

UNIVERSITÉ DE STRASBOURG



# GENDER, SPORT AND EUROPE: A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

PR. WILLIAM GASPARINI  
European Chair Jean Monnet



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## THE TRANSFORMATIONS UNDERGONE BY SPORT IN EUROPE

- At its birth, sport was first and foremost a competitive or leisure activity reserved for European elites
- Sport has also integrated more and more women, namely through the fight for women's rights and gender policies
- Although an increasing number of women engage in sport, gender inequalities remain
- By integrating an increasing number of women, sport has opened up to modes of practice other than competition: “soft” practices, health-sports, fitness, ...



## THE TRANSFORMATIONS UNDERGONE BY SPORT

- We have gone from a limited (competitive sport) to an extensive definition of sport

From the 19th century to the 1970s, competitive sport has been the prevailing model: in clubs, schools, and companies

From the 1980s: diversification of the modes of practice and integration of an increasing number of women in sports

- Today, for both the European Union and Council of Europe, sport is a regular physical activity, be it under supervision or not

For the **European Union** (cf 2007 White Paper on Sport)

-sport is an area of human activity [...] improving the health of European citizens, [which] has an educational dimension and plays a social, cultural and recreational role.

For the UE, sport is more than just a physical activity:

-It conveys **values**

-It promotes an **active participation of the citizens** of the European Union in society and facilitates an active citizenship.

**Now**

**-this citizenship mostly applies to men**

**-women practice less sport in the public space**

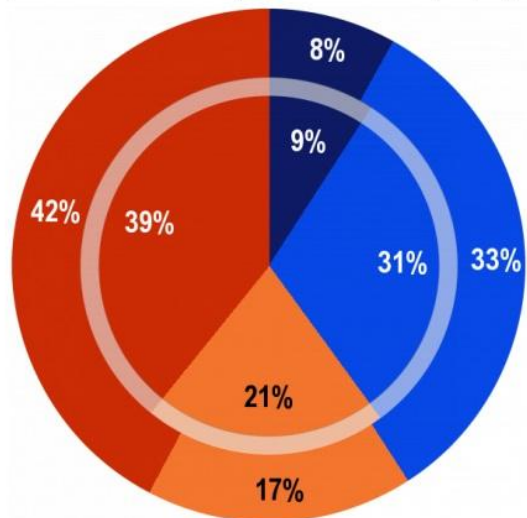
And yet, women's sport is the expression of every woman's freedom to control their own body and to intervene in the public space

# **Europeans and their sport practices**



# 58% OF EUROPEANS PRACTICE A SPORT

QD1. How often do you exercise or play sport?



- Regularly
- With some regularity
- Seldom
- Never
- Don't know

Inner pie : 2009 (EB72.3 Oct.)

Outer pie : 2013 (EB80.2 Nov.-Dec.)

EU28



## Les pratiquants réguliers dans un échantillon de pays de l'UE (Eurobaromètre 2013)

	Nombre d'habitants	% de pratiquants de plus de 15 ans
Allemagne	81 471 834	49%
Belgique	10 431 477	50%
Danemark	5 529 888	64%
Espagne	46 754 784	39%
Finlande	5 259 250	72%
France	65 312 249	48%
Italie	61 016 804	30%
Pologne	38 441 588	25%
Portugal	10 562 178	36%
Royaume- Uni	62 698 362	46%
Slovaquie	5 477 038	30%
Suède	9 088 728	72%

## **42% OF EUROPEANS NEVER HAVE ANY PHYSICAL OR SPORT ACTIVITY**

- An increase in inactive people: the number of people declaring that they never have any PSA has increased by 3 points since the survey conducted in 2009 (from 39% to 42%)

- **Men engage more in physical or sport activity than women**

In every European country, the inactive population mostly consists of women, except in a few northern Europe countries (Denmark, Finland, Sweden).

