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*Gender, Media and Sport: from policy to
practice. A comparative analysis of gender
representation in Italian and British online
sports news*

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ABSTRACT

Sports media have traditionally conveyed a male-dominated image of the sporting dimension: research showed that women tend to be highly underrepresented both in newsrooms and in sports coverage and that media have long perpetrated gender assumptions that reinforce the notion of sport as a preserve of hegemonic masculinity.

This thesis aims to investigate from a gender lens the present status of online sports news media representation in Italy and in the UK, starting from the interrelation between gender equality policies, sports system and media organisations which is specific to each national context and underlies each Country's sports media contents production.

On the one side, policy frameworks are analysed by adopting a Critical Frame Analysis (CFA) approach on official documents related to gender, media and sport; on the other, six sports news websites (Raisport.rai.it, Sportmediaset.mediaset.it, Gazzetta.it, BBC Sport, Guardian Sport, Mail Online – Sport) are monitored over the course of a regular week by applying an adapted methodology of the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP).

INTRODUCTION

From an early age we are exposed to images and narratives concerning the sport dimension, which not only determine our vision of what sport is, but also dictate our assumptions about who can and should play it, with broader consequences on the social and cultural level. Take the case of football, in many Countries considered as the sport *par excellence*, thus taking up a large portion of media coverage and sponsorship: it's a mix of physical strength, personal skills, talent, tactics and team spirit, characteristics not inherently defined by gender, yet, when we think of football, by default we tend to think of eleven men, not women, playing.

As a social institution which thus involves the construction of cultural meanings, sport has historically contributed to forge established notions of gender roles, whereby sport, or at least what is considered "real sport" (Hedenborg & Pfister, 2017, p.1) has long been regarded as male territory, relegating women athletes to secondary status, if not invisible status.

The sport system's organisation has been a part in this, excluding women from the decision-making bodies and denying them for a long time the possibility to compete in professional contexts for cultural reasons linked to their perceived role in society (Cinquelpalmi, 2016), but the status quo has been preserved and further established in the collective consciousness also by media choices and practices in terms of representation.

Media find in sports contents the mean to grab the attention of multitudes of people, captivated by the competition, the athletes' skills and the effort put into reaching important results for one's team, nation or personal fulfilment. Regrettably, the gender biased representation which, as evidenced by the longitudinal research conducted in the context of Global Media Monitoring Project (Macharia, 2015), still characterizes media production on a broader scale, is particularly entrenched in sports coverage, in consequence of what appears as a self-fulfilling prophecy: media overlook women's sports for commercial reasons assuming that audiences are not interested in them and trivialize women's accomplishments consistently with cultural stereotypes about what "femininity" is; as a consequence, audiences reinforce their perception of sports played

by male as the norm and show less interest in their female equivalents, giving less credit to women's talents and hard work, as well as implicitly discouraging young girls from engaging in a field dominated and presumably made to measure for men, or rather for those men displaying determined masculine traits (Cooky *et al.*, 2013; Kane, 2013; Hardin, 2005; Scheadler & Wagstaff, 2018).

This trend refers back to the link that has been established between sport and the notion of “hegemonic masculinity”, understood as the sum of traits which “embodies the currently most honoured way of being a man [...] and [...] ideologically legitimates the global subordination of women to men” (Kareithi, 2014, p. 30). Indeed, sport has been traditionally associated with physical strength and power, characteristics which were not considered appropriate for women, thus preventing them from having the same opportunities as men and conveying the message that they weren't fit for this men's world. However, the consequences do not affect only women, but all genders, because this understanding creates barriers based on stereotypical assumptions that undermine the very values embodied by sport, which has instead the potentiality to be a positive force for promoting equality, since it “could provide a space where masculinity and femininity are re-negotiated rather than re-affirmed in their dominant acception” (Bridge, 2008, p.4), as acknowledged also by Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development, which recognizes sport as a vehicle for achieving sustainable development goals (UN General Assembly, 2015, p.10).

Accordingly, a growing number of recommendations, guidelines and strategy plans have been made on the international and regional level in order to foster gender equality in both the sport dimension and the media system. As media play an active role in determining our vision of sports, these provisions gave space to the intersection between media and sport, dedicating specific sections to media coverage of sports and outlining which gender sensitive principles should guide media professionals in sports reporting. To the same end, civil society organisations and professional journalists' associations have engaged in initiatives aimed at encouraging gender equality in sports media and raising awareness on the persistence of gender disparities.

Too often women and men's representation in and through sports media¹ has been defined by gender assumptions and at the same time has contributed to perpetuating them in society, following alarming patterns that have yet to be dismantled. Therefore, as women are achieving more and more important results even in those team disciplines traditionally associated with men's fields, it's important to keep examining what type of narratives media build around the sport dimension, especially in relation to gender.

Research on this matter has been conducted since 1980s, gradually expanding its scope from the United States to Australasian, Western European and Asian Countries, where national sports media contents have been analysed from both a quantitative and qualitative point of view. These studies found common patterns of concern in sports media representation which do not appear to have been significantly and sufficiently challenged over the years, not even in the favourable environment for change provided by digital platforms, although registering some tentative steps forward in this direction (LaVoi & Calhoun, 2014).

My contribution aims to follow in the wake of these works, trying to investigate the present status of online sports news media representation from a gender lens, but it also wants to point out the interrelation between gender equality policies, sports system and media organisations which is specific to each national context and underlies each Country's sports media contents production. Accordingly, I decided to focus on two Country cases, Italy and the UK, which are interesting to compare as Western democracies from different geographical regions (North Atlantic and Southern Europe respectively), defined by historically different structural and political backgrounds, as well as different media systems models (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). This comparative effort could then provide contextual background for their sports media performances.

The type of portrayal offered by national sports news is indeed the result of multiple factors, which have to do with the sociocultural context they are produced in, the international and regional policy framework on gender equality in sports and media and its national transposition, the impact of advocacy activities, the sports system structure and media houses' codes of practice. Therefore, I am going to try to take all these aspects

¹ From this point forward I'm using the term "sports media" to refer to media outlets which provide sports-related contents, as it has been used in previous literature on the topic.

into consideration before monitoring the two Countries' online sports news media contents and seeing whether they fit into tendencies identified by previous research.

My work is structured in two main sections. The first part (**Understanding the context and issues**) introduces a general overview of the interconnected dimensions of gender, media and sport, the ground my research is based on, whereas the second part (**Country cases**) focuses on two specific Country cases, the UK and Italy.

The first chapter (**Gender, sport and media: overview and open issues**) comprises both the **Literature review** (1.1) and the **Research plan** (1.2) I developed accordingly. On the one hand, I review previous works, studies and reports on the subject, outlining the main research paths undertaken and the different approaches adopted throughout the last 40 years investigating the nexus between sport, media and gender and how media narratives assist in perpetuating society's harmful gendered assumptions in relation to sport. The literature review allows thereby to identify the main issues, how these have been discussed in literature and addressed by media companies, as well as the challenges and shortcomings to making change. Then, on these bases, I present my personal research design and the mixed methodology I decided to employ, which introduces an additional component to the type of analysis usually conducted on gender equality in sports media content, as I intend not only to monitor national sports media behaviours, but also preliminarily take into consideration and problematize the policy dimension, as the laying foundation these media behaviours rest on. The choice to focus on the policy aspect responds to a widely acknowledged need: in order to have sustainable change it is core to have policies, strategies and mechanisms in place to make sure principles of equality in representation and non-discrimination are respected. This is often an overlooked aspect in gender and sport related studies, hence an innovative element in my analysis.

In the second chapter (**Gender in and through the media: Normative Frames, Problems and Responses**) I adopt a mapping approach aimed at outlining how the interconnected dimensions of gender, media and sport are framed as a policy problem at the supranational level and what type of responses have been developed so far in this field. Therefore, in the **Policy framework** (2.1) section I provide the analysis of the main international and European policy frameworks produced on the matter, applying on a list of relevant texts some core elements of the Critical Frame Analysis template used in the

MAGEEQ project, an European comparative research run on EU and six member Countries' policy texts. This type of analysis allows me to map how policy discourse constructs the relation between media, sport and gender issues, identifying the main topics and frames occurring in the international and regional official documents which should be a point of reference for national implementation of gender equality principles in sports media. Namely, Critical Frame Analysis examines policy texts identifying what is represented to be a problem, who is held accountable for it, which factors are presented as reasons, what kind of initiatives are recommended and who is called to implement them. In the **Initiatives (2.2)** section, then, I provide an overall mapping of some selected relevant initiatives fostered so far at the international, regional and local level by organisations, governments' sports departments, civil society and professional associations, which have been developed to meet policy requirements both to raise awareness on the gender-biased representation of sport competitions and to promote better media practices.

Finally, the third and fourth chapters (**Italy and the UK**) are devoted to two Country cases, both structured as follows.

First, there is an overview of their national context: I focus on their legislative and policy framework on gender equality as well as on civil society's activity in this field (**3.1 and 4.1**); I take a separate look at their media (**3.2 and 4.2**) and sport (**3.3 and 4.3**) systems, highlighting eventual issues of inequality and investigating the connections between gender and media/sport in policies, in professional associations' work and in active groups' contribution; then, I explore their national sports media context (**3.4 and 4.4**) from a gender perspective, mapping policy documents and initiatives which take into account the role of media in promoting gender equality in sports-related contents.

I subsequently bring attention to some of their main national media organisations (three per Country), including television broadcasters as well as newspapers and websites publishers, which are specialized in sports news or devote significant space to sports news, in order to better examine them through a gender lens, especially in light of the policy framework previously analysed (**3.5 and 4.5**). Finally, I focus on the online sports news content they provide, monitoring for one week the performance of their sports news websites (**3.6 and 4.6**). To this end, I apply the Global Media Monitoring Project

methodology, adapted to the specific needs of my research, in order to assess whether the patterns noted by previous studies on sports media content can still be observed and whether the content actually produced by these media reflect their policy commitments or lack thereof.

PART 1 - UNDERSTANDING THE CONTEXT AND ISSUES

Chapter 1

Gender, sport and media: overview and open issues

1.1 Literature review

As Shoemaker & Reese (1996) state, media contents absorb and reflect the culture they are produced in and at the same time contribute to further establish it, strengthening certain assumptions to the point that it gets difficult for people to question these assumptions and to not consider them a matter of fact. Considering that “news and entertainment both tell us something about the world, and together [...] make up a significant symbolic environment” (p. 28), research on media and gender has revealed how the symbolic environment created and reasserted over the years by mass media has been consistently based on gender hierarchies, where women are marginalized and considered background characters in a men’s world.

The Global Media Monitoring Project, a longitudinal study conducted every five years on more than 100 Countries’ news media contents, has proved that since 1995, when the project first started, women’s visibility has remained at low levels, as evidenced by 2015 results (substantially unchanged if compared to those of five years earlier): only 24% of the people appearing in traditional media (tv, newspaper and radio)’s stories were women, raising to 26% in digital news (Internet and Twitter) content (Macharia, 2015). As for the voice reporting these stories, in 2015 women made up 37% of news reporters in traditional media, 42% in online news (p. 65).

This “symbolic annihilation” (Tuchman, cited in Byerly & Padovani, 2016, p.7) of women, who are made invisible by media, is particularly evident in the sports domain. Accordingly, coming back to GMMP 2015 results, only 4 % of stories focused on women were about sports and the sports topic was one of the 10 topics women reported less about (Macharia, 2015).

In addition to this quantitative disparity, studies on media representation of women have pointed out how their portrayal is often marked by persistent sexist stereotypes (Byerly & Padovani, 2016, p.7), which have unsurprisingly proved to assert themselves especially in sports narratives. In fact, the sport institution, along with mass media, is one “of the primary forces helping to preserve hegemonic masculinity in the democratized world” (Kian *et al.*, 2011, p.4), legitimizing unequal cultural assumptions about men and women’s role in sport and society on the basis of their different biological characteristics (Kane & Greendorfer, 1994).

Therefore, despite the impressive results women have been achieving in both individual and team disciplines over the years, sport is still a stronghold of hegemonic masculinity and sexism, which are entrenched in its system and are then perpetuated by sports media instead of being challenged or criticized (Fink, 2013).

Feminist scholars have focused their attention to sports media contents since the ‘80s, in order to investigate both the amount of coverage devoted to women and their portrayal. These studies, initially conducted in the United States and Australia, proliferated in Western and Australasian Countries in the 1990s and 2000s, gradually expanding their focus also to Eastern sports media (e.g. Giuggioli, 2013; Yu, 2009).

1.1.1 Women’s underrepresentation in sports media content

From the quantitative aspect, sportswomen’s underrepresentation has been widely reported, though it is not widely acknowledged. One of the main longitudinal studies conducted from 1989 to 2009 on American televised news media, which monitored KNB, KCBS, KNBC and ESPN’s SportsCenter sports coverage, found that in 2009 coverage of women’s sport had actually diminished compared to 1999’s results, amounting to 1,6% of the total (Messner & Cooky, 2010). Comparison with men’s sport airtime (96.3%) revealed high quantitative disparity, which still occurred when men’s and women’s competitions were held during the same timeframe or even when women’s sports were in season and men’s sports weren’t (Messner & Cooky, 2010; Cooky *et al.*, 2013). Godoy-Pressland (2014) examined British press in the space of 24 months (from January 2008 to December 2009) using as a sample five Sunday newspapers and noted that they produced an average of 35 articles per months about women athletes, as opposed to 897 about men. The European project “Sports, media and stereotypes – women and men in

sports and media” (SMS), promoted by the Centre for Gender Equality in Iceland and funded by the European Commission, compared Austrian, Icelandic, Italian, Lithuanian and Norwegian press and television coverage of sports news in certain periods of 2004 and 2005 finding that out of 1751 stories analysed 78% were about only (or almost only) men (Ólafsson, 2006). The International sports press survey 2011, which inspected 80 newspapers from 22 Countries, collecting a total of almost 18,000 sports news articles, showed that men took up more than 88% of coverage (Horky & Nieland, 2013). More recently, the Mediterranean Network of Regulatory Authorities (2017) conducted a research on eight Countries (Spain, Croatia, Andalusia, Catalonia, Morocco, Portugal, Serbia and France)’ televised sport information which provided evidence that during the first weeks of February, March and April 2016 the percentage of female sports news didn’t surpass 11% in any of the Countries monitored, reaching the lowest level in Spain (1,5%); along the same lines, the results of the UE funded cross-media research on the coverage of women’s sports in the UK, Sweden, Romania, Malta and Greece showed that in the monitoring periods only Romania exceeded 10% of women’s coverage (14%), whereas men’s sports percentage ranged from 60% to more than 80% (Women in Sport, 2018).

Various research, however, proved that space devoted to women’s sports tend to rise on the occasion of big international events where women and men compete in the same time and space, especially during the Olympic and Paralympic Games, where women’s competitions are harder to ignore and athletes’ gender differences, at least in terms of amount of coverage, seem to be levelled out, as they all become neutral expression of national identity (Bruce, 2016b). For example, Giuggioli (2013)’s investigation of international newspapers during 2012 Olympics showed that difference in coverage of men’s and women’s athletes was overall consistent with their participation rate in the event, and King (2007)’s analysis of British newspapers’ coverage of track and field competitions in Olympic Games over the period that goes from 1948 to 2004 revealed a gradual improvement on gender equal representation, to the point that in the 2004 edition women athletes’ coverage amounted to 69% percent.

Studies on digital sport news platforms seem to corroborate these same tendencies: when considering Olympic Games’ coverage (Burch *et al.*, 2012; Jones, 2004, 2006, 2012) quantitative differences on the base of gender do not appear to be of high significance,

especially if compared to male and female athletes' participation rate, whereas in day-to-day practice disparity persists regardless of the fewer time and space limitations afforded by the online setting. For example, Coche (2012) registered ESPN official website's unequal coverage of Australian Open, which devoted 20% of space to women's competition, as opposed to 72% focused on the male tennis players' circuit. Furthermore, over the course of 2012 the main sports news websites from Canada, France, Great Britain and the United States were monitored revealing a wide gap between the coverage of men's sports (90%) and of women's sports, which amounted to an average of 4%, reaching over 5% only during the Olympic and Paralympic games taking place in that year (Coche, 2015).

These findings do not diminish digital platforms' potential for reducing sportswomen underrepresentation in news, as online channels allow a wider range of sports news to spread and reach heterogeneous audiences, but nevertheless invite us to examine whether at present they are effectual in challenging the established order. In this respect, Messner (2002a) argues that the multiplication of sports news contents of different kinds makes it difficult to talk of "symbolic annihilation", as women are not invisible anymore, however they can still be relegated (or in Messner's words "ghettoized") to other and peripheral spaces, leaving "largely intact the masculinist cultural centre of the sport-media-commercial complex" (p.92). ESPN websites provide valid examples in this regard: during 2007 NCAA men's and women's basketball tournaments, the amount of espn.com articles devoted to male and female players didn't differ significantly in their general numbers, but women had much less probability of appearing on the homepage (30.6% versus 69.4%) (Redmond *et al.*, 2009); then, in 2011 espnW.com was created, a website dedicated to women's sports which guarantees more equal representation (Wolter, 2015), but could still be considered an instance of ghettoization as it frames sports practiced by women as a separate class, relevant only for a niche, mainly female, audience (Meân, 2014).

1.1.2 Sportswomen's portrayal patterns

Women's sports' marginalization has historically been accomplished not only through their underrepresentation, but also through qualitative differences observed in their portrayal in comparison to their male equivalents. While overtly sexist tropes' frequency,

such as disrespectful humour and female athletes' objectification, has decreased over time (Messner & Cooky, 2010), some patterns have proved to be subtly but steadily ingrained in sportswomen media representation, helping propagating gender stereotyped assumptions which frame women's sport as something other and lesser than what is considered real sport.

In particular, sports narratives tend to represent women in ways that do not undermine the culturally shaped vision of femininity, which isn't in line with the "stereotypical sporty persona" (Cambridge University Press, 2016, p.9) usually associated with dominant masculine traits and thus needs to be reaffirmed in order to maintain the gendered social order. Therefore, female athletes tend to be infantilized to a greater extent than men, as they are more frequently mentioned by their first names or childlike nicknames (e.g. Giuggioli, 2013; Cinquepalmi, 2016) and referred to as "girls" and "ladies" (Cambridge University Press, 2016). Moreover, their portrayal has a higher probability of including "non-sport-related aspects such as appearance, family relationships, personal life, and personality" (Wensing & Bruce, 2003, p.388), especially when these characteristics meet heterosexual and feminine standards, so that often women in sports news are presented as mothers, wives or girlfriends (Messner & Cooky, 2010) and emphasis is put on their aesthetic or physical appearance rather than their athletic skills and performances (Cambridge University Press, 2016; Cinquepalmi, 2016; Giuggioli, 2013; Kian & Clavio, 2011), even going as far as making them sexual objects, as can still be observed in some sports websites photo galleries (Cinquepalmi, 2016).

Over the last decades, the main pattern identified in women's sports media representation has been ambivalence, a "framing technique [...] where positive descriptions and images of women athletes are juxtaposed with descriptions and images that undermine and trivialize women's efforts and successes" (Wensing & Bruce, 2003, p.388). Far from blatantly denigrating female athletes' accomplishments, this form of representation conveys stereotypical assumptions as a constant subtext even to women's celebratory stories. For example, it occurs when media comment on sportswomen's victories highlighting their emotional vulnerability or some fashion details rather than the athletic ability displayed (Cinquepalmi, 2016) or illustrate their skills recurring to infantilized and oversimplified descriptions rather than precise technical explanations (Hellborg & Hedenborg, 2017). Interestingly, ambivalence has also been noted in media

representation of male gymnasts, who practice a sport traditionally associated with feminine characteristics, thus being subject to gendered expectations as well: Hellborg & Hedengborg (2017) found that at the 2012 Olympic Games newspapers' portrayal of male gymnasts, despite describing the difficult technical moves they had to perform, focused less on their hard work compared with female athletes and often linked their failures to young age, inexperience and poor control of emotions.

Research on sports news websites showed that online contents, although presenting some instances of improvement in sports gender sensitive portrayal in comparison with traditional media (Kian & Clavio, 2011), nonetheless seem to replicate ambivalent patterns outlined above. For example, Jones (2012) examined three websites affiliated to Australian, British and Canadian public broadcasters during 2008 Olympic Games and found that personal relationships had twice the chance to be mentioned in female athletes related articles, women's emotions were highlighted as limits as opposed to men's stoic behaviour and sportsmen were taken as universal standard for comparison.

1.1.3 Women's representation in sports media environments

Not coincidentally, both traditional sports media and their online extensions' newsroom composition still displays huge gender disparity. The 2011 International sports press survey found that less 8 % of the sports news articles were written by women (Horky & Nieland, 2013); in 2012 women made up only the 15% of journalists and photographers covering the Olympic Games (EIGE, 2017); similarly, a longitudinal research conducted by The Associated Press Sports Editors on daily press and sports websites in U.S. and Canada showed that, although their presence had been slowly increasing since 2006, in 2017 women still hardly exceeded 20% of all reporters (11.5%), columnists (16.6%), sports editors (10%) and copy editors/designers (20.4%), reaching 30.1 % only as assistant sports editors (Lapchick *et al.*, 2018). In addition to their overall underrepresentation in sports newsrooms, the glass ceiling effect prevents female journalists from reaching managerial positions, where editorial policies and practices are outlined (Hardin & Whiteside, 2006; Messner & Cooky, 2010). Thus, as "no medium is likely to achieve objectivity in its product without broad representation among its staff and its decision makers" (Claringbould *et al.*, 2004, p.711), scarce presence of women in

the sports media environment, and particularly in decision making positions, is an incisive factor in the perpetuation of hegemonic masculinity patterns.

In order to assess the status of gender equality in sports media representation, then, all different dimensions making up the sports media ecosystem – the sport institution, media organisations and the understanding of gender equality itself in various policies and contexts - need to be critically examined and questioned, both separately and in their interrelation.

1.1.4 Problematization of “equal representation” in sports media

Before delving into the specifics of my research, it is however important to reflect further on what could/should even be considered as “equal representation” in sports media. From a liberal feminist standpoint, which according to Bruce (2016b) influenced large part of research on sports media coverage, the mean to achieving gender equal representation is bringing women’s sport to the centre along with men’s sport, in balanced proportions, and reducing gendered qualitative differences in their portrayal (Creedon, 1994c; Messner, 2002b). However, the standard itself by which sportswomen’s representation is estimated appropriate or not is still one built on what has historically been established as the norm, which coincides with “coverage of culturally valued men’s sport” (Bruce, 2016b, p. 364). This vision subtly implies that, in order to be valued as serious and respected athletes, both men and women need to be described in terms of physical power, stoic tolerance of pain, high competitiveness, aggressivity and emotions’ suppression, unwittingly corroborating the correlation between sport and hegemonic masculinity, as well as the “incompatibility between athleticism and femininity” (*ivi*, p. 368).

As Creedon (1994c) states, “the norm itself is problematic because increased or equal coverage does not guarantee change in any of the values that construct what is considered a newsworthy sport event” (p.9), thus not only sportswomen should not be marginalized anymore, but the centre itself needs to be contested (Messner, 2002b). The options for athletes shouldn’t only come down to either conforming to values and characteristics associated with masculinity and sport in order to be fairly represented or being overshadowed and trivialized for not conforming to them. According to transformist approaches, then, gender equality in sportspersons’ representation can be thoroughly achieved only if binary cultural assumptions about femininity and masculinity in relation

to sport are challenged and reconfigured in interconnecting ways (Bruce, 2016b). For it to be possible, change is needed in the environments directly responsible for building and perpetuating this gendered vision of sport, including mass media organisations and the sport system itself, as well as the education system, from university to journalism school to ongoing training for professionals, which should lay the grounds for gender-sensitive standards in media professionals' behaviour.

1.2 Research plan

1.2.1 Research questions

As previously illustrated, the research conducted over the last 40 years on women and men's representation in and through sports media has found some main recurring patterns, which expose gender biases both in terms of quantity and quality in sports media coverage and news. There's limited visibility devoted in media to women in sports (e.g. Coche, 2015; Cooky *et al.*, 2013; Eastman & Billings, 2000; Giuggioli, 2013; Godoy-Pressland, 2014; Jakubowska, 2017), a very small percentage of female journalists write about sports news (e.g. Claringbould *et al.*, 2004; Franks & O'Neill, 2016; Hardin & Whiteside, 2006; Jakubowska, 2017) and, when women related sports news are given space to, they tend to reveal stereotypical portrayals of women and men, which highlight (whether in blatant or ambivalent ways) the former's appearance and emotions and the latter's strength and technical skills, often sexualizing women athletes and rarely recognizing them as experts in the sporting field (e.g. Bernstein, 2002; Boykoff & Yasuoka, 2017; Bruce, 2016a; Cinquepalmi, 2016; Eagleman, 2017; Fink, 2013; Hellborg & Hedenborg, 2017). Not even the major achievements accomplished by women's teams in what have been traditionally labelled as "men's disciplines" seem to have resulted in significant variations on the double-standard sports narratives media usually offer (Kane, 2013).

At the same time, due to the growing realization of these inequalities and their impact on the society's biased perception of the sports reality, increasing attention has been given to the intersecting dimensions of gender, media and sport by international and European institutions, which adopted resolutions and plans both aimed at acknowledging media's role in fostering gender equality within society and also specifically concerned with the meanings media build around the sports dimension. Therefore, it could be interesting to figure out how those directives have been adopted and adapted by different national

systems and how they are integrated by the Countries' main sports media organisations, laying what should be the groundwork for their actual performances.

Starting from these considerations, my work revolves around the following research questions: how are sports media trying to fulfil strategic objectives related to gender equality? Do their practices rely on specific policy on gender equal representation? And if such policy guidelines exist: to what extent are they respected and implemented? Do their contents still perpetuate unequal gendered patterns?

In order to answer these questions, I conduct a comparative analysis of sports media enterprises from two Western European Countries, the UK and Italy. My contribution wants to examine whether and how their sports media engage in providing a gender equal representation, moving from the policy dimension their practices rest on to the contents they produce.

1.2.2 Research design

I opted for a research design that could take into account the multiple factors which intervene in shaping the type of contents and values sports media promote, starting from the policy regulations provided at international and regional level.

My investigation is indeed grounded on a critical analysis of documents adopted at the international and European level where core principles for equality and non-discrimination in media (and sport) have been established. In order to map the frames produced by policy texts at this broader level, I decided to analyse them applying a specific template designed within the framework of the Critical Frame Analysis methodology. In fact, as emerged from Carol Bacchi's contribution to policy studies (Bacchi, 2012), each policy text frames the issues in a certain way, producing a specific representation of the "problem", which thus cannot be considered as a pre-established notion, but as a discursive construction of meanings. In her own words, "policies produce 'problems' with particular meanings that affect what gets done or not done" (p.22). In the case of gender equality in sports media contents, for example, it's important to critically reflect on the concept of equality as balance: the feminist debate (Creedon, 1994; Strutt & Hissey, 1992) has made clear how it can assume different meanings and intentions, whereby the problem could be framed as the necessity to achieve the same representation

of women and men in and through media or the need to eradicate the very assumption of current men's coverage as the desired and neutral standard of representation (Bruce, 2016a; 2016b). Assuming a constructivist theoretical framework, then, the concepts themselves of equality and equal representation expressed in these texts need to be problematized.

Mapping the core frames and responses outlined by policy, as well as some selected initiatives that have been developed at all levels to comply with them, provides a general reference framework for the examination of my specific study cases.

On the one hand, I look at how international and regional policy frameworks have been incorporated into these Countries' own national policies and what type of measures and policy frames have been adopted by national sports news media to address gender inequality and work toward a more equal representation of women and men. The comparison between two Countries, then, allows to see how the interactions between multiple factors - supranational dispositions, national contexts, media and sport systems, specific media organisations involved - produce a contextual groundwork for the production of sports media contents.

On the other hand, I focus on the UK and Italy's main sports news media performance, trying to figure out whether their contents and division of tasks still perpetuate gender assumptions of any kind, which result in harmful depictions of the presumed roles women and men should play in sports and thus in society. In particular, I decided to proceed on the path of the still small amount of available gender-related researches conducted on sports news digital platforms. Therefore, I monitored some of the main national sports news websites, adapting the GMMP methodology to fit the aims of my research: namely, during the week of 31 August – 6 September 2020 I observed the online contents offered by Rai Sport, SportMediaset and Gazzetta dello Sport on the Italian side and BBC Sport, Guardian Sport and Mail Online – Sport on the British side, daily selecting the first 15 news items which appeared on their website's homepage, and I analysed each news on the basis of a coding sheet which allows to register for example the presence (or lack thereof) of women as article's subjects and/or authors, of gendered features paired with either sportswomen or sportsmen's descriptions or, instead, of aspects which challenge

gender stereotypes, leaving also room for a deeper qualitative analysis of language, pictures and stories.

1.2.3 Hypotheses

My hypotheses, based on existing literature and reports, are the following:

- The media organisations taken into account are going to present gender unbalanced internal composition, especially in the decision making and managerial positions;
- The websites affiliated to media houses which do not rely on specific gender equality policies could be more likely to underrepresent women and/or offer gender stereotyped portrayals;
- Male journalists are going to constitute the majority of the analysed sports news articles;
- As my research does not focus on any particular big international sport event, but monitors sports news websites over an average sporting week, I expect to find significant underrepresentation of women's sports and a higher probability of them occurring in scroll down articles than in the homepage's first sections;
- Women's sports contents are going to present more references to athletes' appearance, emotion and personal lives and less to their skills in comparison with sportsmen;
- Women are going to be less likely portrayed as competent and experts in the sporting field;
- Ambivalence is going to be widely employed in sportswomen's portrayal, as opposed to blatant stereotypes.

1.2.4 Methodology

I decided to choose as case studies for my comparative analysis two Countries from the Western European area, Italy and the UK, of the Southern and Northern region respectively, which have historically differed in terms of sociocultural and political context, as well as in terms of media system structure and journalistic practices. In fact, according to the classification carried out by Hallin & Mancini (2004) with respect to Western European and North American media systems, Italy conforms in many aspects

to the Polarized Pluralist Model typical of Mediterranean Countries, whereas Britain presents a mixed combination of characteristics from both Liberal and Democratic Corporatist models. Furthermore, taking these two specific Countries as case studies allows me to easily access and inspect with high degree of linguistic proficiency their national official documents, as well as the online sports media contents necessary for properly conducting my research.

On the methodological aspect, two types of analyses are requested and integrated in order to get a fuller picture on each of these two Countries' sports media landscape's status in relation to gender equality: a policy analysis on official documents and a quali-quantitative monitoring of sports media contents.

The policy analysis, initially conducted on international and European texts and provisions, focused on the British and Italian national frameworks and, finally, on some of their individual media organisations. In this way the comparative approach can highlight the differences in terms of which policies are adopted and how the national context can contribute to elaborate different modalities of conceiving the nexus between gender, media and sport or the concept itself of gender equality in connection with these other interrelated dimensions.

The chosen approach, based upon a constructivist theoretical framework, draws on the Critical Frame Analysis methodology, which aims to map the different ways gender equality can be framed as a problem in policies produced in different contexts (Verloo & Lombardo, 2007). In particular, I relied on the template applied in the context of the MAGEEQ project (Verloo, 2004).

MAGEEQ (Policy Frames and Implementation Problems: The Case of Gender Mainstreaming), funded by the European Commission, has been a comparative research project aimed at mapping how gender equality is framed in policy texts produced in the European Union. It lasted three years, from 2003 to 2005, applying frame analysis specifically on six member States' policies: Austria, Greece, Hungary, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Spain (Verloo & Lombardo, 2007).

The conceptual framework used for the analysis consisted in a set of Sensitizing Questions structured around six main dimensions (Verloo, 2004). I did not use the

complete template, but I selected some core elements which I considered of sufficient importance for the purposes of my research. As outlined in Table 1.1, the template components I took into consideration are *Voice*, *Diagnosis (Overall representation and Normativity)*, *Attribution of Causality/Responsibility*, *Prognosis (Overall representation and Normativity)* and *Call for Action*. The aim was to figure out by whom (*Voice*) and how the problem is framed: which aspects and dimensions are/are not taken into account (*Diagnosis*), which actors and causes are/are not considered responsible for it (*Attribution of Causality/Responsibility*) and which actions and subjects are/are not considered relevant for its solution (*Prognosis* and *Call for Action*). Therefore, the Sensitizing Questions guiding my analysis were:

- Who is speaking in the text? Who is excluded?
- What is represented as the problem? What is not a problem?
- What is depicted as a norm?
- What is good? What is bad?
- Is gender equality mentioned as a norm? What does it mean?
- Who is responsible for it? Who is suffering because of the problem?
- What is seen as a cause of what?
- What should be done to make it right?
- What are the suitable courses of action suggested?
- Which dimensions of gender are (not) covered?
- Which norms are present/ absent in the solution?
- Who should do something? Who is not called upon?

(Ivi, p.12)

The first sample was composed of a selected group of relevant documents drafted at the international and European level on the interrelated dimensions of gender, media and sport. These texts' analysis, which served as a preliminary stage, provided a general framework for reference, in order to look at each of the two Countries' sports media policies on the basis of a better understanding of the wider directives they need to comply with.

The same type of analysis, indeed, was applied in the context of each case study, first on the most recent national policy regulations on the matter and then on some of the national main sports media organisations' policies which set gender sensitive standards for their own conduct.

