



## **CIVL 2016 PLENARY – ANNEX 7 FEMINIZATION OF SPORTS**

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Feminisation of sports is a main issue underlined by the IOC over the last decade and is probably going to continue so until the levels of female involvement in leisure and competition practices altogether reach a more realistic level.

Free flying and its main activity paragliding is no exception to this situation: although I have no data for the overall worldwide figures, I believe the French ones describe accurately the overall situation. With 30 % of beginners pilots as female, these seem to rapidly leave the activity to a level of approximately 10% of overall licensed pilots and less than 5 % in competition pilots. The level remains similar in hand gliding.

A number of hypothesis have been made to explain the disinterest and disappearance of women in our sport, but no real study or sharing of experience across the worldwide federations have been made so far.

Personally, I have now completed my third season as the delegate for the Women Commission at the largest regional instance in France, the Ligue Rhone Alpes, and was required by the FFVL to create the Federal Women' s commission with a mission to investigate the reasons for this situation and try and improve the over all retaining of female pilots in the activity. I am myself a (modest) competing paraglider pilot and have been flying since 2005. I am 51, and the mother of two (grown up) children, and today, after a number of different professional activities that range from investment banking to sustainability issues, I am a bilingual science teacher in France. I have also lived in the UK for 25 years and speak French, English, German and some Spanish.

The aim of my presentation at CIVL is to present our work at FFVL and try to motivate other federations to work with us on this issue, by sharing our experience and existing actions in this field, mutualise human and budgetary means, and work together in improving these figures. Some may think there is no need to have a Women's Commission to do this, well, I will disagree but expect this Commission to disappear in the near future, as this would mean the equality in genders in our sports will have been reached. Until then, it seems quite reasonable to overlook at our differences and identify the working strategies as well as the non-working ones and implement changes in our training and practice to allow more women to enjoy this sport. It is rather interesting to see that in some countries like Japan, the participation of women in our sport is much greater and increasing, and linked to some good success in the past two years in international competitions like the PWC. I have myself witnessed the teamwork and coaching taking place amongst the Japanese female pilots, and I tend to believe this could be a leading edge for our investigation and work.

In short, here are the axis of work that have been set by our federation for this Commission:

- 1- *Axis 1: Identify the relevant technical and psychological issues in pilot training that affect women pilots and offer a differentiated pedagogical approach that may increase the retention of women pilots on the long term: on this axis, it has been noted that women pilots leave the activity before or around the acquisition of autonomy ( before or around IPPI4 level). Once this autonomy and independence of flying is acquired, most continue the activity on the long term, even if they stop for some time for maternity (for example). In this axis, the aim is to reach some recommendations in teaching practice that can be added to the training of paragliding coaches and instructors.*
  
- 2- *Axis 2: Provide continuous opportunities for differentiated « clinics » on several pertinent points and level of expertise to hike the overall level of practice. We have noted after three years of « stages filles » organised by the Ligue Rhone Alpes, that women pilots come to train in such a stage to review some technical and mental aspects of their practice, and do not actually strictly wish to train in a female-only environment. They insist that mixed training is a good thing, but that the female training is an opportunity to strengthen and cure some precise issues, which they find difficult to deal with in a mixed environment. The impact of these women training in France can be measured with data on women pilots participating in the French XC contest (CFD) over the past four years: the overall pilot increase in this friendly competition is 65% from 2011/12 to 2014/15 as the women pilots number increases by 81% in the same time. It remains however modest with 5,8% of all pilots entered in this competition, but the trend is going the right way.*
  
- 3- *Axis 3: Encourage the sharing of experience, technical an mental training amongst women pilots, in order to erase the « failure feeling » that most of them go through at one stage during their practice and probably responsible for a large number of resignations in the activity. The **isolation of women pilots** in their club, geographical area is a common fact, and when they find it difficult to improve or be as daring as the male pilots they fly with on a regular basis, they endure a **common lack of motivation** and find it hard to go over it, with little opportunities to share their stress with other female pilots. It is one of the leading thread in the three years of organising women-only training, to read in trainees' feedback how grateful they were to be given the opportunity to share their stress and realise that other pilots felt similarly, and that it was a normal stage to go through as a female pilot. Our trainers have regularly mentioned the **need of their female trainees to be listened to and free to share stressful situations and questions with a positive ear**. We have also involved regular mental training sessions with a sport psychologist and sophrologist on themes as such as « I am scared when I fly» or « how can I fly if I have young children depending on me? ». The French Federation has helped local clubs and Ligues organise women events in our sports to de-dramatise the dangerous aspect of free flying and put together an integrated calendar of women events across France to help pilots meet up and get organised for this. The Ligue Rhone Alpes has also organised twice a year over the past three years some beginner female pilots competition « les challenges feminins », at entry level and FAI2 registered in order to get more female pilots to meet up, organising theoretical training during these events, and involving potential future female pilots that wish to discover what xc competition is about. These popular events have drained regularly over 20 female pilots on launch (more than double the normal figure), along with a similar number of male pilots (but never exceeding the female number).*

- 4- Axis 4: The French Federation is engaging in 2016 a **global think tank on female gear in paragliding**, involving professionals, pilots of all levels, trainers and coaches and any relevant body that may contribute positively to this work. It would be very interesting if more bodies would agree to contribute to this project, on the long term. The topic is complex as it involves issues to do with safety, fairness of the sport and performance. It matters not only to women pilots but also to any small weight pilot (that is, let's say, below 70 kg in body weight).
  
- 5- Axis 5: Bring **more female pilots to International competitions' level**, at PWC qualification level and overall, at the Cat1 FAI competition level, in order to generate a real competition in women. At this stage, women never exceed 7-10% in PWC and sometimes less in FAI 1 competitions: the overall level of women pilots is a reason for this lack of them, but not the only one. The modest trial of the Challenges feminins in France since 2013 and the women Open competitions organised last in 2012 in Ajer have proved to be successes. Several issues prevented this last event to reoccur, but it seems that this year 2016, things could develop positively. Such competition at an average FAI2 level is beneficial for the image of women in free flying and allow the mix up of very experienced and less experienced pilots in a truly unique atmosphere. A global thinking may be needed to help talented and motivated women pilots' progress to this level. **An open international cooperation** on this issue is needed as the topic concerns everyone. The question of a women-only circuit is still there, although not generally wished by women pilots. More thoughts can be given in a constructive manner to this global question, on an international scale.

In conclusion, I would like to be offered the opportunity to make a presentation on my work at the Ligue Rhone-Alpes and FFVL women's Commissions, during the CIVL conference in lausanne this winter. I would be primarily presenting these axes, which all deal with specific issues independent from each other. Thereafter, the project would benefit of an opportunity of general brainstorming in the free flying world. The CIVL conference seems to be the right opportunity to perform such reflexion, and I am ready to work with you to prepare some workshops on these axes, would you give a go-ahead to this project.