- **The more they have a working-class background, the less women play sports and are physically active**



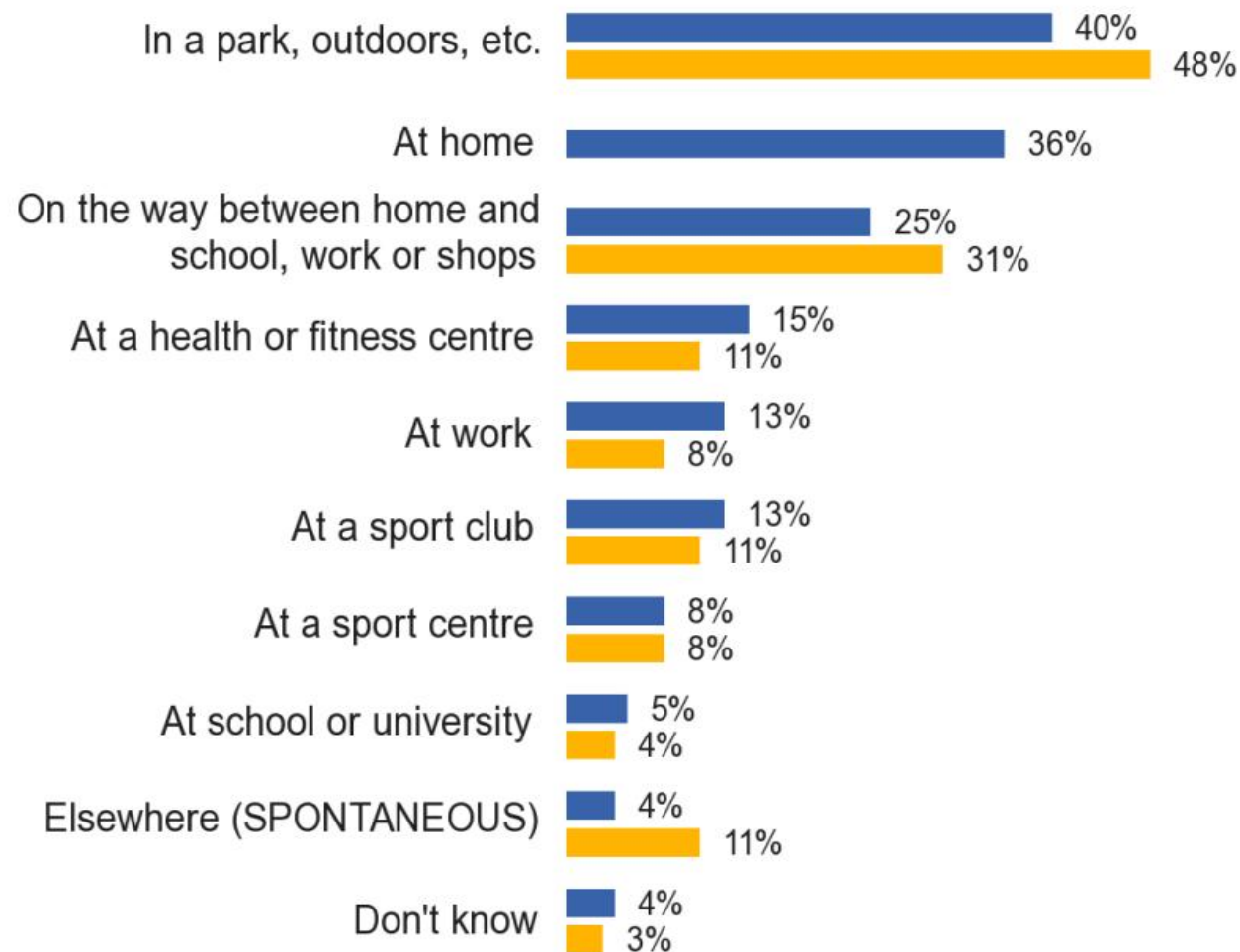
**When women play sports in Europe, they rarely do it in clubs**

**The majority of women practice a physical activity in cities (walking, cycling, running), at home, or in fitness centres**



# WHERE DO EUROPEANS ENGAGE IN SPORT OR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY?

QD7. Earlier you said you engage in sport or other physical activity, vigorous or not. Where do you engage in sport or physical activity?



