The Nordic Sport Model in Transition. Migration, management and mixed identity in Scandinavian women’s football.

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This special issue has grown out of an ongoing Nordic collaborative research project (Nordcorp) using Scandinavian women’s football as a strategically selected extreme case (of organizational development) to study a Nordic sport model in transition. The common point of interest for the project group, that overlaps with the editors and authors in this issue of Soccer & Society, is a fascination with the current development of Scandinavian women’s football that stands out as an intriguing subject for sports research as well as the social sciences.

First of all women’s football in Scandinavia (as well as in other places of the world) has become an increasingly important social phenomenon due to a steady growth in participation, attendance rates, support to professional management, etc. In terms of participation soccer has become the largest organized sport for girls and women in Norway and Sweden, and the third largest in Denmark. This can be regarded as the immediate culmination of a historical process, where the Scandinavian countries have been among the pioneers for the development of women’s football. Moreover, since the 1990s, in particular, the immigration of international top-level players into Scandinavian clubs has developed, so that today Scandinavia forms a center for women’s football globally. Thus, Scandinavian women’s football offers the opportunity of studying sports labour migration in its emerging processes and the challenges and opportunities that follow in the wake.

A second reason for making Scandinavian women’s football the object of social scientific sports research, is the fact that the current development of the game offers opportunities of studying the meeting between emerging processes of globalization, professionalization and commercialization on the one hand and the so-called Nordic civil society model of sports on the other hand. Following this model, Scandinavian women’s soccer is still to a large extent organized in local clubs (villages, provincial towns, and suburbs), driven by volunteers, and built on ideals such as contributing to social cohesion in civil society. Concurrently, we see local football clubs now entering the global market e.g. by recruiting top players from remote countries, combining voluntarism and professionalism in their administration and performance, and developing partly idealistic and commercial perspectives towards the local community (as sponsor market and global village). Women’s football seems to be less fixed in traditional organisation models, than male football in Scandinavia (particularly Sweden), which creates a space for entrepreneurship when it comes to commercial input and organisational alternatives. Thus, crucial changes in club
management are emerging in Scandinavian women’s football that may provide a laboratory for studying hybrid models of sports management.

A third reason for studying Scandinavian women’s football is grounded in the role the sport plays for collective imagination among participants, and spectators alike. For women’s soccer, in particular, processes of identifying with basic social groups in relation to gender, sexuality, ethnicity etc. are spelled out. Since women’s soccer challenges traditional narratives of female and male behavior, sex roles, and ideas of national homogeneity, we have a chance of revisiting our collective comprehension of what is feminine and masculine, what is normal and deviant, and who are the established and the outsiders, etc. Thus we may gain insights into the formation of mixed identity in the sense that we see sports people developing membership of various social groups across nation-state borders, gender dichotomies, and sexuality norms.

**State of the art (and possible additions)**

By taking up Scandinavian women’s football as a research topic we aim to contribute to various areas of social scientific sports research. This will take place through adding bits and pieces to the growing international literature in three areas: 1. Sports labour migration that so far only holds few studies of migration processes developing outside the Anglo-American sporting context, 2. Sports management studies that have to come to terms with organizational changes of the Nordic civil society model of sport, and 3. Studies of women’s football where it is relevant to add to the predominant focus on gender identity issues related to the development of the game.