Table 1.1 Author's adaptation from MAGEEQ project framework template (Verloo, 2004)

Voice		Who is speaking in the text? Who is excluded?
Diagnosis	Overall representation	What is represented as the problem? What is not a problem?
	Normativity	What is depicted as a norm? What is good/bad? Is gender equality mentioned as a norm? What does it mean?
Attribution of Causality/Responsibility		Who is responsible for it? Who is suffering because of the problem? What is seen as a cause of what?
Prognosis	Overall representation	What should be done to make it right? What are the suitable courses of action suggested? Which dimensions of gender are (not) covered?
	Normativity	Which norms are present/ absent in the solution?
Call for Action		Who should do something? Who is not called upon?

My empirical research, then, moved to a second methodological section, focused on the monitoring of some selected sports media digital outlets' performance.

Research on the subject of gender, media and sport has been primarily focused on quantitative and qualitative analyses of press media and broadcast television's contents. Over the last ten years, in the so called "*second wave* sport media research" (LaVoi, 2014, p.45), the focus has shifted also towards digital platforms, especially social networks and blogs, where it is possible to monitor how people (users) themselves reformulate in their discourses the same gender biased assumptions linked to the sports field which have become entrenched in society largely thanks to sports media.

Some of these works, however, have concentrated on sports news websites (e.g. Coche, 2015; Jones, 2004; Kian & Clavio, 2011), which in times of digital convergence have become precious sources to sports fans and assets to media houses. I have decided to follow this line of research, although thus far not largely explored, because websites both transpose in digital form the main printed and televised contents and add new ones to the media brand's full content offering, resulting in the most direct and updated sports news platforms available. Moreover, as Coche (2015, p.228) has stated, the online platform allows to include a wide range of news without any restraint of time and space, whereas print and broadcast media need to be more selective and are therefore more subject to market demands.

Hence, I monitored for one week the digital contents which were available on three of each Country's sports news websites in order to find eventual trends, contents of interest or gaps between practice and intentions expressed by policy. However, it is important to state that, this being a particular year, the monitoring results took into account the influence the Coronavirus epidemic had both on the international and national sports system and on the contents that sports media could offer in absence or shortage of official sports competitions. The health emergency situation indeed has prevented many sporting events from taking place, which could result in an unbalanced amount of news and reports devoted to some sports or athletes compared to others, as well as in an increasing number of articles about non-sports related aspects or about athletes' reactions and feelings about the new conditions they have to adjust to.

The websites selected are well-known in the respective contexts and abide by national media houses' policies. Both the UK and Italy count on a public service broadcaster which offers digital sports news contents, so I monitored both BBC Sport and Rai Sport websites. The other digital sports news platforms selected were SportMediaset and Gazzetta dello Sport on the Italian side, Guardian Sport and Mail Online – Sport on the British one. I chose to look at both public and private entities in order to compare their behaviour, expecting to register more gender-sensitive results in public service media contents, since their mission primarily requires to promote social values and constitutional principles, consequently binding them to show real commitment at the policy level to foster, *inter alia*, non-discrimination and gender equality. I also decided to take into account organisations operating in different media markets, namely broadcasting companies and press publishers, and appealing to different audiences, such as broadsheets and popular outlets in the British media industry.

The methodology I applied for this part of the empirical analysis was adapted from a longstanding international project, the GMMP². The Global Media Monitoring Project is a research activity coordinated by the World Association for Christian Communication (WACC) that has been going on since 1995 with the contribution of researchers, academics, grassroots activists and other volunteers from all over the world (over 100 Countries are currently involved). Their aim is to monitor the representation of women and men in the news media, collecting data from national news media performances on a specific day every five years and comparing the results through time and space as a tool of analysis and advocacy, in connection to Strategic Objective J.2 of the Beijing Platform for Action (Promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media).

The GMMP monitoring consists in a quanti-qualitative approach³, which requires compiling a coding sheet for the quantitative analysis and then proceeding with a further analysis of the stories that seem to be of particular interest from a qualitative perspective (WACC, 2020b).

² WACC (n.d.). *Who makes the news? The GMMP. Background*. <http://whomakesthenews.org/gmmp>

³ WACC (n.d.). *Who makes the news? Monitoring Methodology Guides and Coding Tools*. <http://whomakesthenews.org/gmmp-2020/media-monitoring/methodology-guides-and-coding-tools>

I adjusted this analysis framework to the context of my research, modelling it on the basis of the patterns found by previous literature on media, gender and sport. Since I monitored sports news websites, I adapted the GMMP template for Internet news, not taking into account those designed for television, press, radio or twitter.

As a preliminary step, I gave an overview of each website's structure and features, such as the categorization of the main sports covered, as well as the eventual presence of photo galleries where women bodies' objectification usually proliferates.

Then, I coded 15 news per day from each website homepage, starting from the top of the page and choosing only those linked in some way to sports or sportspeople (for example, I did not take into account those concerning the Coronavirus emergency but not including any relevant reference to the sports dimension nor to people connected with the sports sector).

I also excluded live news sections, often related to football transfer news, which are constantly updated (thus difficult to monitor) and, in some cases, present only a list of footballers' names alongside their supposed next teams. I did not analyse press reviews, quizzes and first-person narratives; however, since opinion and fact can be deeply interrelated in sports news, I took into account commentaries and analyses as news items.

Videos and images were coded if they served as an integral part of a written article, if the news item consisted in a video report from television news (in the case of TV broadcasters' websites) and if one of the main news stories was made up of a video or a set of pictures, not if they were included in separate sections devoted exclusively to video or photo galleries. I did not consider full press conferences and extended footage taken from live coverage of races/matches.

Following the example set by GMMP, there has been a quantitative analysis, conducted through the compilation of a freely adapted coding sheet, and a qualitative analysis of those news which could be of particular interest for my research. The qualitative analysis focused also on those parts of the website's structure that appeared to be relevant elements of the sports news media performance in relation to gender equality.

The coding sheet [Table 1.2] was structured as an adaptation of the GMMP 2020 Internet news coding sheet's original frame (WACC, 2020a). At first, I registered each news'

reference data, then I took into consideration its homepage *Position* (whether it was in the main visible section or it was a scroll down item), the eventual presence of *Coronavirus-related information*, the type of sport reported (*Topic*) and its *Scope*. I examined whether the story was “about a particular woman or a group of women”, whether it “clearly highlight[ed] issues of inequality” and whether it “clearly challenge[d] gender stereotypes” (*ibid.*).

Then, I focused on the *Sex* of the journalist (or journalists) writing/speaking, including the author of the news story and any additional interviewer, except from interpreters and journalists who ask questions on video but work for other media houses. After assessing the journalists’ sex, I coded each one of the people appearing in the story: I kept the entries *Sex*, *Occupation/Position*, *Function in the story*, *Family role given*, *Directly quoted* (or speaking on video) and *Photographed* (or appearing on video) from the original template and I replaced some categories with new ones which could account for the patterns found by previous literature on sports media, in order to see whether I could still find the same double-standard gendered representation both in terms of quantity and quality of contents. Specifically, I added *Appearance description given*, *Skills noted*, and *Emotionality brought up*, since they are some of the main issues emerged from previous studies on female and male athletes’ representation. As in the original framework, where applicable and relevant, I added comments on the multimedia items included in the news, as well as on the title and on the language used.

Table 1.2 Author’s adaptation from GMMP Internet news coding sheet (WACC, 2020a)

Basic information	Website name	
	URL	
	Date/time accessed	
Story	Position	
	Coronavirus-related info	
	Topic (which sport?)	
	Scope	
Analysis	Is the story about a particular woman or a group of women?	

	This story clearly highlights issues of inequality	
	This story clearly challenges gender stereotypes	
Journalist	Sex	
People	Sex	
	Occupation/position	
	Function in story	
	Family role given	
	Appearance description given	
	Skills noted	
	Emotionality brought up	
	Directly quoted	
	Photographed	
Comments which could be useful for further analysis	Analysis of photos, images, audio and video clips in the story	
	Analysis of titles	
	Analysis of language	

On the basis of this first quantitative analysis, I then used a qualitative approach which complies with the Gender and Media (GEM) Classification, the framework for qualitative analysis adopted by GMMP, as an adaptation of the classification system previously developed by the Gender Links organisation (WACC, 2020c, p.2). The stories under scrutiny were those perpetuating blatant gender stereotypes, those exhibiting subtle assumptions - such as the so called “ambivalence” (Bruce, 2016a, p.10) highlighted by previous literature in sports media - , the gender-blind ones, which assume a single point of view as if it was the only possible, and the gender aware ones, which can be considered as good practices because they address inequalities or because they challenge either the stereotyped or the gender-blind behaviour.

Chapter 2

Gender in and through the media: Normative Frames, Problems and Responses

Over the past 30 years, gender equality in and through media has emerged as a relevant area of debate and intervention at the international and European level, providing a framework individual Countries, such as the UK and Italy, can refer to and should comply with in developing their own policies and strategies. The chapter's aim is thereby to map this broad area, seeing how the issue has been addressed and framed over time by different actors and how it has been connected to the sports dimension, as well as integrated into sport-related policies. To this end, I resort to Critical Frame Analysis, applying a set of questions adapted from MAGEEQ project (see 1.2.4 Methodology) to a selected number of official texts. It is equally interesting, then, to map the type of effective responses and initiatives formulated at all levels by a wide range of subjects, consistently with the reference provisions set by policy documents.

This mapping effort constitutes the first stage of my empirical investigation, which is later going to delve into two Country cases, looking at how they specifically fit in relation to the general framework here outlined. In fact, Italian and British media policies and laws are informed by a larger set of principles, provisions and regulations developed by supranational organisations Italy and the UK are (or have been) a part of; each Country, then, negotiates their meaning and translates them into normative frameworks which differ from one national context to the other.

2.1 Policy framework

2.1.1 International documents, tools and initiatives on gender and media⁴

The international reference document for gender equality in media is Section J of the Beijing Platform for Action (United Nations, 1995), which was produced and adopted in 1995 by 189 Countries at the Fourth United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing as a global policy agenda for achieving gender equality in 12 inter-related areas

⁴ Byerly & Padovani (2016) and Montiel & Macharia (2018) have been useful resources for this mapping analysis.

of concerns. One of these areas is indeed “Women and media”, addressed in Section J as an acknowledgment of the role media play in promoting (or hindering) the advancement of women’s rights in society.

This document outlined some of the main frames that have since marked the representation of the problem in subsequent texts, mostly produced at the European level. On the one hand, the issue is framed in terms of *unequal access and participation*, which refers to the inadequate number of women holding decision-making positions in media and involved in devising media policy, as well as expressing themselves through media and information technologies. Therefore, *equal opportunities* emerge as the sub-textual norm which should inform media environments and practices. Women as a whole are presented as the subjects suffering from the problem, since they are not given the opportunity to make their voices heard and to give their contribution in order to stop media perpetuation of gender-based stereotyping. The underlying implication emerging from the text is that women’s greater involvement in contents production, decision-making, media policy and self-regulation design can lead to increased gender sensitivity in the media (but it also runs the risk of exonerating men of responsibility in this respect). The problem’s prognosis is then reflected in strategic objective J.1. “Increase the participation and access of women to expression and decision-making in and through the media and new technologies of communication”, which, in order to be achieved, requires commitments on the part of governments, media systems, as well as NGOs and media professional associations. Among the actions suggested, the formulation at all levels of targeted *policies, codes of conducts and regulatory mechanisms* for gender equality in the media sector (and women’s participation in these processes) have a particularly important role, as the gender insensitiveness of existing policies is represented as the problem’s main cause. Moreover, “the development of *educational and training programmes* for women” (p.101), aimed at giving them the opportunity and the tools necessary to access “all areas and levels of the media” (p.100), is strongly advised to governments and to media professional associations, as are “the compilation of a directory of *women media experts*” (p.101) and the creation of *networks* among NGOs, media professional associations and women’s organisations to monitor the media from a gender equality perspective and promote gender equality practices within them.

The other main frame emerging from section J (specifically from strategic objective J.2. “Promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women in the media”) is *distorted portrayal of society*, as media contents tend to convey stereotyped or overtly degrading images of women, confine them into traditional labels, sexualize them as objects and undermine their worth presenting them as inferior than men, thus “negatively affecting women and their participation in society” (p.99). The text stresses the importance of portraying women’s lives in their diversity and complexity and providing a balanced representation of their different experiences, implicitly setting as standard the portrayal men are usually given. Hence, it recalls *non-discrimination principles* as norms. However, it is worth mentioning that intersectional dimensions, such as age, ethnicity and social status, are not properly acknowledged, since the text does not further problematize the women category. In terms of solutions suggested, international organisations and national governments are called upon to develop specific *legislation, measures and educational and communication strategies* to “promote a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women” (p.101), as well as promote *research* on the matter, whereas media organisations are required to devise *internal policies*, incorporate gender perspectives in their contents and increase the number of women in decision-making positions. The platform also urges media, NGOs, the private sector and national structures committed to gender equality mainstreaming to raise awareness on women’s rights in and through media, by promoting *campaigns, information and educational programmes* and alternative media channels, as well as developing the tools and expertise necessary to conduct *gender analysis* of media contents.

The Beijing Platform for Action (Section J) is still the international landmark for policy on gender equality in and through media. In its wake other texts have been produced by different entities, which incorporate the frames outlined by the Beijing document, but also further some aspects of it.

In 2003 the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women adopted agreed conclusions on “Participation in and access of women to the media, and information and communication technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women” (CSW, 2003), which give particular relevance to some sub-frames already addressed in Section J: the importance of *gender-sensitive policies* (“policies, legislation, programmes, projects, strategies and regulatory

and technical instruments”, p. 1) in the media and ICT field and of women’s “participation in [their] development and implementation” (*ibidem*), as well as the need to develop “*monitoring and accountability mechanisms*” (*ibidem*) to assess the effective implementation and impact of these policies; the role of *education and training* in enabling women’s access to media and ICT activities and to decision-making positions in the communication sector, as well as in making media professionals responsive to gender concerns; the value of *partnerships and networks* between all stakeholders (governments, international organisations, civil society, NGOs and the private sector) in order to promote gender equality strategies and measures – *guidelines, research, good practices* - in the media and ICT context.

In 2012 UNESCO produced a set of Gender Sensitive Indicators for Media (“Gender-Sensitive Indicators for Media: framework of indicators to gauge gender sensitivity in media operations and content”) aimed at guiding the assessment of the status of gender equality in media operations and contents, “regardless of the technology used” (p.12). In providing specific indicators, this document sets out the main areas of concerns and the strategic objectives related to them, which are based around the Beijing Platform for Action’s framing bipartition. Accordingly, two broad categories of actions are presented. The first centres on “gender equality within media organizations” (p.18), recalling principles of *equal opportunities, equal responsibility, equal participation* and *equal access* to decision making positions, and introduces also *equal treatment* in the work place as a norm to be implemented by equally recognizing women and men’s capacities, ensuring a safe and inclusive working environment, providing equal pay and work-life balance conditions to employees. *Gender-sensitive policies*, as well as internal structures and mechanisms for the promotion of gender equality, and adequate *education and training* for female and male media professionals are once again referred to as essential for the achievement of gender equality in media. The second category (“gender portrayal in media content”, p. 39) echoes Strategic Objective J.2. in its call for *diverse and balanced portrayal* of women and men in media contents, “reflecting the composition of society” (p. 41) and promoting multi-dimensionality rather than gender stereotyped narratives, as well as providing gender aware stories in all content areas. This document, then, places responsibility on (and presents itself as a guide for) *in primis* media organisations, but also “non-governmental organizations, media associations, journalists’

unions and clubs, media self-regulatory bodies, civil society organizations, especially those concerned with gender and media, government ministries or entities, academic institutions and research centres such as journalism, communication, technology schools and universities and other training institutes” (p.16), recognizing the importance of integrated multi-stakeholder efforts to monitor and promote gender equality in the media.

Civil society actively participates in the discussion processes that underlie the definition of global policy framework on gender and media, as in the case of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. In recent years the Global Alliance on Media and Gender (GAMAG), which comprises more than 500 organisations, expressed concerns about the insufficient implementation of these policies at all levels and in 2017 issued a “Statement to the Commission on the Status of Women”, calling for the development of further policy provisions aimed at advancing gender equality in and through the media and ICTs. In particular, the text stresses the importance of including specific recommendations for UN Member States, as well as for media and ICT organisations. Accordingly, national Governments should be encouraged to develop more comprehensive *policy on gender equality in/through media*, by better incorporating both media communication into national gender equality plans and gender into media (and digital) policies, in order to eradicate *gender stereotypes* in media content, promote women’s *access to and participation in the media sector*, ensure a *safe working environment* for women and secure their *employment rights*, as well as mainstream gender in journalism and media *educational programmes*. They should also ensure women’s rights to own media and ICTs, to access information and to produce media contents themselves; provide digital literacy programmes to encourage women to use *online platforms* to tell their stories and *create networks*; gather *gender-specific data* about the media and ICT dimensions to regularly assess and report on their status. On their part, media organisations are recommended to adopt gender equality *internal policies* and *regulatory mechanisms*, implement national, regional and international directives on gender equality, guarantee *equal working conditions* (from recruitment and promotion processes to retribution) and appropriate *work-life arrangements*, implement *internal reporting mechanisms and sanctions* for discriminatory behaviours and arrange *training programmes* for employees. Finally, the statement affirms the need for *multi-stakeholder integrated involvement* in sharing *good practices* in order to create a virtuous circle of feedback and improvement.

2.1.2 European documents on gender and media⁵

- **Council of Europe**

Over the last ten years gender equality in and through media has been a widely acknowledged topic by Council of Europe, both in specific Committee of Ministers' Recommendations and in wider strategic plans on gender equality. "Recommendation CM/Rec (2013)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on gender equality and media", adopted in 2013, recognizes media's influence on social environment and their responsibility to foster change toward gender equality. The problem presented here is the *reproduction of social inequalities* in the media context and contents: it is framed in terms of *women's under-representation* in the media sector ("in media ownership, in information production and journalism, in newsrooms and management posts"), *unequal working conditions* in media workplaces, as well as in terms of *women's low visibility* and *stereotyped portrayal* in media contents. Gender equality is explicitly invoked as a guiding principle and as an essential condition for real democracy, which is based on "pluralism and diversity", thus requiring media to "reflect the reality of women and men" and their distinctive and multifaceted experiences and contributions in society. Public service media, in particular, are called upon to lead the way in this direction, given their responsibility "to serve all communities". Moreover, the document clarifies that the achievement of gender equality in all areas, including its implementation in the media sector, is not only a women's concern, but is instead "a prerequisite for the achievement of social justice" for all. The outlined solutions to the problem recall international documents on the matter, as they include the development of *national legal frameworks* on gender mainstreaming in the media sector, the adoption of *internal policies* and *self-regulatory measures* by media organisations, the establishment of media *accountability mechanisms*, the provision of *educational programmes* for young people, parents, teachers and media students, as well as *training programmes* for media professionals, in order to promote a gender-sensitive perspective in both the reception and production of media contents, the organisation of initiatives and *campaigns to raise awareness* on gender stereotypes conveyed by media and the promotion of specific *research* on the topic.

⁵ Byerly & Padovani (2016) provided useful material for this mapping analysis of European documents

Media are acknowledged as a critical field for gender equality also in more recent documents, such as the “Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023” and the subsequent “Recommendation CM/Rec (2019)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on preventing and combating sexism”. In both cases the problem is framed in terms of *sexism*, “a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between women and men, which leads to discrimination and prevents the full advancement of women in society” (Council of Europe, 2019, p.1), taking on different forms on the basis of intersectional dimensions such as age, religion, disability, sexual orientation and ethnicity: media play an important role in perpetuating through their contents sexist gender stereotypes which disproportionately place barriers to women’s participation in public life, as well as set society expectations that both girls and boys, women and men are limited by and feel bound to live up to. Recognizing sexism as “a critical cause and consequence of gender inequality” (*ivi*, p. 3), the Council of Europe deems essential to eradicate it at all levels and in all spheres in order to achieve gender equality related goals set at the international level by, *inter alia*, the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Beijing Platform for Action and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The “Recommendation CM/Rec (2019)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on preventing and combating sexism”, in particular, which was adopted as part of the first Strategic Objective outlined by Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2018-2023 (Prevent and combat gender stereotypes and sexism), calls upon member States’ national Governments to implement specific measures with respect to media, as one of the main critical areas responsible for sexist behaviour. The courses of action recommended include specific *legislation* against sexism in media (and advertising), “*self-regulatory policies and mechanisms* for the elimination of sexism” (*ivi*, p.9) in the media sector, establishment of *monitoring and regulatory authorities*, *educational and training programmes* for media professionals, *research* and *awareness raising campaigns* on the impact of sexist portrayals, measures to achieve equal participation in decision making positions and representation in media content of women and men, creation of *databases of women experts* to be consulted, *incentives* for those media which provide gender-sensitive content and are responsive to intersectional issues, as well as *networks and partnerships* between all media stakeholders in order to promote good practices.

- **European Union**

Before the adoption at the international level of Beijing Platform for Action, the European Union had already started developing a policy framework on gender equality in the media, starting from the European Parliament's "Resolution on the depiction and position of women in the media" (Doc. A2-95/87), which presents the *distorted portrayal of society* frame, acknowledging the unequal patterns of media portrayals of women and men, whereby women's lives, concerns and views are ignored or trivialized and their depiction does not reflect their actual contributions in society, rather building on "outdated patterns of behaviour" (European Parliament, 1987, p.67). The problem's solution is primarily identified in the increase of the *number of women employed* in all levels of the media sector, as the text explicitly states that "if there were more women in positions of responsibility in the media, this would help to ensure that topics of interest to women receive wider coverage and that the portrayal of women is more in tune with reality" (*ibidem*). *Non-discrimination* and *equal opportunities* in the workplace are then the norms which should guide media organisations both in the recruitment, training and promotion processes: the specific recommendations include, for example, a temporary preferential treatment for women in employees' recruitment, the provision of *training and guidance* for women in order to give them the tools to have the same career opportunities as men, the adoption of *work-life balance measures* allowing both women and men to reconcile work and family obligations. It also calls for the creation of *women's networks* within media organisations, the promotion of "realistic and equal portrayal of women and greater representation of women in all walks of life" through *public funded initiatives*, the institution of *prizes* for programmes providing positive portrayal practices and of targeted *research projects* in the 'women in media' area.

In 2010 the Audiovisual Media Services Directive (European Parliament, 2010), which still regulates all audio-visual services in the EU, was adopted: it includes among its chapters the general prohibition of any *incitement to hatred* and of any form of *discrimination on the basis of sex* (as well as on the basis of "racial or ethnic origin, nationality, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation", p. 15) in audio-visual media contents, without however making any reference to gender equality within media

organisations nor providing further provisions on gender equality in media portrayal of women and men.

In the same year the Advisory Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men issued its Opinion on “Breaking gender stereotypes in the media” (2010), more thoroughly elaborating on the topic of women and the media (including also new technologies of communication). The problem is traced back to *gender stereotyping* and its detrimental effects on society, as it causes the persistence of unequal and asymmetrical power dynamics between women and men in the private and public sphere. Media environments are affected by gender stereotypes and the contents they produce actively contribute to perpetuate these conventional assumptions, which have impact on both women and men (here they are not considered as homogeneous categories, since the text recognizes the intersecting factors beyond gender which define them and their experiences). The prognosis, then, is structured around the two areas of intervention previously outlined by the Beijing Platform for Action: on the one hand “increase participation and access to expression and decision-making for women in and throughout the media” (p.3), on the other promote “a balanced and non-stereotyped portrayal of women and men in the media” (*ibidem*). In order to achieve the first goal, media organisations are called upon to implement positive *action programmes* for the empowerment of women, integrated into *national gender equality policies* and based on *measurable objectives*, for example increased participation of women in decision-making processes, pay-gap reduction or establishment of female experts’ databases. National gender equality policies should also be implemented, involving *monitoring mechanisms*, funds for *research* and studies on the matter, *public awareness campaigns*, *networks* between media professionals, gender equality experts, civil society and academia. As for the second goal, the Committee prompts the establishment of a European Media Monitoring Group with a specific gender equality concern; urges national Governments to implement UE *legislation*, develop *monitoring mechanisms*, promote *gender equality programmes in schools*, communication academic studies and journalism courses; calls for media companies to adopt *gender sensitive codes of conduct* (produced in collaboration with women’s associations), develop co- or *self-regulation systems* and promote *gender trainings* for media professionals, *awards* for the production of gender

sensitive contents, *awareness-raising initiatives* and *media literacy programmes* for young people.

This same double framing translates into European Parliament resolution of 17 April 2018 on gender equality in the media sector in the EU (2017/2210(INI)), which presents recommendations to enhance *equal representation* and *equal opportunities* for women and men in all areas and at all levels of media organisations, as well as to eradicate any form of *sex-based discrimination*, *sexism* and *gender stereotyping* in media contents. The responsibility to actively work toward change is placed upon both public and private media services: they are required to adopt *internal policies* aimed at ensuring that women and men benefit from the same career opportunities without any gender-based barriers to exclude them from training for and working in particular areas or from attaining high ranking and decision making positions (for example by providing for specific measures, such as quotas, to ensure equal representation); media policies should also include provisions for the implementation of *work-life balance arrangements* and *anti-harassment commitments*, as well as *equal pay measures*, for both women and men; finally, they are called upon to create *databases of women experts* and to develop *guidelines*, *codes of conduct* and *self-regulation systems* which set the standards for respectful and non-stereotyped portrayals of women, adequately monitored by regulatory authorities, NGOs and national equality bodies. National governments, on their part, are required to develop and implement *legislation* on gender equality in all areas, including the media sector, focusing on measures to incentive women's access to decision-making position in media and media production of gender-balanced and non-discriminatory content; moreover, the resolution invites Member States to promote *awareness-raising campaigns* on gender discrimination in media content and to enhance *educational and training programmes* on STEM disciplines for women in order to give them the tools to engage in media career paths. Civil society organisations are also called upon to monitor and influence the media agenda, developing specific strategies targeted to the media and new technologies of communication field.

It is worth mentioning also two documents produced over the last year by the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) and the European Regulators Group for Audiovisual Media Services (ERGA) respectively, which draw guidelines for the implementation of gender equality in the audio-visual media sector. The 2019 EBU publication “All Things Being

Equal. Gender Equality Guidelines from Public Service Media” (Vaccarone, 2019) frames the problem in terms of *women’s underrepresentation* both on screen and within the media industry, thus outlining a roadmap for achieving gender equality in media organisations, understood in this context as *diverse* and *inclusive portrayal* of “the full spectrum of society” (p.9) which can then “contribute to a more respectful, inclusive society” (*ibidem*). The steps mapped out in the text, however, focus primarily on *media internal environments*, side-lining the dimension of media contents, implicitly establishing a cause and effect relationship between these two spheres. In particular, media companies are recommended to gather and subsequently *analyse gender-related* data about their organisation in order to assess the situation in terms of gender equality and eventually develop strategies for improvement; *raise men’s awareness* of gender inequalities and actively engage them in making change; *adopt internal policies* which set gender equal standards and measurable goals in order to promote women’s involvement at all levels, focusing on the recruitment and career advancement processes, on the provision of equal pay and flexible working arrangements, as well as on the preservation of a safe and inclusive working environment; explicitly commit “to build a *sustainable culture* in which gender equality can be nurtured” (p. 10).

In 2020 the ERGA subgroup on gender diversity published the “Study on Industry-led Good Practices related to Gender Diversity in the European Audiovisual Sector“, which includes also a set of targeted recommendations for achieving gender equal representation in and through media. By framing the problem as *lack of diversity*, the text highlights the interconnection “between on-screen and off-screen representation, as well as media literacy”, urging for a multi-stakeholder effort (including broadcasters, national regulatory authorities, civil society and academia) to work toward its solution. National regulatory authorities should *analyse gender representation* in both media contents and media departments on the quantitative and qualitative level, encouraging *gender mainstreaming* in the audio-visual production and broadcasting system and promoting gender-sensitive *media literacy programmes*; public authorities are invited “to set specific targets related to on-screen representation of genders in audiovisual *legislation*” (p.31), to *monitor* audio-visual media programs, *collect gender-specific data* on their contents and encourage the creation of *women experts databases*; audio-visual media services are called upon to adopt *policies* and set targets for equal opportunities in the

workplace (equal retribution, work-life balance measures, strategic actions to prevent vertical and horizontal segregation), provide *gender-sensitive training* to professionals and establish *collaboration with journalistic educational institutions*, support *public awareness initiatives* against gender biased and stereotyped media contents, set *measurable targets* in terms of gender diversity in TV programs, periodically monitor women and men's visibility and roles in audio-visual contents; finally, funding bodies should give *financial incentives* to those audio-visual media services providers which implement gender diversity projects.

2.1.3 Policy on gender, media & sport

The documents serving as policy framework on gender and media often referred to the need to promote women's representation in all areas of the media, including the segments traditionally more dominated by men, among which the European Parliament (2018) explicitly mentions the sports section. The interrelation between gender, media and sport, however, is made more evident in sports related policies, which usually include specific provisions on gender equality in media coverage of sports.

In 1987 the European Parliament Resolution on women in sport (Doc. A 2-32/87/corr.) was adopted, including a "Role of the media" section where qualitative and quantitative issues related to media coverage of women in sports were presented. Both the *low visibility* of female sports competitions and the *sexist and stereotypical portrayals* of sportswomen provided by media, often focused on non-sports related aspects and reflecting gender-based assumptions rooted in society, are deemed in the text as responsible for perpetuating negative images of women and for hindering their participation in sports, as well as their involvement in social activities. The measures suggested, however, are limited to general calls for the implementation of *action programmes* aimed at involving media in the coverage of women's sporting events, including the promotion in all Member States of a specific Women's Sports Week.

In the aforementioned "Recommendation CM/Rec (2019)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on preventing and combating sexism" the sport dimension is acknowledged as one of the critical areas for combating sexism (II.H. Culture and sport) and one of the Council's recommendations in this particular area addresses the problem of *sportswomen's underrepresentation* in media contents, calling especially public media

to ensure that both women and men's sporting events and achievements have equal chances of being given visibility to, in order for them to serve as positive role models for society; other provisions focus instead on *sexist portrayal of sportswomen*, urging for the development of *training tools and programmes* on gender-sensitive communication and for the promotion at all levels of “*concrete actions* to promote gender equality and the non-stereotypical portrayal of women and men, girls and boys” (Council of Europe, 2019, p.14).

Other texts present a fuller picture of the problem, looking also at the influence internal media practices and environments have on the sports contents provided. In 2015 the Council of Europe adopted “Recommendation CM/Rec (2015)2 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on gender mainstreaming in sport” in order to call on all the multiple actors responsible for the perpetuation of gender inequalities in sport (including “political institutions, public authorities, sports organisations and other sports-related organisations as well as education institutions and the media”) to commit at all levels to implement a gender mainstreaming strategy. In the specific case of media, the problem is framed in terms of both *what type of content* they offer and *who* produces these contents. On the one hand, the Council urges for measures to eradicate *gender-based stereotypes* and *sexism* from media portrayal of women and men in sport, as these patterns can contribute to encourage sexist and discriminatory behaviour in society and downplay the steps made toward gender equality in sport. To this end, specific *educational and training programmes* for sports media professionals and students are recommended, in order for them to gain awareness of gender equality concerns and to implement gender-sensitive practice. On the other, *women's underrepresentation in sports media departments* is addressed as an issue of *unbalanced participation*, to be resolved by promoting female employment and career progression in sports editorial staff.

However, the most comprehensive policy text on the relation between media, sport and gender has been so far the European Commission's Proposal for Strategic Actions 2014 – 2020 in Gender Equality in Sport (2014), which devotes an entire section to “Fight against negative gender stereotypes in sport and the role of the media”. It outlines three main interconnected frames: *gender stereotyping* in sports media contents, *low media coverage* of women in sport and women's sports, *gender imbalance* of female and male sports media professionals. In fact, the text states that the stereotyped portrayal and

marginalization of sportswomen in media contents negatively affect social perception of women's sport, demeaning its value and discouraging girls and women from participating in sport activities; at the same time, the low number of women working in sports media departments and holding decision-making positions within them is referred to as a hindering factor in the promotion of gender-sensitive practices in sports media contents production.

The identified prognosis for unfair portrayals of sportswomen is *raising gender-awareness* in sports media professionals, in light also of the ethical journalism principles they should abide by, including “accuracy, fairness [...] diversity [and] avoiding stereotypes” (p. 34). Therefore, media organisations are called to adopt *gender-sensitive editorial guidelines* for sports content production, establish *databases of female experts* in the sport field to be consulted for opinions and reports, provide *specific training* on gender equality to sports media professionals, establish *awards* for journalistic work which challenges gender stereotypes in sport. Moreover, *professional media associations and NGOs* should set standards and develop guidance tools for media organisations to follow, *journalism schools* should include gender perspectives in all their courses, including those on sports journalism, and *sports authorities* should provide targeted training to athletes and coaches in order for them to “control the rights of ethical and appropriate use of their names and images” (p.35).

As for the *low coverage of women in sport and women's sports* problem, the Commission sets the goal of reaching 30% by 2020, calling different actors to contribute to its achievement. Not only it urges *media organisations* to increase the amount of coverage devoted to women's competitions and the number of female experts involved in sports programmes, regularly monitoring their performance in this respect, but also encourages *sport governing bodies* to build strong connections with media and give them incentives to cover women's events. On their part, *governments* are called upon to “include the mediatisation of women's sports as an integral part of a national strategy on gender equality in sport” (p.38) and to fund projects aimed at promoting wider and fair coverage of women's sports, whereas *civil society organisations* are invited to develop these projects and set up awareness-raising campaigns.

