

# Discussion Paper

# **Feminist Sport Policy**

## **Authors**

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## **Feminism – liberation for all**

Thanks to the tireless work and dedication of many, especially BIPOC activists, the broader population has a better understanding of how different forms of inequality and discrimination interact and exacerbate each other. Intersectional feminism allows for systematic oppression to be understood within the context of structural and historical factors without overlooking the uniqueness of individual living circumstances and different contexts.

Equaletics e.V. understands feminism as a liberation movement to dismantle gender norms and patriarchal orders, thereby realizing self-determined and equal participation and dignified life for all. This is explicitly not limited to the rights of those that identify as women. Pursuing genuine justice requires the willingness and ability to reflect critically and not only understand different types of oppression but also recognize the struggles against them as compounding. This is why the resistance of marginalized and disenfranchised groups deserves visibility and solid support. United in diversity, structural inequalities inside and outside of sport can be overcome.

## **Sport and sport policy today**

The consistent and collective support of feminist causes is currently only a peripheral matter within German organised sport and within the society in which it is embedded. Patriarchal power structures reproduce white, male-dominated, cis- and heteronormative spaces that are locked for some, unsafe for others, but comfortable for many. Hegemonic, often toxic masculinity dominates a sport, which claims to serve a public-benefit purpose through social participation and embracing diversity. In this way, an essentially binary system, which tends to cement historical and hierarchical orders (between genders) instead of breaking them down, has been established and reinforced for decades. The illusion of openness of organised sport, which is fed by millions of memberships and countless self-written success stories, often serves as a means of self-reassurance, making it challenging to take a genuinely critical look at one's structures and actions.

There is no doubt that sport can break down societal complexity: Ideally, thanks to a handful of rules and the respect of key values, markers of difference can fade into the background. With this, sport fulfils an important prerequisite to unfolding a feminist,

i.e., a liberating and progressive force. Sport can not only make oppressive mechanisms and power dynamics visible and take a stand on these issues, but can also create spaces, which are free from harmful practices and impact society with this emancipatory force positively. If the promises and values of organised sport are taken seriously, feminist action should be understood not only as a potential or opportunity, but as its central mission.

### **Feminist sport policy**

Sport policy which commits itself to feminist causes experiences a shift in thinking and in action. Feminist sport policy aims to realise equal participation for everyone, not only for those benefiting from a status quo that is shaped by members of dominant and mainstream societal groups. Hence, dealing with (gender) diversity is no longer an obstacle to be woven into the "normal" and "well-tried" processes, but a core mandate. Reforms that result in the reduction of injustice are henceforth obligatory. Transforming this ideal into a measurable and achievable goal requires a radical redistribution of rights, representation, and resources. The problem is clearly not the fact that people have them, but how they are (re-)produced. Current structures and dynamics promote an extremely uneven distribution due to multiple, often simultaneously operating mechanisms of oppression. For this reason, from now on, intersectional feminism must be considered as a cross-cutting issue and priority in decision-making at all levels.

Provided that there is a sincere commitment to the often emphasised sporting values and a willingness to rethink and (un-)learn, feminist sport policy can succeed on both a small and a large scale. Pivotal for the success of feminist sport policy is the renegotiation and rebalancing of the societal functions of sport. Feminist liberation goes hand in hand with a rejection of pure profit-seeking and the absolutisation of performance to the detriment of other goals. Instead, sport must be stipulated and incentivised by policy-makers as a safe, discrimination- and barrier-free space for self-identified and equal participation. Competitive sport and its promotion must also serve this purpose.

### **Demands and outlook**

Feminist sport policy is not a ready-to-use solution that can simply be adopted and implemented. It is a negotiation process that will never be completed. However, there

are some reform measures that are indispensable for the change in perspective a feminist sport policy requires. The following four demands by Equaletics e.V. are by no means meant to be exhaustive, but rather outline exemplary ways of how the ideal of a feminist sport policy can be approached:

1. Clubs and associations commit themselves to feminist goals and recognise them as guiding principles. They acknowledge feminism as an intersectional task and incorporate it in their statutes. In this way, clubs and associations commit themselves to take feminism as a key priority into account when making decisions.
2. Clubs, associations and all other sport-political actors address historically established inequalities and their consequences. Based on this self-critical reflection, they commit themselves to eliminating these wrongs quickly and permanently through structural change, if necessary, by systematically promoting and supporting previously disadvantaged groups.
3. Public funding of sports must be tied to increasingly ambitious feminist criteria at all levels. In line with intersectional thinking, other dimensions besides gender equity shall be taken into account. All types of oppression should not be seen as isolated, but as interconnected. Disproportionate benefits for certain genders, for instance, can only be justified by adequate compensatory measures, and in the long term only by pursuing ambitious plans to eliminate imbalances in participation and support.
4. "Nothing about us without us!". In the spirit of feminist liberation, social participation should be realised as a collective task. In all decision-making processes affecting sport policy, power, privilege and representation should be critically reflected as well as fairly and newly distributed.

The aim of this discussion paper is neither to introduce a new term into the public discourse, nor to provide empty phrases allowing those responsible to conceal their omissions or even to decorate themselves with. On the contrary: feminist sport policy as a term and idea should give two impetuses. First, to remind policy-makers of the central characteristics, goals and potentials of sport, which should be strengthened and consistently pursued. This includes the creation of spaces in which free, just and fulfilling coexistence and communal life can be negotiated, tested, and shaped in a collaborative and respectful manner. Second, the reorientation of sport based on past and present mistakes as well as on the realisation that societal conditions have

radically changed and therefore also require a comprehensive paradigm shift. In times of sport-specific and general societal challenges, such as declining membership figures and politically divisive tendencies, feminist thinking and action opens up optimistic and progressive perspectives that identify sport as liberating force for the good of all.

A sport that cares for the interests of the many and of the few.

A sport that takes its promises and visions radically serious.

A sport that strives for equal participation and the greater good.

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### **About Equaletics e.V.:**

Equaletics is an independent feminist collective aiming to establish processes and structures in sport that allow for a fair and equal participation of everyone.

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