

Olympic Governance and Regulated Recognition in Greek Women's Sport 1922–1936

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Abstract: How did a national federation acquire authority over a field of women's sport that clubs had begun to organise independently? Focusing on Greece from 1922 to 1936, this study places SEGAS within the wider contest among the IOC, IAAF, and FSFI over women's athletics. Official Olympic reports published administrative evidence, Greek sport historiography, and source-critical press reconstructions are used to compare the timing of club activity, federation policy, and Olympic selection. Panionios's volleyball tournament of 1926 serves as a concise example of organised competition before state-level sporting regulation. Greek developments cannot be explained as a delayed copy of Amsterdam 1928: domestic initiative and international legitimacy moved on separate but intersecting timetables. SEGAS's circular of 16 March 1928 converted an existing practice into a supervised field, yet facilities, preparation, and international representation remained limited. The interval between recognition and Domnitsa Lanitou's Berlin appearance in 1936 reveals four distinct institutional processes—admission, jurisdiction, implementation, and representation. Their uneven sequence defines regulated recognition and provides a comparative framework for studying how governing bodies incorporated women's sport while retaining control over its organization.

Keywords: women's sport, Olympic governance, Greece, SEGAS, FSFI, institutionalization.

1. Introduction

The history of women's participation in the Olympic Games is also a history of institutional authority. The decisive questions were who could define legitimate competition, which events would count, whose records would be recognised, and which organisation would control selection and regulation. Early Olympic institutions developed within male educational and administrative networks, and their rules treated women's participation as an exception requiring special justification. Histories of women's sport have therefore shown that admission cannot be separated from the distribution of governing power.¹

Medical claims acquired political force when governing bodies used them to set programme limits. Arguments about fertility, motherhood, and physical strain converted social preferences into apparently technical reasons for excluding events or restricting training. The relevant issue for this study is how such claims entered administrative deliberation and helped officials present regulatory choices as protection rather than policy.²

These assumptions shaped early Olympism. Pierre de Coubertin's project connected modern sport with male education, disciplined competition and the production of civic and national character. His sustained reservations about women's competitive participation gave the Olympic revival an androcentric institutional grammar, even as actual Olympic practice gradually changed around him. Yet an account centred solely on Coubertin risks reproducing the very institutional perspective it seeks to criticise. Women athletes, teachers, club officials and organisers did not wait passively for permission. From the early twentieth century they created competitive opportunities, and after the First World War Alice Milliat and the Fédération Sportive Féminine Internationale (FSFI) gave those efforts a transnational organisational form.³

Recent research in Sport in History on Polish women athletes demonstrates the value of national interwar case studies based on press, congress reports, biographies, and archival material. Greece presents a different institutional sequence. Recurring domestic competitions appeared before sustained female Olympic success, while SEGAS debated whether it should recognise and govern a field already active outside its direction. The Greek case therefore reveals how sporting jurisdiction was constructed before international achievement supplied an established source of national prestige.⁴

The international chronology altered the options available to Greek administrators. Women entered a limited range of Olympic sports after 1900, the Fédération Sportive Féminine Internationale (FSFI) built an autonomous international athletics circuit from 1922, and Amsterdam 1928 placed five women's athletics events on the Olympic programme. Greek club activity, however, did not begin as a response to Amsterdam. Competitions organised in Athens before SEGAS recognition show that local practice and international reform followed connected but non-identical timetables.⁵

The principal research question is therefore: how did international struggles over women's Olympic inclusion intersect with the national institutionalisation of women's sport in interwar Greece between 1922 and 1936, and what does the Greek case reveal about the movement from tolerated practice to official jurisdiction? Two subsidiary questions organise the analysis. Why did club-led initiatives advance more quickly than the federation that claimed authority over organised athletics? And why did volleyball provide an early route into competition while track and field remained a more contentious frontier? The article uses these questions to move beyond a chronology of admission and towards an analysis of practice, legitimacy and governance.

The article advances three connected concepts. 'Asynchronous convergence' describes local and international changes that moved in a similar direction at different speeds without a demonstrable one-way chain of causation. 'Regulated recognition' identifies the double effect of formal inclusion: it admitted women while transferring authority over rules, facilities, records, and representation to male-dominated governing bodies. 'Institutional bridge' describes the sequencing function performed by volleyball. Repeated tournaments created schedules, inter-organisational cooperation, reporting routines, and practical precedents that existed before SEGAS adopted a national policy. These are analytical terms rather than expressions used by historical actors.⁶