Finally, in order to increase the number of women working in sports media departments (to at least 30 % by 2020) and achieve gender balance within them, the Commission calls upon media organisations to implement *gender equality plans* and *internal policies* targeted at reaching measurable objectives in terms of percentage of female media professionals in the sports sector, including managerial positions, as well as establish specific *mentoring programmes* and activities to encourage women to pursue this career path. Media professional associations at the national and international level are then invited to produce *guidelines*, promote *best practices* and support *initiatives* in favor of gender balance in sports media organisations.

2.1.4 Analysis results

In order to briefly summarize and further reflect upon what the Critical Frame Analysis of these documents showed, I now look at each of the different dimensions taken into consideration in this type of investigation, namely Voice (who speaks in the text), Diagnosis (consisting in the Overall representation of the problem and the principles set out as Norms), Attribution of Causality/Responsibility, Prognosis (what the solution is represented to be and which are the norms underlying it) and Call for Action (who is called upon to do something to solve the problem).

In terms of **Voice**, the texts which provide the policy framework on gender and media (and sport) are produced by and represent the voices of international and European institutions and organisations, advisory bodies specifically concerned with gender equality issues (as well as trade unions, professional associations and NGOs involved in some of these bodies' activities), European public media sector representatives and media regulatory independent bodies, as well as global civil society networks.

They represent the problem by outlining two main **interconnected frames**: on the one hand, the *unequal access to and participation in the media sector of women and men*, which often comes with sub-frames related to *access to decision-making positions* and *working conditions*; on the other, *media distorted portrayal of society*, both in terms of *low coverage of women*, especially in roles not traditionally associated with them, and in terms of *stereotyped and degrading portrayal of women*.

As for the **normativity** underlying both diagnosis and prognosis, these texts refer to *equal opportunities for and equal treatment of women and men*, as well as to principles of *non-discrimination, diversity and inclusivity*, highlighting the inherent connection between gender equality and *democracy, freedom of expression and pluralism*. Unsurprisingly, *balance* is another key word in the policy framework, understood as ensuring that women have the same amount of media coverage as men (consistently with the actual composition of society) and that their contributions to society are acknowledged in all their diversity; however, the current portrayal of men is still more or less implicitly set as the standard to achieve.

In terms of **causality/responsibility**, the texts tend to connect the problem to *sexist attitudes and gender stereotypes* entrenched in society, which inform media internal practices and contents and are then perpetuated through them. Moreover, they establish a cause and effect relation between the number of women involved in the media sector and the gender-sensitivity of media practices and contents, with the risk of relieving male media professionals of their responsibilities to eliminate gender-biased patterns; however, many texts call for specific training programmes to provide gender competencies to all media professionals, including men, and the EBU publication stresses the importance of actively engaging men in making change. In general, women are presented as the main subjects suffering because of the problem, but it's worth noticing that some policy texts have framed the issue as an impediment to social justice for all or have acknowledged the impact gender biases perpetuated within and by media have on the entire society, as they set unfair and limiting expectations on what women and men should do to fit their presumed social roles.

The **prognosis** broadly reflects the areas of intervention and the principles outlined in the diagnosis, focusing on *increasing the presence of women* in media environments, especially in sectors traditionally dominated by men, as well as in media contents, and *promoting their respectful and non-stereotyped portrayal*. Even though some documents explicitly point out the heterogeneous nature of the “women” category in the diagnosis, not much attention is given to intersectional factors in the prognosis, so that the proposed solutions do not take into account how age and ethnicity, for example, further affect women's representation in and through the (sports) media.

The **courses of actions** suggested concentrate on some main recurring solution frames: the development of *national legislation, policies* and *strategic plans* aimed at mainstreaming gender in the media sector; the adoption of *codes of conduct, regulatory mechanisms* and *action programmes* by media organisations with respect to gender equality; the implementation of *research projects, monitoring activities* and *gender-specific data analysis* at all levels; the establishment of *female experts databases*; the promotion of *educational and training programmes* specifically designed for women, *gender-sensitive training* for all media professionals and *media literacy programmes* for young people, as well as *mainstreaming gender in journalism and communication schools curricula*; the organisation of *awareness raising campaigns and initiatives*; *incentives* for good practices; the creation of *partnerships and networks* between stakeholders.

The policy documents call upon a wide range of stakeholders to implement these actions in a synergic way (**Call for action**), from national governments and their gender equality machinery to media organisations, with particular stress on public service media, from international and EU bodies to academic institutions, from non-governmental organisations to media professional associations, including also sport's governing bodies and sports clubs in the specific case of gender equality in and through sports media.

However, most of the provisions take the form of recommendations which leave to national legislation the responsibility to eventually set gender sensitive standards for media organisations to comply with, whereas the legislative framework in force at the EU level regulating the audio-visual sector, the 2010 Audiovisual Media Services Directive (European Parliament, 2010), generally establishes the principle of non-discrimination in audio-visual commercial communications, whether it be on the grounds of sex or other characteristics such as ethnicity, age and disability, without any specific provision on gender equality in media environments or in media content.

2.2 Initiatives on gender, media & sport

The policy framework on gender and media, and then specifically on gender, media and sport, has outlined three main critical areas for targeted actions to promote gender equality in and through sports media: increasing the number of women working in sports media departments, including decision-making positions; incrementing the amount of coverage

devoted to women in sport and women's sports; eradicating gender stereotypes and sexism from sports media portrayal. The suggested actions included policy interventions, guidelines production, awareness raising initiatives, incentives for good practices and training programmes.

Over the last years these provisions have resulted in initiatives of various nature, which have been launched at the international, regional and local level by a broad spectrum of actors such as international and regional organisations, national governments' sports departments, media companies, media professional associations and advocacy groups. Even though at the national level there still seems to be a general lack of coordinated and comprehensive policies that are required for structural change, these initiatives nonetheless represent positive inputs to encourage gender equality in sports media practices and help eventually making it a relevant topic in the policy agenda. In particular, a significant number of them are awareness raising efforts, aimed to disclose to the wider public the relevance media have in building social perceptions about sport and the gender biased framing they have long perpetuated, so that sports media can be held accountable for the type of contents they produce, as well as the values they help promoting, and people can realize there is more to the sporting world than what has been traditionally made visible and valuable to them.

Among the actions developed to address the low proportion of female journalists and media professionals in sports media departments, some media organisations adopted specific measures to increase their number. For example, in 2013 the Swedish public service radio broadcaster (Swedish Radio) introduced **gender quotas** in the recruitment system for the sports section, committing to hire three women out of five new employees, and succeeded in doubling the percentage of female sports staff within the space of five years (Vaccarone, 2019, p. 26).

Other initiatives focused instead on encouraging girls to pursue this career and helping them overcome barriers built on prejudices. A specific advocacy group was created in the USA, the **Association for Women in Sports Media**, in order to provide support to women who work or aspire to work in sports media, whether as editors, journalists, broadcasters or in public relations. For instance, it offers scholarships and internships to college students and pays tribute to those women who can be considered role models in

the sports media industry, the so-called “Pioneers”, by establishing an annual award named after Mary Garber (AWSM, n.d.).

Another important initiative in this area is **Women In News and Sport (WINS)**, a project implemented by ABC International Development (a division of the Australian Broadcasting Association which provides support to Asian and Pacific Countries in the field of media and communications) to train and mentor female sports journalists living in the Indo-Pacific region. Its scope includes now seven Countries (Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Indonesia, Vietnam, India, Vanuatu and Philippines), where workshops, training sessions and targeted activities are programmed in order to give female media professionals better chances in the sports department as well as to create networks between them and promote the increase of women’s sports coverage in the overall media offer (ABC International Development, n.d.).

Several initiatives have been designed at the national level to remove women’s sports from their almost invisible status on media. In France The Conseil Supérieur de l’Audiovisuel (CSA), in collaboration with the French Ministry of Sport, has promoted “**Sport Féminin Toujours**”, a project born in 2014 and come this year to its third edition which consists in dedicating a weekend specifically to women’s sports broadcasting, ensuring that national media commit to include in their schedules women’s sport related programs, interviews and contents in the hope of motivating them to gradually increase the total percentage of sportswomen’s coverage (Council of Europe, n.d.).

Along the same lines, between 2015 and 2017 the British charity Women in Sports promoted three editions of the “**Women sport’s week**”, a week in which BBC and Sky Sports - partners of the initiative - helped showcasing women contribute to the sports field by assigning huge broadcasting space to them (Women in Sport, n.d.).

In 2018 the Federation of Irish Sport presented the “**20x20 – If she can’t see it, she can’t be it**” **campaign**, aimed at increasing by 20% national media coverage of women’s sport by 2020 (along with women’s participation rate in sports). The initiative consisted in engaging all the stakeholders involved in the sport dimension, inviting them to make a concrete pledge in support of this goal and to share it on social media (Along Came A Spider, n.d.). It also involved the creation of short films posted online featuring Irish

female athletes and a viral competition in which girls were invited to post videos where they “showed their skills” (#ShowYourSkills).

Other examples of local initiatives giving visibility to women in sport are **#Parolesdechampionnes** and **#SeeHerInSports campaigns**, launched in Belgium and in the USA respectively. The Belgian awareness campaign was promoted by a feminist association, Les Femmes Prévoyantes Socialistes, and was meant to spread over press and online media, as well as through a photo exhibition, stories and images of sportswomen who defied societal expectations and could provide testimony of the challenges women face in the sport environment in both grassroots and professional sports (Council of Europe, n.d.). #SeeHerInSports campaign, launched in 2019 by the American Association of National Advertisers as an extension of the SeeHer movement, similarly aims to increase media representation of sportswomen irrespective of which sports are traditionally considered female appropriate, giving voice to them through videos posted online and through social platforms (ANA, n.d.).

In order to foster gender equality in sports media representation, **awards and prizes** have also been established at the national level for those providing virtuous examples in this regard. For instance, in 2017 the Spanish High Council for Sport introduced the Lili Álvarez Award for journalistic works which stand out as good practices in women’s sports press, radio, audio-visual and photographic coverage because they prove to value female athletes’ accomplishments as much as those of their male equivalents and expose the discriminating practices women are subject to in the sport field (Council of Europe, n.d.).

Meanwhile, other initiatives aim to provide media professionals with useful material on female representatives of the sports sector or specialists in the sports subject: in the early 2000s the Australian Sports Commission chose to give journalists working in press, radio and televised media the tools needed to make steps forward in gender equal representation, by way of an information package containing statistics, research data and useful contacts of women in the sports environment (White & Scoretz, 2002, p. 39), whereas **online databases of female experts** in different subject areas, including sport, were established, for example, in the USA (WMC SheSource) and in the UK (The Women’s Room).

Finally, different types of actions have been developed in order to address gender-based discrepancies in media portrayal of women and men in sport. In 2018 UNESCO devoted its annual Women Make the News initiative, which is aimed at sensitizing society on the issue of women representation in and through the media, to sports coverage, launching a social media campaign and developing a useful digital tool for raising awareness on the unequal patterns featured in sports media contents (UNESCO, 2018c). The **#HerMomentsMatter campaign** consisted in sharing images and videos produced by UNESCO and encouraging others to further produce and spread them: these contents exposed the sexist nature of some problematic headlines which had appeared in 2016 Olympics coverage and revisited them showing how they should have looked like in an equitable framing (UNESCO, 2018a). Moreover, in order to expose the gendered narratives fed by sports media, some of the contents shared were videos which juxtaposed a man and a woman's voice each talking about their own experiences in the sporting field and pointing out the different treatment media give them (*Ibidem*).

In addition to this, UNESCO developed a Gender Equality plug-in, "**Her Headline**", aimed at pinpointing the presence of gender biased expressions in sports articles: on the basis of a study which had examined the language used in 2016 Olympics coverage (Cambridge University Press, 2016), a database of phrases and words was built so that when the Chrome extension detected identifiable expressions in a sports news text it highlighted them, clarifying why they were evidence of gender unequal portrayal (UNESCO, 2018b). Anyone who was interested in checking on sports media behaviour, then, could download Her Headline and test it on any sports article, becoming actively involved in raising awareness on the topic.

In the same year more than 100 countries around the world participated in the celebration of World Radio Day by organising a **series of events under the theme "Radio and Sports"** which were focused on promoting gender equality in and through sports reporting. Among these were included activities organised by young people in Morocco, Jordan, Palestine and Tunisia with the support of the EU-funded NET-MED Youth project, consisting in specific forums, courses and trainings which addressed gender stereotypes in sports coverage and provided insight into the links between sport, gender and media (Montiel & Macharia, 2018).

An initiative put in place at all levels, whether by international organisations, national charities committed to promoting women participation in sport and journalists' associations advocating for equal representation of women in and through media, is the production of **specific guidelines**.

At the international level the International Olympic Committee (IOC) published in 2018 the **“Portrayal Guidelines for Gender Balanced Representation”** inviting all the stakeholders involved in the Olympic Games coverage to comply with gender sensitive standards. After stressing the importance of devoting an equal amount of time and space to women's and men's sports coverage, the document outlines and provides examples of good and bad practices in terms of the images and language used for their portrayal in articles, commentaries and interviews. For instance, it calls on media professionals to avoid gender marking, descriptions and comments about the athletes' appearance and/or their personal relationships, as well as images and video shots which focus on their aesthetics or sexualize them (IOC, 2018).

National active groups have produced publications for similar purposes, too. For example, the Women's Sports Foundation is an American charitable organisation which was founded to support women's participation in sport in order for them to enjoy the benefits that result from it. The acknowledgment of media involvement in allowing this to happen has resulted in a publication titled **“Media – Images and Words in Women's Sports: the Foundation Position”** (Women's Sports Foundation, 2016), which shares information on the quantitative and qualitative disparity of media representation of sportswomen, answers to the most common questions about this topic and provides both reporters and audiences with guidelines for gender equal portrayal and tools to recognize the instances where images and texts portray women athletes in inappropriate ways. Here as well, concrete examples are provided of what should be avoided in terms of language and images, such as the use of infantilizing names for female athletes or the sexual implication of photographs depicting particular parts of their bodies.

We can find another example of this in Italy: the female journalists' association GiULiA (Giornalista Unite Libere Autonome) and the association for social promotion UISP (Unione Italiana Sport Per Tutti) cooperated in drawing up a manifesto titled **“Media, Donne, Sport: idee guida per una diversa informazione”** where they illustrate the

guidelines journalists should follow in reporting about sport without giving space to gender stereotypes. These rules of conduct include providing valuable information about women's sports (as usual in men's sports reporting), not giving more prominence to women's physical appearance and personal relationships than to their skills and accomplishments, using gender inclusive language, exposing discriminating practices and gender inequalities within the sport system, as well as making women's sports as visible as men's and including more female journalists and reporters in sports newsrooms (Cinquelpalmi, 2019).

This brief overview of initiatives developed within the framework of gender, media and sport shows how, especially in recent years, there have been increasing efforts to raise awareness on media's responsibility to fairly represent women and men in sport and to change previously established patterns which have traditionally undermined women's role in the sporting field. Civil society and media professional associations led the way through their advocacy commitments, but international organisations (such as UNESCO) and sport's governing bodies (i.e. IOC), as well as national government agencies in charge of the sport dimension and in some cases media organisations, have also been instrumental in promoting these welcomed initiatives.

The main areas of intervention, the type of actions primarily designed, and the variety of actors involved in their implementation ultimately reflect the provisions outlined by policy framework on the matter. In particular, most of these initiatives address the issues of *low coverage* and *unfair portrayal* of women in sport, responding to policy calls for awareness raising campaigns, training and mentoring programmes targeted at aspirant sports media professionals, guidelines and tools for sports journalists, databases of women experts, awards and prizes recognizing good practices in the industry.

On the other side, fewer actions have been implemented with respect to *women's underrepresentation in sports media departments*, especially in top positions: so far media organisations have sparsely taken measures to increase the number of women in their sports newsrooms (i.e. gender quotas in Swedish Radio), without actually developing strategic plans to improve women's access to decision-making positions nor to tackle deep-rooted gender inequalities in the sports media industry; moreover, except for the advocacy activity of the American Association for Women in Sports Media and

some relevant projects in the Indo-Pacific region providing mentorship and training for girls willing to work in this sector, it appears that educational institutions are still little involved in coordinated efforts to foster female participation in sport journalism courses.

Therefore, this proves that there's still a long way to go in terms of integrated strategies and policies at all levels in order to effectively promote gender equality in and through sports media.

PART 2

COUNTRY CASES

As each national context, with its economic, social and cultural implications, determines how supranational policy frameworks on gender equality are eventually adopted, adapted and implemented in different Countries, it is interesting to see whether and how the international and European provisions on gender, media and sport mapped out in the previous chapter have translated into normative frameworks and gender-sensitive practices in two Western European Countries, Italy and the UK, which present media systems of different nature, coming from a Mediterranean and North-Atlantic tradition, respectively (Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

Their comparison moves from media policy to sports media content, in order to try to get a comprehensive view of the status of gender equality in these two Countries with respect to women and men's representation in and through sports media. Therefore, firstly I investigate the three dimensions involved in this research - gender, media and sport - both singularly and in their interrelation within the Italian and British context (with particular attention to national policy frameworks), then I focus on sports media houses and their online outlets.

Consistently with the need to take into account both policy and practice, the empirical analysis unfolds in two main phases, relying on a mixed methodology (see 1.2.4 Methodology): on the one hand, I resorted again to the Critical Frame Analysis in order to look into the gender-related policies adopted by three sports media houses per Country and see how national normative frameworks inform their actual commitments on gender equality; on the other hand, I monitored for one week these media organisations' sports news websites, applying an adapted template inspired by the Global Media Monitoring Project methodology (WACC, 2020b), in order to conduct a quanti-qualitative analysis on their performance in terms of women and men's visibility and portrayal.

The Italian sports media houses taken into consideration are the public service broadcaster Rai (Italian Radio Television), the commercial broadcaster Mediaset Group S.p.A. and the leading multimedia publishing company RCS MediaGroup S.p.A., whereas on the

British side I selected the public service broadcaster BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) and two leading multimedia organisations, Guardian Media Group plc and Daily Mail and General Trust plc, responsible for publishing broadsheet papers and mid-market outlets, respectively. They all include in their offer updated and comprehensive sports news websites (raisport.ra.i.it, sportmediaset.mediaset.it, gazzetta.it, BBC Sport, Guardian Sport, Mail Online – Sport) which are also some of the most visited online sources in the respective Country, with the exception of raisport.ra.i.it, which however needs to be analysed as a public service media outlet.

The monitoring analysis took place in the week between Monday, August 31st and Sunday, September 6th, since several sports competitions were taking place after a long Coronavirus break, but at the same time some major male football tournaments which would have presumably taken up the majority of coverage and commentaries, such as Serie A and Premier League at the national level and the men’s UEFA Champions League at the European level, had already come to an end (however, male football matches were still held in the context of the UEFA Nations League qualifiers and some female’s national football leagues were already in-season, while the women’s UEFA Champions League final had taken place the night before the monitoring began).

I selected the top 15 news items which daily appeared in each website’s homepage in the time period that goes from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m., regularly capturing the homepage and each news item in order to further analyse them in subsequent hours and days (for further details on the news selection procedure and on the template used for the quanti-qualitative analysis, see 1.2.4). The template, adapted from the methodological tools used by the Global Media Monitoring Project, is designed to collect gender-sensitive information on the news stories in general, on the journalists producing them, as well as on the people making the news.

In terms of the story, I registered the following variables for each news item:

- **Position** on the webpage (Top section/Scroll down);
- Presence of **Coronavirus-related information**;
- **Topic** (meant as the sport discipline the story relates to);
- **Scope** (national/European/international);
- Is it **about a particular woman or a group of women** (yes/no/mixed)?

- Does it **clearly highlight issues of inequality**?
- Does it **challenge any gender stereotypes**?

I assessed, when possible, the **Sex** of the journalist responsible for producing the story, be it in written or audio-visual form, including also additional interviewers.

Then, I focused on each individual people appearing in the news, registering information on the basis of the following categories:

- **Sex**;
- **Occupation/position**;
- **Function in the story** (Subject, Spokesperson, Expert, Personal Experience/Witness)⁶;
- Is there reference to their **Family role**?
- Are they described in terms of their **Appearance**?
- Are their **Skills** taken into account? ⁷
- Is their **Emotionality** brought up?
- Are they **Directly quoted** (or do they speak on video)?
- Are they **Photographed** (or do they appear on video)?

Images, titles and language were also analysed in order to highlight any good or bad practices which warranted further review. In fact, on the basis of the quantitative data gathered and on the other visual and linguistic elements which make up the stories, I conducted a qualitative analysis on some news items which were of interest according to the GEM classification adopted by GMMP:

- stories providing **blatant stereotypes**;
- stories providing **subtle stereotypes**;
- stories assuming a **gender-blind perspective**;
- stories displaying **gender awareness**.

⁶ As athletes and coaches can simultaneously serve as subjects and spokespersons, I decided to always code them as subjects.

⁷ This category was applied only in the case of athletes.

Chapter 3

Italy

Geographically located in Southern Europe overlooking the Mediterranean Sea, from an economic-political standpoint Italy is included among the Western European Countries. It is indeed a democratic Republic, founded on a capitalistic system and member of the European Union since 1958, as one of its six founding Countries.

The Italian Republic relies on its Constitution, come into force in 1948, which establishes the fundamental principles of the state, the citizens' rights and duties, as well as the structures and functions of the Country's political institutions. The responsibility to make sure the Constitution is respected lies with the head of state, the President of the Republic. As in any liberal democracy, the political system is founded on the separation of powers: the legislative authority is vested in a bicameral parliament, the executive power is in the hands of the Council of Ministers, headed by the President of the Council, and judicial powers are exercised by an independent judiciary.

At the administrative level Italy is subdivided in regions, provinces and municipalities, each with their own statutes, powers and duties defined by the Constitution.

Over the last twenty years both the Italian political and economic landscape have been marked by precariousness and uncertainty. In 2008 Italy fell into a recessive crisis of major proportions, characterized by public debt and unemployment, which has especially affected the Country's youth. In addition to that, political stability has been lacking, since several different governments have kept replacing each other, preventing the Country from finding a reliable path toward new economic stability and furthering the crisis of trust in parties and in politics among the population.

From a socio-cultural point of view, Italy proves to be still bound by traditional and conservative values, due also to the influence Catholic Church has historically exerted over its national cultural environment (Rosselli, 2014). Among them are the persistence of patriarchal views of society and family and the perpetuation of codified gender roles. These traditional values stand particularly firm in the southern context (Anheier, 2017), which is more anchored to a rural and conservative dimension.

In light of this general picture of the Italian context, I intend to further examine it in connection with the dimensions lying at the heart of my project: gender equality, media and sport.

3.1 Gender equality in Italy

Although the steps forward made in legislation in consequence of the 70s women's movements brought with them important social changes – Law 898/1970 legally introduced divorce in Italy, the Reform of Family Law (151/1975) established formal equality between spouses, Law 194/1978 legalized abortion – progress in the field of women's rights in Italy has been slow and there has been the lack of adequate changes on a structural level (Rosselli, 2014).

According to the Gender Equality Index 2019 from the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE, 2019a), Italy currently scores 63.0 out of 100 points, in 14th place among the other EU Countries, showing a good improvement on its 2005 ranking (26th). Despite the overall progress registered particularly in the Power and Knowledge areas, the Italian Country still presents substantial gender disparities, which are most evident in the Power, Time and Work areas. Italy ranks the lowest in Europe if we consider just the Work domain: women's employment amounts to 53% (men's 77%) and 33% of them work at a part-time job compared to 9% of men; the gender pay gap is 18%, which rises to 30% in couples with children, whereas life pension for men is 32% higher than the one received by women. Career paths are still unevenly distributed: women tend to be employed in the education, social care and health sector way more than men (26% versus 7%), whereas only 6% of them work in STEM fields. The same pattern can be found in study choices, as much as access to knowledge seems to have substantially improved. Another domain where important progress has been registered despite it being the lowest Italian value is Power, thanks to the introduction of gender quotas both in company boards and in elective offices. In terms of Time, the gathered data reflect the persistence of gender stereotypes which bind women to traditional roles in society and in the family, so that 81% of women (as opposed to 20% of men) daily devote at least an hour to housekeeping or cooking and gender disparity is registered also in the distribution of care responsibilities. Health, on the other hand, is the only domain where Italy surpasses the average European score, reaching high levels in terms of health status, as well as access to health services.

In general, however, progress in all dimensions of gender equality is hindered by both Italian political uncertainty and the economic crisis the Country has endured for the past ten years.

3.1.1 Legal framework

Looking at the Italian Constitution, the pillar on which Italy's democratic life rests on, gender equality is explicitly included in only four articles. Article 3 sets out the basic principle of non-discrimination: "All citizens shall have equal social dignity and shall be equal before the law, without distinction of gender, race, language, religion, political opinion, personal and social conditions" (Senato della Repubblica, 2018, p.6). The article, then, requires not only a formal, but also a substantive equality, which should be ensured by the Republic, responsible for removing "those obstacles of an economic or social nature which constrain the freedom and equality of citizens, thereby impeding the full development of the human person and the effective participation of all workers in the political, economic and social organisation of the country" (*ibidem*).

Art. 37, included among the articles establishing citizens' rights and duties in economic relations, affirms that "women workers shall be entitled to equal rights and equal pay as men for similar jobs" (*ivi*, p.19). Furthermore, it reiterates the importance of allowing women to reconcile working and family life, stating that "working conditions shall allow women to fulfil their essential role in the family and ensure appropriate protection for the mother and child" (*ibidem*).

Article 51 deals instead with political relations, thus establishing the right for all citizens to have equal opportunities of access to public and elected offices. To this end, "the Republic shall adopt specific measures to promote equal opportunities between women and men" (*ivi*, p. 24).

Finally, Art.117 focuses on regions' legislative powers and explicitly requires that "regional laws shall remove any hindrances to the full equality of men and women in social, cultural and economic life and promote equal access to elected offices for men and women." (*ivi*, p. 56-57).

The document providing the Italian legal framework in terms of gender equality is Legislative Decree No. 198 of 2006 ("National Code of Equal Opportunities between

Women and Men”), later partially amended by Legislative Decree No. 5 of 2010 and by 2018 Budget Law (205/2017), which collected in a single text all the pre-existing provisions on equal opportunities and non-discrimination on grounds of sex. It is composed of 58 articles and 4 sections, which are dedicated to the general promotion of equal opportunities between women and men and to three specific dimensions of equal opportunities: ethical-social, economic and political relations respectively. After establishing the main purpose of the provisions collected by the Code, that is removing gender-based discrimination and ensuring equal opportunities between women and men in all fields, the first book lists nature and function of the bodies responsible for integrating these principles into national activities and policies. The second section focuses on relations between spouses and on violence practiced in the context of family relations. The third book includes regulations about a wide range of discriminations occurring in the working environment: from recruitment to payments, from career progression to the reconciliation between maternity/paternity and work, from harassment in the workplace to equal opportunities in business enterprise and equal access to goods and services. The fourth section deals instead with provisions on the access to public offices.

3.1.2 Laws and policies

Italy signed international agreements on gender equality, starting from United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1981 e and the Beijing Plan of Action (1995), acceded to Conventions promoted by the Council of Europe, such as 2013 Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, and was called upon to adopt EU Directives on these topics, for example the Council Directive 2004/113/EC implementing the principle of equal treatment between men and women in the access to and supply of goods and services, which was implemented in Italy by Law 196/2007.

The commitments made in the context of these international platforms resulted in three National Action Plans: the first one was National Extraordinary Action Plan on Sexual and Gender-based Violence (2015-2017), aimed at providing a systemic structure to actions in support of women victims of violence and then renewed for the period 2017-2020 (National strategic plan on male violence against women); consistent with EU

Directive 2011/36, the National Plan of Action on the Fight against Trafficking (2016-2018) was then launched, focusing on the practices of human trafficking and exploitation of persons, which are strongly connected to gender-based violence and need gender-sensitive support measures; finally, in the wake of UN Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) Italy developed its third National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security (2016-2019), aimed at protecting women and girls in war contexts and promoting women's involvement in conflicts' prevention and pacific resolution, as well as in post-war reconstruction.

Legislative efforts in favour of gender equality have been deployed in different spheres, starting from gender-based violence. For example, in Law 66/1996 (Law against sexual violence) sexual violence was officially identified as a crime against the person, repealing previous articles which defined it as a crime against public morality; Law 154/2001 finally provided the possibility for the judge to impose the separation of those under investigation for family abuses from the places frequented by their victims; in 2009 – Law n. 38 - stalking was recognized as a crime (UN Women, 2018). Other normative references on this topic are Law 199/2013, which added further aggravating circumstances in gender-based violence crimes and increased the number of protective measures for the safeguard of victims, and Law 29/2019, which introduced new crimes, such as revenge porn, voluntary facial disfigurement, forced marriage and violation of precautionary removal from the family places.

Provisions on the working sector focused on the glass ceiling which prevents women from getting the same opportunities as men in accessing decision-making posts, on work-family life balance measures and on harassment in the workplace. Law 120/2011 (Golfo-Mosca Law) established a minimum quota (initially 1/5, then 1/3, later raised to 2/5 by Budget Law 2020) for the less represented gender in management bodies of listed companies and public companies, leading to an increase of women in the largest societies' decision-making councils by 20.4% from 2010 to 2015 (Anheier, 2017), but didn't result in the expected driver for gender balance (Biaggioni & Pividori, 2020). Legislative Decree 80/2015 on work-life balance provided for measures to support parental cares by introducing new terms for maternity/paternity leaves and by allowing violence victims to take a temporary leave from work. Moreover, since 2017 the annual Budget Law has included a “family package” with measures extending paternity leaves, delivering

babysitter vouchers and providing economic support for childcare services. Finally, 2018 Budget Law made some amendments to the Code for equal opportunities' subsection entitled "Harassment and sexual harassment" prohibiting any type of retaliatory dismissal, demotion and/or punishment against workers who report harassment in the workplace and making employers accountable for the preservation of workers' safety and dignity, also through initiatives carried out in collaboration with trade unions and confederations, such as UIL, CISL and CIGL, which have historically engaged in these activities (Pillinger, 2017).

In the political sphere Italy took measures to provide gender balance in the access to public and elective offices at all levels: Law 215/2012 requires gender rebalancing in local administrations; Law 56/2014 establishes a 40% quota of each gender representation in councils of municipalities with more than 3000 inhabitants; Law 65/2014 sets gender quotas in European Parliament members' election, requiring that candidates of each sex do not exceed half of the list and that electors give their preferences to candidates of different sex under penalty of cancellation of their second (or third) preference; Law 20/2016 and Law 165/2017 govern gender representation in regional electoral laws and in the national Parliament's electoral law respectively. It is debatable, however, how much these gender quotas can really be effective over the long term, as Italian women's associations pointed out that deep and structural changes are needed instead (Biaggioni & Pividori, 2020).

In the education area, Law 107/2015 (Good School Reform Act) sets out the need to promote gender equality principles in schools and combat every other form of discrimination, making everyone – students, teachers, families – aware of and adequately informed on this thematic. At the same time, though, networks between educational institutions and social realities (such as centres) committed to gender equality issues, as well as specific training activities for educators, are still not sufficiently developed (*ibidem*).

3.1.3 Established agencies and mechanisms

In 1996, following the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing and the implementation of the 4th EU Plan of Action on Gender Equality (1996-2000), the Minister for Equal Opportunities' office was established (it is currently held by Elena Bonetti). In order to assist the Minister in her/his duties, a Department for Equal Opportunities (DEO) was set up, with the task of implementing policies on equal opportunities in concert with national, regional and local administrations, as well as with international and European entities engaged in gender equality, such as United Nations, Council of Europe and the European Union. (EIGE, n.d.-a). DEO is particularly active in undertaking initiatives and projects in the field of, *inter alia*, gender-based violence, trafficking of human beings, work-life balance and stereotypes in scientific culture. Since 2003 the Italian National Office against Racial Discrimination (UNAR) has operated under the Department for Equal Opportunities, in an intersectional effort which however does not seem to be properly effective since UNAR fails to integrate gender equality in its programs, thus keeping their competencies still separated (*ibidem*).

Another body responsible to promote gender equality in Italy is the Equal Opportunities National Committee, established in 1991 in order to enforce equal treatment and opportunities between women and men in the working environment; headed by the Minister of Labour and Social Policies, it comprises trade union representatives, women's movements exponents, legal and economic experts, representatives of the Ministries. Among these people the National Equality Counsellor also joins the Committee: since 2000 the Counsellor has been required to ensure that principles of non-discrimination are respected in the workplace and to foster initiatives to this end, in collaboration with a network of Equality Counsellors operating at regional and provincial level. At local level in 2010 CUGs - Committees for the Rights of Employees – replaced Equal Opportunities Commissions (CPOs) as bodies present in all public institutions to monitor and promote the protection of those who work in these administrations against any form of discrimination, included the gender-based one (*ibidem*).

3.1.4 Gender mainstreaming

Despite registering some progress, primarily driven by European Directives and civil society inputs (Rosselli, 2014), which brought to the implementation of mainly regional

and sub-regional gender equality measures (with a particular focus on gender-based violence), EIGE (n.d.-a) reported that Italy still lacks a thorough national plan, as well as appropriate infrastructures, to widely mainstream gender equality, relying instead on practices enforced at local level or targeted for specific domains. Furthermore, the Shadow Report drawn up by Italian women advocacy groups with reference to the implementation of the CEDAW Convention in Italy (Italian platform “CEDAW: Work in progress”, 2017) highlighted the lack of tools assessing the integration of a gender perspective in policies and the impact these policies have on people.

Similarly, gender budgeting has been adopted since 2001 at regional and provincial level, but it has not been adequately promoted as a national policy instrument nor implemented through clear tools and mechanisms. At the legislative level, Legislative Decree 150/2009 strongly advocates gender budget drafting in all public administration, but does not provide sufficient methodological guidelines, deadlines nor penalties aimed at actually encouraging its implementation (Rosselli, 2014), whereas Legislative Decree 90/2016 introduced a national gender budget initiative, for now conducted only experimentally, in order to examine budget resources allocation and their impact on society from a gender perspective.

