

WOMEN'S FOOTBALL PROSPECTS IN CITY OF ZADAR AND ZADAR COUNTY

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Abstract: The research conducted is focused on status and prospects of women's football in the city of Zadar and Zadar County. Since football is the most famous sport in the world, and thus also in the mentioned area, it transcends the category of sport. The concept of sport is not unambiguous and it has no unique generally accepted definition. The aim of the research was to determine the satisfaction of the respondents with the status and popularity of women's football in the city of Zadar and Zadar County. The research used a method of survey and a suitable questionnaire in order to investigate satisfaction of respondents with social status of women's football in the city of Zadar and Zadar County. The respondents included 78 sports employees, coaches and players of women's football from the city of Zadar and Zadar County area. The aim of this research is to establish the level of satisfaction of the respondents with social status of women's football and the level of its popularity growth in the city of Zadar and Zadar County. Moreover, the aim is also to establish the level of socialization of such population achieved by participating in women's football. According to this research it is possible to confirm the hypothesis that participants are not completely satisfied with social status and the popularity growth of women's football in the city of Zadar and Zadar County and that the level of socialization is improved by participating in such activity.

Keywords: football, women, prospects, satisfaction, social status.

INTRODUCTION

As numbers show, football is one of the most popular sports in the world and as such, in Croatia. Its popularity is defined and enabled by the possibility of participation for both male and female sportspeople (Grgić, 2018). According to the Croatian Football Association (HNS) data there are 124.064 registered football players while there are about 22 million in the world. Women's football in Croatia is insufficiently represented since there are 1264 registered female football players which is only 1% of overall number of registered football players (HNS, 2019). Thus, football is still considered as men's sport in Croatian society which is obvious because of: the amount of funds invested, the number of active players, clubs, leagues, media interest, number of stadiums, etc. (Softić, 2018). At the same time, women's football as such is still not properly developed because of the problem of gender stereotypes in our society. In their research with respondents from student population, Bosnar and Žugaj concluded that even educated population sees football as primarily men's sport (Bosnar, Žugaj 2009). However, "women's football is a sport in the world of women's sports that transcends the area of sports and becomes a serious dispute in many international councils and governing bodies" (FIFA, 2019). As confirmed in the last FIFA Women's World Cup in Lyon, France 2019, most of women's sports in the world are in the shadow of men's. However, football, as the most important of the less important things in the world, provides a chance to establish itself and achieve the "importance", i.e. equality. Of course, women's football is primarily a sport and secondarily a tool for achieving certain goals. So, terms "women and men" should not be taken for granted since in its core it is a game played by women and men. Thus, it is obvious that women's football is not sufficiently represented and recognized in the city of Zadar and Zadar County and as such is "fighting" for its existence. Thomas Bach, the president of International Olympic Committee (IOC), is promoting and insisting on principles of gender equality in Olympic Movement project and he also promotes proper terminology in football. Hence, there are questions: Are there prospects in women's football? Can women's football be just football and not a tool for fighting inequality? Are there ways to promote women's football and what are they?

SPORT AND FOOTBALL

Sport is a matter of interest for different profile of scientists, sociologists, medics, economists, communicologists, etc. in modern society. Since the concept of sport is not unambiguous and it has no unique generally accepted definition, the paper states social component accepted by most sociologists that we “should ask what activities are defined as sport and why in a certain society” (Coakley, 2007). As a social institution, sport depends to a large extent on dominant culture, i.e. values and norms of a society it belongs to which is of great importance considering the context of this paper. According to the Sports Act in Croatia, sport is defined as “any physical and psychological activity that person does according to a set of rules, with aim to compete with an opponent or an opponent’s team by applying a set system of scoring that defines a winner” (Sports Act). Sport is a part of social needs of all individuals, a universal mean of understanding and cooperation among people with aim of physical and spiritual upbringing, vitality and health, social relations and attitudes, defence readiness and quality of life, and it also represents the category of economy.

Today’s football represents, without doubt, the most popular sport in Croatia and it has features of acyclic activity. It belongs to a dynamic group of sports in which two teams, 11 players each, compete against each other, establish the ball flow and try to achieve a score during the match. Stamina, speed, strength, coordination, accuracy and flexibility form the hierarchy of motor abilities (Dujmović, 2006). Even though football can be marked as “male” sport, there is a positive social attitude towards women’s participation. Leskovar (2012) identified positive attitude towards women’s football on a sample of both male and female students of high school. Rural areas in our country and Zadar County represent the most conservative parts of society. If a positive attitude towards women’s football exists in such areas, we can conclude that it is time for institutions to do their part in order to develop it. Thus, the aim of this research is to establish the attitude towards women’s football in rural area on a sample of people of different gender and age.