2. Sources, archival limits and historiographical positioning

The study follows a historical-qualitative and comparative approach. Its core chronology begins with the post-1922 reconstruction of Panionios in Athens and ends with Berlin 1936, when Domnitsa Lanitou became the first Greek woman to compete in Olympic track and field. The earlier period from Athens 1896 to the mid-1920s functions as an interpretive prologue: it establishes the gendered institutional grammar of early Olympism and the emergence of an autonomous international women's sporting movement. This narrower centre of gravity is deliberate. The article does not seek to retell the entire history of women in the Olympic Games; it uses international milestones to explain the political environment within which Greek actors made decisions.⁷

The source base requires explicit qualification. Zaikos's 2019 study reports that the SEGAS archive for the 1920s and 1930s appears not to have survived intact and therefore reconstructs institutional debate largely through the political and sporting press, especially material consulted in the Press Archive of the Hellenic Parliament Library. Newspapers frequently reproduced administrative acts, statements by officials, interviews and reports of meetings. The present article relies on Zaikos's source-critical reconstruction and on the bibliographical identification of those press items; unless otherwise stated, it does not claim independent examination of every original newspaper issue. This distinction is important because it separates direct evidence from evidence mediated through prior archival scholarship.⁸

Within those limits, the press is treated not merely as a substitute for a missing federation archive but as a historical arena in its own right. Reports in *Athlitikos Kosmos*, *Vradyni*, *Elliniki*, *Ethnos* and the Sunday edition of *Eleftheron Vima* recorded competitions, reproduced institutional positions and staged arguments over motherhood, records, clothing, propriety and the role of the state. Such texts are not transparent measures of public opinion. They are interventions by editors, journalists, doctors, administrators and sports advocates. Their value lies precisely in revealing the vocabulary through which women's competitive sport was made respectable, dangerous, modern or administratively governable.⁹

The method is comparative without assuming direct causation. Chronological proximity between an IOC, IAAF or FSFI decision and a Greek federation decision cannot by itself prove influence. The comparison instead tracks mechanisms visible at different institutional scales: initiative from below, resistance by governing bodies, medicalised claims about the female body, public proof through repeated competition and eventual incorporation into official structures. The recent Polish study provides a useful contrast rather than a template. Its emphasis on celebrated athletes and international success shows one route by which women's sport acquired national visibility; the Greek evidence foregrounds a different route, in which domestic institutional infrastructure and club initiative preceded a comparable record of international female success.¹⁰

3. From Olympic exclusion to contested international recognition, 1896–1928

The first modern Olympic Games in Athens in 1896 took place without women's competitive participation. This absence reflected more than an organisational omission. Early Olympism emerged within educational and civic cultures that associated disciplined competition, strength and national representation with men, while female exercise was commonly assessed through biological and moral filters. Competitive effort could be represented as a threat to reproductive health or feminine decorum, allowing exclusion to be framed as protection. Women nevertheless entered selected Olympic sports from 1900 onwards, and swimming and diving were added for women in 1912. These admissions mattered, but they did not dismantle the principle that male administrators could decide which forms of female effort were appropriate.¹¹

Alice Milliat emerged as the central figure in this campaign. An athlete and sports administrator in France, Milliat did not confine herself to petitions addressed to the IOC. Instead, she supported the creation of

autonomous structures that would demonstrate that women's sport could be organised internationally. In 1921 the Fédération Sportive Féminine Internationale (FSFI) was founded in Paris, with representatives from several countries. The federation sought to develop women's athletics, recognise records, standardise regulations, and organise international competitions.¹²

The FSFI altered the politics of exclusion because it converted a demand for admission into an organised alternative. The 1922 Paris meeting commonly described as the first Women's Olympic Games, followed by major women's international competitions in Gothenburg, Prague and London, demonstrated that female athletics could produce rules, records, audiences and transnational loyalties outside the IOC's programme. This was a challenge not only to gender ideology but to jurisdiction. The IAAF could either continue to ignore a substantial field of women's athletics or absorb it under its own regulatory authority. The history of Olympic admission is therefore inseparable from a contest over which organisation had the right to govern women's international athletics.¹³

The inclusion of women's athletics in the Olympic Games did not arise as the natural consequence of a general process of social 'progress'. It resulted from concrete negotiations among organisations seeking different degrees of control. The FSFI sought recognition of a full women's programme and the preservation of meaningful autonomy. The IAAF, by contrast, could not ignore the success of women's competitions but wished to secure its role as the sole international authority governing athletics. The IOC was concerned with protecting the structure and prestige of the Olympic Games. The convergence of these different interests eventually produced a compromise.¹⁴