3.1.5 Civil society

In Italy there is no shortage of women associations and feminist organisations, NGOs and civil society groups participating in discussion and taking action first-hand to foster change toward greater gender equality in the Country. Just recently, in July 2020, a large group of feminists took part in drafting the position paper “Il cambiamento che vogliamo. Proposte femministe a 25 anni da Pechino” (Biaggioni & Pividori, 2020), in which they call for proposals related to seven broad thematic areas including all the critic areas outlined by Beijing Platform for Action. The complex of all the groups involved provides an overview of the multifaceted and lively Italian women’s organisations landscape. It includes, *inter alia*, the network of anti-violence centres “D.i.Re - Donne in rete contro la violenza”, ONGs such as “Differenza Donna – Women and Girls Against Violence” and “AIDOS” (Associazione Italiana Donne per lo Sviluppo); the cultural association “Donne in Quota”; “LeNove”, which is an association engaged in sociological and historical research; women’s movements such as “Donne in Nero” (advocating for peace)

and “Se Non Ora Quando”; associations committed to develop training projects for eliminating gender stereotypes in the education field, e.g. “Progetto Alice” and “SCoSSE”; professional associations such as “GIUDIT” (Italian female legal officers), “Gi.U.Li.A” (Italian female journalists) and “AIDM” (Associazione Italiana Donne Medico); the feminist centre “Associazione Orlando” in Bologna; not to mention the advocacy and research activities conducted by Italian Universities, such as the University of Padua and the University of Bologna, and the confederations of workers, i.e. CGIL, which cooperate closely with women’s organisations.

3.2 Media & Gender

3.2.1 Media context

The Italian media system in many respects reflects the “pluralized pluralist model” outlined by Hallin & Mancini (2004) to describe common patterns in Southern European Countries’ media systems.

On the one hand, Italian print press has historically retained an elite orientation toward educated and politically engaged citizens, as well as a low propensity for tabloid-like newspapers, with the exception of popular sports dailies (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Mancini & Gerli, n.d.), which make up some of the most read newspapers in the Country. Consequently, given the impossibility of counting on sales as sufficient sources of income, the Italian press industry depends on external financial support, whether it be from big corporations with specific economic interests in controlling and owning press enterprises (such as the Fiat Chrysler Automobiles and Confindustria) or from state subsidies aimed at assisting minor newspapers in order to encourage pluralism (Mancini & Gerli, n.d.). Currently, a limited number of big multi-media publishing groups makes up most of the press market, which is dominated by Gruppo Editoriale GEDI and RCS Media Group. However, press proves to be an ever more struggling sector, as the low circulation of newspaper continues its progressive decline: between 2007 and 2018 it has fallen from 5.5 million to 2 million copies per day, keeping a restricted number of regular readers (approximately one in three Italians) and a great gender disparity among them, since women still make up the majority of those who do not read any newspaper (Mauro, 2019).

Television, instead, is the dominant media, as it reaches the widest audience and can thus be supported by much higher advertising investments (*ibidem*). According to the latest Censis report, in 2019 TV consumption has remained steady, with 94.2% of the population watching television compared to 50.4% reading newspapers (Ruggiero *et al.*, 2020). Three main actors currently control the Italian television market: the public service broadcaster RAI and its main competitor in free-to-air broadcasting, the Mediaset commercial group, as well as Sky Group, the digital pay television company once owned by Rupert Murdoch and now controlled by Comcast Corporation. The rest of the Italian television landscape consists of other minor players, including also local medium-small-sized tv stations.

As for online media, development of digital infrastructures in Italy has been quite slow in comparison with other Countries, but recent reports registered an increasing tendency to access news and contents on social networks or via websites of newspapers, TV and radio (Mauro, 2019; Ruggiero *et al.*, 2020).

The relation between media and politics and the journalistic practices within the Italian media system are also consistent with some other common features of the pluralized pluralist model. Italian televised and press media alike are extremely interconnected with politics, continuing a historical tradition of partisanship that, although mitigated with respect to the past, still emerges in the political parallelism of media outlets, which reflect each a particular political orientation, thus providing what is referred to as external pluralism (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Moreover, politics and media interweaving patterns can be observed, for example, in the *lottizzazione* of public service broadcasting channels, implemented according to proportional parliamentary representation criteria (Law 103/1975), in media entrepreneurs' entry into politics (such as Mediaset Group's owner, Silvio Berlusconi) and in the political interests existing within media companies' ownership. Media regulatory authorities are themselves made up of different political parties' representatives, mirroring the Parliament's composition: these are the *Commissione Parlamentare per l'Indirizzo e la Vigilanza sui Servizi Radiotelevisivi*, a parliamentary committee which monitors public service broadcasting activities, and AGCOM, the independent authority in charge of regulating and supervising the communication sector, including all type of media, which carry out its functions over the entire Italian territory thanks to its regional operators, Co.re.com (Mancini & Gerli, n.d.).

As for journalistic practices, Italy has retained a tendency toward a commentary style, typical of Mediterranean Countries, which links back to the political orientation expressed by media outlets (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Moreover, despite the fact that Italian journalists have to pass an exam in order to see their professional status recognized and join the *Ordine dei giornalisti*, the level of professionalization within it is low due to the Order's inability of establishing common ethical standards and codes of conduct with respect to journalistic routines (*ibidem*), which then undermines the efficacy of accountability systems for media professionals' performance (Mancini & Gerli, n.d.).

In addition to that, the journalistic profession in Italy has been experiencing a crisis for several years now, as the working conditions have become more and more precarious and the wages have declined, resulting in an expanding category of underpaid and unprotected freelancers (Rea, 2015).

3.2.2 Gender in/equality in and through the media

According to the most recent analyses conducted on the Italian media environment, there's still a lot of ground to cover before gender equality is achieved both in and through media organisations.

In spite of the increasing number of employed female journalists, which amounts to 41.6% in AGCOM's latest report (2017b), their career is still marked by vertical and horizontal segregation, as well as by higher probability of low income and unstable employment.

EIGE (2014a) analysed the composition of decision-making bodies in the four main Italian media organisations (RAI, Mediaset, Corriere della Sera and La Repubblica) and found that in average there was only 13% of women within them (10% in private organisations and 25% in the public broadcasting company RAI), showing the persistent existence of a glass ceiling preventing women from accessing high responsibility roles and hindering their career progression, which has been confirmed also by AGCOM (2017b) findings with respect to the low percentage of female employees in media managerial positions (3,9 % compared to men's 14,2%).

On the horizontal level, the distribution of topics among female and male journalists highlights the disproportionately lower number of women who cover hard news, such as

politics (55% versus 64%) and economy (20% versus 30%), and who address topics traditionally deemed as areas of male expertise, such as sports (AGCOM, 2017b). In addition to these two types of segregation, another cause for concern is the gender pay gap, whereby women most rarely access high income groups and earn an average of about 20% less than men (GAMAG, 2020).

As for the amount of time and/or space devoted to women in Italian news media contents, the latest available results of the Global Media Monitoring Project (Azzalini & Padovani, 2015) show that, despite slowly increasing from the percentage registered in 1995 (7%), women's visibility is still far too low (21%). Traditional media rarely represent them as experts (18%) and tend to portray them following gender stereotyped patterns (in more than 50% of cases), thus providing a biased image of women and men's role in society which does not correspond to reality, for example marginalizing women's involvement in the politics area. The same patterns are substantially reproduced in online news media, which give slightly more representation to women in their stories (29%) but rely on the contribution of way fewer female journalists (13% out of 101 total online reporters) and actively reinforce traditional assumptions about gender relations.

Public service media, however, seem to act more in consonance with gender-sensitive standards, at least according to a recent monitoring conducted on the main three channels of public broadcaster Rai (Osservatorio di Pavia, 2019b): women's visibility amounted to 36,3%, more or less in line with 2018 results, and out of the 1100 television programs analysed 99,7% offered a respectful and non-sexist portrayal of women, 17,2% addressed to some extent gender issues and only 5,8% registered the presence of subtle (3,8%) or overt (2%) gender stereotypes, decreasing by 6,4% in relation to the 2018 level. These data show an overall better performance than other media outlets, but further improvement is still needed at all levels, especially in the representation of female politicians (18,1%), experts (24,8%) and spokespersons (22%), which remains highly unequal.

This difference between public service and private media's behaviour seems to reflect their different commitments at the policy level. Whereas the requirements included in the latest RAI/State Service Contract adopted in 2018 establish gender equality principles and provisions public service need to comply with (see 3.5.1), the other main actors

within the Italian media sector do not appear to have made any progress in terms of gender-related internal policies and initiatives (Padovani & Belluati, 2020). In one of the few studies investigating this dimension, EIGE (2014a) registered the existence of policies on *equal opportunities/diversity* and *dignity at work* in the Italian leading private media organisations, but at the same time acknowledged the absence of specific codes of conduct, as well as practical measures, to promote *gender equality*.

3.2.3 National policy framework

At the national policy level, not much has been done in terms of gender mainstreaming in the media sector, in spite of international and European recommendations on the matter.

Art. 49 of the “National Code of Equal Opportunities between Women and Men” (198/2006) recalls the provisions of Law 223/1990, which regulates the broadcasting system: art.11 requires public and private national broadcasters to promote good practices aimed at implementing *equal opportunities between women and men* in recruitment, work organisation, distribution of tasks and access to position of responsibilities, as well as provide regular *monitoring reports* on the status of women and men within the company in terms of recruitment rates, training, promotion and salary.

As for policies on media contents, “Testo unico dei servizi di media audiovisivi e radiofonici”, the Italian legal framework for the audio-visual media which was introduced by Legislative Decree 177/2005 never explicitly mentions gender equality; article 32, paragraph 5, generally requires all audio-visual services to respect *human dignity* and not to tolerate any form of *hate speech on the basis of sex* (as well as on the basis of race, religion and nationality), whereas *sex-based discrimination* is framed as an issue to be prohibited only with respect to commercial audio-visual communications (Art.36-bis, paragraph 1) and tele sales (Art. 40, paragraph 1).

Gender equality in and through media is not specified as a primary issue neither in the mandate of the Italian regulatory authority for communication, AGCOM (Padovani & Belluati, 2020). Among the guidelines it recently produced, AGCOM Atto di indirizzo n. 424/16/CONS and AGCOM decision n. 157/19/CONS generally focus on the *respect of human dignity*, on *non-discrimination* principles and on the *fight against hate speech*

within audio-visual services, echoing the provisions of “Testo unico” and mentioning women only in relation to the “CEDAW convention against all forms of discrimination against women”, which is invoked in the preamble along with other reference texts; on the other side, AGCOM decision n. 442/17/CONS (“Recommendation on fair representation of the image of women in information and entertainment programs”) includes specific concern on women’s representation, calling for the *elimination of stereotypes* offensive to their dignity and for a *realistic portrayal* of their contributions to society, but the effective recommendations draw attention to women only with respect to gender-based violence reporting and do not establish any specific performance indicators nor provide any suggested courses of action.

It is worth noting, however, that the “National Extraordinary Action Plan on Sexual and Gender-based Violence” for the years 2015-2017 (Consiglio dei Ministri, 2015) included the communication sector among the key areas of intervention for preventing gender-based violence, devoting Annex A to specific guidelines on “Communication and representation of the image of women in media”. Following the trail of 2011 Council of Europe “Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence” (Istanbul Convention), the document acknowledges media’s role in perpetuating a stereotyped, sexist and degrading image of women which builds distorted perceptions of gender relations that can lead to discriminatory and violent behaviours in society. It stresses, then, the importance of promoting a *realistic and respectful portrayal of women*, free from gender stereotypes and aimed at fostering healthy and symmetrical dynamics between women and men. In particular, it calls for three types of intervention: *gender-sensitive training* for media professionals, *awareness raising initiatives* (such as media education projects and social media campaigns) and *monitoring mechanisms* in order to periodically assess media performance from a gender perspective.

In recent years the greatest effort made at national level to foster gender equality in the media sector has consisted in the inclusion of specific gender-related guiding principles and provisions in the 2018-2022 Service Contract signed between the Italian Government and Rai public broadcasting service. The problem is framed in terms of *gender stereotypes*, which represent obstacles to the achievement of the principles and objectives set in article 2, all interrelated with gender equality: *pluralism* (par. 1.a), *respect of (gender) diversity* (par. 1.b and 1.c), *equal opportunities* (par. 1.c;), *fight against violence*

(par. 1.c), *social cohesion* (par. 3.a), *non-discrimination* (par. 3.g). Article 9 is then explicitly centred on *gender equality*, guaranteeing “the most complete and plural representation of women’s role in society” [my translation] (Ministero dello Sviluppo Economico, 2018, p.29), as well as committing to prevent and combat violence against women. Other articles containing mentions to gender equality are Art. 6, which includes the promotion of *equal opportunities between women and men* among the requirements Rai should meet to increase the quality of the information offer provided, and Art. 8, which focuses on the content for children and calls for the promotion of *equal and non-stereotyped role models* of both sexes, reminding public service of its educational duties with regard to the respect for gender diversity and the fight against violence. The courses of action outlined in article 9 and later reaffirmed in article 25 (“Specific obligations”) include establishing *gender-sensitive training* for Rai professionals in order for them to provide a respectful and non-stereotyped portrayal of women (Art. 9, par. 1.a; Art.25, par. 1.p); carrying out an annual *gender-monitoring* of Rai programs, followed by a report on its results (Art.9, par. 2.c; Art.25, par. 1.p and 1.q); appointing an *internal structure* responsible to implement gender equality measures (Art.25, par. 1.q); drawing up and publishing a *social report* on the company’s activities, with particular attention to, *inter alia*, the representation of the female image.

3.2.4 Advocacy initiatives

Since 2014, when continuous training has been made obligatory for Italian media professionals, the Equal Opportunity Commission within Ordine dei Giornalisti, in collaboration with female journalists’ associations and trade unions (Italian National Press Federation, FNSI, and RAI journalists’ trade union, USIGRai), has made increasing efforts targeted at providing training materials, courses and guidelines to media professionals on gender issues, with a particular focus on sexist language and stereotypes, starting from the manual “Tutt’altro genere d’informazione”, published in 2015, which included gender-related data about media contents, examples of good and bad practices in journalistic representation of women and specific recommendations on the production of gender inclusive contents, to the latest professional online course provided by CNOG (Consiglio Nazionale dell’Ordine dei Giornalisti) on the rules to follow when reporting

about violence against women and femicide⁸. Media representation of gender-based violence has also been at the centre of the 2017 “Venice Manifesto of women and men journalists for the respect and gender parity in news and against all forms of violence and discrimination through words and images”, promoted by FNSI Equality Commission, USIGRAi and GiULiA giornaliste association, along with a manual (“Stop violenza: le parole per dirlo”) published by GiULiA giornaliste on the appropriate language required for this specific topic. However, the relevance of these initiatives on newsrooms’ practices is yet to be determined (Padovani & Belluati, 2020).

As for the education field, Italy has participated in transnational projects supported by the European Union which aim to address communication schools and students in order to promote a gender sensitive approach to the media profession: in 2003 the ARESTE project resulted in a publication which included useful materials providing media teachers and students with insights into gender stereotypes in media contents and tools to eradicate them in both verbal and visual language, whereas the ongoing Advancing Gender Equality in Media Industries (AGEMI) project, co-coordinated by the University of Padua, provides learning resources to raise awareness on gender inequality issues in the media sector, a resources bank to share good practices from around the world, tools to monitor media performances, as well as opportunities for mutually-enriching encounters between students and media professionals. However, the UNESCO UniTWIN Network on Gender Media and ICT recently exposed the very low number of “degrees in communication and journalism across the country [which] include courses focused on/dealing with gender in/equality issues” (GAMAG, 2020, p. 6), highlighting so far a lack of institutional commitment in this direction.

In terms of monitoring, the media analysis and research institute C.A.R.E.S. – Osservatorio di Pavia has engaged over the years in many activities revolving around gender issues in media contents, starting from the Global Media Monitoring Project (GMMP) to the yearly gender-monitoring of RAI programs required by the RAI-State Service Contract. Its efforts within the gender and media thematic area have also included advocacy projects and initiatives developed in collaboration with professional and

⁸ Consiglio Nazionale dell’Ordine dei Giornalisti (CNOG). (2020, August 5th). *Online il primo corso di formazione professionale ideato e realizzato dal CNOG sulle regole dell’informazione nel racconto della violenza di genere*. <https://www.odg.it/comunicato-corso-cpo/38038>

cultural associations: in 2016, along with the female journalists' association GiULiA and the Bracco Foundation, it contributed to create a database of women experts in the STEM field, as well as in economic and political matters, that reporters can resort to in news making ("100 women against stereotypes"), which then led GiULiA giornaliste and the cultural association "cheFare" to promote the "European Network for Women Excellence (ENWE)" project, aimed at broadening the scope of this initiative at the regional level.

Women's associations and groups have a prominent role in fostering the goals set by Section J of the Beijing Platform for Action: in addition to the initiatives put forward by the professional association of GiULiA giornaliste, which include also the publication of manuals drafted with the contribution of experts in linguistics and in gender and media subjects in order to raise awareness on gender-related issues within media contents and language, it is worth mentioning the creation of a female blog ("La 27esimaora") run by a group of journalists within Il Corriere della Sera, as well as the advocacy efforts made by feminist organisations engaged in different fronts to promote change in women's representation in and through the media. Among these, of particular importance is the 2009 online campaign conducted by a network of women's associations and equality bodies at the national and regional level (the "Appello Donne e Media" initiative), which called upon national institutions to implement specific reforms aimed at promoting a respectful and non-stereotyped image of women in the media and finally resulted in the introduction of the first commitments on gender equality in the national Service Contract regulating RAI broadcasting activities.

3.3 Sport & Gender

3.2.1 Sport context

In Italy all national sports activities are supervised and regulated by CONI, the Italian representative institution of the International Olympic Committee, which officially recognizes and coordinates national sports federations and associate sports disciplines.

The most practiced sport in the Italian context is football (23,8% of sign-ups in 2017), followed from afar by tennis (8,4%), volleyball, basketball and track and field (Centro Studi e Osservatori Statistici per lo Sport, 2018). Compared to the past, the spectrum of practiced sport disciplines is getting wider, but more than half registered athletes still

belong to these five federations. Football's predominant position in the Italian sport environment is reflected in and reinforced by its visibility in sports media, whether they are press, radio or televised media, which devote most of their airtime and space to football events and news.

3.3.2 Gender in/equality in sport

In the Italian sport context gender gaps are also evident: despite the increasing number of top-level sportswomen, who represented 48% of the Italian athletes competing in the 2016 Olympic Games (Azzalini, 2017), women's overall participation in sport is still disproportionately lower than men's. According to the latest information shared by CONI with respect to the 2017 sporting year, female athletes represented less than 30% of Italian registered athletes, which is consistent with ISTAT data about low percentages of women engaging with continuity in sport activities (Centro Studi e Osservatori Statistici per lo Sport, 2018). One of the reasons may be that women are still unequally tasked with household chores and domestic care responsibilities, so that they tend to devote less time than men to leisure and sporting activities outside the house (EIGE, 2019a).

In 2017 the sport disciplines more practiced by girls and women were volleyball, tennis and gymnastics and the proportion of female athletes in sports federations exceeded 50% only in twirling, gymnastics, volleyball, roller sports, competitive dancing and equestrian sports (Centro Studi e Osservatori Statistici per lo Sport, 2018).

The percentage of women involved in the sport dimension decreases even more if we consider coaches and referees, not to mention sports managers and members of sport federations' councils. For instance, the National Council of the Italian Olympic Committee comprises only 8 female members out of 82 and none of the 45 National Sports Federations has a female president (Italian platform "CEDAW: Work in progress", 2017).

In addition to female numerical proportion in sports, another issue concerns the recognition of athletes' professional status. Art. 2 of Law 91/1981 states that the distinction between amateur and professional activity is regulated by CONI directives, which National Sports Federations need to comply with in setting standards for the recognition of athletes, coaches, sports managers and athletic trainers' status. However,

given the lack of clear directives on this matter, each Federation make its own arrangements, more often than not choosing not to recognize any form of professionalism and thus preventing athletes from getting an employment contract with their sports societies. The only Federations currently recognizing professionalism are Italian Football Federation (FIGC), Italian Cycling Federation (FCI), Italian Golf Federation (FIG) and Italian Basketball Federation (FIP), so that all the athletes engaged in other disciplines need to succeed in signing profitable advertising contracts or become members of military sports clubs, in order to financially support themselves only through sport.

Female athletes are particularly affected by this setting, as even the four Federations which admit professionalism relegate women's sport to amateur status. Consequently, all sportswomen in Italy, regardless of their discipline or their achievements, are technically amateurs, lacking any employment contract, as well as any resulting right or safeguard.

Despite the fact that European Parliament Resolution on Women and Sport ((2002/2280(INI)) requires for member Countries' national Federations to ensure that male and female disciplines are equally recognized as top-level sports and that women and men have equal access to top-level athlete status, Italy still hasn't taken the necessary measures to comply with these requirements, ignoring two legislative proposals submitted in 2014 and 2016, which aimed to amend Law 91/1981 by explicitly introducing non-discrimination and equal opportunities between women and men as imperative standards underlying the distinction between amateur and professional sport.

Actually, a first step to paving the way for change has recently been the inclusion in Law 160/2019 (Budget Law 2020) of an amendment exonerating sports clubs which stipulate employment contracts with female athletes from paying any social security contribution (except for mandatory injury insurance) for the next three years, in order to remove the financial concerns which are usually invoked as reasons for the non-recognition of women's professional status in sports. However, it is still up to each individual Federation to officially recognize such status and thus create real change.

3.3.3 Advocacy associations & organisations

Two main associations in Italy are engaged in strongly advocating for equal rights in and through the sport dimension, including gender equality: UISP (Italian Association of Sport for All) and Assist (Italian Women Athletes' Association).

UISP is an association for social promotion that since 1948 has been fostering the development of an equal sport culture through initiatives coordinated at national and regional level, also participating in international and European projects. In terms of gender equality, in 1985 UISP edited the “Charter of Women’s Rights in Sports” and submitted it to the European Parliament, which subsequently adopted it as the 1987 Resolution on Women in Sport. In 2011 the UISP-coordinated European project “Olympia: equal opportunities via and within sport” resulted in a new “European Charter of Women's Rights in Sports”, which not only outlines gender equality principles that need to be implemented in sports, but also provides specific recommendations to UE institutions, sports federations and organisations, sports clubs, Universities and fan groups, in order for them to implement those principles in different sport-related areas, such as participation in sport, leadership, education, research, media and audiences. The document also includes an overview of the main issues observed in each of these areas, as well as some examples of good practices developed in different European Countries. In 2016, in the context of the European Network for Women's Sport Promotion (ENWOSP) project, a comics version of the Charter was elaborated in order to raise awareness on the topic also among younger audiences.

Assist, on the other hand, is a non-profit association which was born in 2000 to advocate for female athletes (but also coaches, managers and sports media professionals)’ rights through various initiatives, projects and awareness campaigns, such as the social campaigns Game Over and #nostereotipi (#nostereotypes). For example, on the occasion of 2017 International Women’s Day, Assist called on sportswomen to take pictures of themselves with a fake pregnant belly in order to underline the lack of recognition of athletes’ maternity rights by Italian institutions, whereas the 2015 #nostereotipi campaign spread on social media ironic slogans which exposed the most common stereotypes unfairly associated with female athletes.

3.4 Sports media & Gender

3.4.1 Sports media context

Sport is extensively covered, reported and commented on by Italian media, whether by print press, audio-visual broadcasting or online platforms. Three sports dailies are consistently among the most read newspapers in the Country; according to Audipress data, in 2019 *Gazzetta dello Sport* (RCS MediaGroup) was the leading print outlet, counting on a 3.2/3.3 million readership, whereas *Corriere dello Sport* was ranked in fourth position with about 1.4 million readers and *Tuttosport* maintained a consistent audience (between 850.000 and 880.000) throughout all the three periods monitored (Audipress, 2019).

Televised and radio broadcasters devote a considerable amount of time to the sports subject, be it through specialized channels, sports columns or transversal visibility in other type of news and programs, with a particular attention to football, as evidenced for example by a 2019 monitoring study conducted on a sample of 516 RAI TV programs, which found that, among 106 cases addressing the sports subject, the percentage (51,9%) of football-related topics equalled the time (48,1%) devoted to all the other disciplines combined (Osservatorio di Pavia, 2019a). Four main broadcasting companies provide the majority of TV sports contents: public service RAI broadcasts sporting events, daily sports news and sports shows on its three generalist channels (RAI 1, RAI 2, RAI 3) and manages a sports thematic channel (Rai Sport), counting on the work of the Rai Sport journalistic staff; the Sport Mediaset newsroom within the privately owned Mediaset Group is in charge of a daily newscast dedicated to sports on the Italia 1 channel, but also of sports matches broadcasting, commentaries and night shows on some of the network's main (Canale 5, Italia 1) and thematic (20 Mediaset) channels; finally, both the Italian branch of Sky Group (now owned by the American corporate Comcast) with its wide array of Sky Sport channels and the Eurosport network (owned by another American group, Discovery Inc.) broadcast a great amount of sports events and competitions available on pay TV. In addition to these four major players, other free-to-air thematic channels deal with sport at the national level, such as Sportitalia (controlled by Italian Sport Communication S.r.l.) and Supertennis (completely devoted to tennis and managed by the Italian Tennis Federation), as well as at the regional and local level, where football-

related news and talk shows dominate the scene. Furthermore, in 2018 the online streaming service DAZN, which is delivered by the British sports media company DAZN Group, was officially launched in Italy, providing an increasing number of live sports events accessible from all platforms.

In terms of online sports news, each of the aforementioned companies has a comprehensive website offering multimedia contents, news and insights on the sports world. According to Audiweb data, once again Gazzetta dello Sport proves to be a leading sports brand, as throughout 2019 its website (gazzetta.it)'s unique users per day consistently amounted to about 2 million, peaking at 3 million on the first day of the football season. Sky Sport also counted on a solid digital audience attesting itself around 1 million unique users, whereas TGCOM 24 news service (which includes Sportmediaset.mediaset.it) registered over two million unique users per day. As for Corriere dello Sport and Tuttosport websites, their online audience stands at lower levels, between 300.000 and 400.000 daily users.⁹ Rai Sport website, along with the overall Rai digital news offer, lags behind, still paying the price for a late investment in online information (Verdelli, 2016).

It is also worth noticing that among the top brands ranked in Audiweb data there is a considerable amount of online-only sports news providers, 55% of which deal with football subjects (AGCOM, 2018), such as tuttomercatoweb.com, calciomercato.it and specific sports clubs-related news websites (e.g. FCInternews.it, [IlBiancoNero](http://IlBiancoNero.com), etc.).

3.4.2 Gender in/equality in and through sports media

In Italy, as it is the case in many other Countries, media have actively contributed to perpetuate, rather than challenge, gender inequalities in the sport dimension, by conveying through their practices and contents the assumption that sport is a male preserve.

On the one hand, the number of women dealing with sports subjects in the media is disproportionately low: according to the II Report on the journalism world (AGCOM, 2017b) only 20 % of Italian female journalists cover sports, compared to 46% of men, and if we consider only the print media sector, 2019 Newslab data show that, whereas the

⁹ These data come from Primaonline reports on Audiweb monthly surveys (see References)

maximum of women working in newsrooms amounts to 33% (“Il Messaggero”), the two leading sports dailies in Italy, “Gazzetta dello Sport” and “Corriere dello Sport-Stadio”, comprise 7% and 2% of female writers, respectively (GAMAG, 2020).

As for women’s representation in sports news and programs, the latest monitoring activity conducted by Osservatorio di Pavia on the three main channels of the public broadcaster RAI confirms the tendency to marginalize women in sports contents: according to a research based on a sample of 1100 programs broadcasted throughout 2019 (including 56 sports columns) female visibility in sports news amounted to 16,9%, only 2% of women appeared as representatives of the sporting world (compared to 6,1% of men) and none of the sports columns analysed was centred on a woman or a group of women, although 8 sports stories addressed gender issues (Osservatorio di Pavia, 2019b); an additional monitoring analysis on a smaller sample of RAI broadcasts from the last quarter of 2019, then, showed that women made up only 14,4% of the people speaking on the sports subject (50 out of 347) and 15,3% of the sportspersons (athletes, coaches, referees) appearing as guests or interviewees, out of a total of 295 (Osservatorio di Pavia, 2019a).

Moreover, a research project on the Italian coverage of the 2016 Olympic Games not only showed that men’s competitions are given way more time (34,7%) and space (52,5%) than women’s (17,9% and 24,7%), but also that even when there’s an overall good amount of female visibility (41,8% in television news and 39,2 % in sports newspapers), one third of the reported stories presents gender stereotyped portrayal of sportswomen, especially insisting on their female status and on their sex appeal rather than on their sporting performances. Interestingly, this analysis highlighted how gender stereotypes also affect (although to a somewhat lesser extent) the portrayal of sportsmen, putting the focus on non-sport related details such as their appearance and their personal relationships and reinforcing through them traditional assumptions about masculinity (Azzalini, 2017).

3.4.3 National policy on sport, media & gender

At the policy level, the national code of self-regulation with respect to sports news, “Codice Media e Sport” (Ministero delle Comunicazioni, 2008), which was signed by the leading national broadcasters, as well as by Ordine dei Giornalisti and journalists’ trade unions such as Italian National Press Federation (FNSI), Italian Federation of Newspaper

and Periodical Publishers (FIEG) and Italian Sports Press Association (USSI), does not provide any references to gender equality issues nor recommendations to implement gender-sensitive measures in the sports commentary, while still retaining only the masculine form of the words *athletes, supporters, referees, journalists* (“atleti [...] tifosi avversari, arbitri, giornalisti”). Furthermore, in 2009 the Order of Journalists’ National Council (CNOG) approved the “Decalogue of the sports journalist” (Decalogo del giornalismo sportivo), which establishes the specific deontological code for journalists working in the sports sector; among these rules are the *respect of human dignity* and the *principle of non-discrimination* “on the basis of race, nationality, religion, sex, political beliefs, club affiliation and sports discipline” [my translation] (CNOG, 2009), but there is not any specific reference to gender equality nor any provision addressing the disparity existing between media representation of women and men in sports, not to mention that once again the term “giornalista sportivo” (*ibidem*) never appears in its feminine form.

3.4.4 Sport, media & gender in civil society initiatives

On the other hand, the advocacy activity of civil society and women’s professional associations has produced two relevant documents linking sport, gender and media in order to promote change.

The aforementioned “European Charter of Women's Rights in Sports”, elaborated and presented at the European Parliament in 2011 by UISP and the partners of the Olympia Project, acknowledges the media dimension as an important area of intervention for gender mainstreaming in the sports sector. In the “Women, sport and the media” section, the problem is framed in terms of *low visibility of sportswomen and women’s sports* in mass media contents (digital media are not mentioned in the text, if not as a potential resource for better practices), which prevents them from gaining sponsors’ interest and funding; *unequal patterns of portrayal* which belittle women’s sporting performance focusing on their appearance and conveying a male-dominated vision of sports; *underrepresentation of women in sports newsrooms* and in policy making within sports media organisations. The principles set as norms, then, are *equal opportunities* of female and male athletes to be represented in and through mass media and *respect of human dignity* in their portrayal, with a specific focus on women as the subjects mainly suffering from these principles’ violation. However, the document does not include specific

recommendations to media organisations and media professionals; instead, it calls upon sports organisations and federations to promote gender-sensitive training workshops with journalists, devote more space to women's sports in their own publications, make available online material and reports on sportswomen's activities, as well as encourage female athletes to demand more and better coverage from media and to build connections with audiences by sharing their stories with them. Moreover, it includes also recommendations for the European Union, which should promote the establishment of an annual European event totally dedicated to women in sports (and their coverage) and the "publication of a magazine on women's sports at all levels" (UISP, 2011, p.7).

In 2019 another important initiative was born from the collaboration between UISP and the female journalists' association GiULiA giornaliste, the "Media Donne Sport: idee guida per una diversa informazione" manifest, which states media responsibility in the fight against gender-based discrimination in the sport dimension and provides specific guidelines in this direction. *Inter alia*, Ordine dei giornalisti, FNSI, USIGRai and their equality commissions, as well as the Italian Sports Press Association (which does not include any equality commission) and Assist association, adhered to it. Recalling the European Parliament Resolution on women in sport (1987), the manifest focuses on sportswomen's representation and portrayal through media, which has traditionally been affected by *gender biases and stereotypes* that need to be eradicated, thus calling upon journalists to follow specific rules of good conduct: give equal visibility to and provide equally competent reports on women's and men's sports disciplines; focus on sports related aspects without giving more prominence to athletes' appearance and personal relationships than to their commitment, skills and performances; avoid to include images that objectify or sexualize women's body; use an inclusive language when referring to sports roles and functions; address gender issues in the sports world. One of the guidelines also stresses the importance that publishers commit to increase the number of sports journalists and commentators in their newsrooms (Cinquelpalmi, 2019).

Along with these two reference documents, in recent years some interesting projects have been developed in order to raise awareness on media representation of women in sports: the Italian Women Athletes' Association (Assist) launched several social media campaigns to expose gender stereotyped narratives about women engaged in the sports field; Osservatorio di Pavia launched the research and advocacy project "Rio 2016.