First and foremost, with regard to the existing research on sports labour migration, we turn attention to the movement of athletes into and away from Scandinavian sports which now forms a new study area. The cross-disciplinary field of research in sports labour migration has focused almost entirely on male athletes in internationally renowned sports disciplines such as (men’s) football and primarily this has looked at migration to English-speaking societies. In Scandinavia there is virtually a complete lack of literature on football labour migration, and so far there are only a few published studies focusing on female footballers’ migration. The present studies have concentrated attention to immigration into Scandinavian women’s football while the emigration of women footballers away from Scandinavia has not yet been considered. Also, the more general power relations between Scandinavia and sending countries, as for instance Africa, have not yet been considered in more details, as they will be in this special issue.
Secondly, the administrative changes in Scandinavian women’s soccer organizations have not been considered in the existing literature on sports club management. In Scandinavian sports management literature, there is a tendency to draw on the civil society concept as it is developed in opposition to other models of society, which have focused solely on the state and the market. The expression a ‘Nordic civil society model of sports’ is an analytical construct since there have been few empirical studies to define the model in more detail; either by relating the model to sports systems outside of the Nordic countries (which may disclose a number of overlaps) or by describing the variety between the ways sports are organized in the Nordic countries. The general characteristics of voluntary sport organizations in Scandinavia have been described and summarized as: Voluntariness, independence from the state and market, and democratic decision-structures, so distinguishing them from the professionalization processes in sports. However, through the last decades the so-called voluntary sports clubs have to a higher degree become professionalized to take up work with not only elite sport but also welfare issues as health promotion, social integration etc. Thus, the professional and the voluntary may not be that easily distinguished but rather we need to develop understanding of the emerging aspects of and ways to professionalization (from above and below). Moreover, it seems highly relevant to develop models for changes of management, and in particular consideration of the organization of women’s soccer with its limited financial resources.

Thirdly, when considering the international literature on women’s football, much attention has been turned to gender perspectives on women’s right to play, and on the current state of the game. There is a general consensus in the literature that the development and current state of women’s football is dependent on women’s success in fighting the masculine domain of sport. However, in some of these studies you also find references “to a transformation of the concept of ‘femininity’ and gender in society at large”. In line with this perspective, it is considerations of the ways in which women’s participation in and fandom of soccer not only reproduce but also renew and challenge perceptions of gender, sexuality, etc. that can be found in the following contributions.

**Content**

The contributions to this special issue can be paired so that they fall in three thematic couples focusing on migration, management and mixed identities respectively.
First of all, in relation to the emerging processes of migration in Scandinavian women’s football, the article by Mari Haugaa Engh, Sine Agergaard and Joseph Maguire frame our understanding of the talent pipeline of African women’s soccer players immigrating into Scandinavia. This article examines Scandinavian constructions and readings of potential football migrants from the African continent by providing an investigation of the dynamics and narratives surrounding African football teams’ participation in three Scandinavian youth football tournaments. Drawing on Elias and Scotson’s theory of established-outsider relations the article explores the transnational power relations and processes of inclusion and exclusion in groups’ relationships.

The article argues that a particular representation of self, on the part of the tournaments, as being providers of ‘development’ and gender equity programs to African teams, is fundamental in maintaining the established-outsider power relations between Scandinavian and African football teams. In so doing, the article also points to the inter-dependency between the groups of established and outsiders and the dynamic nature of power relations.

As another contribution to the understanding of migratory processes in Scandinavian women’s football, the following chapter by Vera Botelho and Bente Skogvang presents new empirical findings. Besides from Scandinavia being a center for the importation of foreign players, Denmark, Norway and Sweden have also been great donors of players for other countries. The article is based in an exploratory study attempting to shed light on the emigration of Scandinavian women footballers. It maps out the history and geography of this migratory process and examines factors that, within a pull and push framework, may explain why Scandinavian players opt to leave leading countries of women’s football.

The next couple of articles both shed light on changes in sports club management due to emerging professionalization and commercialization processes in Scandinavian women’s football. The article by Jørgen Bagger Kjær and Sine Agergaard describes the ways in which Scandinavian women’s soccer has transitioned from being a solely amateur one to a professional sport with work opportunities for women footballers from around the world. Conducting document analysis of the new license program implemented by the Swedish and Danish soccer associations (FA’s) in 2012, the article suggests that women’s professional soccer, in a Scandinavian context, is best understood through the theoretical construct of “new professionalism.” Professionalism has become a goal in itself and an ideology for the management of women’s soccer with limited relation to the current state of the game.
The second article, in the aforementioned couple, by Mattias Melkerson considers the options of revising developmental opportunities and challenges within contemporary women’s soccer in Sweden. The intention of this article is to illustrate how changes of management of women’s football can be viewed whilst revising the leading Swedish football club LdB FC Malmö’s entrepreneurship in attaining a prosperous position in a Swedish football context. The article views LdB FC Malmö’s history and tactical approach from a brand management vantage point. An overall conclusion stresses that there is significance in how identity and values are being communicated which ultimately might have an impact on how developmental strengthening aspects are being encountered and implemented.