■ 2013 (EB80.2 Nov.-Dec.)

■ 2009 (EB72.3 Oct.)

## A PARADOX OF SPORT

**An increase in the number of women playing sports, yet gender disparities remain**

Since the 1980s, the Council of Europe and the European Union have issued recommendations to their member states with regards to gender equality in public decision-making

Since the late 1990s, every European government has implemented a proactive policy toward gender equality on the political, economic and social stages.

However, in the field of sport, which is historically very much a male one, women are still largely under-represented in the decision-making positions in sport organisations.

In many European countries, the proportion of women with technical or administrative responsibilities in sport organizations remains very low.

## THE CASE OF FRANCE

A national plan for the feminization of sport voted in 2013

### **5 lines of work**

- open up the practice of sport to the great majority, and especially to women;
- feminize the federal, national and local governance bodies;
- feminize technical supervision;
- feminize the refereeing and supervision functions;
- promote and increase women's success at the high level.



## THE CASE OF FRANCE

In 2015, women accounted for:

- 10% of the presidents of federations (a total of 12 female presidents for 114 federations)
- 11% of the highest-level technical managers (appointed national coaches and national technical directors)

The Executive Board of the International Olympic Committee (IOC) consists of 102 active members, 18% of whom are women



## **In society, sport proposes a masculine image**

**Media in Europe:** women's sports only represent 7% of the sport events broadcast on television and 85% of the sports magazines readership consists of men

### **The Faculties of sports sciences in France:**

- a decrease in the number of women choosing to study sports sciences
- the majority of teachers are men
- the majority of university lecturers are men



## **A masculine reproduction of the sport world**

As early as the training in the sport trades, the male domination is very strong

In STAPS, women are largely under-represented (28% of the students in the first year of the STAPS degree are women in 2014), which expresses the gender disparities that can be observed in the sport trades



## **AND YET, WOMEN ARE MORE SUCCESSFUL THAN MEN IN SPORT SCIENCES STUDIES**

### **The example of the Faculty of sport sciences of Strasbourg: success in examinations in 2015**

- **Total number of students: 418**
- **Total number of men: 329**
- **Total number of women: 89**
- **Male success: 21%**
- **Female success: 40%**

**Women are more successful than men in sport studies, but they exclude themselves from the sport trades**



## **The paradox of male domination in sports: to show or to hide one's body**

**Many women feel compelled to keep outward signs of femininity when they play a sport**

See for example the international federation of volley-ball, which forced the female players to wear a bikini during official competitions until 2012

At the same time, in certain countries (for example Saudi Arabia and Iran), women are banned from stadiums or have to conceal their body



# **Beach volleyball at the Olympic Games of Rio**

- The two sides of male domination in the eye of the camera
- the sexualized female body: concealed or sexualized



## Beach volley aux JO de Rio (2016)

Les deux faces de la domination masculine sous l'œil des caméras.

Le corps féminin érotisé : dissimulé ou exhibé ?



**For the sociologist, male domination has been assimilated – by men and women alike – and now contributes to the persistence of an ordinary sexism.**

As far as sport is concerned, we must:

- feminize sports
- feminize the decision-making positions in sports organizations
- change the way men regard women