Donne sul podio” in partnership with UISP and Assist, which consisted in monitoring the Italian media coverage of the 2016 Olympic Games from a gender perspective and sharing the analysis results in order to sensitize public opinion on the gendered patterns that media consistently reproduce in sports reporting; in 2019, on the wake of the “Media Donne Sport” manifest, GiULiA giornaliste published a manual of the same name (“Donne Sport e Media. Idee guida per una diversa informazione”) to present and analyse the main problems in the Italian media coverage of women in sports and to provide gender-sensitive guidance on what should be an appropriate use of media languages (words and images) in stories about women’s sports.

3.5 Gender equality in sports media houses

Looking specifically at the main Italian-based¹⁰ media houses which provide both offline and online sports news content, we can identify the public service broadcaster RAI, the private broadcasting company Mediaset, RCS MediaGroup, which is the publisher of Gazzetta dello Sport, and Gruppo Amodei, the editorial group which publishes Corriere dello Sport-Stadio and Tuttosport. In order to investigate on their gender-related policies and initiatives, I decided to focus on the first three of them as Gruppo Amodei does not provide any type of information on the principles and policies its media outlets should abide by nor any company report on its internal composition and practices.

3.5.1 Rai – Italian Radio Television

3.5.1.1 Gender equality policy

As a public service broadcasting company, Rai needs to comply with the provisions set by the national Service Contract concluded with the Ministry of Economy. The latest five-year agreement (see par. 3.1.3) extensively refers to gender equality and associated principles - such as *pluralism, social cohesion, diversity, equal opportunities and non-discrimination* - in its articles, stressing the importance of providing *equal and non-stereotyped images of women* on all platforms (Article 9) and calling for the implementation of a *regular gender-monitoring* activity on Rai programs as a “specific obligation” (Article 25) the company must fulfil. In the context of my research it is also

¹⁰ Sky and Eurosport are not taken into consideration here since they do not abide by Italian companies’ policies

important to highlight paragraph 2.d of Article 3, which states that Rai sports news and programs should promote also less popular sporting events, women's sports included, and disseminate sports values as well as social aspects related to sport (Ministero dello Sviluppo Economico, 2018).

Rai commitments to implement the 2018-2022 Service Contract, then, resulted in several monitoring efforts which in various degrees account for the company's gender-related performance. The main one consists in the annual gender-monitoring analysis of the three generalist Rai channels' content, conducted in collaboration with CARES-Osservatorio di Pavia in order to assess the status of the representation of the female image in a sample of 1100 programs ("Monitoraggio sulla rappresentazione della figura femminile nella programmazione RAI"). Gender-specific data emerge also from another study commissioned to Osservatorio di Pavia which investigates on the pluralism offered by Rai programming over a three-month period ("Monitoraggio del pluralismo di temi, soggetti e narrazione in un campione di programmazione Rai"), as well as from the qualitative analysis conducted in co-operation with BVA-Doxa Institute which registers audience perceptions about the way Rai and media in general represent women in their programs. Finally, specific questions on Rai performance in terms of women's respectful portrayal are included in two surveys carried out in collaboration with GfK to detect audience opinions on Rai programs (Qualitel survey) and how citizens judge Rai's ability to fulfil its public service mission (Corporate Reputation survey). All these analyses' results are then publicly reported and summarized in the annual social report which accounts for the company's efforts to contribute to the sustainable development goals set by the 2030 Agenda (RAI, 2020a). It is worth mentioning that for what concerns the representation of social reality provided by Rai contents, the results of the 2019 monitoring activities were re-elaborated to generate an Adherence index (from a minimum of 0 to a maximum of 1) which gives an account of how televised representation reflects society's actual composition in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, religion, disability and sexual orientation. Whereas the total average value is 0.92, the gender dimension registers the lowest value out of the categories analysed (0,85), interestingly presenting the maximum gap between representation and reality (0.65) in sports programs (*Ibidem*).

Apart from the Service Contract, another important reference document is the Charter on public service journalists' rights and duties ("Carta dei diritti e dei doveri del giornalista

radiotelevisivo del servizio pubblico”), enclosed in the supplementary agreement between Rai and USIGRai trade union. The Charter was drafted in 1990 but later modifications led to the inclusion of some important provisions with respect to gender equality. In its first version, an “equal opportunities” section already called for positive actions to promote the *employment of female journalists* in Rai, providing for the establishment of a 6-member joint working group appointed to monitor quantitative and qualitative data on women’s presence in Rai editorial staffs and to implement measures aimed at identifying and removing obstacles to *equal opportunities between female and male journalists*, with the subsequent introduction of additional provisions urging to offer *guarantees to working mothers* after maternity leave (De Cesare, n.d.). In 2018 Rai and USIGRai agreed to include also a specific chapter “On the respect of human dignity, non-discrimination, gender equality and protection of minors” [my translation] (RAI, Unione Industriali Roma, USIGRai & FNSI, 2018, p. 7), in which Rai not only commits to fight *hate speech* (including *distorted images* and *stereotypes*) as well as any type of *discrimination*, harking back to AGCOM guidelines n. 424/16/CONS, but also pledges to promote a *non-stereotyped representation of women’s role* in society and to abide by the Venice Manifesto, paying attention to using *respectful language* in gender-based violence reporting.

These gender equality commitments are confirmed by the current Rai Group’s Code of Ethics (RAI, 2020b): establishing the respect of “women’s human, cultural and professional dignity” (p.3) as a guiding principle, Rai sets out *equal opportunities* and *realistic representation of women’s diverse roles in society* among its priority objectives. On one side, the code of conduct addresses recruitment processes and employee management, ensuring that all the procedures - from recruitment to training to retribution to career advancement – are based on objective and non-discriminatory criteria in order to guarantee internal pluralism and providing that Rai takes measures to create a respectful working environment, free from any form of discrimination or harassment; on the other side, it focuses on quality of content, calling for programs which respect human dignity, avoid vulgarity as well as violence, and offer “a modern representation of women’s role in society” [my translation] (p.22).

Furthermore, in 2019 Rai gave its contribution to the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) publication “All things being equal”, participating in the compilation of

international guidelines to implement gender equality in media organisations and committing to abide by them (Vaccarone, 2019).

3.5.1.2 State of women in the workplace

In terms of the actual status of gender equality within the company, in the late '80s Rai established an Equal Opportunities Committee (comprising twelve members, half appointed by Rai and half by trade unions) which still constitutes an important driving force for gender-sensitive initiatives, such as the first attempts in 2019 to introduce smart working as a work-life balance measure (RAI, 2020a). According to the latest published Social Report (“Bilancio Sociale Gruppo Rai 2019”), sex-disaggregated data show that women make up 43,3% of the total workforce, reaching a good presence among journalists (45,5%) and administrative and operational staff (47,4%), but still being under-represented in executive (35,7%) and managerial (25,5%) positions, starting from the Board of Directors, where out of 7 members only 2 are women. However, it is noteworthy that looking only at post-2000 employments, the total female percentage amounts to 48%, registering higher numbers, as well as an overall lower pay gap, in all categories except for the managerial one. As for the type of contracts, 95,4% of Rai employees have a full-time contract and 89,1% of part-time employees are women (*Ibidem*).

3.5.1.3 Sports department

The Rai sport editorial staff, which comprises more than 110 journalists spread all over Italy, has always counted on a male chief director (currently Auro Bulbarelli), assisted since 2019 by six deputy directors, five men and a woman, Alessandra De Stefano, who has been given the responsibility for “various sports”. As for the current composition of the team working on the raisport.rai.it website, it is not known, since the most recent available data date back to 2016 and only state that at the time the website’s staff comprised two journalists and three back-up assistants (Verdelli, 2016).

3.5.2 Mediaset Group S.p.A.

Mediaset Group is the leading commercial broadcasting company in Italy, owned by the Berlusconi family holding Fininvest, as well as the main competitor to Rai in terms of free-to-air national broadcasting.

3.5.2.1 Gender equality policy

As expected, in comparison to public service, Mediaset commitments with respect to gender equality are less comprehensive. In particular, we can notice that the Group's policy documents prominently intend gender equality as a principle to implement within the organisation, almost completely overshadowing the issues concerning women's representation and portrayal in media contents.

Its Code of Ethics (Mediaset Group, 2019a) sets out *inter alia* human dignity, respect for diversity and *non-discrimination on the basis of sex* as the company's guiding principles, reaffirming them in articles 7 and 8, which address the management of human resources and their safeguard in the working place. Art. 8 specifically states that the Group rejects and opposes any act of abuse and/or discriminatory behaviour, prohibiting any form of sexual violence or harassment, and calls for "the promotion of equal opportunities in relation to working conditions and employment opportunities, training, development and professional growth" (pp.12-13). These commitments are reflected in the company's 2019 Sustainability Report (Mediaset Group, 2019b), which underlines the efforts made at all levels in order to help achieve the 2030 Agenda Sustainable Development Goals; interestingly the document once again associates Gender Equality (goal n.5) only to two areas, "Corporate Governance and Compliance" and "Responsibility toward employees", excluding it from the "Product Responsibility" section, which refers to the quality of content offered.

3.5.2.2 State of women in the workplace

The sex-disaggregated data provided by the Sustainability Report show that out of 4984 total employees (3407 if we count only those working in Italy) women make up the 48%; they are equally represented in journalistic and executive positions, whereas the number of female managers still amounts to less than half the number of their male counterparts (104 women compared to 243 men). As for the Board of Directors, it is composed of 15 members, 10 of which are men. In terms of contracts, the Group reports that 85% of the 321 part-time employees are women, mainly in consequence of working mothers' needs; for the same reason, in 2019 trial forms of smart working have been initiated (*Ibidem*).

3.5.2.3 Sports department

The Sport Mediaset newsroom, which is in charge of providing sport-related content for both television and the dedicated online platform sportmediaset.mediaset.it, includes 16 journalists and is currently directed by Alberto Brandi, one of the co-directors of the News Mediaset agency (along with Anna Broggiato, Anna Ragusa, Paolo Liguori and chief director Andrea Pucci).

3.5.3 RCS MediaGroup S.p.A.

RCS MediaGroup is an Italian based multimedia group which operates in all the publishing sectors in Italy as well as in Spain, leading in particular their national daily press. In fact, some of the most read newspapers in Italy are published by RCS, namely *Corriere della Sera* and the sports daily *Gazzetta dello Sport*, and the same can be said for the Spanish sports daily *Marca*.

3.5.3.1 Gender equality policy

The company lays down its policies in two main documents, the Sustainability Policy and the Code of Ethics. The Sustainability Policy (Gruppo RCS MediaGroup S.P.A., n.d.) does not include any specific provision on gender equality, invoking general principles of *non-discrimination* and *respect for diversity* in the management of human resources and calling upon journalists to produce content which complies with *human rights*. However, since its mission includes positively impacting people's lives by committing to social responsibility, the text also stresses the importance of bringing attention to issues relevant to women. The Code of Ethics (Gruppo RCS MediaGroup S.P.A, 2014) further elaborates on these commitments: it explicitly mentions *gender-based discrimination* among the discriminatory behaviours the Group cannot accept and actively combats within its organisation, and although the provisions aimed at journalists still generally refer to the respect of human rights in content production, the text encourages the promotion of projects and initiatives aimed at giving visibility to and raising public awareness on, *inter alia*, *gender equality* and *women-related issues*.

In the 2019 Non-Financial Statement (“Dichiarazione consolidata di carattere non finanziario al 31 dicembre 2019. Redatta ai sensi del D.Lgs. n. 254/2016”) the company states that the principle of *equal opportunities between women and men* informs

employees' recruitment, remuneration and career advancement, as *gender diversity* is considered highly beneficial for cultural and professional enrichment. However, no specific measures have been implemented to reach these goals.

3.5.3.2 State of women in the workplace

Looking at sex-disaggregated data gender disparity is still evident in some employment categories: women make up 44,1% of all RCS employees (41.9% if we consider only those working in Italy), but there's still a disproportionate presence of men in the journalistic staff (739 men compared to 475 women), among editors-in-chief (28-12) and in managerial positions (61-20). As for the Board of Directors, RCS abides by national legal provisions on the composition of listed companies' management boards: it currently comprises 4 women out of 12 members (1/3 quota for the less represented gender), with a commitment to increase this quota to at least 2/5, consistently with the latest 2020 Budget Law provisions.

It is also worth noticing that RCS MediaGroup is a member of Valore D, an Italian association which promotes diversity and female leadership in business.

3.5.3.3 Sports department

Focusing on the Group's activities in relation to sport, in 2009 "Fondazione Candido Cannavò per lo sport" was founded in order to promote social values in and through sports, including gender equality: through the years it has made several efforts to fight against prejudice and gender discrimination and to promote women's contribution in the sports field, such as the 2011 exhibition "Donnaèsport - La storia del movimento femminile sportivo italiano dalle origini a oggi", which displayed the history of women's sports in Italy, celebrated Italian female athletes and gave visibility to all the sports disciplines practiced by them. Furthermore, in 2019 the "Sportweek" magazine by Gazzetta dello Sport completely devoted to women's sports a special April issue in order to offer in-depth interviews to female representatives of a wide range of sports, including football, volleyball, boxing, swimming, basketball, motocross, skiing, tennis, mountain-climbing and road running.

However, the gender composition of Gazzetta dello Sport work team shows that the sports subject is still a widely male preserve. The sports daily newspaper counts on an editorial

staff of over 100 journalists historically directed by men (Stefano Barigelli is the current chief director, assisted by three male deputy directors) and according to 2019 Newslab data the percentage of female writers amounts to 7% (GAMAG, 2020). Similarly, the staff responsible for its official website, gazzetta.it, which is the leader in the Italian sports online information sector, is composed of a chief director, Andrea Di Caro, two male editors-in-chief, four male senior editors and a 12-member newsroom which includes only two women.

3.6 Online sports news analysis: Raisport.rai.it, Sportmediaset.mediaset.it, Gazzetta.it

After looking into these sports media organisations' policies, structures and internal practices from a gender perspective, it is interesting to examine whether the content offered by their outlets perpetuate gender unequal patterns and how commitments made at policy level inform their actual performance. In order to do so, I focused on their sports news websites, monitoring their homepages for a week, from the 31st of August to the 6th of September, and applying an adapted template of the long-standing Global Media Monitoring Project to the top 15 news items daily published on each homepage.

3.6.1 Websites overview

Before delving into the monitoring analysis, the three websites' structures give us a preview of how the sport dimension is framed in each of them, inevitably shaping also what most of their daily top news will look like in terms of topic and format.

The Rai Sport homepage (raisport.rai.it) is divided in four main areas, respectively devoted to top stories (which often refer to football), football-specific news, motors and, finally, the heterogeneous category of other sports. For the most part, it presents the same content broadcasted in Rai tv sports news, adapted to the website format, and short news stories with little commentaries.

Likewise, SportMediaset's website (sportmediaset.mediaset.it) mainly focuses on football and motors, which are given their own dedicated sections in the homepage, whereas the other disciplines are all grouped under the label "Other sports". The upper half of the website is devoted to the most relevant news of the day in the sports world, but it is generally dominated by football-related content. Moreover, specific sections

comprise news about Coronavirus and sport, as well as the so-called “Cover girl” photo galleries, which include photographs of semi-nude women, mainly sportsmen’s girlfriends and wives, accompanied by tabloid-like headlines.

As for Gazzetta dello Sport’s online offer, *gazzetta.it* comprises a wide range of news and multimedia content: as per usual in Italian sports media, football takes up a good amount of space and has an ever-present dedicated section in the homepage, whereas motors, basketball, cycling and tennis periodically appear depending on circumstances; the other disciplines are instead included under the umbrella section “Other sports”. It is worth mentioning that part of the news items is labelled as premium content, accessible only to those taking out a monthly subscription. Among other features, the website also comprises an area specifically concerned with Coronavirus-related news and a video portal where updates and gossips on the personal lives of sportsmen’s wives and girlfriends (“Star wags”) regularly appear.

3.6.2 Sample

The sample I conducted my analysis on consisted in a total of 315 news items, 105 per website, collected among the top 15 news stories daily appearing in their homepages between 9 a.m. and 10 a.m. during the week that went from Monday, 31st August to Sunday, 6th September.

The news items included written articles of variable length, ranging from the short and basic Rai Sport news reports to the comprehensive accounts provided by *gazzetta.it*; news video published on the website after being broadcasted on television sports news (TG RaiSport); stories consisting in videos or photo slideshows introduced by a headline and accompanied by a brief written description. For what concerns Gazzetta dello Sport, some of the news items coded were labelled as premium content, available only through subscription.

I selected them starting from the top of the page and excluded only Coronavirus-related news without any connection to the sports dimension, live news sections (updated minute by minute over the span of multiple days) and news items which were still in evidence in the top positions but had already been monitored on the previous days. Thematic boxes

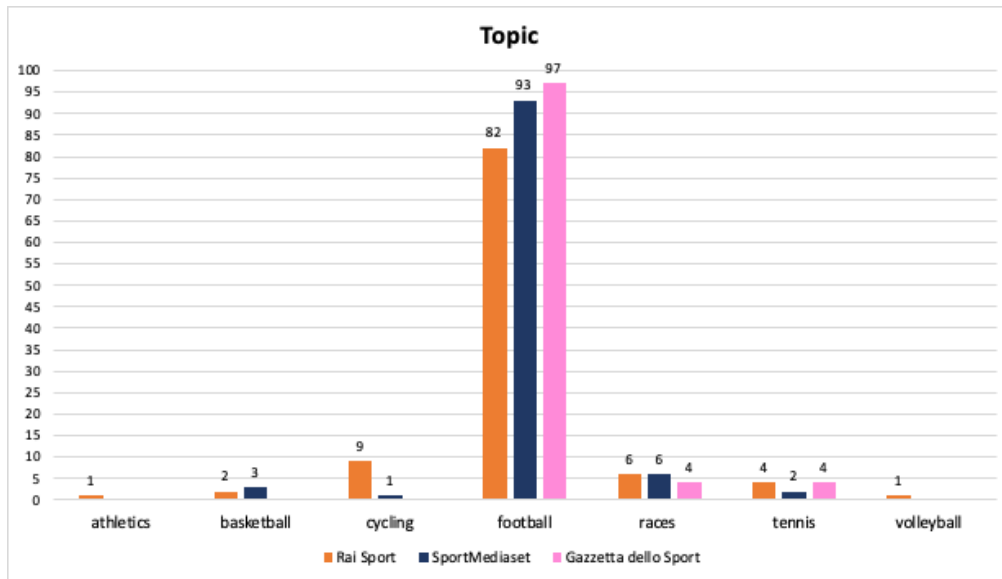
comprising only photo galleries, video galleries and tips for healthy living were not coded.

In order to better contextualize the findings, it is important to note that the monitoring period happened to fall on the decisive week for Messi's permanence in the Barcelona football team, which represented a huge topic for discussion among the Italian football fans. As for football events, women's Serie A matches were already taking place, whereas the Italian male football League was not in-season yet; nonetheless, it is worth noticing that the transfer window for men's teams was open and that matches were played by national male football teams in the UEFA Nations League qualifiers. Moreover, the women's UEFA Champions League final had taken place the night before August 31st. The monitoring period also coincided with the first week of both the US Open Grand Slam Tournament and the men's cycling Tour de France, as well as with the aftermath and the qualifying sessions of Formula 1 Belgian and Italian GPs, respectively. Another sporting event of international resonance was the NBA Playoffs tournament, which involved American men's basketball teams. Finally, men's basketball and women's volleyball matches were played at the national level in the context of their Super Cup tournaments and both national and international athletics meetings were taking place on weekends.

3.6.3 Findings

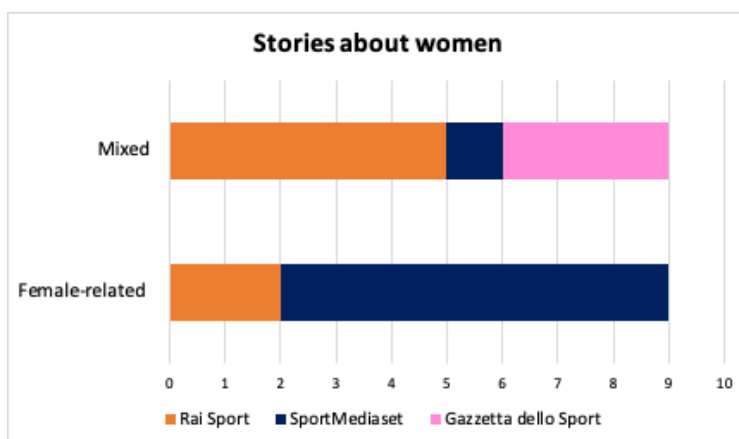
As expected, football was the predominant topic on Italian sports news websites, with 272 dedicated stories out of 315, despite men's club competitions being off-season. As a matter of fact, most items were related to transfer news, as well as to the male national team's engagement in Nations League qualifiers, covered especially on the Rai Sport website since the broadcaster had exclusive broadcasting rights of these matches. Interestingly, women's Serie A fixtures taking place on both the days immediately prior to the first monitoring date and the monitored weekend were completely disregarded.

Fig. 3.1.



This all-male football predominance resulted in an extremely limited number of stories about women, 9 out of 315, plus 9 mixed stories: Gazzetta dello Sport did not devote any article nor video to any particular woman or group of women, providing only 3 mixed stories; SportMediaset presented 7 women-related items, but they were all about sportsmen’s girlfriends, wives or fans; the only stories on female athletes’ accomplishments were published by Rai Sport website and consisted in two short news about women’s UEFA Champions League final and women’s volleyball Super Cup. The other mixed stories were mostly tennis-related, except for two cases where organisational issues concerning both male and female football and cycling competitions were discussed. Out of these 18 news items, only 5 were in top positions, one female-focused article and four mixed stories.

Fig. 3.2.

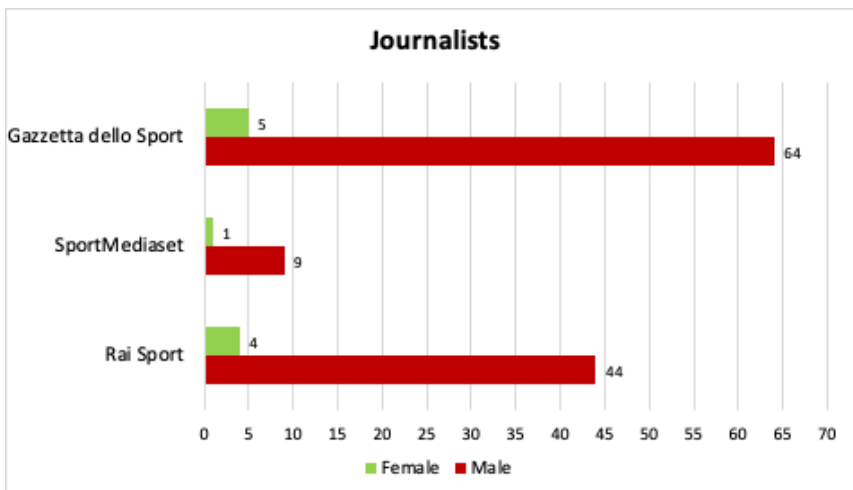


However, none of them highlighted issues of inequality and only one article from Gazzetta dello Sport website clearly challenged gendered assumptions about female athletes by providing a positive example of non-stereotyped portrayal (see 3.6.4.).

The coronavirus emergency predictably had some impact on the type of content provided, as 82 news items out of 315 were at least in part related to its consequences on the sporting world, to athletes' impressions, to new procedures and conditions of play, as well as to updates on any newly infected sportsperson, rather than on actual athletic performances; more specifically, Rai Sport presented twice as many stories about covid-19 implications (40) as SportMediaset (22) and Gazzetta dello Sport (20) did.

In terms of who produced the news, 92% of the authors with identifiable gender (117 out of 127) were men, while women made up only 8% of journalists, dealing with football (8), races (1) and athletics (1). It is worth noticing, however, that in three out of five occasions Gazzetta dello Sport's news items with a female author were videos reporting social media reactions to football transfer news or curiosities on male players' careers and personal lives.

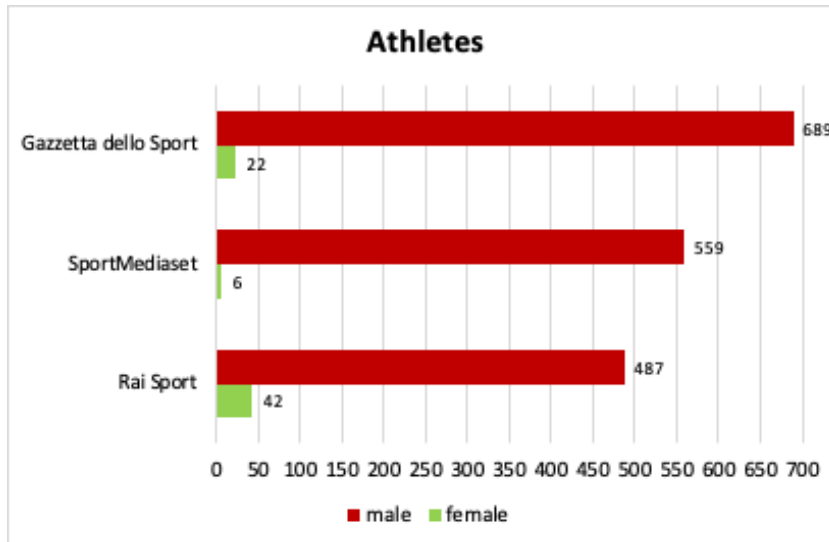
Fig. 3.3



Shifting focus to the people making the news, the total of individuals appearing in the monitored sample of stories amounted to 2488, 96% of which were men, with barely 102 female representatives. If we narrow the results down to show exclusively athletes, 70 out of 1805 were women, tennis players for the most part (88); RaiSport showcased the

highest percentage of sportswomen (8%), compared to SportMediaset (1%) and Gazzetta dello Sport (3%).

Fig. 3.4.

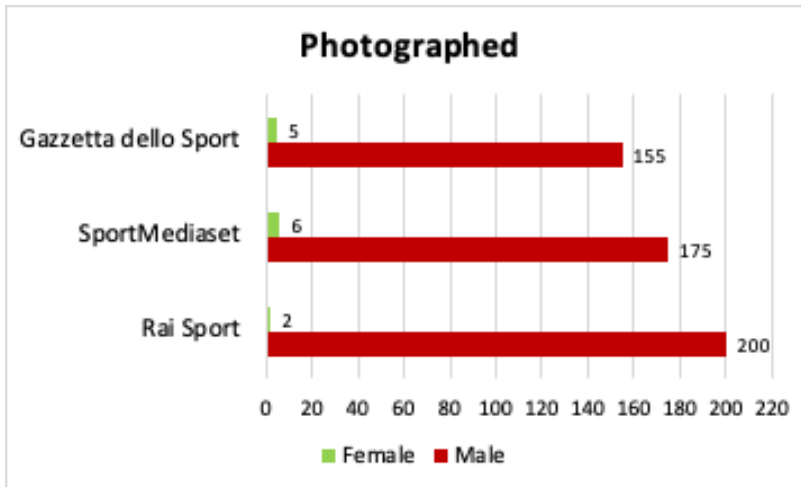


In general, few women appeared in other sport-related occupations: female coaches (0), former athletes (1 female versus 72 males), managers (1), sport presidents (2), were predictably underrepresented considering the strong focus on male football.

Looking at their function in the story, the entirety of women mentioned could be regarded as subjects, since none of them served as expert, spokesperson or bearer of personal experience in the sporting field: spokespersons (19) and experts (12) accounted for were all males.

Out of 201 people directly quoted only three were women: a female politician speaking about Milan's president Silvio Berlusconi and two footballers' wives. The same gendered disproportion could also be registered in photographs and videos, as 13 women were pictured or appeared on video as opposed to 530 men; SportMediaset pictured the largest number of women (6), but they all consisted in highly sexualized images of male athletes' wives and girlfriends.

Fig. 3.5

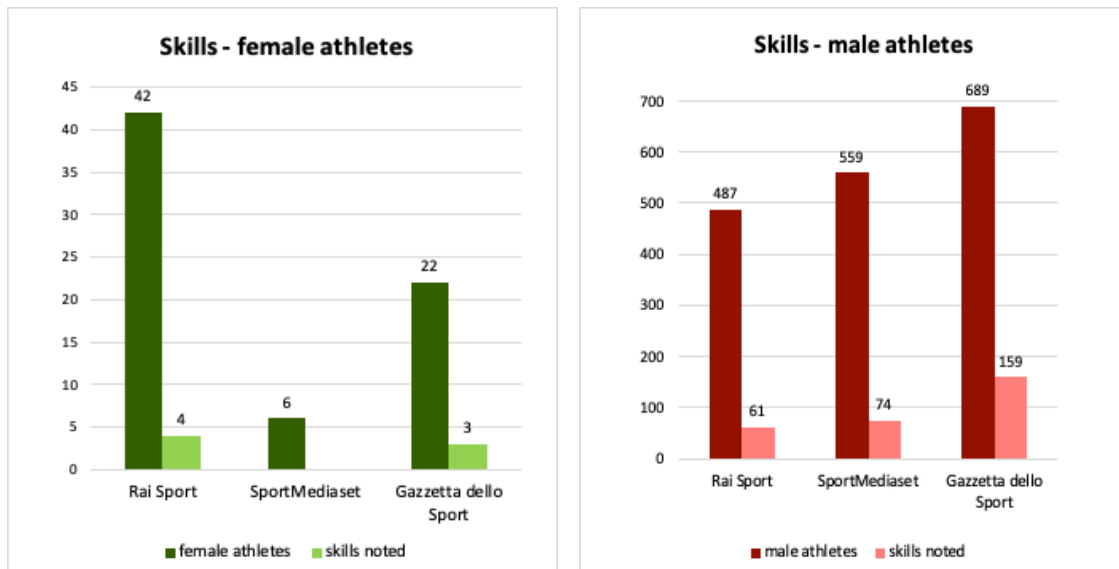


Comparing how many times women and men's family role was mentioned, 21.6% of females (22 out of 102) were described in terms of their family relationships, whereas taking into account men the percentage significantly dropped to 2%, despite several articles mentioning Messi's agent and father. While on Rai Sport reference to personal relationships was minimal with regard to both women and men (2.1 % and 2.3%), SportMediaset and Gazzetta dello Sport displayed an evident imbalance as the female percentage rose to 50% and 31.6%, respectively, compared to men's 2%.

As for the categories I specifically added in light of the patterns found in previous literature (*Appearance description given, Skills noted and Emotionality brought up*), the results were impacted by the limited number of women as subjects. However, some considerations can be drawn from the available data: 10 male athletes out of 1735 were described in terms of their physical aspect (2 on Rai Sport, 2 on SportMediaset, 6 on Gazzetta), with reference to their height and muscles, whereas no stress was put upon the few mentioned female athletes' appearance, but both SportMediaset and Gazzetta dello Sport focused on girlfriends and wives' body image, highlighting in 3 and 2 occasions, respectively, their beauty, their figure and their cosmetic corrections. Except for Rai Sport, then, which never mentioned any women's physical details, in percentage the focus on appearance was higher in females' descriptions (17% Mediaset, 5.3% Gazzetta) than in males' (0.3% Mediaset, 0.6% Gazzetta).

The low number of sportswomen and female-related stories led also to a disproportionate focus on male athletes' skills, 294 instances as opposed to 7 on the female side.

Fig. 3.6.



As for the emotional sphere, in 14 cases men were written/talked about with reference to their vulnerability, whether it be caused by a debut, by the Coronavirus situation, by nerves and frustration impacting their performance or by some personal issues. Only two instances of female emotions were registered, but they presented particularly dramatic narratives: on the one side, a SportMediaset news item described a female fan as “desperate” at the thought of Messi potentially leaving the Barcellona team; on the other, an article on Gazzetta dello Sport reported a sportswoman’s performance using expressions hardly found in male athletes’ descriptions, such as “wearing her heart on her sleeve” (“giocando con il cuore in mano”¹¹) and “sucked into a whirlpool of emotions” (“risucchiata in un vortice di emozioni”¹²), which seem to validate the trend in stressing pathetic and emotional details in narratives about female athletes.

Looking specifically at the pictures accompanying text articles on these three sports news websites, we can note that Rai Sport and Gazzetta provided respectful images of both women and men both in female and male-related articles, as well as in the context of

¹¹ Marianantoni, L. (2020, September 4th). *Auger-Aliassime ferma Murray col servizio. Thiem e Medvedev ok*. Gazzetta dello Sport. <https://www.gazzetta.it/Tennis/04-09-2020/tennis-us-open-auger-aliassime-ferma-murray-col-servizio-thiem-medvedev-ok-3801678101821.shtml>.

¹² *Ibidem*

mixed stories, where in some cases photographs represented only men (3), but in other instances (3) the opposite also happened. In SportMediaset case, however, the only photographed women (6) were wives, girlfriends and celebrity fans, portrayed 5 times out of 6 in highly sexualized manners with a persistent tendency to objectify their bodies.

In terms of titling, in total 5 out of 9 mixed stories were introduced by titles focusing exclusively on male sport, whereas their text bodies gave space also to reports and commentaries on female athletes and competitions. It happened on all three websites in articles about US Open, even though the two occasions in which Rai Sport included only men in their titles could be explained by the focus on the only Italian athletes still competing in the tournament, after all females had been eliminated. An interesting case, however, was a Rai Sport article on audience's return into stadiums in German football competitions: despite reporting a public statement which explicitly mentioned men's third division, the German Cup and women's Bundesliga, the title highlighted only male competitions, as it read "Germany: audience set for return in Cup and third division" ("Germania: torna il pubblico in Coppa e terza divisione"¹³).