The last couple of articles cover issues of mixed identity that are particularly related to aspects of gender and sexuality identification. The first article by Gertrud Pfister, Verena Lenneis and Svenja Mintert focuses on a new and uncovered research field on girls and women as football supporters with a particular focus on female football consumers and fans in Denmark. Based on gender and socialization theories, the article describes women’s (lack of) interest in men’s football. The sources of information are reader and user data of mass media, results of surveys about the habits of the Danish population and the results of an interview study with female fans. A specific focus of this article is on the minority of female supporters who attend football games. How do they adapt to a “man’s world” and what are their roles in this “male environment”? The analysis reveals the mixed identity of being a women consumer and football fan. Female fans have to cope with a measure of sexism, but they can also adopt the men’s perspectives in order to be accepted as “authentic fans”. Other women reacted on men’s domination in the football stadium by founding a women only fan group that allows them to find still another way to be women and fans.

The second article presents the results from a study about female and male football players and their coaches’ attitudes towards the football players’ sexualities. The concepts hegemonic masculinity from Connell and symbolic power and doxa from Bourdieu are used in the analyses. It is expected that men like tough games with body contact, but for women such masculine activities seem to influence other people’s views on their sexuality. In conclusion, it seems much easier to be a female football player today than twenty years ago, which is also reflected in the enormous increase in the number of female players over the last years. However, some of the players, especially gay male footballers, struggle with discrimination and lack of tolerance inside their sport.
Finally there is the article by Ciara McCormack and Kristin Walseth that relates both to the mixed identity and migration theme. The focus is here on various ways in which Norwegian women’s soccer players attempt to combine elite soccer with education. A comparison is made between players opting to stay in Europe or attending university in the US. Using Bourdieu’s theoretical concepts the analysis shows that the players’ production of educational capital has been affected by their engagement in elite women’s soccer. Moreover the analysis shows that after high school, combining soccer and education seemed easier for the players who attended university in the US and played NCAA soccer. Both players that have stayed in Europe and migrated to the US plan on using their soccer capital in their civil careers. Yet research demonstrates that physical capital is not easily transferable. Thus the article ends with a discussion of the opportunities for women’ soccer players to enter coaching and administration, once they are done with their career as professional soccer players.

Contributions and perspectives
In this collection of articles a number of interesting suggestions for future research can be found. Here, we will concentrate on possible conceptualizations of the hybrid forms of organization encompassing both emerging globalization, professionalization and commercialization processes on the one hand, as well as the Nordic civil society model of sports on the other hand.

Perspectives on globalization in sports have ranged from the so-called cultural imperialist view of sport as a diffusion of a global monoculture to the counter-point stressing the diversity of local responses to globalization processes in sports. A step away from this dichotomous discussion, on whether globalization makes the world of sports more homogeneous or heterogenous, is taken with the concept of glocalization. In line with this approach, our studies illustrate the interdependencies in global sporting networks and hybrid forms of sports organizations that develop in the meeting between local conditions and global structures. Further research is needed with an eye for the ways in which processes of globalization, through e.g. immigration and emigration of players, interweave with the Nordic sports model.

The development of professionalism in sports has already been described in Nordic countries as an increase in the number of athletes and club managers who take up sport as a job. Latterly, the concept has come to mean not only the employment in itself but also the processes whereby club activities and administration are organized according to a market-oriented rationality. Referring to Julia Evett’s concept of new professionalism and the variety between
professionalization from above and below, new perspectives on the transition of the voluntary sports clubs organization in Scandinavia are presented in this special issue. Further studies are needed of the ways in which these emerging professionalization processes merge with ideas and routines of voluntary work in Scandinavian sports clubs.