WOMEN IN FOOTBALL

Equality in football should be one of the basic goals of contemporary sports, as set and conducted by FIFA. Since different efforts to promote equality are introduced by society, governing bodies, etc., prejudices have reduced in everyday life and in football, but they still exist. Thus, traditional values which consider football as an area dominated by masculine values are beginning to decrease (Coakley, 2007). According to Talleu, in a handbook “Gender equality in sports: access for girls and women to sport practices”, it is still necessary to make an effort to achieve gender equality in football because there is still great unused potential in society. Sport can give positive contribution to society: doing sports promotes mutual respect, resourcefulness and understanding by connecting people of different gender, race, religion, age and economical background. Sports activities, if managed well, can be tools for fighting discrimination, prejudices and stereotypes (Talleu, 2011). One can question the state of women’s football in countries where national teams did not qualify for world championships and in that way did not enter the international scene. Insufficiently developed sports infrastructure and insufficient funds as well as overall support is generally a serious problem of women’s team sports in Croatia and especially football which position is considered as insufficiently recognised. However, women’s football has recently achieved some progress in Croatia. Researches and strategies such as “Together for the future of football” from 2019 to 2024, Bosnar Kovačević in 2011, Herman in 2016, Medo in 2018, etc. all show a certain progress that also includes investment in infrastructure, competition system, coach education, number of clubs and, most importantly, the number of new young sportswomen. 1937, when the first women’s football club “Bata” in Borovo was formed, is considered as the beginning of official women’s football. Whereas today, according to HNS data, “from total of 118 316 registered players of football and futsal in Croatia, only 2106 are female, including younger age groups” which is worrying. But these data and the following should be taken with precaution because in last few years there has been an improvement in this area (Baršić, 2018). There are 1 732 football clubs registered in Croatian Football Association with only 38 women’s clubs. Among judges, there are 2239 men and only 19 women (HNS, 2013). Such status can be explained in several ways: insufficient care, not enough interest within sports institutions responsible for development of football, gender stereotypes in society, negligence and resistance of overall society regarding this matter. Stereotypes possibly influence parents when choosing sports for girls and there is still a very conservative attitude regarding the choice of sports for girls, like for example: volleyball, basketball, swimming, etc. Gregurić research from 2018 is based on social aspect of sex and gender and it

confirmed that gender stereotypes can inhibit the development of women's football as well as all gender stereotypical activities. (Gregurić, 2018).

WOMEN FOOTBALL IN CROATIA

It should be stressed that since 2012 there has been a continuing growth of registered female players of football which is a result of various factors and processes done by public administration and overall society. "There are five centres of women's football in Croatia (Zagreb, Varaždin, Split, Osijek, Rijeka) which are equivalent to men's football" and they organise camps where educated coaches work with girls and promote football (HNS, 2019). This presents infrastructural grounds for development of women's football. It is obvious that the existence of such centres helps to form a system of competitions, women's sports clubs, quality matches and educated staff which is a key moment for further development of women's football. Currently, in Croatian official system of competitions, women's clubs compete in 1st HNLŽ (Croatian Football League for Women) and 2nd HNLŽ and in regional system of competing for youth. This trend is marked by achieved sports results of clubs as well as national teams on international competitions (participating in qualifications for Euro League - ŽNK Split, etc.), professionalization of players' status, possible creation and participation of Croatian clubs in regional league with aim of raising the quality. Countries which have well developed women's football (Austria, Hungary, Slovakia, etc.) and which have market interest would participate in the competition.

In the last few years there has been a vivid continuing growth of women's football in the city of Zadar and Zadar County. There has been an increase in number of active clubs (3 clubs) as well as the number of girls and women (around 190) who play football. This means that they are becoming increasingly important factor of women's football in this area. Along with volleyball, swimming, rhythmic gymnastics, basketball and several individual sports, women's football makes up a sum of sports which dominates in popularity in the city of Zadar and Zadar County (ŠZGZ, 2019). Considering social context, presence and role of modern technologies in lives of youth, all should be used to promote football.

METHODS

In order to investigate the satisfaction of respondents with social status of women's football in the city of Zadar and Zadar County, method of survey was used and appropriate questionnaire was formed. The survey represents a quantitative form of research and it gathered data about different attitudes and opinions (satisfaction) of respondents which identified possible changes needed in order to improve social status of women's football. The questionnaire included four areas of research: social status of women's football in the city of Zadar and Zadar County, popularity of women's football in the city of Zadar and Zadar County, quality of women's football and women's football.