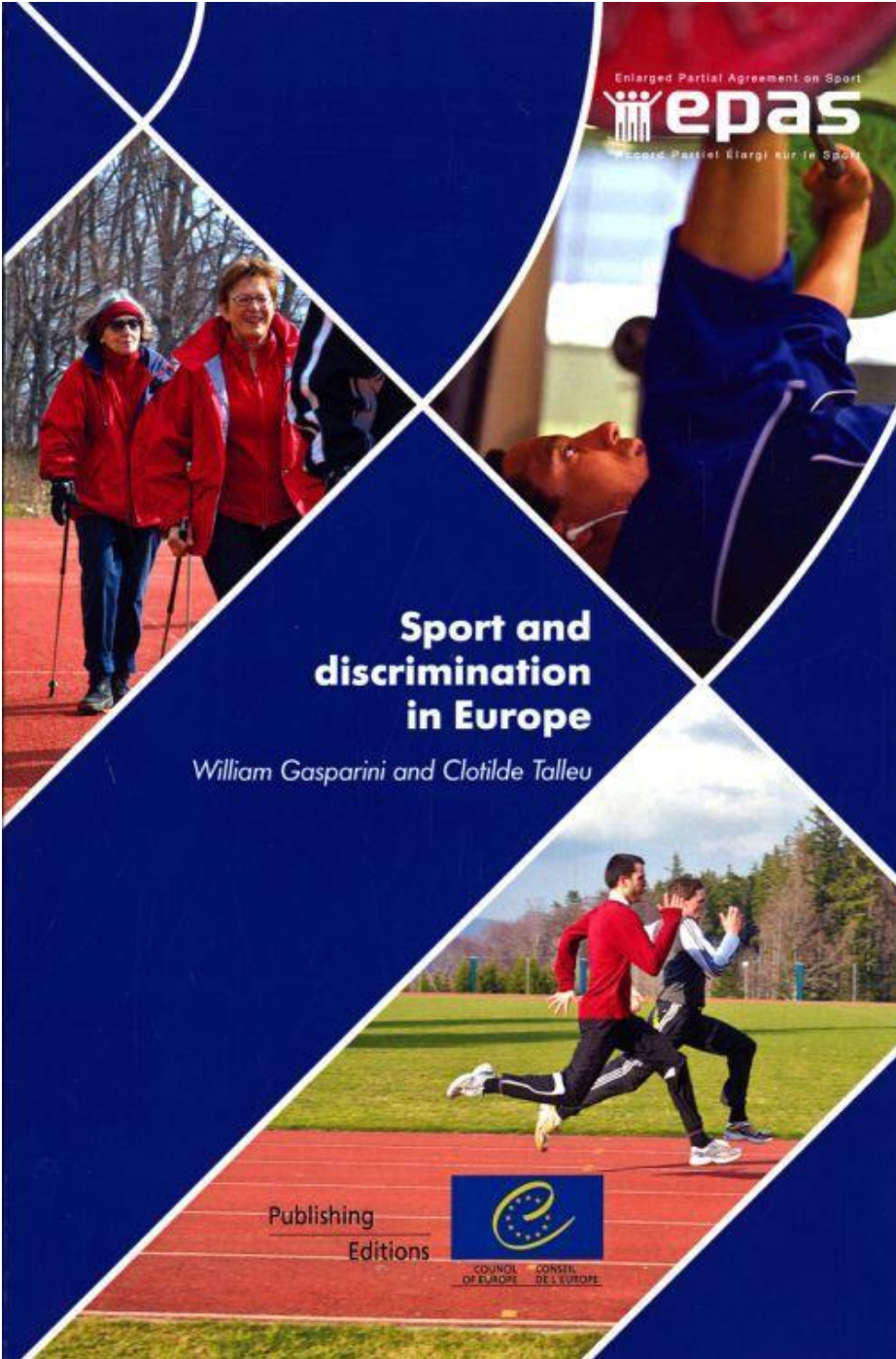
## WANT TO LEARN MORE?

The website of the Faculty of sport sciences of Strasbourg features a page dedicated to the European Chair of sport

<https://3es.unistra.fr/>



Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport  
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# Sport and discrimination in Europe

*William Gasparini and Clotilde Talleu*

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