Related to this, is the development of commercialization defined as the process by which transactions are based on compensation rather than reciprocity. However, empirical studies have already pointed to the occurrence of a so-called ‘dugnadsøkonomi’ in Norwegian sports, where economical compensation is mixed with reciprocity among volunteers. In line with the theoretical perspectives presented (in this special issue) on new professionalism and brand management, we are to develop future studies that draw attention not only to economic exchanges, but also to the continuous normative development of values and identity.

Thus, given the fact that women’s football does not have the same financial resources as men’s football, we might have a chance to identify new hybrid forms of organization that will provide football governing bodies and club managers with alternatives to a simple transition from a civil society to a market-based model of organization; models that bear on the civil society model and at the same time may serve as models for the future development of Nordic sports clubs. This seems highly relevant in the current setting where politicians expect that sports clubs are capable of re-establishing voluntary and normative work while also professionally administrating projects serving to solve welfare society issues such as physical inactivity and social differentiation.

This prompts the question for the future of whether Scandinavian women’s football clubs can expand, organize and brand the product in a different way to men’s football clubs, for instance by making the clubs seem “more multicultural”, “more collective” and “more fun”, in order to attract sponsors. For instance, recruiting professional female players from abroad (instead of employing national players) may be justified by referring to their contribution to and social integration into the club. When pointing to migration, changes in management and mixed identity as subtopics for this special issue we hope that the readers will also discover new ways in which these themes and others interweave and point together towards new opportunities and challenges for the development of Scandinavian women’s soccer in a global world.

Notes
1. The project is based on a grant of 600,000 Euro from the NOS-HS Joint Committee for Nordic Research Councils for the Humanities and the Social Sciences and co-financing from Malmö University, Sweden, and Copenhagen (later Aarhus) University, Denmark.

2. Flyvbjerg, Five Misunderstandings about Case-Study Research, 230.

3. From 1990 to 2007 the numbers of participants in Danish and Norwegian girls’ and women’s football have doubled from 31,000 to 60,344 and from 50,000 to 97,958, respectively. In Sweden the number of female footballers increased in the same period by more than 100,000 participants from 32,753 to 136,062. Weigelt and Kanoh, Elegant on the offenwe, 23; and information retrieved from http://www.fifa.com/mm/document/afdeveloping/women/93/77/21/factsheets.pdf.

4. For more specific information on attendance rates and organizational change (economic funding) of women’s soccer in Denmark and Sweden see Kjær and Agergaards article in this special issue.

5. For information about the number of girls and women in organized sport in Denmark see http://www.rf.se/Forskningochfakta/ForskningFakta/Statistik/Idrottenisiffror/, retrieved 26 April 2012; for soccer being the largest organised sport for girls and women in Norway see Skogvåg 2013, for the same information for Sweden see www.rf.se/Forskningochfakta/ForskningFakta/Statistik/Idrottenisiffror/, retrieved 30 April 2012.

6. Ottesen, Hvornår begyndte kvinder; Brus & Trangbæk, Asserting the Right; Grønkjær & Olsen, Fodbold, Fair Play and Forretninig; Hjelm & Olofsson, A Breakthrough; Hjelm, Amasoner på planen; Olofsson, Har kvinderne en sportslig chance?: Fasting, Small Country; Skogvåg, Topfootball: Skogvåg, The Historical Development, Skille, Biggest but smallest.

7. Eliasson, The European football market; Agergaard & Botelho 2011, Female Football Migration; Botelho & Agergaard 2011; Moving for the love.


