

## **WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN VENEZUELAN SPORTS MANAGEMENT**

**Rosa López de D'Amico**, Universidad Pedagógica Experimental Libertador- (UPEL) - Venezuela

**Rebeca Oropeza**, Universidad Pedagógica Experimental Libertador -UPEL - Venezuela

### **INTRODUCTION**

The present research is part of a project that looks at the behavior and profile of National Sport Federation administrators, with an emphasis in Venezuelan women's participation in sport leadership. The main objective of this paper is to present a descriptive analysis of women in sport leadership in Venezuela, specifically in sport federations registered at the National Institute of Sport (IND) which is the official government organization that registers and controls the sport and physical education development in Venezuela. It has 54 registered national federations nevertheless 40 are the ones considered for this study as they are the ones which have had more activities and participation in all the national sport development and internationally. All the positions at the federation board are elected. The analysis of the whole research project is on-going.

### **METHODOLOGY**

In Venezuela there is not much published data or academic studies about women's representation in sport, specifically in leadership roles (e.g., Garradez, 1994; Murillo, 2005). Several researches were reviewed (e.g., Hartmann-Tews, & Pfister, 2003; G.Pfister 2005; Hodven, 2005), the questionnaire used by Pfister, under her consent, was translated into Spanish and adapted for the purpose of this study. This exploratory research used questionnaires, interviews and bibliographical review. Preliminary results of the study are presented in this paper but more analysis is in process, it is a research in progress. Ten in-depth interviews were conducted to sport administrators from several sport federations (9); the main focus was on attitudes towards gender, reasons for working as sport leader, benefits, obstacles and procedures in the sport regulations. They were 5 male and 5 females interviewees; The interviews were analyzed based on qualitative content analysis. The questionnaire was sent to 40 registered National Sport Federation. It addressed issues related to: educational level, their commitment to sport, age, family, experiences, barriers. The processes started in October 2005, 5 questionnaires per federation were sent, twice in some cases, so in total 200 questionnaires were sent. So far, we have received a total of 38 replies from 11 sports. For the purpose of this study we will refer to the III part of the questionnaire in which it is explored gender issues in the sport organization.

### **RESULTS**

It is interesting to observe that there is much similarity in the interviewees' answers and similar views in spite of the fact that they belong to different sports. They all agreed that in the past it was hard to find women in administrative positions, nevertheless as the years have passed this has changed and more women are participating in leadership positions in sport. This can be observed in the following quotations (male and female):

I see women participating in sport leadership in Venezuela in a very good way, some of them in very important roles, such as the president of volleyball federation and in aquatic sport, the vice-president in karate and in the Venezuelan Olympic Committee, and they are doing an excellent job" (Alberto René Granate – President of the Venezuelan Hockey Federation).

There are women participating in leadership position, several as president of national sport federations, 3 at the Venezuelan Olympic Committee and in international organizations as well. Men controlled the sport world for many years but women are present now and we are sure we can get to higher positions due to our

strength, passion, dedication and endurance towards what we do” (Lourdes de Goncalves – President of the Venezuelan Federation for Aquatics sports).

Interesting there is coincidence in the findings we obtained in the questionnaires and the interviews. The barriers they have faced to be a sport leaders, indicated by either male or female leaders, referred to politics, time, and family. All the interviewees indicated that the amount of time that is dedicated to sport compromises their dedication towards their family. It is also common that most of them do not work full time in their respective professional careers and they have dedicated more to sport. The other common element mentioned is that it is too hard to get to the top levels in the administrative sport positions, there is too much egoism. They all agree that once the leader is established in the top levels, in spite of the fact that they do not receive any salary, the support they received to participate in all sort of events nationally and internationally besides the satisfaction to motivate and participate in the development of sport pays for all the sacrifices they have made. The interviewees also believed that women participate less in sport due to cultural issues, for example it was not so common for women to participate in sport in the early 70s, this has changed and nowadays there is much more participation at all levels, nevertheless it is not enough, still in comparison with men’s participation women still have a way to go.

Many changes have been taking place in the global world in terms of women participation in all areas. The changes that have occurred in Venezuela are no isolated, it starts by the changes in the national constitution and it has extended to other areas. For example in the recent elections for parliaments in the National Assembly the increase of women participation has been significant, in the past there was a relationship of 9 men to 1 woman, at present it is 3 to 1, nowadays in the Venezuelan National Assembly 30% are women. This has also been transferred to other organizations, e.g., in the most recent national election, the members of the National Electoral Council are three women and 2 men. In 34 board federations reviewed - the first five positions – out of 170 positions, 36 are held by women, it represents 21,1%, so indeed more balance is needed.

There is much more that needs to change in order to look for the better people to perform the jobs, instead of being prevented for gender issues. In sport it is important to indicate that much needs to be done to incorporate more women to participate at all levels. One of the interviewees referred that “parents prefer their daughters to be professionals rather than athletes because they believe sport will not provide them much benefits” (Oswaldo Bórges). It is interesting to observe that families view have also changed because now to have a degree is important for women, but it is a task that all those who are involved in the physical activity world have to communicate to society the advantages of it and that both things can be combined.

## **DISCUSSION**

In general, it is observed that there is acknowledgement towards the importance of women participation in sport as leaders; it is a good sign for the changing culture of leadership in sport. A research of this nature was and is not easy for several reasons, all the administrative positions in the federations are run by volunteers, few contact with university and even less with academic research. Nevertheless the outcomes of the questionnaires and even more the interviews are very significant. The contribution of this paper is to initiate a discussion in terms of women’s participation in leadership position in Venezuela, to listen to their voices and experiences. In Venezuela at the moment women do participate in sport leadership position, nevertheless through this study we understand that their significant contribution in sport organizations and the numbers should increase. It is a process of many years and at present it is at its best moment, nevertheless more actions and research needs to be conducted and published in order to motivate much more participation of women in leadership positions.

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