Language did not display any relevant disparity in the presence of first names or nicknames, which are typical of Italian sports narratives especially when referred to well-known athletes, nor of infantilizing expressions, since young males and females are both usually called with diminutives or with the term "baby x". However, it is worth noticing that, in Rai Sport articles in particular, there was still a certain tendency to adopt gender marking with reference to female competitions and to use neutral masculine forms that subtly perpetuate the assumption that sport is a male preserve; moreover, in the news item devoted to women's volleyball Super Cup, the Imoco captain was mentioned using the masculine form "capitan Wolosz"¹⁴.

¹³ Rai Sport (2020a, August 31st). *Germania: torna il pubblico in Coppa e in terza divisione*. <https://www.raisport.rai.it/articoli/2020/08/calcio-coppa-germania-pubblico-a6287a61-531d-4d89-a19c-2eb029778d1c.html>.

¹⁴ Rai Sport (2020b, September 5th). *Supercoppa donne: Conegliano in finale*. <https://www.raisport.rai.it/articoli/2020/09/volley-supercoppa-donne-conegliano-in-finale-a73f6fe2-eea5-4531-88db-e3175f729fcc.html>.

3.6.4 Qualitative analysis

The GMMP monitoring also provides for a qualitative analysis of those news items which represent good or bad practices, taking a more critical look at the type of messages they convey. In particular, on the basis of the GEM classification system, it focuses on stories that offer in blatant or subtle ways a stereotyped view of women and men, that display a gender-blind perspective or that positively deviate from gender unequal patterns.

In this specific case, from a qualitative point of view, the sports news website providing more stories which are worth further analysing is Gazzetta dello Sport. In fact, except for the presence of neutral masculine forms, Rai Sport did not perpetuate in any other significant way gender stereotypes linked to the sporting dimension and at the same time did not clearly challenge them nor pointed out any issues of inequality that still impact on the recognition of female athletes' worth. As for SportMediaset, the hyper-sexualized image of women emerging from its few female-related stories and the almost total disregard for their involvement in sports evidently shows the persistence of a stereotyped notion of women as valuable subjects only for gossip purposes or for sexual objectification.

Gazzetta dello Sport, on the other side, offered some interesting stories which suit different categories of the GEM classification. In terms of blatant stereotypes, a video item¹⁵ comparing two footballers, Dzeko and Suarez, by presenting their respective skills and merits, as well as some curiosities on their careers and personal lives, included in the list and highlighted in the title the fact that they have beautiful wives, as if their female partners' appearance elevated these two men's worth and women were only male athletes' attributes. Even more interestingly, the news item's author was a woman, proving that the mere presence of female journalists is not a sufficient condition for improvement in the absence of a widespread gender-sensitive culture in the newsroom.

There was also a case of ambivalent narrative, which conveyed some subtle stereotypes interlaced with a positive description of a female athlete's performance. In fact, the report on Serena Williams's victory against Margarita Gasparyan in the US Open second round

¹⁵ Cardoni, A. (2020, September 1st). *Centinaia di gol, due mogli bellissime e... Suarez e Dzeko ai raggi X*. Gazzetta dello Sport. https://video.gazzetta.it/mercato-juve-suarez-dzeko-raggi-x/a7970fb8-ec3e-11ea-92f2-57fbc4a4288e?vclk=home_generico.

presented on the one side a detailed account of the different stages of the match, pointing out some of Williams's technical skills and the resilience she showed in order to win a hard fought match, but on the other side it dwelled on dramatic descriptions of her emotional state, which were not found in any other articles: expressions like “playing with her heart on her sleeve” (“giocando con il cuore in mano”), “sucked into a whirlpool of emotions” (“risucchiata in un vortice di emozioni”), “with her heart in her throat and goggle-eyed with fatigue” (“con il cuore in gola e gli occhi strabuzzanti di fatica”)¹⁶ gave more the impression of a novelistic narration than of a sports report, resulting in an almost caricatural effect that runs the risk of undermining Williams' abilities.

An example of gender-blind news was an insight on the Coronavirus emergency's repercussions on the football dimension, with particular attention to the pivotal role now played by television, which however only focused on men's football, totally disregarding the impact on women's competitions¹⁷. This represented a lost chance to reflect upon the issue from different points of view, especially as female football had been largely overlooked by the public discourse on post-lockdown restart.

As for good practices, a tennis article¹⁸ written by the same author of Serena Williams's match report and portraying another female tennis player, Coco Gauff, proved to challenge gender stereotypes by providing a dialectical juxtaposition of heterogeneous characteristics; in fact, while it stressed the athlete's young age by calling her “stellina” (diminutive of “star”) and “baby Gauff” (“piccola Gauff”), which, as stated above, are infantilizing expressions frequently found in the sample with reference to young athletes of any gender, it also highlighted her strength and determination, features typically linked to male narratives and much rarer in sportswomen's descriptions.

¹⁶ Marianantoni, L. (2020a, September 4th). *Auger-Aliassime ferma Murray col servizio. Thiem e Medvedev ok*. Gazzetta dello Sport. <https://www.gazzetta.it/Tennis/04-09-2020/tennis-us-open-auger-aliassime-ferma-murray-col-servizio-thiem-medvedev-ok-3801678101821.shtml>.

¹⁷ Teotino, G. (2020, September 2nd). *Il nuovo calcio post pandemia che esiste solo se trasmesso in tv*. Gazzetta dello Sport. <https://www.gazzetta.it/Calcio/Serie-A/01-09-2020/nuovo-calcio-post-pandemia-che-esiste-solo-se-trasmesso-tv-3801614414431.shtml>.

¹⁸ Marianantoni, L. (2020b, September 1st). *Djokovic allunga la serie e si arrabbia, Osaka avanza nel nome di Breonna Taylor*. Gazzetta dello Sport. <https://www.gazzetta.it/Tennis/01-09-2020/tennis-us-open-djokovic-allunga-serie-osaka-solidale-promossa-3801597289495.shtml>.

3.6.5 Summary of key results

The analysis of Italian sports news websites has given results which are consistent with trends noted in previous literature. The most evident issue that emerged from this monitoring was women's almost invisible status as both journalists and people in the story: the number of news items written by women never exceeded 10%, whereas female athletes were represented only from 8% to 1% of cases; women were quoted on average 1.5% of the times, appearing in 1-3% of pictures, often only as sportsmen's wives and girlfriends. Moreover, none of them were regarded as experts or commentators.

As expected, the amount of women-related stories were very limited (9 out of 315), only one of which was on top positions: they were completely absent on *Gazzetta dello Sport*, whereas *SportMediaset* included only stories centred on women who were not involved in the sports industry if not for personal relationships with male athletes. To these were added 9 mixed stories, mostly about tennis.

Hypothesis on references to appearance, emotionality and family roles were confirmed on *Gazzetta dello Sport* and *SportMediaset*, whereas public service showed a more gender sensitive approach with respect to these categories. In the case of the two private media houses, there was a gender-based disparity in terms of physical aspect's descriptions and explicated family roles, which registered higher percentages in relation to women than to men; a qualitative difference was noted, instead, on the way female and male emotions were described, as some overly dramatic narratives connoted only female subjects. As for skills, sportswomen's abilities were way less highlighted in consequence to female athletes' severe underrepresentation; however, each digital outlet presented gendered imbalance not only on a quantitative level, but also on a proportional level.

From a qualitative point of view, all three websites did not prove to attach any particular importance to issues of inequality, which were completely overlooked, whereas only on one occasion a story clearly challenged gender stereotypes. In contrast with expectations, however, there were more examples of stories perpetuating blatant assumptions than subtle stereotypes or ambivalent narratives, due to *SportMediaset* in particular, which displayed a tendency to objectify and sexualize women's body, while *Rai Sport* proved again to comply with more gender-sensitive standard by avoiding stereotyped images of women in accordance with the principles set in its Service Contract.

Chapter 4

The UK

With the term United Kingdom, we refer to the political union between four countries: England, Scotland and Wales, which are located in the Great Britain island, and Northern Ireland, which corresponds to the north-eastern part of Ireland. Lying between the North Atlantic Ocean and the North Sea, off the west coast of France, the UK is counted among the Western European Countries from both a geographical and economic-political point of view, as it has a largely capitalist economy and its political system is rooted in a liberal-democratic tradition.

As a constitutional monarchy and a parliamentary democracy, the sovereign is the head of state, while a bicameral parliament is responsible for making the laws and the Prime Minister, along with the Cabinet, exercises the executive power. The constitution, however, is not codified in written form: it consists in a combination of statutory law, common law and conventions which can thus be amended by simple Acts of Parliament.

Except from England, which exclusively depends on the national Government, the other three countries count on their own devolved governments, holding varying degrees of independent powers. Local administration is entrusted to local authorities, such as unitary councils, county councils, district or borough councils and parish or community councils.

The United Kingdom has historically built a wide network of foreign relations and coordination with other countries: it has been a long-standing ally of the United States since the two World Wars; it joined the NATO alliance for military defence; it is part of the Commonwealth, which comprises former colonies of the British Empire willing to maintain allegiance with the UK; it is an active member state of the United Nations and of the Council of Europe and has been for many years also a member of the European Union, until a referendum taking place in 2016 resulted in the Country's withdrawal. After four years of negotiations, Brexit was formally made official on January 1st, 2020, initiating a one-year transition period in which, despite not being represented in the EU

political institutions, the UK still follows the EU regulation and, in the meantime, further negotiates on what their post-exit relations will look like.

Over the last years, the extreme uncertainty surrounding Brexit gave rise to increasing concerns related to the repercussions on the Country's economic, political and social environment, including also the impact on gender equality, which however has not been given much attention neither in the political arena nor in media discourse (EIGE, n.d.-b).

4.1. Gender equality in the UK

According to EIGE Gender Equality Index (2019b), the United Kingdom scores 72.2 points, ranking fifth among the EU Member States and registering an overall better performance (+4.8 points) than the European Union average score. However, the improvement rate between 2005 and 2017 has been quite slow, with a total increase of just 1 point. The domain where disparity between women and men is more evident is Power, although female representation rose approximately to 30% both in ministries and in Parliament, as well as in the boards of publicly listed companies. As for the Work domain, women's employment rate has reached 74%, compared to men's 84%, and the gender gap in terms of participation has narrowed, but horizontal segregation is still an issue, since only 5% of women work in the STEM field (as opposed to 28% of men), whereas way more women (37%) than men (11%) are employed in health, education and social care, reflecting an uneven tendency which is evidenced also by their study choices in tertiary education, with 47% of girls (versus 25% of boys) choosing education, welfare and humanities as subject areas. Moreover, the share of women with part-time contracts (41%) is three times higher than that of men (13%), leading to pay differences and lower chances of career advancement. In terms of Money, the gap between men and women's earnings persists (24%), reaching 41% in couples with children, and their use of Time is affected by the disproportionate distribution of housework and care responsibilities, which largely rests on women.

Despite the good ranking maintained by the UK within the European context so far, international and national organisations advocating for gender equality expressed some concerns mostly related to the lack of a comprehensive UK strategy for gender equality, the uneven enforcement of women's rights in its four countries and its recent withdrawal from the European Union (Women's Resource Center, 2019). In fact, an issue gone

largely unnoticed in the political debate surrounding Brexit-related outcomes (EIGE, n.d.-b) is that the absence of the EU framework could negatively impact gender equality in the UK, as long as the Government does not provide specific guarantees that equalities rights are not going to be reduced (WEC, 2017; Women’s Resource Center, 2019).

4.1.1 Legal framework

In absence of a codified constitution setting out gender equality principles, the UK relies on a set of statutory provisions which represent the legal framework for equality between women and men, as part of a broader legislation that covers all types of discrimination. The reference document in this respect for England, Scotland and Wales is the 2010 Equality Act (Parliament of the United Kingdom, 2010), which makes unlawful discrimination on the basis of sex, as well as on the basis of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion/belief and sexual orientation (including the combination of two or more of these protected characteristics).

Section 149, in particular, establishes a Public Sector Equality Duty requiring public authorities to “eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimization”, “advance equality of opportunity” and “foster good relations between persons” (p. 116), by committing to remove any disadvantage people with protected characteristics might suffer, meet their specific needs, foster their participation where they are underrepresented, eradicate prejudices and encourage mutual understanding. For its part, Northern Ireland’s legal framework on this matter is Sex Discrimination Order 1976.

According to the Government’s claims, “the robust protections provided by the Equality Acts 2006 and 2010, and equivalent legislation in Northern Ireland, [will] continue to apply after the UK leaves the EU” (Government Equalities Office, 2019a, p. 5), but the Women and Equalities Committee (WEC, 2017) stressed the importance of making specific legislative commitments in this direction, which have yet to be provided (EIGE, n.d.-b).

4.1.2 Laws and policies

The UK’s efforts to adopt laws and policies aimed at reducing disparities between women and men and improving women’s status in society are guided by international agreements

on gender equality whose validity is not affected by the exit from the European Union (WEC, 2017). In fact, the Government committed to comply with the directives of landmark documents, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Beijing Platform for Action, as well as the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), which resulted in the latest UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security for the years 2018-2022.

As for the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention), the UK signed it, but has not yet ratified it; however, strategic plans to combat violence against women and girls have been developed at national level, as well as by the devolved administrations, with specific commitments to finally complete the ratification process. In particular, in 2019 the government updated its “Strategy to end violence against women and girls: 2016 to 2020” and adopted the “Domestic Abuse Bill” in order to address all forms of domestic abuse and provide support and protection to victims. Moreover, in recent years revenge pornography (2015) and up skirting (2019) were legally recognized as criminal offences (Government Equalities Office, 2019a).

Despite lacking an integrated gender equality strategy to implement the CEDAW recommendations (Women’s Resource Center, 2019), several policies and measures have been introduced, targeting specific gender-related issues.

For the most part, provisions on women’s conditions and opportunities in the work dimension tackle gender pay gap, work-life balance and safety in the workplace.

In 2017 a revision of the Equality Act made gender pay gap reporting mandatory for organisations with more than 250 employees in England, Scotland and Wales (Northern Ireland’s legislation still does not require it, but it remains the UK region with the lowest gender pay gap). The establishment of these national regulations, then, not only resulted in employers’ higher transparency, but also represented an effective way to reduce pay differences between women and men, which reached their lowest level in 2019 (17.9%). Furthermore, in order to keep closing the gap, the Government supported specific research programmes (e.g. the 2017 Gender and Behavioural Insights programme and the 2018 Workplace and Gender Equality Research Programme) aimed at providing guidance to employers on how to understand their organisations’ gender pay gap and improve

women's opportunities in the workplace. To this same end, the Government supports also the Women's Business Council, which works closely with business companies and CEOs to improve gender equality within their realities (Government Equalities Office, 2019a).

In terms of work-life balance, England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland all adopt family friendly policies, including childcare provisions, parental leave regulations (e.g. "Shared Parental Leave and Pay", which offers working parents the opportunity to share 50 weeks of leave and 37 weeks of pay during the year after their child's birth) and measures supporting adult carers, such as the "Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014", the "Carers Action Plan 2018 to 2020" and the ongoing process for a Reform of Adult Social Care in Northern Ireland (*Ibidem*).

Moreover, the Equality Act 2010 sets explicit provisions against sexual harassment in the workplace and prohibits pregnancy discrimination against women, whereas an Equality Advisory and Support Service has been established in order to offer advice to employees who feel unlawfully discriminated (*Ibidem*).

For what concerns women's representation in decision-making positions, the UK does not adopt any legislative quotas for gender composition of corporate executive boards nor establish national gender quotas to increase the number of women in politics. However, political parties can have voluntary quotas, for example by introducing All-Women Shortlists (AWS), as in the case of the Labour Party. In 2015, the Women's Equality Party was founded: its mission is achieving gender equality advocating for actions on all levels, including the end of violence against women, equal media treatment, equal education, equal parenting and caregiving, equal pay and opportunity, equal representation in the political system and equality in health¹⁹.

4.1.3 Established agencies and mechanisms

The Government Equalities Office (GEO), created in 2007, is the UK national gender equality machinery, tasked with developing gender-related policies and promoting women's empowerment in society. Recently it was moved to the Cabinet Office in order to better coordinate the national efforts toward gender equality and to adopt an

¹⁹ <https://www.womensequality.org.uk>

intersectional approach which takes into consideration all the different dimensions of inequality (*Ibidem*).

The GEO is the Government sponsor for the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), an independent body established by the Equality Act 2006 to promote, *inter alia*, women's rights and gender equality in England, Scotland and Wales, whereas in Northern Ireland this role is held by another Non-Departmental Public Body, the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland (ECNI), which is sponsored by the Executive Office (*Ibidem*).

Three ministerial posts are specifically concerned with gender equality issues: on one side, the Minister for Women and Equalities within the Cabinet Office (role currently held by Elizabeth Truss) is responsible for the Government Equalities Office's performance and is held accountable by the Shadow Secretary of State for Women and Equalities, who holds the respective position in the Official Opposition Shadow Cabinet; on the other, two parliamentary under-secretaries, the Minister for Women and the Minister for Equalities, have responsibility for policy on gender equality and for equality legislation, respectively. Moreover, among the parliamentary Select Committees appointed by one or both Houses, the Women and Equalities Select Committee is in charge of scrutinizing the Government Equalities Office's activities (*Ibidem*).

In Scotland, the Government appointed a National Advisory Council on Women and Girls (NACWG) in 2017 to monitor the status of gender equality in the Country and to provide recommendations on the policies and courses of action needed to make change.

4.1.4 Gender mainstreaming

While the UK government Department for International Development has drafted a comprehensive 2018 to 2030 Vision for Gender Equality (DfID, 2018) which sets out the commitments and the courses of action needed in order to fulfil Goal 5 of the 2030 Agenda, outlining some key areas of intervention such as women's political and economic empowerment, sexual and reproductive health, gender-based violence and girls' education (but at the same time without providing any measurable indicators to assess its effective implementation), the Government Equalities Office has not developed

any national strategy on gender equality, leaving to each individual government department the responsibility of mainstreaming gender in their policies (EIGE, n.d.-b).

However, in recent years new commitments have been made to adopt a cross-government approach, as evidenced by the publication of “Gender equality at all stages: a roadmap for change” (2019), in which the Government Equalities Office establishes the diversified courses of action needed to eradicate gender inequalities, with a specific focus on the economic challenges women face in their lives (Government Equalities Office, 2019a). In addition to that, an annual Gender Equality Monitor was set up to regularly assess the situation of gender equality in the Country by using a set of indicators which can account for the national performance on five main areas: Economic participation and progression, Attitudes and leadership, Education and skills, Crime and justice, Health and wellbeing (Government Equalities Office, 2019b).

As for gender budgeting, only the Scotland Government has so far tried to implement this type of analysis by publishing equality budget statements along with its annual draft budgets, even though it is worth noticing that in 2019 the UK Parliament’s Treasury Select Committee called for the assessment of equality (and thus gender) impact of budget allocations at the national level (EIGE, n.d.-b).

4.1.5 Civil society

In the UK there is a wide range of women’s organisations which actively advocate for gender equality, launching awareness-raising campaigns, publishing reports on the status of women in the Country and participating in national consultations to share their views on the Government’s performance. In particular, four umbrella organisations based in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland respectively - National Alliance of Women’s Organisations, Engender, Women’s Equality Network and Northern Ireland Women’s European Platform – make up the Joint Committee on Women which represents the UK at the European Women's Lobby.

In addition to them, the UK civil society landscape includes non-issue-based charities, such as Fawcett Society and Women’s Resource Centre, which deal with all the issues outlined by CEDAW; government-funded organisations, such as Scottish Women's Convention, aimed at making women heard in the policy processes; charities specifically

focused on gender based violence and abuse (e.g. AVA Against Violence and Abuse, Centre for Women's Justice, the Zero Tolerance Charitable Trust, Women's Aid); groups campaigning for gender balance in the STEM field (WISE – Women in Science and Engineering); feminist organisations combating sexism in the educational sector (UK Feminista), supporting girls' economic empowerment (Young Women's Trust), advocating for equal representation of women and men in politics (as in the case of the 50:50 Parliament campaign) or promoting gender equality in the media sector (e.g. Women in Journalism, Gender Equal Media Scotland).

4.2 Media & Gender

4.2.1 Media context

The British media system presents some of the main characteristics that define the Liberal model outlined by Hallin and Mancini (2004), common also to Ireland, Canada and the United States. In fact, press circulation in Britain had an early development, which dates back to the second half of the 19th century, and quickly started displaying a commercial and mass-oriented nature, as well as generating big revenues that allowed for press independence from government funds and influence. Consequently, the UK counts on a strong national press, which is funded by advertising and comprises a total of 10 dailies (plus 9 corresponding Sunday editions), with an average daily circulation that in 2017 amounted to 6.1 million copies (Mediatique, 2018), as well as on a lively regional and local press. British newspapers' typology, however, differs in terms of whether they are targeted at upper-middle-class readership, such as quality broadsheet papers (e.g. Times, Daily Telegraph, Guardian), or at middle-class and popular masses, such as tabloids (e.g. Sun, Daily Mirror) and mid-market titles (e.g. Daily Mail) (Hallin & Mancini. 2004; Whitelock, 2020).

A substantial difference from the other North-Atlantic Countries' press, which is characterized by complete political neutrality, is the presence of external pluralism, as British national newspapers tend to parallel political sympathies depending on their ownership (*Ibidem*): for example, Daily Mail and Daily Telegraph reflect a conservative point of view, whereas Daily Mirror and The Guardian have pro-Labour tendencies.

Moreover, the British press market is dominated by few big companies, which include DMGT (Daily Mail and General Trust plc) Group, Guardian Media Group, News Corp UK & Ireland Limited, Telegraph Media Group and Reach plc. In recent years all these players have strongly invested in their online offer, as evidenced by Comscore 2019 Digital Market Overview reports, which showed that their websites' monthly unique visitors steadily ranged from a maximum of about 40 million (Reach plc) to a minimum of about 20 million (Telegraph Media Group)²⁰. In fact, online platforms have become the main sources of news in the UK: according to the data provided by the latest Reuters Institute report (RISJ, 2020a), in 2020 the reach of online news amounted to 77%, surpassing television (55%) and most of all newspapers (22%), which particularly suffer the rise of digital sources.

This report also indicates that television is more commonly used than print in the UK, so much that the public service broadcaster BBC (with its televised and radio channels), the commercial network ITV and the satellite provider Sky are the three main news brands on a weekly basis (*Ibidem*). Other channels are the public service Channel 4, the free-to-air Channel 5 and a large group of non-UK owned broadcasters which include for example Virgin Media, Turner, Discovery, DAZN Media, as well as Sky (Firmstone, n.d.). Scotland and Wales also have their own specific channels of interest, such as the free-to-air S4C and STV channels, respectively.

Radio keeps steady reach levels, with 89.4% of people listening to the wide range of BBC and commercial local radio stations (more than 30 and more than 200 stations, respectively) over the course of 2019 (Ofcom, 2019b).

Differently from what happens in other Liberal media systems, the government has been traditionally involved in British broadcasting, as BBC provided the first public service model which would then be replicated throughout Europe. However, the government's intervention does not undermine broadcasting's political neutrality; in fact, what distinguishes the UK broadcasting system from British print media is the absence of political parallelism and the internal pluralism inspired by professional values of impartiality and balance (Firmstone, n.d.; Hallin & Mancini, 2004).

²⁰ See UKOM (2019a, 2019b, 2019c, 2019d)

In terms of journalistic practices, the UK shares with the other North-Atlantic Countries a high degree of professionalization, which does not come from institutionalized self-regulation, but is informally passed on by a tradition of professional ethics, such as objectivity and public accountability.

Whereas all broadcasting services are regulated by the independent Ofcom (Office of Communications) authority, only in 2012, in consequence of some big scandals surrounding News Corp's newspapers, there has been an attempt to introduce self-regulation in the press: along with a Royal Charter on Self-regulation of the Press, two new regulatory bodies were created, the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO) and the Independent Monitor for the Press (IMPRESS), but, since this effort is not supported by statutory law, the self-regulatory system remains voluntary and most publishers choose not to take part in it (BBC News, 2018; Firmstone, n.d.). For example, IPSO counts on a large number of compliant publishers which however do not feature broadsheet papers like The Guardian and The Financial Times, as they rely on their own independent regulatory systems.

Moreover, in order to become a journalist in the UK, it not necessary to pass any exam: 19 gatekeepers among the main organisations and associations which operate in the media environment or represent media professionals issue the press credentials (Press Card) to journalists on a voluntary basis (Firmstone, n.d.). As for education and vocational training, most journalists nowadays hold a university degree and two leading training institutions, the National Council for the Training of Journalists (NCTJ) and the Broadcast Journalism Training Council (BJTC), provide courses for aspiring and current employees in the media industry (*Ibidem*).

The main trade union for those who work in the journalistic sector is the National Union of Journalists (NUJ), which sets in its code of conduct the professional principles its members must abide by and mainstream in the media industry. Other associations providing support, training and ethical codes to media professionals are the British Association of Journalists (BAJ), the Chartered Institute of Journalists (CIoJ) and the Broadcasting, Entertainment, Cinematograph and Theatre Union (BECTU) (*Ibidem*).

4.2.2 Gender in/equality in and through the media

As is the case in most Countries, the UK media sector is not exempt from gender inequalities occurring within media organisations and propagating through media content.

On the one hand, the percentage of female journalists and media professionals seems to have reached good levels: a survey conducted by the Reuters Institute on a representative sample of journalists at the end of 2015 showed that women made up 45% of the total journalistic workforce in the UK, especially highlighting a positive trend in women's employment over the course of the previous two years, as two-thirds of the most recently employed journalists were female (Thurman *et al.*, 2016). The latest Ofcom report on diversity and equal opportunities in the British broadcasting industry (Ofcom, 2019e), then, confirmed this percentage (45%) among the media professionals who work in the UK television, with Channel 4 and ITV reaching 57% and 54%, respectively. In general, according to the data gathered from different monitoring studies, radio appears to be a less inclusive environment than television in terms of news reporting, presentation and production (Ross, 2015; Select Committee on Communications, 2015); as for newspapers, the 2015 edition of the Global Media Monitoring Project found the presence of 32% of female reporters in the sample analysed (Ross, 2015), whereas a longitudinal research conducted by Women in Journalism showed that in the period between June and July 2017 25% of front page stories were written by women, with a very small improvement from the average registered in 2012 (Mills *et al.*, 2017).

However, in all media sectors, even in those where women have slowly reached an almost equal representation in the workforce, issues of vertical and horizontal segregation are still of concern. The “Journalists in the UK” report (Thurman *et al.*, 2016) evidenced how women are less likely to occupy senior management positions: EIGE (2014b) found that, taking into consideration four of the main British media organisations in the radio, TV and newspaper market, only around one third of the staff in charge of decision-making was composed by women. Looking more specifically at the broadcasting system, Ofcom (2019e) recently reported that the female proportion of senior managers has reached 42% in the television industry, whereas public service organisations, which on average register a higher female ratio in senior strategic and operational positions (EIGE, 2014b),

nonetheless still present only 31% of women as board members (EIGE, 2019b); in the radio system, on the other hand, the percentage of men in senior management amounts to 63% (Ofcom, 2019c). The same can be said of UK newspapers, where women hold only 34% of senior roles (Mills *et al.*, 2017) and 61% of top editors in the major news outlets (both online and offline) are men (RISJ, 2020b), despite the positive steps registered over the last years with respect to the slowly increasing number of daily national newspapers edited by women (Mayhew, 2020).

In addition to this glass ceiling effect, UK female journalists are also less likely to cover specific subject areas which have been traditionally considered as male fields, for example the Women in Journalism research on newspapers' front pages showed that "the business, politics and sport sections are still overwhelmingly dominated by men" (Mills *et al.*, 2017, p.3).

In terms of women's representation through the media, the 2015 GMMP monitoring research showed that women are still underrepresented in the news, as women made up only 28% of the 1960 sources coded across newspapers, tv, radio and internet and the female-centered stories amounted to 11% of the total (Ross, 2015), whereas another monitoring analysis which was specifically focused on two broadcasting channels, BBC1 and ITV1, confirmed that the proportion between women and men in their programmes was 1:3 (Ross *et al.*, 2016). Moreover, women were hardly mentioned as experts or spokespeople - 20% and 25% respectively according to the latest GMMP results (Ross, 2015).

4.2.3 National policy framework

At the policy level, all media companies need to comply with the provisions of the 2010 Equality Act, including avoiding any form of discrimination on the basis of sex in the workplace. However, the Public Sector Equality Duty does not apply to private organisations, which therefore must not observe the mandatory requirement to promote equal opportunities.

The reference text in terms of broadcasting communications, that is the Communications Act 2003, sets the duties of the Ofcom regulatory body which is tasked with overseeing all broadcasting services. Among them section 27 outlines Ofcom's responsibilities in the

area of “Training and equality of opportunity”, as the regulator is required to promote equal opportunities, and specifically *equal opportunities between women and men*, within television and radio service providers, in relation to both employment and training. Under section 337, then, all licensed services need to fulfil the conditions set by Ofcom in order to promote, *inter alia*, equality of opportunity between women and men (Parliament of the United Kingdom, 2003). However, the text does not include any specific provisions aimed at fostering women’s participation in decision-making.

Ofcom, on its part, requires broadcasters to provide data about their internal composition and their policies on equal opportunities, with particular reference to some protected characteristics, such as gender; over the last three years the information gathered have then been published in annual reports.

As for regulation on broadcasting content, the Ofcom Broadcasting Code (2019a) establishes that “*discriminatory treatment or language* (for example on the grounds of age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation, and marriage and civil partnership)” (p.16) must be avoided, recalling also the Audiovisual Media Services Directive, which prohibits all forms of discrimination in audio-visual media content, as well as the non-discrimination principle laid down in article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Public service broadcasters’ activity is regulated by an Agreement between the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and BBC, which includes among the Regulatory obligations for the UK public services a specific sub-paragraph (12) on *Equal opportunities* for employees in relation to relevant protected characteristics, namely sex, race and disability (Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, 2016a). On the other hand, provisions on content and editorial guidelines do not make any reference to gender equality.

In addition to these policy documents, in 2015 the House of Lords Select Committee on Communications published the report of an inquiry investigating the state of women in news and current affairs broadcasting, accompanied by a set of recommendations which were formulated in light of the registered results. In particular, the Committee stresses the importance of promoting *gender balance* within media organisations calling for *equal opportunities in the workplace* (and broadcasters’ transparency in this regard), *flexible*

work and childcare arrangements for mothers and women with care responsibilities, and *measures against sexism and harassment* in the industry (Select Committee on Communications, 2015), which are all policy provisions adopted by public service, but less likely to be implemented in private companies (EIGE, 2014b). Moreover, it also recommends that broadcasting organisations “should have distinct policies which differentiate between gender equality and diversity” (Select Committee on Communications, 2015, p.18), instead of generally including gender among all protected characteristics. Finally, the Committee urges for more monitoring and reporting efforts that account for women representation in news and current affairs and for measures that actively contribute to foster *equal treatment* of women and men in media content, for example by establishing databases of women experts.

On the other hand, the policy documents setting the standards for press media are provided by IPSO and IMPRESS, the recently set up independent authorities which are nonetheless part of a voluntary self-regulation system, so that not all organisations agree to be subject to their regulations. The Editors’ Code of Practice enforced by the Independent Press Standards Organisation (Editors’ Code of Practice Committee, 2020) features “Discrimination” as its twelfth clause, requiring the press to “avoid prejudicial or pejorative reference to an individual’s race, colour, religion, *sex, gender identity*, sexual orientation or to any physical or mental illness or disability” (p.127) and to not go into the details of these characteristics if they are not relevant to the story being told. The IMPRESS Standards Code recalls almost literally these provisions in its fourth clause (“Discrimination”), adding only the requirement to avoid incitement to hatred against groups of people on the grounds of, *inter alia*, sex and gender identity (IMPRESS, 2020).

UK journalists’ trade of unions set out in their own codes of conduct what are the principles and correct practices which should guide a journalist in the exercise of her/his profession; the two main national trade associations, in particular, explicitly condemn *gender-based discrimination* in their codes. The National Union of Journalists’ code of conduct states that the material produced must not encourage “hatred or discrimination on the grounds of a person’s age, gender, race, colour, creed, legal status, disability, marital status, or sexual orientation” (NUJ, 2013), while the British Association of Journalists calls for *unbiased portrayal*, as its code of conduct’s ninth clause (“Biases”) provides that “members shall not place unnecessary emphasis on the characteristics of a

person likely to lead to discrimination, hatred, derogatory behaviour to be exhibited, or likely to cause hurt or offence to be suffered” (BAJ, n.d., p. 2) in relation to gender as well as other dimensions.

4.2.4 Good practices within the industry and advocacy initiatives

In terms of women’s participation in the industry and recognition of equal opportunities within media companies, over the last years broadcasting companies have especially engaged in developing programmes and initiatives aimed at supporting women’s careers and improve their access to managerial positions. BBC, for example, established the “Women at the BBC” network, which advocates for the progression of BBC female employees, launching events which give voice to female role models; Sky launched the “Women into leadership” programme in 2018 in order to train women who want to pursue a career in middle management; Channel 4 implemented the RISE programme, targeted at achieving gender balance in senior positions within the next few years; ITV nominated some of its female executives for the WeQual Awards and the HERoes awards in order to give public recognition to their merits and their efforts to promote gender inclusive environments, as well as to raise public awareness on the glass ceiling which prevents women to equally access management boards (Ofcom, 2019d).

Furthermore, these four broadcasters, along with Viacom, S4C and some major producing companies, are partners and stakeholders of the Creative Diversity Network, which in 2016 launched Project Diamond, an online monitoring system built to gather information and publish annual reports on diversity in programmes commissioned by these channels, focusing both on off-screen and on-screen representation in relation to gender, but also age, disability, ethnicity, race, gender identity and sexual orientation.