9. Andersson and Carlsson, A diagnosis of commercial immaturity

10. Agergaard & Sorensen, The Dream of Social Mobility; Hognestad, Transglobal Scandinavian?

11. Maguire & Falcous, Sport and Migration, 277

12. Lopez, Women on the Ball; Pfister et al., Women and Football; Caudwell, Women’s experiences; Caudwell, Women’s Footballing Bodies; Harris, The Image Problem; Harris, Doing Gender on and off the Pitch, Scratch et al., It’s still a man’s game; Scratch, Magee and Caudwell, Women, Football and Europe, Scratch, Caduwell & Holand, Bent it like patel; Hong and Mangan, Soccer, Women, Sexual Liberation; Williams, A Game for Rough Girls; Williams, A Beautiful Game; Williams, An Equality Too Far?

13. Maguire and Stead, Border Crossings; Stead and Maguire, No Boundaries to Ambition; Stead and Maguire, ‘Rite de Passage’; Maguire and Pearson, Global Sport; Maguire & Pearson, Elite Labour Migration; Lanfranchi and Taylor, Moving with the Ball; Magee and Sugden, The World at their Feet; McGovern, Globalization or Internalization; Darby, Africa and the World Cup; Darby, African Football Labour Migration; Darby, Akindes and Kirwin; Football Academies; Molnar, Mapping Migrations; Molnar and Maguire, Hungarian Footballers; Poli and Ravanel, Borders of “free” movement; Poli, Migrations and Trade; Taylor, Global Players; Dietschy, Football players’ migrations; Tiesler and Coelho, The Paradox; Cornelissen and Solberg, Sport Mobility.

14. Eliasson, The European football market; Agergaard & Botelho 2011, Female Football Migration; Botelho & Agergaard 2011; Moving for the love.

15. Pestoff, Beyond the market and the state; Pestoff, Democratic Architecture.


17. Norberg, Idrotternes vig til folkhjemmet; Seippel, Professionals and volunteers.

18. Agergaard, Development and appropriation.

19. Lopez, Women on the Ball, Melling, Ladies’ Football; Newsham, In a League of their Own; Williams, A Game for Rough Girls?; Williams and Woodhouse, Can Play, Will Play?: Brus and Trangbæk, Asserting the right to play; Fasting, Small country; Magee et al., Women, Football and Europe; Olofsson, Har kvinderne en sportslig chance?: Ottesen, Hvornår begyndte kvinderne at spille fodbold?: Hong and Mangan, Soccer, Women, Sexual Liberation.

20. Caudwell, Women’s Football in the United Kingdom; Caudwell, Women Playing Football; Caudwell, Gender, feminism and football studies; Scratch, Caudwell and Holland, ‘Bend it Like Patel’; Williams, A Game for Rough Girls?; Williams and Woodhouse, Can Play, Will Play?: Macbeth, ‘The “Pals”’, the “Professionals” and the “Conformers”; Knoppers and Anthonissen, Women’s Soccer in the United States and the Netherlands; Markovits and Hellerman, Soccer and American exceptionalism; Markovits and Hellerman, Women’s soccer in the United States; Pelak, A Case Study of Women’s Soccer; Menneson and Clement, ‘Homesociability and Homosexuality’. Majumdar and Bandypadhyay, Goalless!: Christopherson, Janning and McConnell, Two Kicks Forward; Cox & Thompson, Facing
the Bogey; Cox & Thompson, *Multiple Bodies*; Fasting, *Small country*; Pfister et al., *Women and Football*; Scraton et al., *It’s still a Man’s Game?*

21 Fasting, *Small country*, 160.

22 For numbers and percentages of migrant players in Scandinavia see Botelho & Agergaard, *Moving for the Love*, 809.

23 Elias & Scotson, *The Established and the Outsiders*.


26 Houlihan, *Sport and Globalization*; Maguire, *Global Sport*; Rowe, *Sport and the Repudiation*.


28 Peterson, *Leken som blev allvar*.


31 Enjolras, *Community-based economy*.

32 Enjolras & Seippel, *Struktur, økonomi og frivillig indsats*.

References


