Sport" – the White Paper on sport for promoting sport elsewhere). Furthermore, in 1992 the European Charter of sport of the Council of Europe defined "sport" as any form of physical activity with positive physical and mental benefits and also which promotes socialization and achievement of results in competitions at all levels. Specifically, in 2003 the Women and Sport Resolution was adopted (2002/2280, INL), where female sport is defined as an expression of the right to equality and freedom of all women to dispose of their bodies and occupy public space, regardless of nationality, age, physical disability, sexual orientation and religion.

At national level, in particular, in Italy in 2011, following new regulations introduced by European countries, the Gender Quotas Act (Law n. 120/2011, on July 12th 2011, also known as Law "Golfo-Mosca"), was adopted with significant changes about the composition of the corporate boards in terms of women's membership through the "gender quotas" (quote rosa) within the boards of directors in the Italian listed public companies. Consequently, since July 2012, the boards of directors of listed companies (companies quoted in the Stock Exchange market) and public companies (companies subject to the public control and management) must be composed of one-fifth of women (gender quotas on the boards in measure of 30% by 2015 and 40% by 2020), guaranteeing for women the equal access to directors and auditors bodies.

The gender quotas regulations represent a relevant intervention to address women's underrepresentation in sport governance in Italy. Indeed, these regulations present relevant implications also for sport companies and the overall sport organizations with the specific parameters identified in the regulatory system, going to reinforce the fundamentals of the national regulatory system, that is the Italian Constitution (1948), in providing and guaranteeing formal equality for women in the legal system and at the workplace.

Otherwise, the Italian regulatory system presents a large delay, especially taking into consideration some of the distortions of the current

regulations of sport professional work. Despite the introduction of laws and several rules, like the Gender Quotas Act, the sport setting is still poorly considered by the legislature aiming to provide a clear and complete discipline in the perspective of absolute gender equality without any discrimination at all organizational positions in sport setting. Some specific regulations introduced still do not completely achieve the goal, that is the total equal access for women in the sport setting at any positions, as athletes and at top leadership positions (the "Libro Bianco sullo Sport" by National Olympic Committee CONI in 2007; the European Charter of the women rights in sport proposed by the Italian Sport Union for All, UISP, in 1985 and changed in 2011, or the same Legislative Decree 242/1999 for the Reorganization of CONI - Italian National Olympic Committee).

The presence of women in sport regards both their direct participation in sport activities as athletes, including the highest level, and the opportunity of covering managerial positions or being responsible for other roles very important in the sport world, e.g. sport doctors, sport journalists, sport designers.

In sum, currently, effective legislative interventions by the Italian Government and sport regulatory system are necessary for reducing and completely eliminating gender discrimination in Italian sport context.

In particular, women are still underrepresented in sport governance. Some international sport organizations show significant data to witness the still existing underrepresentation of women.

In the realm of sport, the introduction of gender targets and quotas aimed to increase gender diversity in governance in all the business, did not have relevant positive effects. In spite of the increasing studies on women's underrepresentation in sport governance, research on the impact of gender targets and quotas is still scarce. In brief, a few studies on the issue completely agree the sport is a gendered space; consequently, all the processes in sport operate within a hegemonic masculine norm.

Using several official data sources (public research and sport institutions like CONI, NSOs, Istat, official websites of sport federations and listed sport companies, and private research institutions like Sydney Scoreboard Organization) we provide a portrait of women representation in the Italian sport setting.

According to Sydney Scoreboard Organization, for the years 2013-2014, Italy (57 sport organizations considered in 2009-12 and 61 in 2013-14) had a very small increase in the number of women board directors, passing from 10,21% in the first research (127 women on a total number of 1244 board directors) to 10,59% (98 women on a total of 925). Women board chair increased from 0 (2009-12) to 1,64% in 2013-14 while the percentage of Women Chief Executives, instead, decreased from 23,64% of 2009-12 to 18,97 of 2013-14.

Analyzing more specifically the Italian sport organizations, specifically the national sport federations, only three of them have a percentage of female board directors higher than 1/5: Twirling (41,67%, 5

women on a total of 12 board members), Sailing (21,43%, 3 women board members on a total of 14) and Basketball (21,05%, 4 on a total of 19). All of the three federations had though a male CEO. Considering the totality of the Italian organizations only 18, 03% (11 on the 61 federations) had a female CEO in 2013-14 and 22,95% (14 on a total of 61) of them had no female member at all in their board directors.

Regarding the three Italian listed soccer companies, Juventus S.p.A. and Roma A.S. Calcio S.p.A., applying the gender quotas law, respectively present 4 women on the total of 12 members in the corporate board, and 3 women on the total of 13 corporate board directors. Instead, the company S.S. Lazio S.p.A, although quoted in the stock exchange market does not have any women in the corporate board but also because the corporate board includes only two male directors. Data regarding the female representation in sport leadership in Italy outline that women are still in minorities more than in other countries.

This research, although still at its starting point, can contribute to understand the allocation governance in Italian sport Governance and can activate larger debates about implementing gender quotas in sport governance. We suggest adopting measures and initiatives *ad hoc* (e.g., mentoring programs, diversity training, etc.) in order to promote cultural change in the roles of men and women in society and to balance out women's under-representation in sport governance.

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