Other initiatives worth mentioning concern women’s visibility in the media: in 2017 BBC launched the “50:50 Project”, a self-monitoring system which aims to report on the amount of female voices and contributions (experts, reporters, analysts, ...) featuring across all type of programmes and news and to make editorial choices informed by the goal of equal representation of women and men in BBC content; online databases of female experts and journalists have also been established, such as The Women’s Room and the BBC Expert Women database, which lists all the women who trained at the BBC Academy; The Guardian, on the other hand, is testing the use of a Bechdel Filter to

conduct software-based analysis on gender balance within its news stories and topic sections, on the basis of the proportion of women appearing as subjects and sources, of female journalists writing the articles and of feminine pronouns occurring in the text (European Parliament, Directorate General for Internal Policies, 2018).

Advocacy organisations for women's rights in the media system, such as Women in Journalism and Gender Equal Media Scotland, engage in a wide range of activities, from research to awareness raising events, from training courses to projects conducted in collaboration with journalists, women's organisations, trade unions and scholars. Specific awards for women in the media industry were also launched, among which should be mentioned the "Words by Women" award: in two occasions, in 2016 and in 2019, this award was established in order to recognize the work of female journalists as a protest to the presence of all-male shortlists for traditional journalistic awards, namely the Society of Editors' Press Awards and the British Journalism Awards.

As for education and training, university-led projects were developed to promote women's access to and professional advancement in the media industry, addressing gender-related issues and creating links between students and media professionals who can give their insight into the barriers faced by women in newsrooms; among these feature the Women in Media project, which extends across several UK universities, and the European AGEMI (Advancing Gender Equality in Media Industries) Project, which is led by the Newcastle University.

Moreover, female platforms such as MediaWoman – Media training for women and Global Girl Media UK provide mentoring, training courses, workshops and practical exercises targeted at women and girls who intend to pursue a career in the media, in order to give them the tools necessary to enter a male-dominated environment and consequently lay the foundations for gender balance in the media landscape.

4.3 Sport & Gender

4.3.1 Sport system

The ministerial Department for Digital, Culture, Media, and Sport (DCMS) sets out the Country's policies on sport, whereas five government-funded Sports Councils (UK Sport, Sport England, Sports Scotland, Sport Wales, Sport Northern Ireland) are the

intermediate structures responsible for recognizing and funding the National Governing Bodies of Sport, which develop the rules and manage the development of specific sport disciplines, serving a similar purpose as the Italian sports federations (Girginov, 2017). Furthermore, UK Sport uses National Lottery income to directly pay high-performance athletes with an award (the Athlete Performance Award) which allows them to bear their living and sporting costs.

In terms of sports club participants, the Active People Survey running from 2005 to 2016 showed that at least until 2015 the most practiced sports disciplines in clubs were football (18%) and golf (15%), followed by rugby union (6%) and cricket (5%) (Nichols & Taylor, 2015), which not coincidentally have all strong historical ties with England (and Scotland in the case of golf). Other activities which in general register high levels of participation are athletics, cycling and swimming (Sport England, 2020).

4.3.2 Gender in/equality in sport

There is a high number of sportswomen competing at elite levels in the UK: in 2015 45% of the athletes who were supported through the UK Sport's World Class Programme were females (BBC Sport, 2015). However, unequal participation of women and men in sporting activities has been widely registered over the years by surveys and reports commissioned by the UK Sports Councils in light of the Government's call to monitor and measure the participation of underrepresented groups, including women (HM Government, 2015).

The Active People Survey run by Sport England between 2006 and 2015 registered an increase in female participation in sports, from 6.25 million to 7.21 million, despite still not closing the gap with men (who amounted to 8.76 million according to the 2015/2016 survey results) (DCMS, 2015; BBC, 2016). Since 2016, however, the Active Lives Survey has been gathering data on people's engagement in a broader range of physical activities, not only in traditional sports disciplines: although lacking specific gender-disaggregated information on sports, its latest report (Sport England, 2020) shows that 61% of women (14.2 million) are less likely to be active than men (65%, 14.4 million), a gap that widens in the young population, since 1.8 million boys (51%) spend their leisure time on physical activities as opposed to 1.5 million girls (43%) (Sport England, 2019).

An important initiative which has proved to have positive impact on women's active engagement since its launch in 2015 (BBC, 2016) is the This Girl Can campaign, developed by Sport England in order to encourage the increase of English female participants in sport and physical exercise by sharing inspiring video and stories of active women of all ages, sizes and abilities, providing information on a whole range of activities available in the territory or to be practiced at home, and launching viral social network campaigns aimed at connecting women through shared active life experiences²¹.

Moreover, according to the 2018/2019 "Diversity in Sport Governance" report, associations linked to sport disciplines which have been traditionally dominated by male athletes have made increasing efforts over the last years to promote women's participation: in 2017 the English Football Association²² developed a Women's Football Strategy targeted at doubling the number of women's participation by 2020 and currently register almost 2.5 million female players, making football the most practiced sport by women and girls in England; between 2016 and 2018 there was a 30% increase of women's dedicated sections in English cricket clubs; in 2019 British Cycling launched the "One in a Million" campaign as part of its seven-year strategy targeted at increasing the number of female cyclists by one million by 2020 (Inclusive Boards, 2019).

Focusing instead on the sporting context in devolved nations, disparity between women and men's participation in Scottish sport has remained quite stable over the last decade: the latest report commissioned by the Observatory for Sport (Rowe, 2019) found that in 2017 58% of men participated in sporting activities, outnumbering women (49%) in all disciplines apart from dance, aerobics and swimming. A recent survey conducted in Welsh further education colleges showed that 36% of female students, as opposed to 50% of male students, participate in sport or physical activities at least thrice a week, engaging primarily in individual activities such as running (49%), swimming (45%) and fitness (43%), whereas 56% of boys (against 24% of girls) practice football (Sport Wales, 2018). As for Northern Ireland, the Continuous Household Survey 2018/19 reported a consistent gap between women (49%) and men (62%) taking part in sporting activities and between

²¹ <https://www.thisgirlcan.co.uk>

²² <https://www.thefa.com/womens-girls-football/about-womens-football>

female (17%) and male members (31%) of sports clubs over the course of the previous year (Department for Communities, 2019).

Government's acknowledgment of the issue and efforts to make it a relevant topic in the national agenda resulted in "Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation" (HM Government, 2015), a sport strategy outlining the different factors recognized as responsible for women's underrepresentation in sports and the measures to be implemented in subsequent years in order to promote change. This document, along with the recommendations provided by the Government's Women and Sport Advisory Board (DCMS, 2015) and by the Scottish Women and Girls in Sport Advisory Board (2019), stressed the importance of fostering female participation in physical activities; boosting commercial investments in women's sport, which in 2015 amounted to 0.4% as opposed to 85.5% devoted to men's sport (DCMS, 2015); improving sportswomen and women's sports' representation in the media; increasing the number of females at all levels of the sports sector, including the coaching workforce, as in 2015 women made up only 30% of entry level coaches and 10% of elite coaches (HM Government, 2015), and especially sports governing bodies.

In light of the Government's call for more diversity in sports governance, UK Sport and Sport England set out "A Code for Sports Governance" (2016) which established as a mandatory requirement for every organisation funded by them to "adopt a target of, and take all appropriate actions to encourage, a minimum of 30% of each gender on its Board" (p.26). According to a recent report (Inclusive Boards, 2019), the standards set by the Code in terms of gender balanced representation led these organisations to reach an average of 40% of female members in their boards, as the 30% target has been accomplished in more than half cases, although other intersectional categories as disability, ethnicity and sexual orientation remain widely underrepresented. As for Olympic and Paralympic funded National Governing Bodies, on average women currently make up 37% of their board members, with 77% of NGBs achieving the required benchmark (*Ibidem*). A more general EIGE (2019b) overview, however, reported that men keep retaining 71% of all decision-making positions in Olympic sports organisations from all over the UK; in Scotland, for example, women accounted for 31% of board members in sports governing bodies during 2017-2018 (NACWG, 2018), but

the percentage of female chief executive officers still amounts only to 14% (Scottish Women and Girls in Sport Advisory Board, 2019).

As for athletes' employment status, the British cyclist Jess Varnish's recent dispute with the British Cycling Federation exposed the lack of protection for many UK Sport-funded athletes who are not formally recognized as employees, as they are not guaranteed any parental rights nor benefit from any equal pay provisions, unlike for example football players (Balmelli, 2020).

4.3.3 Advocacy associations & organisations

The two main organisations advocating for gender equality in the sport dimension in the UK are Women in Sport and Women's Sport Trust.

Women in Sport is a long-standing charity which supports female participation in athletic activities by carrying out research projects, publishing useful advice for both women and sports organisations and launching events and social media campaigns to foster equality in sport. Women's Sport Trust, on the other side, was founded in 2012 and is particularly committed to raise visibility of women in sports: it promotes several initiatives in order to give voice to female role models, increase the quantity and quality of media coverage of female athletes and boost women's sport's sponsorship and funding. Its social media campaigns include, for example, #Athleteinfluencers (2015) and #ManOnSide (2017), which called upon elite athletes and male role models, respectively, to use their platforms to openly support women's engagement in sport; their efforts were then recognized in the #BeAGameChanger awards, which celebrated those sporting role models, as well as those sponsorships and initiatives, that had most notably promoted gender equality in the sport sector. Moreover, Women's Sport Trust has recently launched the Unlocked campaign, which consists in connecting 40 elite athletes and 40 representatives of sport organisations and media companies in order to create dialogue and coordinated action aimed at improving the status of women's sport.

Along with the wide-ranging programs of these organisations, it is also worth mentioning the contribute of professional associations that provide a network and a platform for women working in specific sports industries. For example, Women in Football fights gender-based discrimination and advocates for greater female representation in the

football context, whether it be among athletes, coaches, ground staff, journalists or board members.

4.4 Sports media & Gender

4.4.1 Sports media context

Unlike Italy, in the UK sports-only newspapers do not circulate, but sport nonetheless makes up a large part of the press content, as broadsheets and popular papers alike provide comprehensive sports-dedicated sections in order to improve their competitiveness in the market. In fact, Franks & O'Neill (2016) state that sport has become a key driver for revenues in the UK newspaper market, as well as in the broadcasting system.

Many broadcasters offer extensive sports coverage both on free-to-air and pay television. In particular, in addition to the group of listed events that must be fully or at least partly covered by free-to-air providers (e.g. the Olympic Games, the FIFA World Cup, the Wimbledon finals, the Rugby World Cup Finals, the World Athletics Championships and the Ryder Cup), at the initiative of the Sports and Recreation Alliance UK sport's governing bodies signed a voluntary Code of Conduct for Rights Owners, committing to grant broadcasting rights for major sporting events (whether in live coverage or in highlights form) to free-to-air television (Woodhouse, 2020). Therefore, sports content is widely featured in the schedules of public service (BBC and Channel 4) and of commercial generalist broadcasters (Channel 5 and ITV), as well as in the Welsh channel S4C, in the thematic channel FreeSports and in the US-owned Quest programming. Sky Sports provide the broadest and most diversified sports offer in the pay TV landscape, which comprises also BT Sport, operated by a British telephone company, the pan-European network Eurosport and the Premier Sports channel.

Moreover, BBC radio channels and the thematic commercial radio talkSPORT owned by News Corp are the main actors covering sporting events and broadcasting sports news in the radio market.

Consistently with the early and extensive development of online platforms in the UK and the leading role they currently have as sources of news, a large amount of people visits sports websites (or websites' sports sections) on a regular basis. As expected, legacy players dominate the sports news area, especially BBC, as its sport-dedicated website is

visited on a weekly basis by 22.4 million browsers (BBC, 2020). Moreover, according to the latest Comscore data specifically related to sports brands' digital audience (UKOM, 2018), in September 2018 Sky Sports was the second most-accessed website after BBC Sport, registering 11.830.000 unique visitors; some of the major brands operating in the press market and providing comprehensive online content, such as The Sun Sport, Mirror Online-Sport, Guardian Sport and Mail Online - Sport, all stood at around three million monthly unique users or more. The Guardian and Mail Online, in particular, received the Sports Website of the Year award in 2017 and 2018, respectively, at the British Sports Journalism Awards organized by the Sports Journalists' Association, ranking second and third in 2019 after Boxing News, a thematic boxing news website (SJA, n.d.).

The performance of online-only sports news providers is also solid, especially if we consider GIVEMESPORT.com, a website providing updates and commentaries on the sport dimension which, according to Comscore data (UKOM, 2018), counted on almost six million unique visitors throughout September 2018.

4.4.2 Gender in/equality in and through sports media

Just like in many other Countries, in the UK female contribution in the sport dimension has been traditionally overlooked by media. Women's invisibility, then, has been recognized by advocacy organisations as one of the main factors hindering girls' participation in sports, since it prevents them from drawing inspiration from female role models who can prove that sport is not a male-only area (WSFF, 2014).

Patterns of women's underrepresentation as sports sources and subjects have been noted over the years both on tv, in the press and in online platforms: in 2017 only 4% of sports media coverage was devoted to women's sport (Women in Sport, 2020). In general, better results are usually registered only in presence of big international events, as evidenced by a research conducted by Women in Sport in two different monitoring periods, which showed that women's sport accounted for 10% of TV coverage in the first period (July-August 2017), as opposed to 4% in October-November, and the amount of women's sports covered by press media similarly ranged from 3% to 12%. However, on a more positive note, the analysis did not register any difference of importance in the way women and men were portrayed, highlighting a substantial improvement in terms of quality over the previous years (Women in Sport, 2018).

Recent researches have focused on the online performance of legacy media, finding some positive trends in terms of women's visibility: in 2019 Women's Sport Trust monitored the websites of BBC Sport, Sky Sports, The Telegraph and The Guardian over the period that went from April 29th to August 11th and reported that in 20% of the times women's sport made up at least half of the homepage's top stories. Moreover, in the peak month when both the Women's World Cup and Wimbledon were taking place, there was equal representation of female and male sports: BBC Sport's homepage devoted 45.7% of its 10 leading stories to women and in three occasions women-related news made up more than half of the total stories appearing on the homepage, whereas female sports daily accounted for 28.3% and 30.2% of The Telegraph and The Guardian's homepages' leading stories, respectively. However, especially when considering also the online platforms of mid-market and tabloid press, persisting issues have been detected in women's portrayal: a research conducted by the Scottish Collaboration for Public Health Research & Policy centre at the University of Edinburgh monitored on two different days the online news outlets of the Daily Mail, The Sun and The Mirror, along with those of BBC and The Telegraph, and noticed that 22% of online news items still sexualized women, whether in articles or in the accompanying images (Scottish Women and Girls in Sport Advisory Board, 2019).

Women are highly underrepresented also among British sports reporters: the latest "Journalists in the UK" report stated that male journalists deal with sport subjects ten times more than women (Thurman *et al.*, 2016) and the percentage of female sports reporters is particularly low in press newsrooms, as in 2016 only 1.8% of sports articles were written by women (Franks & O'Neill, 2016). According to the National Council for the Training of Journalists, these alarming data find confirmation at the educational level, considering that in 2015 women made up 54% of journalism students, but they accounted only for 11% of those studying sports journalism (DCMS, 2015).

4.4.3. National policy on sport, media & gender

The advisory boards which were appointed in 2013 and in 2017 to provide advice on women's participation in sports to the UK Government and the Scottish Government, respectively, both addressed the role of media in their finale reports and recommendations. The Government's Women and Sport Advisory Board set, *inter alia*,

the objective of “Improving the media profile of women’s sport” (DCMS, 2015, p. 9), framing the issue in terms of *low coverage* and placing responsibility on different actors to make change: it called upon *news agencies* to provide more information on women’s sports to journalists; *national governing bodies* to better promote female competitions in synergy with news providers; *broadcasting, press and digital media* to devote more time/space to women’s sport; the *media industry* and *training institutions* to encourage women’s access to sports media departments; the *audience* to personally attend more female sporting events.

On its part, the Scottish Women and Girls in Sport Advisory Board (2019) established the need “to significantly improve and increase the visibility of women’s sport, athletes and participants through *improved content* and *increased coverage* across all media platforms” (p.11). Therefore, on the one side the Board urged the Scotland’s Government to develop a strategy aimed at *monitoring* media performance from a gender perspective in terms of both quantity and quality of sports coverage, *working alongside media and civil society* on an integrated approach to achieve gender equality in sportspeople’s representation and promoting “a culture of *responsible reporting, diversity and inclusion*” (*ibidem*); on the other side, it called upon sports media outlets to commit to make improvements on women’s visibility by setting *measurable objectives* in this direction.

In its national sport strategy, the UK Government acknowledged the *underrepresentation of women’s sport* in media content as an issue of concern, committing to make this consideration inform the BBC Charter Review, which took place in 2016 (HM Government, 2015). However, the renewed BBC Agreement (Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, 2016a) only establishes in Schedule 2, subparagraph (3)(d) that Ofcom should provide requirements for radio services “to broaden sports coverage [and] to better support sports which currently receive less broadcast coverage” (p.51), without making any explicit reference to women’s sports.

Moreover, specific mention to gender-related issues in sports coverage is not included neither in the Ofcom Broadcasting Code nor in press regulatory authorities’ codes of practice, whereas the Sports Journalists Association does not provide for any guidelines on gender equality in editorial practices.

4.4.4 Sport, media & gender in civil society and media industry's initiatives

Advocacy organisations for women in sport have developed important initiatives targeted at increasing sportswomen's visibility in media content, as well as improving the quality of their portrayal. Women in Sport promoted for three years, from 2015 to 2017, the annual Women's Sport Week in partnership with Sport England and the two main sports broadcasters, BBC Sport and SkySports, in order to devote an entire week to raise awareness on the world of women's sports by putting female athletes and their competitions at the centre of tv sports programming, with extensive coverage of live events, as well as dedicated interviews and insights. In Scotland, then, since 2017 has taken place once a year the Scottish Women and Girls in Sport Week, which encourages all actors involved in the sport sector to celebrate women participating in sport and physical activities at all levels, from athletes to leaders in sport organisations, by sharing positive stories on different platforms.

Women's Sport Trust, on the other side, launched The Mixed Zone, a women's sport online magazine which counts on the collaboration of female and male top sports journalists and editors, with the contribution of numerous sportswomen and sportsmen. The charity also advocates for respectful and non-stereotyped portrayal of female athletes, with particular attention to images of women in sport: in 2015 it supported the Sport is Beautiful project, aimed at providing and celebrating images that highlight women's skills, strength and motivation rather than their looks, and in 2016 it established a partnership with Getty Images to promote inspiring and diverse images of sportswomen, setting some core guidelines ("Visual Guidelines for Sporting Women") media should follow in their visual portrayals, such as focusing on sport-related characteristics and values rather than exterior appearance, providing diverse and realistic representations of athletes, increasing the quantity of sportswomen depicted and taking responsibility for making change (Women's Sport Trust, 2016).

As for women in sports journalism, it is worth mentioning the initiative of the National Council for the Training of Journalists, which in 2019 partnered with Nike and PA Training in order to provide a free sports journalism training course for women (NCTJ, 2019).

In recent years increasing efforts have been made also within the media industry to increase women in sport's visibility. In particular, in 2019 Sportsbeat and The Telegraph developed two initiatives which have had a good impact on women's sport media coverage (Women in Sport, 2020). As one of the major press agencies operating in sport, Sportsbeat launched the HerSport wire, which consists in a daily feed freely provided to media, comprising 5 to 10 stories, interviews and content on women's sport in order to give publishers useful material on female athletes even when they need to deploy resources to cover other more popular disciplines (Sportsbeat, n.d.), whereas The Telegraph created a dedicated Women's Sport section on its website, integrating its content also in other pre-existing sections and publishing a monthly print supplement; the project was accompanied by a manifesto setting out the aims of the initiative, which include increasing women's sport coverage in both its print and digital outlets, addressing the issues that hinder women's participation in sport, promoting awareness campaigns on the subject and supporting journalists specialized in women's sport, as well as female sports writers (The Telegraph, 2019).

4.5 Gender equality in sports media houses

In order to further investigate British sports media houses' commitment to gender equality, I now take a closer look into the policies and internal practices of three UK-based media companies which provide sport-related news both offline and online.

I chose to focus on BBC, Guardian Media Group and Daily Mail and General Trust plc, since they represent different types of organisations: on the one side, there is a public broadcaster, on the other, two private publishers which appeal to different market segments, as GMG publish quality broadsheet papers (The Guardian), whereas DMGT targets a wider public with its popular mid-market outlets (Daily Mail). Moreover, according to available data on digital audience (UKOM, 2018), these three media houses provide some of the most accessed sports news websites in the Country, which are later going to be at the centre of the content monitoring analysis.

4.5.1 BBC – British Broadcasting Corporation

4.5.1.1 Gender equality policy

The Royal Charter which regulates the British Broadcasting Corporation establishes *diverse representation* as one of the broadcaster's public purposes, stating that "BBC should reflect the diversity of the United Kingdom both in its output and services [...] accurately and authentically represent[ing] and portray[ing] the lives of the people" living in the Country (Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, 2016b). This general call for diversity is further explicated in the Operating licence developed by Ofcom, the regulatory authority appointed to set the standards for BBC activity, which recalls this Charter's provision and clarifies that it "should include age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion and belief, sex, sexual orientation and socioeconomic background" (Ofcom, 2020, p.9); Ofcom, then, requires BBC to report its performance in terms of diversity both in on-screen/on-air representation and portrayal practices and in the workforce composition.

Consequently, several BBC policy documents reflect these directives, starting from the Code of Conduct, which does not contain any gender-specific provisions, but sets *diversity, inclusion* and *equal treatment* as principles that should inform the conduct of everyone working in the company (BBC, 2019d).

In 2016 the public service broadcaster developed its "Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2016-2020", which outlined measurable objectives tailored for different dimensions, including gender: on the one side, it established the goal to achieve gender balance in the workforce by 2020, reaching 50% of female representation at all levels, especially in senior leadership positions; on the other hand, it set a 50% benchmark for women's representation in television and radio content of all genres (BBC, 2016), to be reached, for example, by implementing the 50:50 Project, aimed at increasing the number of female reporters, experts and guests featured in all types of programmes (BBC, 2019b), and the Expert Women project, through which tv and radio training is provided to women who want to become BBC contributors (BBC, 2019a).

Moreover, being part of the Creative Diversity Network, the British Broadcaster Corporation sets diversity-related requirements which need to be fulfilled on all the

programmes it commissions. In fact, the “BBC Diversity Commissioning Code of Practice” (BBC, 2018a), after mentioning sex among the characteristics included in the company’s notion of diversity, requires by contract content makers to have their own policies on diversity and inclusion; ensure diversity at all levels in the commissioning and production teams’ workforce; implement measures aimed to “ensure authentic on air representation, portrayal and diversity” (p.9) and “strive for authenticity in all incidental portrayal of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, geographical location, social class, religion and religious beliefs and disability for all role types” (*ibidem*). The Diamond Project’s online database, then, allows to monitor and annually report on the status of diversity in these productions.

Diverse and authentic representation is also recalled in the BBC Editorial Guidelines (BBC, 2019c), especially in the “Portrayal” sub-paragraph, which prescribes to “avoid careless or offensive stereotypical assumptions” (p.83) in order to not perpetuate existing prejudices on the diverse communities living in the United Kingdom; in addition to this, sub-section 5.3.38 reaffirms the BBC commitment to follow the Ofcom’s Broadcasting Code’s provision against hate speech on the grounds of gender and other protected characteristics.

In respect of the provision on Equal Opportunities for employees of different sex, race and disability included in sub-paragraph 12 of the Agreement between BBC and the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (2016), BBC made increasing efforts to promote gender equality within its organisation, as evidenced by its leading contribute to EBU’s “All things being equal” guidelines (Vaccarone, 2019), as well as by the development of internal policies and programmes targeted at improving women’s opportunities in the workplace. The recommendations included in the “Making the BBC a Great Workplace for Women” report (BBC, 2018b) called for work-life balance measures, gender-unbiased recruitment processes, mentoring and training programmes targeted at women and support to females’ career progression into senior leadership positions. This resulted, for example, in flexible working policies and in specific training programmes for women willing to move into higher-ranking roles, such as the Women in Leadership programme (two editions in 2015 and 2017) and the Hilda Matheson Development Programme, which had positive impacts on women’s motivation and actual promotion opportunities (Vaccarone, 2019).

4.5.1.2 State of women in the workplace

According to the latest Group Annual Report (BBC, 2019a), in 2019 the company had almost reached gender balance in the staff composition, with 47.9% of women in the total workforce; improvement was registered in leadership positions, with 43.8% of female representation in decision-making roles, despite still far from achieving gender parity especially in the BBC Board (31%) and in the Executive Committee (38%). As for freelancers collaborating with BBC, the percentage of women among them amounted to 44%.

The gender pay gap was reduced by 0.9 percentage points between 2018 and 2019, when it settled at 6.7%; in terms of contract, women were slightly less likely to work under continuing employment contract (46.7%), whereas they unsurprisingly made up the majority (56.8%) of employees under flexible working conditions (*Ibidem*), as BBC committed to develop flexible working practices especially targeted at meeting the needs of women after maternity leave, since between 2014 and 2018 an alarming number of them (31%) had left the company during or shortly after this period (Vaccarone, 2019).

4.5.1.3 Sports department

After a long line of male directors, since 2009 BBC Sport has been directed by a woman, Barbara Slater, who still leads a team of 450 journalists and staff members across the Country working in the sports department.

Moreover, BBC Sport News joined the 50:50 Project in order to increase female visibility in its contents and already registered promising results, as some programmes doubled their share of women's representation reaching over 40% of female contributors (BBC, 2019b). An important initiative was also the #ChangetheGame campaign, launched by BBC Sport to extensively promote women's sport on all platforms in occasion of the big international events taking place in the summer of 2019, such as the Women's World Cup (BBC, 2020).

4.5.2 Guardian Media Group plc

Owned by The Scott Trust Limited, Guardian Media Group plc is one of the leading multimedia companies in the UK, which controls Guardian News & Media, the subsidiary

in charge of publishing The Guardian and The Observer newspapers, as well as theguardian.com website.

4.5.2.1 Gender equality policy

The Guardian Media Group, and in particular its main business, Guardian News & Media Ltd, set some gender-sensitive goals in its 2017 action plan, especially targeted at achieving *equal representation of women and men in top level positions*, and consequently closing the gender pay gap, within the subsequent five years. The plan also provided for measures to support women's recruitment and progression within the company, thus resulting in the introduction, for example, of gender-neutral recruitment practices and of mentoring programmes for both female and male employees at the start of their career. Moreover, specific training modules focused on dignity at work and on the values promoted by the organisation are provided to employees and have been made mandatory for new recruits, whereas an internal forum was set up in order to address *diversity and inclusion* related issues (GNM, 2019).

Despite relying on its own self-regulation system and not signing up to the Independent Press Standard Organisation (IPSO), Guardian News & Media nonetheless adheres to the Editors' Code of Practice (Editors' Code of Practice Committee, 2020), which in its twelfth clause establishes the principle of *non-discrimination* on the grounds of sex, gender identity and other protected characteristics, by requiring to "avoid [any] prejudicial or pejorative reference" (p. 127), as well as any detail related to these characteristics which is not relevant to the story.

4.5.2.2 State of women in the workplace

According to the company's latest report, there has been an increase in women's recruitment at all levels, including the top half of the organisation which now comprises 41% of women, rising by 5 percentage points from 2017. Female representation in the total workforce amounts to 48%, but there is still an uneven distribution of women and men across different pay quartiles, as the upper quartile presents the lowest female percentage (37%), whereas the highest proportion of women (63%) is found in the lower quartile. Consequently, despite reducing by 3.5 percentage points from 2017, the median

gender pay gap is yet to be closed, amounting to 4.9%, 5.9% if we consider only the editorial department (GNM, 2019).

However, it is worth noticing that the Guardian Media Group's Board currently includes 5 women out of 12 members and that more than half of the Guardian News & Management's Executive Committee is made of female representatives (6 out of 10), including the newly appointed chief executive Annette Thomas and the first female editor-in-chief of The Guardian, Katherine Viner, who has been in that capacity since 2015.

4.5.2.3 Sports department

The Guardian's sports department still appears dominated by men, not only in leading roles such as head of sport or as chief sports editor/reporter/writer, but also in the total number of sports writers accounted for in the website's "All Writers" section: out of 19 sports specialists the only woman is Nicky Bandini, one of the few transgender sports journalists in the industry, who covers football topics, whereas among Guardian columnists, another female representative who regularly writes about sport is Marina Hyde, who was recently named Sports Columnist and Sports Writer of the year at the 2019 British Sports Journalism Awards (SJA, n.d.).

An important initiative must be noted with respect to The Guardian's commitment to respectful portrayal of women in sport. Despite the lack of policy provisions binding journalists to comply with gender-sensitive directives, during the 2016 Olympic Games a writer of The Guardian, Lindy West, published guidelines for reporters on how to fairly write about female athletes: first of all she urged them to cover women's sporting accomplishments and to do so in the same way they write about sportsmen, without pointlessly putting the stress on their gender unless for highlighting discrimination issues in the sports world; then, she recommended to focus on sportswomen's skills rather than on their appearance, age, relationships or other non-sport related aspects, avoiding to define them in terms of the men in their lives and to sexualize their bodies (West, 2016; Cinquepalmi, 2019).

4.5.3 Daily Mail and General Trust plc

Daily Mail and General Trust plc is the parent company of DMG Media, a leading media organisation which publishes some of the most popular newspapers and online brands in the UK, including first of all The Daily Mail, Mail Online and Mail on Sunday, as well as Metro, Metro.co.uk, i newspaper and inews.co.uk.

4.5.3.1 Gender equality policy

Daily Mail and General Trust plc (DMGT) relies on an Equal Opportunities policy in order to ensure, in compliance with Equality Act 2010, that all employees have the same opportunities for recruitment, training, promotion and pay, as well as to guarantee them equal working conditions without any discrimination based on gender and other protected characteristics (DMGT, 2019a). The organisation has also developed programmes and tools targeted at achieving diversity and inclusion standards in the business, for example by establishing a Human Resources Information System to monitor and track disaggregated data on gender, ethnicity, race and disability at all levels (*Ibidem*).

Principles of *equal opportunities*, *non-discrimination* and *diversity* are reaffirmed in the group's Code of Conduct (DMGT, 2019b), which prohibits discrimination on the grounds of "gender, age, race, disability, marital status, pregnancy or maternity, religion or belief, colour, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation or gender reassignment" (p.18), urges for merit-based decisions on all areas, from employment to promotion, and deems unacceptable any form of harassment, abuse and discrimination, as well as any other behaviour which does not respect human dignity.

As for editorial guidelines, DMG Media is regulated along with all its publications by the International Press Standard Organisation (IPSO), thus adhering to the Editors' Code of Practice and its non-discrimination clause.

4.5.3.2 State of women in the workplace

Women's underrepresentation is still an issue, especially in top level positions: Daily Mail & General Trust plc registers in total 39% of female employees and, while 45% of the operating company CEOs are women, men account for 83% of board directors (DMGT, 2019a). Looking specifically at DMG Media, then, we see that its 637 female employees (as opposed to 1065 males) are unevenly distributed across the pay quartiles,

as only 29.3% of the highest paid positions are occupied by women, whereas they are most heavily represented (49.4%) in the lower quartile, proving that there is still a vertical segregation and that it keeps affecting the gender pay gap, which currently amounts to 15.4% in median hourly pay (DMG Media, 2020). As a further confirmation of this persisting issue, DMG Media has an all-male leadership team of six people and, out of the news brands it owns, only Metro.co.uk has a female editor.

4.5.3.3 Sports department

Out of the news outlets owned by DMG Media, the Daily Mail and Mail Online have been widely recognized as important sports news providers, winning in 2018 the SJA Sports Newspaper and Sports Website award of the year, respectively.

Women are hardly found among sports reporters and columnists working for both the newspaper and the website, which currently have two male head of sports (Marc Padgett and Steven Fletcher); however, until last year a woman, Laura Williamson, was the Daily Mail sports news editor and a former Daily Mail female reporter, Laura Lambert, was appointed Sports News Reporter of the year in occasion of the 2019 British Sports Journalism Awards (SJA, n.d.).

4.6 Online sports news analysis: BBC Sport, Guardian Sport, Mail Online – Sport

As online sports news is a relevant part of the outlets provided by these media houses, their content can be indicative of their performance in terms of gender-sensitive representation of women and men in sport, especially in light of the different policy provisions adopted by each organisation. Therefore, I monitored their homepages over the course of a week (from August 31st to September 6th), conducting a quali-quantitative analysis modelled on the GMMP approach on the 15 news items appearing at the top of each website on a daily basis.

4.6.1 Websites overview

The websites' structures reveal how the sports context is framed, thus informing what type of news items are likely to be given prominence to. The differences with the Italian sports websites are immediately apparent, as a wider range of sports are showcased in the top half of their homepages, at least in the case of BBC Sport and Guardian Sport.

In fact, BBC Sport's website provides a diversified set of news, stories and videos about the sports dimension, highlighting in its header the sections devoted to football, Formula 1, cricket, rugby, tennis, golf, athletics and cycling, whereas the other disciplines can still be found under the "All Sport" label. As a consequence, the homepage appears to offer heterogeneous content, too.

Similarly, Guardian Sport's online platform presents updated news and in depth analysis, as well as video contributions, on various sports disciplines, outlining football, cricket, rugby, tennis, cycling, F1, golf, boxing, horse racing in the homepage header; sections on Other sports are referred to at the bottom of the page, including athletics, motor sports, sailing and a dedicated space to parasports.

