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1 Introduction

Globalization, sports labor migration and women's mobilities

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In recent years women's soccer has enjoyed a boom in participation and it is now undergoing significant growth in participation and organization, worldwide (FIFA 2007). The number of players has more than doubled since the year 2000 and has surpassed 29 million girls and women playing soccer (FIFA 2013). Besides its increasing popularity among participants the game has also experienced a growth in economic support, an expansion of well-organized leagues in several countries and increase in media coverage, advertising and sponsorship. Still, working as a professional or semi-professional women's soccer player is only possible in around 30 out of the currently 123 FIFA-listed women's soccer countries (see chapter 3).

This means that talented and skilled women soccer players in most countries need to leave their home in order to become professionals (Tiesler 2012b: 113). Our initial studies suggest that international mobility in women's soccer (particularly of players but also coaches) has increased substantially in recent years, expanding beyond traditional geographic limits and assuming globalized characteristics (Agergaard and Botelho 2010; Botelho and Agergaard 2011; Tiesler 2012a, 2012b). While the first professional soccer league for women in the USA (WUSA) and its follow-up WPS (Women's Professional Soccer), leagues in the biggest receiving country, had accounted for up to 30 percent of migrant players, the percentages of foreigners in the preferred countries of destination in Europe, such as Sweden, Germany, England and Russia, made up on average between 19 and 23 percent of league players in the seasons 2007/08 and 2008/09 (Tiesler 2010: 5). In single premier league clubs in the European core countries, such as Germany and Sweden, migrants constitute anywhere between 36 to 50 percent of league players (team rosters 2010/11). Very little, however, is known about the ways in which these migratory processes have developed. Which are the main trends and patterns concerning the international mobility of women soccer players? Why do different areas come to appear as centers and peripheries? What is specific about women's soccer migration in comparison to related areas of studies, such as women's and youth migration, male sports migration and migration of the highly skilled? What can we learn more generally, at a conceptual level, from studying this specific subject area? [...]