Respondents

The sample of respondents includes 78 sports employees, coaches and female players of women's football in the city of Zadar and Zadar County. Respondents actively participate in women's football and they are representative sample for this area of research. Total number includes 6 coaches, 3 presidents and secretaries of clubs and the rest (69) are players of Women's football club Donat, Futsal super Chiks and Football club Abeceda sporta. This paper analyses results of the questionnaire which was answered by 78 respondents, i.e. those who were training at the moment of research. Respondents filled in the questionnaire after training in appropriate facility. The questionnaire was first tested on a sample of 5 respondents and later was given to the other participants in this research. All profiles of respondents were included (coaches, players and sports employees). It consists of 11 questions organised in two parts: general and research. First part is related to general data, while the other part consists of questions which have the aim to answer suggested hypotheses of this paper. After conducting this survey, questionnaires in printed form were imported in a program LimeSurvey and then exported in specialized SPSS data analysing program.

Aims

The aim of this paper is to establish the satisfaction of respondents with social status of women's football in the city of Zadar and Zadar County as well as the level of popularity growth of women's football and also to directly identify the level of socialization of such population achieved by playing women's football. In accordance with the

aim, it is possible to generate hypothesis that participants are not satisfied with the status of women's football in the city of Zadar and Zadar County and that the level of socialization is improved because of their participation in women's football.

RESULTS

After the survey was conducted, respondents' answers were analysed. Results showed that there were more female respondents (75%) than men (25%) and majority of respondents (80%) were those aged between 15 and 20. A group of questions related to the satisfaction with social status of women's football in the city of Zadar and Zadar County crystallised the answer that social status is unsatisfactory as seen in answers to the question (Table 1) *How satisfied are you with social status of women's football in the city of Zadar and Zadar County?* The majority of respondents (80%) are completely dissatisfied with the status of women's football, while 8 % are partly dissatisfied. Fewer respondents (9.4%) answered that they are neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. 2.6% respondents are partly satisfied; however no one is completely satisfied.

Table 1. Question results - How satisfied are you with social status of women's football in the city of Zadar and Zadar County?

Completely dissatisfied	Partly dissatisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Partly satisfied	Completely satisfied
80%	8%	9.4%	2.6%	-

There was a clear answer concerning growth and popularity of women's football (table 2) where 63% respondents answered the popularity is growing (as expected concerning the profile of respondents), 26,66% answered it neither grows nor it does not grow and 12,04% answered it does not grow.

Table 2. Question results – Does popularity of women's football in the city of Zadar and Zadar County grow?

It does not grow	Neither grows nor it does not grow	It grows
12.04%	26.66%	61.3%

Question *Does women's football have lower quality than men's football?* generated similar percentage of answers; 21,33% answered yes, neither yes nor no was answered by 33,33%, while 45,33% answered no.

Table 3. Question results – Does women's football have lower quality than men's football?

No	Neither yes nor no	Yes
45.33%	33.33%	21.33%

Question *Does participation in women's football influence your inclusion in society?* generated answers as follows: yes in 60%, neither no nor yes in 25,34% and no in 14,66%.

Table 4. Question results – Does participation in women's football influence your inclusion in society?

No	Neither no nor yes	Yes
14.66%	25.34%	60%

Good response from respondents is due to wish and motivation of sports employees, coaches and players of women's football to improve and open new prospects for women's football. This research and its results gained from 78 respondents opened new topics, questions that are necessary to deal with in the future: is women's football a tool for fighting for women's rights and appreciation of women's football in rural areas of referred county; since contemporary football is business, how fit is women's football for such aspect considering market interest in Croatia? This

research and its results which included 78 respondents opened several other topics that need to be discussed in the future.

CONCLUSION

Women's football in the world is far more developed than in Croatia, including the city of Zadar and Zadar County. As established by the results of this research, the reason is not only the negative attitude of the general population towards women's football, but also insufficient effort in the development of women's football by institutions. In order to follow the models of more developed countries in this area, especially in Europe, in the city of Zadar and Zadar County, the guidelines and goals of FIFA for the development of women's football should be adhered to. These include: improving the infrastructure needed for women's football, increasing the number of members in the football school, increasing the number of women's competitions, enrolling women in technical and management areas of football such as refereeing, training and administration, organizing seminars for coaches, referees and analyzing and monitoring women's technical development. With all of the above in mind, it is important to stress that infrastructure is also essential for men's football. Improving the conditions for women's football can gain prospects in men's football as well. This research found that respondents are not satisfied with the status and popularity of women's football in the city of Zadar and Zadar County and its quality. It has also been confirmed that playing football helps female footballers to integrate into societies of events. Moreover, women's football should not only be a tool for gender equality, but it is an exciting sport, perhaps currently less attractive than men's, but with perspectives and new ideas of improvement it can develop into a sport that can satisfy society in general in the same way as men football.

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