Consistently with the mid-market status of Daily Mail, Mail Online – Sport's homepage displays a multitude of news in a tabloid-style format, with a huge number of pictures and long eye-catching headlines in large letters. It is not organized into thematic sections, but the main focus is evidently on football news, which usually take up the majority of the top fold. Along with football, sports explicitly accounted for in the header are boxing, rugby, golf, cricket, F1, tennis, MMA and racing.

4.6.2 Sample

As was the case with Italy, I analysed 315 news items, 105 per website, selecting on a daily basis 15 news stories from the top section of their homepages in the span of time that goes from 9 a.m. to 10 a.m. during the week of 31 August - 6 September 2020.

Most items consisted in long and comprehensive written articles; however, BBC Sport occasionally included also videos previously broadcasted on tv, whereas Mail Online – Sport presented texts interspersed with a wide number of photos and short video clips (I took into account only those strictly related to the news story).

I coded news, commentaries and insights appearing on the upper half of the homepage as main stories, excluding games, quizzes and live updated sections which usually provide gossip on men's football's transfer market. In the case of Mail Online – Sport, I did not consider thematic video galleries among the monitored news items.

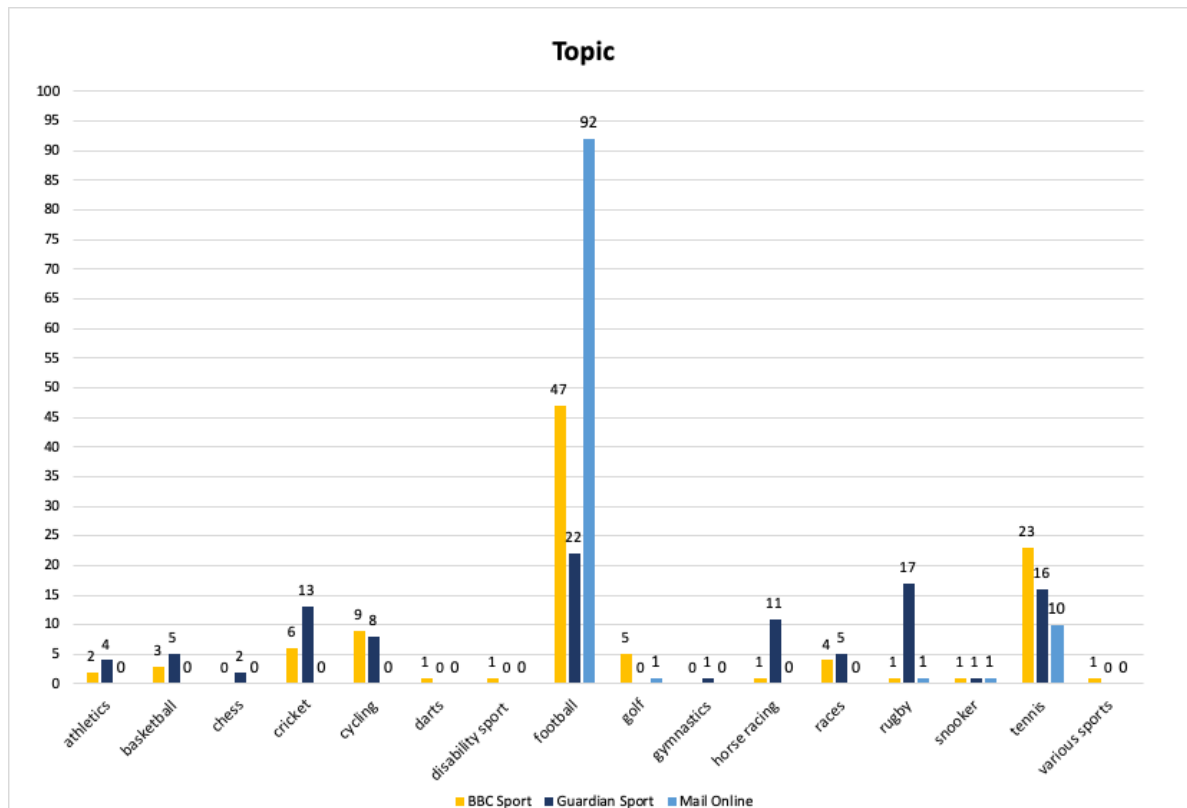
The monitoring week saw English teams and athletes participating in various international competitions, from men's cricket to men's union rugby, from women and

men’s US Open tennis tournament to the World Athletics Diamond League meeting staged in Brussels, from the men’s football team’s match in the UEFA Nations League qualifiers to the international men’s golf BMW Championship, from men’s Tour de France to Formula 1 GPs. Men’s Premier League was off-season, with an open transfer market window, whereas women’s UEFA Champions League final had just taken place on August 30th and Women’s Super League had resumed on the monitoring weekend. Moreover, it was also a crucial week for the world-famous NBA Playoffs tournament between American men’s basketball teams.

4.6.3 Findings

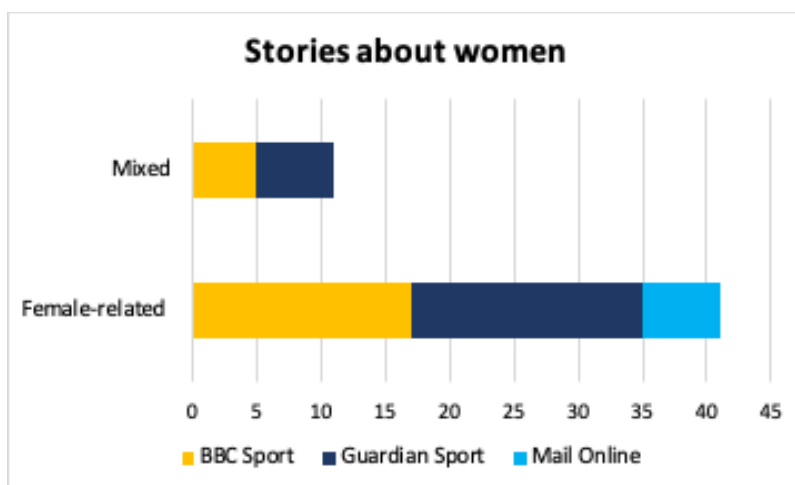
British sports news websites presented a more diversified range of topics than the Italian ones, despite football remaining the sport more written about on all homepages, with a total of 161 news items. However, while different sport disciplines were rather balanced on BBC Sport and Guardian Sport, Daily Mail, which is the outlet with the most popular vocation, featured a disproportionate amount of football-related news (92).

Fig. 4.1.



The percentage of stories about women was very low (13%). Nonetheless, BBC Sport and Guardian Sport contained more than double the amount included on each Italian website, 17 and 18 respectively, whereas Mail Online (6) reflected the Italian trend in this respect, too. In total, there were 41 female-related stories, mostly reporting about tennis (21), but also about football, horse racing, basketball, darts, rugby, athletics and gymnastics, all centred on athletes or women working in the sport industry. Added to these were 11 mixed stories on tennis, chess, races, athletics and various sports. Top positions included 20 news items about women and 9 mixed stories.

Fig. 4.2.



Consistently with worldwide reactions to the events taking place in America, which saw many athletes and sport systems taking a stand against racism, the monitored news items showed a certain sensitivity to racial inequality issues, often mentioned and highlighted in several stories. Although to a lesser extent, gender inequality was addressed, too: 13 stories focused or touched upon on this thematic, 4 on BBC Sport, 2 on Mail Online – Sport and 7 on Guardian Sport, which in many respects proved to be the most gender-sensitive out of the three analysed websites. BBC Sport, for example, referred to equal pay issues in football, maternity leave conditions for tennis players and the intersection between gender and racial discrimination; Mail Online told the story of a male former athlete providing support to the transgender community and included an article calling for equality and diversity in football; Guardian Sport, on its part, highlighted inequality issues in football, sexism in horse racing’s managerial staffs, cases of trans ban in rugby, personal experiences of transgender people in the sporting environment, athletes’

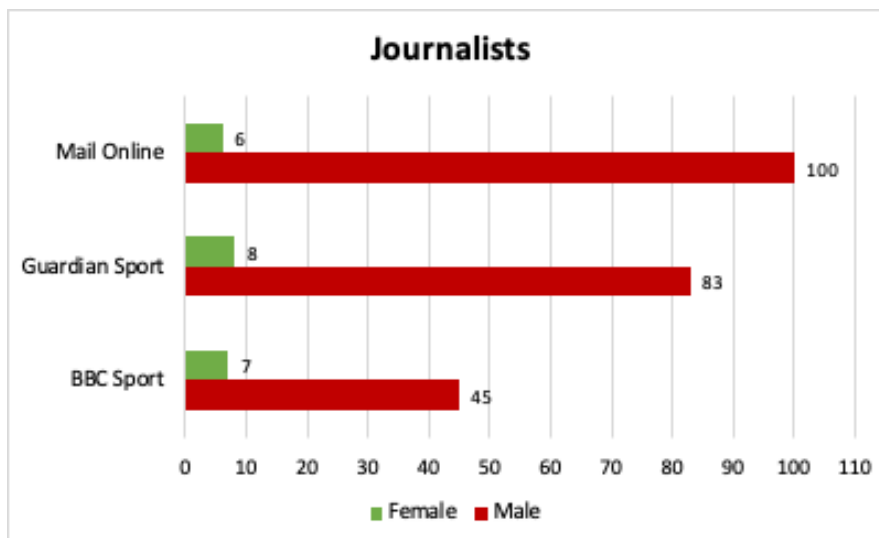
activism for equality rights, calls for diversity on cricket boards. It is also worth noticing that out of all these articles, only one was written by a woman.

On the other part, despite the absence of stories perpetuating any blatant stereotype or sexualizing women in any way, only one news item clearly challenged gendered assumptions (see 4.6.4) on Guardian Sport.

Coronavirus's impact on the type of news items found on British websites can be compared to what was already noticed in the Italian case, since many news (82) were at least in part related to infected athletes or to the consequences on the sporting world.

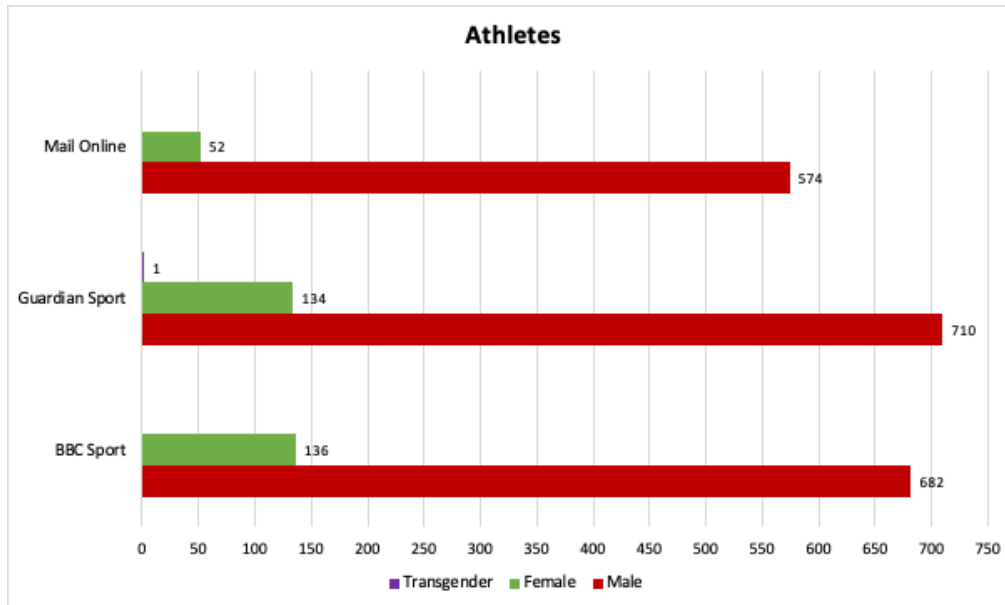
In total, out of 249 journalists with identifiable gender 21 were females, showing the persistence of women's underrepresentation. Topics they wrote about were heterogeneous: football (8), cricket (5), horse racing (2), basket (1), disability sport (1), darts (1), cycling (1), golf (1), various sports (1). Only on one occasion a female journalist dealt with gossip-related news, for the rest their articles focused on matters of a strictly sporting nature.

Fig. 4.3.



Out of 3136 people, 86.5% were men, with only 422 females and 2 transgender women appearing in the news; the same disproportion could be noted among sportspeople, as men made up 86% of 2289 athletes, with 322 females and a trans woman - mostly tennis (197) and football (79) players.

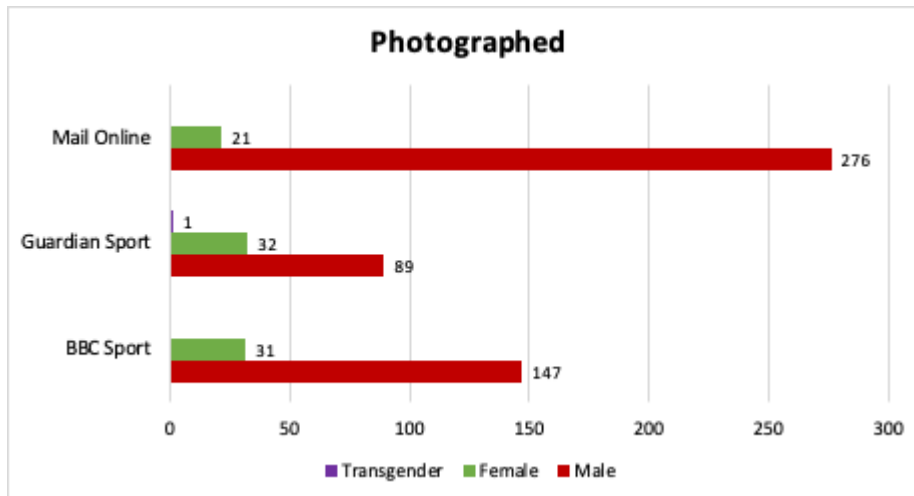
Fig. 4.4.



Women were underrepresented also in other sport-related occupations, including former athletes (6 as opposed to 162 men), coaches/team managers/trainers (11), managerial positions (16) and sports presidents (3), although with slightly higher rates than on Italian websites. In terms of function, women served as experts on 2 occasions out of 37, both times in Guardian Sport articles, whereas BBC Sport and Mail Online consulted exclusively 13 and 23 male experts, respectively. As for spokespersons, 22 out of 29 were men.

Only 16% of quoted people (464) were female (73) or transgender (2), including for the most part coaches, managers and athletes. Men were also disproportionately portrayed in photographs, as women appeared in 14% of pictures (84 out of 597, plus one transgender woman); however, they were always portrayed in respectful and non-discriminatory ways.

Fig. 4.5.

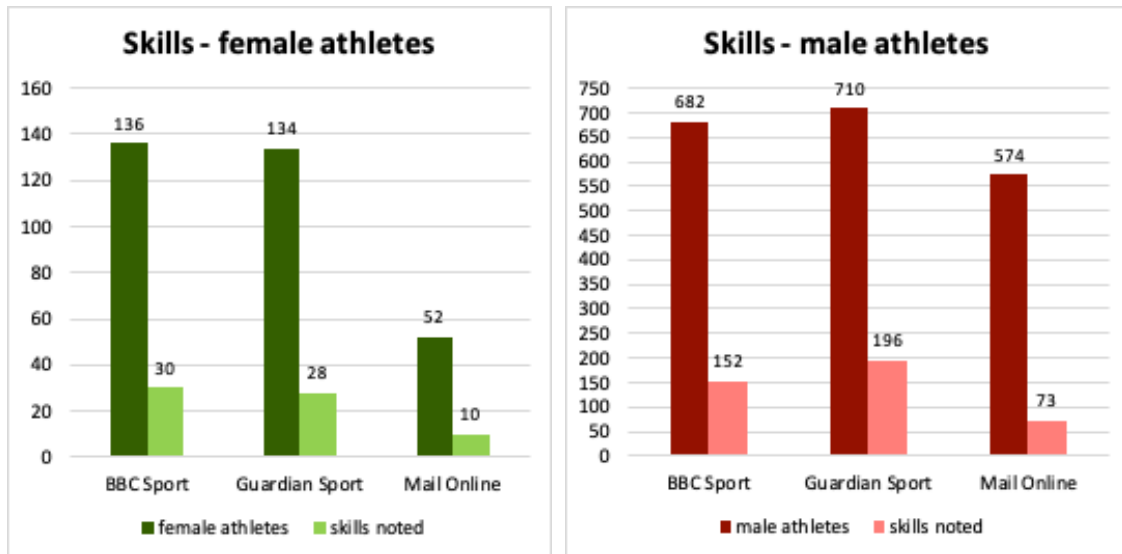


There was a noticeable difference in how many times family roles were mentioned with reference to men (2.1%) and to women (11.3%); in particular, Mail Online described women in terms of their familiar relationships 23.8% of the times as opposed to men's 2.8%.

Despite representing a higher number of women than Italian websites, in terms of appearance-focused descriptions there were only two cases where Guardian Sport referred to Serena Williams's shoes and to the style of dress a transgender football manager was more comfortable with. On all other occasions (5 on BBC Sport, 4 on Guardian Sport, 3 on Mail Online) the focus was on men's appearance, whether it be on their hairstyle or on physical details such as moustaches or teeth.

In comparison to Italy, British websites noted female athletes' skills with greater frequency (22% on BBC Sport, 21% on Guardian Sport, 19% on Mail Online) and substantively reduced any gender gap in this respect, as men's skills were highlighted in 22%, 28% and 13% of the times, respectively.

Fig. 4.6.



People's emotionality was showcased in the story in 36 cases out of 2712 as regards men, in 15 cases out of 422 as far as women are concerned. Despite women's percentage being slightly higher (3.6% as opposed to 1.3%), it is worth noticing that female and male emotions tended to be highlighted without validating any particular gendered stereotype, as narratives dwelled on men's tears, anxiety and frustration as much as on women's. Although there was a certain propensity to link female athletes' poor performances or struggles during a match to poorly controlled nerves, there was not enough evidence to report it as an actual gendered pattern.

As expected, the low number of female-related news items resulted in less photos and videos portraying women but taking into account only mixed stories (11) there were four instances of all-male pictures, as well as two occasions where BBC Sport presented all-female images. Moreover, as already mentioned above, from a qualitative point of view pictures always represented women in appropriate and non-sexualized ways.

In terms of titles and language, there were not many noteworthy cases, except for two headlines on Guardian Sport which referred only to the male side of a mixed story and for some instances of gender marking with reference only to women's sports.

4.6.4 Qualitative analysis

None of the stories from the monitored sample conveyed any blatant stereotypes about women or men, whereas some news items provided examples of subtle gendered assumptions or represented lost chances at exploring certain thematics from different, not gender-blind point of views. On the other side, among them stood out also good practices in terms of recognizing female athletes' dignity and worth, subverting gender-based stereotyped views on sport, as well as acknowledging the issues which still prevent gender equality from being fully realized in the sporting dimension.

On BBC Sport two stories in particular are interesting items to further examine, as they were both female-centred insights which remained for multiple days amongst the news included in the homepage's most visible sections and were deeply interrelated with racial issues. The first one²³ reported the story of Deta Hedman, a successful British darts player who talked about the racism she experienced in the course of her career as a black sportswoman; it is worth noticing that the article, written by a female journalist, was prompted by a 2020 BBC Sport Survey conducted among elite British sportswomen which had revealed that one in five of them had to endure racist behaviours. Thus, issues of inequality were extensively addressed by delving into the athlete's experience, even though the gender aspect was not fully explored.

The other article²⁴ focused instead on the basketball player Maya Moore, who refused to play as long as Jonathan Irons, an African-American man who had been wrongfully convicted of murder, was not cleared of all charges; her story was an inspiring example of sportspeople taking a stand for social issues and was narrated as such, in spite of an introduction filled with pathos which stressed Moore's overwhelming emotion at Irons' release by dramatically describing how her legs collapsed.

Guardian Sport, on its part, presented multiple cases of what could be considered good practices, for example not refraining from reporting male athletes' emotions or from giving voice to transgender people's experiences in the sports industry, but it is particularly interesting to examine a news item about Women's Super League

²³ Grey, B. (2020a, August 13th). *Deta Hedman: 'I'm not here to please you. I'm here to play a game that I enjoy'*. BBC Sport. <https://www.bbc.com/sport/darts/53677651>.

²⁴ Grey, B. (2020b, August 20th). *Maya Moore: WNBA star's successful campaign for Jonathan Irons' release*. BBC Sport. <https://www.bbc.com/sport/basketball/53677658>.

resumption²⁵ as it offered a prime example of how women's sports can be written about by gender-sensitive standards. In fact, the article, authored by a female journalist, focused on technical aspects, teams' strengths and athletes' skills, recognizing sportswomen's worth and their individual abilities, without flattening them to stereotyped descriptions. For instance, introducing Chelsea's coach Emma Hayes, it acknowledged both her "advanced grasp of tactical nuance [and] a stellar handling of human emotion". Moreover, it offered an insight into English women's football movement as a whole, taking into account also challenges and opportunities emerged from the post-Coronavirus reorganisation. Finally, it is worth noticing that all photographs portrayed female athletes on the pitch and that 5 of them were directly quoted in order to enrich the story with their first-hand experiences and opinions. The only non-sport related detail concerned a footballer's passion for dancing in parties, which was a pointless information that appeared in the article's incipit and was resumed in its closing lines, but that begs the question whether it would have been included if it had been a man.

As for Mail Online, a certain ambivalence was noted in one of few news items about women, which was centred on Manchester City new striker, Chloe Kelly²⁶: on the one side, the article told her story and how she reached professional football level, recognizing her skills on the pitch; on the other, it put particular emphasis on her brothers' teachings, starting from the headline, which read "Five big brothers taught Chloe Kelly how to battle in a pen on a gravel pitch", and then reiterating it multiple times with expressions like "plays against the big boys and takes the hard knocks", implicitly setting a male standard to be achieved and tracing back a Women's Super League professional female player's worth to her male relatives who play at local level. Kelly, on her part, was extensively quoted and was portrayed in several pictures, some on the field and some taken from a typical photoshoot unrelated to the sports dimension.

²⁵ Taylor, L. (2020, September 4th). *'The football will be spectacular' – WSL kicks off with renewed hope and energy*. Guardian Sport. <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2020/sep/04/the-football-will-be-spectacular-wsl-kicks-off-with-renewed-hope-and-energy>.

²⁶ Wheeler, C. (2020, September 4th). *'Playing cage football really made me the player I am': Five big brothers taught Chloe Kelly how to battle in a pen on a gravel pitch... now it's paid off with Manchester City move*. Mail Online – Sport. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/football/article-8699301/Big-brothers-taught-Chloe-Kelly-play-cage-paid-Manchester-City-move.html>.

Subtle gendered assumptions were perpetuated also with respect to sportsmen, as in the case of an article about Gareth Bale's appearance²⁷, which made fun of his long hair reporting jokes appeared on social media; the headline included one specific comment that read "Now we know why Zidane leaves Bale on the bench", as if long hair in a male athlete was "overgrown" and made a newsworthy and funny anecdote.

No particular gender-blind stories were found on Mail Online, but most stories about football-related issues, such as new conditions caused by Covid-19 restrictions and the movement's support for Black Lives Matter, focused exclusively on Premier League's players and teams, totally overlooking consequences on and contributions of Women's Super League.

4.6.5 Summary of key results

The monitoring analysis's results confirmed women's underrepresentation in both sports newsrooms and stories, as only 8.4% of articles were written by female journalists (from a maximum of 13.5% on BBC Sport to a minimum of 5.7 on Mail Online) and women made up 13.5% of people making the news (14% of athletes) and 14% of photographed subjects.

Low percentages of stories about women (on average 13%) reflected trends already noted in previous literature: BBC Sport and Guardian Sport presented more than twice as many female-related news items (16% and 17%) as Mail Online (6%), which instead displayed more similarities to Italian sports news outlets. Unsurprisingly, most stories about women, as well as most mixed narratives and mentioned female athletes, were linked to tennis, which has usually been the most gender inclusive discipline in terms of sports media coverage. It is worth noticing, however, that half female-related news and more than half mixed stories were placed on top sections of the homepage.

As expected, women were hardly consulted as competent authorities in the sports dimension, as only Guardian Sport included two female experts in its news items, whereas for what concerns skills, appearance and emotion, British websites defied expectations

²⁷ Seward, J. (2020, September 2nd). *'Now we know why Zidane leaves Bale on the bench': Fans react to incredible photos of Real Madrid outcast letting his hair down on Wales duty*. Mail Online – Sport. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/football/article-8690701/Fans-react-incredible-photos-Gareth-Bale-letting-hair-Wales-duty.html>.

by not showing substantial gender-based disparities. On the other hand, women were more commonly described in terms of their family relationships than men, in particular on Mail Online – Sport, where the difference was of 21 percentage points.

Confirming my starting hypothesis, blatant stereotypes were absent from all monitored outlets, whereas subtle assumptions conveying ambivalent messages could still be found and only one story on BBC Sport clearly challenged gender stereotypes. However, it is worth mentioning that 13 stories explicitly addressed gender-related inequalities, as part of a general tendency to highlight equality and diversity issues, especially if put in comparison with Italian data results.

Unsurprisingly, given its popular vocation, the scarcity of specific gender-sensitive policies and editorial guidelines and the unequal internal composition of its media house, Mail Online was the British website displaying the worst performance in terms of both female quantitative representation and persisting subtle gendered assumptions which emerged from some particular articles. BBC Sport and Guardian Sport, on the other side, despite still perpetuating women's low visibility in and through sports media, proved to pay more attention to provide a diverse and non-stereotyped portrayal of sportswomen and men.

CONCLUSIONS

The research showed that considerable improvements are still needed in order to close the gender gap in sports news coverage. Both Country cases provided data that, on the whole, seemed to confirm the hypotheses formulated on the basis of previous literature, despite displaying also some discrepancies among different media houses' performances, which could be explained by their public or private nature, as well as by the policy framework each of them complies with.

While the overall number of women employed in all the media organisations taken into account exceeds or is approximately equal to 40%, gendered imbalance is particularly evident in decision-making positions, confirming a persisting vertical segregation which is actually addressed in their policies and social reports. BBC and Guardian Media Group, in particular, set out specific plans and strategies in order to increase the rate of female representatives at the company's top levels and this policy effort is reflected in their internal compositions, which present by far the highest percentage of women in decision-making roles out of all six media houses considered.

Looking specifically at their sports departments, female journalists are still a minority, as evidenced also by the monitoring analysis of sports news websites, which showed that most items were produced by men, whereas women appeared as authors in 13.5% of the cases, at best (BBC Sport). This severe underrepresentation is significant, as it highlights how sports newsrooms are still male dominated, thus less likely to integrate diverse experiences and perspectives which could foster more gender sensitivity in content. However, the number of female journalists is not, itself, indicative of quantitative and qualitative improvement in terms of women in sport's coverage, unless it is supported by internal policies and editorial guidelines meant to eradicate a man-centred culture in sports news making. In fact, items produced by women can perpetuate as well gendered assumptions rooted in newsrooms' practices, as proved, for example, by female written articles on *Gazzetta dello Sport* which referred to women only as male athletes' beautiful companions. In this respect, an aspect worth noticing is that women are slowly taking up roles of responsibility in the editorial area, especially in the UK: BBC Sport is coordinated by a female director, Daily Mail's former sports news editor was a woman and The

Guardian, despite entrusting to a man the sport section, relies on a female editor in chief; on the other side, Rai Sport has a female deputy director out of six, SportMediaset counts on two female co-directors out of four and Gazzetta dello Sport includes only male editors.

The monitoring analysis highlighted how women's low visibility in online sports media content is still an issue, since the percentage of stories about them exceeded 10% only on BBC Sport (16%) and Guardian Sport (17%), and women were included in mixed stories in 3.5% and 2.9% of the times on British and Italian websites, respectively. The limitations induced by the Covid emergency, which prevented many competitions from taking place in the monitored period, certainly contributed to reduce the number of available news subjects, but they do not justify this "symbolic annihilation" of sportswomen, whose disciplines are largely ignored whereas men's sport (especially men's football) is profusely reported about even when off-season. If we adopt a comparative point of view, British websites' performance in this respect was certainly better than what was registered in the Italian case, presenting twice as many occurrences of female-related stories, in large part in the homepage's top section: this greater attention to women in sport could be traced back to the UK national policy on sport, media and gender, since it addresses the importance of a diverse representation of the sporting environment through all media channels, including women's disciplines, whereas Italian policy documents in this context do not explicitly stress *diversity* issues, although the increasing efforts made by civil society and professional associations could foster positive change in that direction.

As expected, then, digital platforms do not seem to take advantage yet of the absence of time and space constraints to provide a wider and more gender inclusive range of news items, sticking instead to trends and practices rooted in all their media house's outlets on the basis of editorial lines which, for the most part, do not provide for any specific measure to increase women's sports and women in sport's representation.

Considering that the Coronavirus emergency had an impact both on the sporting world and on the type of news and stories published by sports media, the research should be repeated during a monitoring period less biased by external factors. However, some interesting considerations can still stem from the monitoring results: for example, my

hypotheses on gender disparity in how many times women and men are described in terms of their family roles, appearance, skills and emotions found more validation on Italian websites than on British ones, with apparent discrepancy between public and private organisations' performances. In particular, SportMediaset and Gazzetta dello Sport, which do not rely on any policy related to women's representation and portrayal, tended to meet expectations, combining female low visibility to an image of women as ancillary subjects in the sport industry, with little to no reference to athletes and their worth. Rai Sport, on the other side, counting on Service Contract provisions which are more concerned with conveying equal and non-stereotyped images of women, presented data that seemed to rule out significant gaps in these four categories. As for the UK sample, examined news items confirmed only the tendency to explicate women's personal relationships more frequently than men's. For what concerns women's function in the story, instead, all six outlets without distinction completely disregarded female experts, as only Guardian Sport consulted two of them, implicitly reaffirming the commonly accepted notion that only men can be competent authorities in the sporting field.

From a qualitative point of view, in the British case the research confirmed the trend that had already been noticed in previous studies whereby sports media are less likely to perpetuate blatant gender stereotypes than to convey subtle assumptions which make the story ambivalent. However, in the case of Gazzetta dello Sport and especially of SportMediaset, sexualized images of women and objectifying narratives were still noted, marking the absence of adequate gender-related policy regulating the quality of published content. UK websites, instead, not only avoided any type of blatantly stereotyped or sexist story, but also displayed more sensitivity to issues of inequality which were completely overlooked on Italian websites.

It is also worth noticing that the biggest difference within the British sample was registered between Guardian Sport and Mail Online rather than between public and private organisations. In fact, Guardian Sport, as the official online platform of a quality broadsheet paper, showcased similar performances to BBC Sport, despite relying on the same Code of Practice as Daily Mail, which only prescribes to avoid prejudicial and pejorative reference based on gender, as opposed to more comprehensive BBC policies and editorial guidelines. Mail Online, on the other hand, presented some patterns which

were more aligned with Italian results, due to its mid-market nature, targeted at larger masses.

On the whole, despite being conducted at particular times, the analysis displayed results which seem to confirm the trend already noticed in sports coverage by previous literature, whereby sexist and blatantly stereotyped portrayals of sportswomen are increasingly avoided (the same cannot be said, however, of girlfriends and wives in Italian private media houses' websites), as part of a slow process of improvement which reflects the limited number of gender-related policy adopted by examined media organisations, mostly concerned with eliminating offensive and discriminatory content.

On the other side, women's underrepresentation in and through digital sports media has unsurprisingly emerged as a persistent and substantial issue, which can be considered the result of deep-rooted practices, commercial reasons and the absence of adequate policy solutions. In fact, public service broadcasters (BBC Sport and Rai Sport), which count on some provisions calling for diversity in media content and in newsrooms' internal composition, happen to register in this respect the best performances in their own Countries, albeit still to be improved.

Finally, the research showed that both Italian and British online sports media do not meet gender-sensitive requirements yet, overshadowing women's role and perpetuating a male-dominated vision of sport. Stated that what we see or read on sports news websites depend on interconnected factors involving both media and the sport industry and that the policy dimension can and should play a big part in fostering gender equality in this context, their current policy efforts appear inadequate to make change; in order to do so, specific provisions, guidelines, measures and initiatives should be implemented so that media can give a realistic account of what sport is, respecting and equally representing different subjects, contributions and competences, in all their gender diversity.

TABLES

Table 1.1 Author's adaptation from MAGEEQ project framework template (Verloo, 2004)

Voice		Who is speaking in the text? Who is excluded?
Diagnosis	Overall representation	What is represented as the problem? What is not a problem?
	Normativity	What is depicted as a norm? What is good/bad? Is gender equality mentioned as a norm? What does it mean?
Attribution of Causality/Responsibility		Who is responsible for it? Who is suffering because of the problem? What is seen as a cause of what?
Prognosis	Overall representation	What should be done to make it right? What are the suitable courses of action suggested? Which dimensions of gender are (not) covered?
	Normativity	Which norms are present/ absent in the solution?
Call for Action		Who should do something? Who is not called upon?

Table 1.2 Author's adaptation from GMMP Internet news coding sheet (WACC, 2020a)

Basic information	Website name	
	URL	
	Date/time accessed	
Story	Position	
	Coronavirus-related info	
	Topic (which sport?)	
	Scope	
Analysis	Is the story about a particular woman or a group of women?	
	This story clearly highlights issues of inequality	
	This story clearly challenges gender stereotypes	
Journalist	Sex	
People	Sex	
	Occupation/position	
	Function in story	
	Family role given	
	Appearance description given	
	Skills noted	
	Emotionality brought up	
	Directly quoted	
	Photographed	
Comments which could be useful for further analysis	Analysis of photos, images, audio and video clips in the story	
	Analysis of titles	
	Analysis of language	

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