In 1926 an agreement was reached to introduce a limited number of women's athletics events at the 1928 Olympic Games. The decision was historic but also restrictive. From the perspective of the athletes and the FSFI, Olympic entry represented an important institutional victory. At the same time, a five-event programme fell far short of the breadth of the men's programme and did not satisfy demands for equal representation. The choice of the 100 metres, 800 metres, 4 × 100 metres relay, high jump, and discus throw represented a controlled trial of women's participation at the core of Olympic athletics.¹⁵

This inclusion also had political implications for the autonomy of women's organisations. As official sporting institutions began to absorb women's athletics, the FSFI gradually faced a paradox: the success of its own campaign created the conditions for the field it had organised to be incorporated into male-dominated international federations. Leigh and Bonin describe Milliat as a pioneer who compelled international authorities to take women's desire to compete seriously. More recent studies add that eventual incorporation did not amount to a transfer of power to women; instead, governance of women's athletics gradually moved into institutions in which women still had limited representation. The paradox is central to the argument developed below: women's organisations could win recognition by proving that a field existed, only to see the governance of that field transferred into institutions in which women possessed little decision-making power.¹⁶

4. Amsterdam 1928 and the problem of controlled inclusion

The Amsterdam Olympic Games of 1928 constituted the most important landmark of the period. For the first time, women participated in athletics, one of the most symbolically charged domains of the Olympic programme. Their presence was not merely a numerical addition. It had strong ideological significance because women athletes appeared in sprinting, endurance, jumping, and throwing events, thereby directly challenging the idea that high-level athletic performance was incompatible with femininity. Halina Konopacka in the discus, Betty Robinson in the 100 metres, and the other leading women of Amsterdam became symbols of a new athletic image of womanhood.¹⁷

The event that generated the greatest controversy was the 800 metres. For decades, a narrative was repeated that many athletes collapsed from exhaustion after the final and that the spectacle proved women were physiologically unsuited to endurance events. Historical research has shown that this image was to a significant extent the product of exaggerated or prejudiced journalistic reporting. Photographic and archival evidence does not confirm the widely circulated picture of mass collapse. The controversy is therefore important not only for what happened in the race but for the way the event was interpreted through pre-existing assumptions about the limits of the female body.¹⁸

The historical importance of the controversy lies precisely in the gap between performance and interpretation. The five women's athletics events at Amsterdam - 100 metres, 800 metres, 4 x 100 metres relay, high jump and discus - constituted only a fraction of the men's programme. Yet even this restricted experiment was judged through a standard of bodily decorum that was not applied symmetrically to male athletes. Later retellings of the 800 metres amplified the image of female collapse, while subsequent historical work has questioned the accuracy of that mythology. The event's removal until 1960 therefore stands as evidence of the institutional force of a gendered narrative, not as proof that the distance was physiologically inappropriate for women.¹⁹

Amsterdam therefore provides a useful model of 'controlled inclusion'. It established an irreversible institutional precedent for women's athletics while keeping the programme narrow and preserving male control over the boundaries of acceptable participation. The point is not to treat the Olympic decision as the cause of Greek reform. Rather, it altered the international legitimacy structure within which Greek administrators operated. By 1928, a federation that rejected women's athletics had to defend that position in a world in which women's international competitions were established and the Olympic programme itself now contained women's track and field.²⁰

Gendered knowledge and institutional decision making

Between 1896 and 1936, medical, educational, and journalistic claims about the female body repeatedly entered decisions about event eligibility and programme design. Officials did not need a settled scientific consensus to act. By treating fatigue, muscularity, or reproductive risk as sex-specific administrative problems, governing bodies could restrict women's competition while presenting those restrictions as neutral safeguards. Athletes' performances challenged these claims, but the authority to translate performance into rules remained concentrated in institutions led largely by men.^{21,22,23}

Public representation reinforced this regulatory process. Reports and images could celebrate female athletes as disciplined national representatives while continuing to judge their appearance and respectability by standards not applied to men. At Berlin in 1936, women's participation was firmly established within Olympic representation, yet programme limits and institutional supervision persisted. In the Greek case, this tension is most useful as evidence about governance: the same language that praised health and national promise could also justify limits on records, events, and competitive preparation.^{24,25}

Club practice before federation recognition after 1922

After the Asia Minor Catastrophe of 1922, Panionios re-established its sporting activity in Athens. Its earlier organisational experience and its connections with schools, clubs, and physical educators helped it convene competitions without waiting for a federation programme. For the present argument, the club's displacement history matters chiefly because it explains the organisational capacity through which local practice could precede national governance.²⁶

Panionios did not introduce female physical activity into an empty field. Girls' physical education, gymnastic displays, and earlier competitions had already created precedents, and events in 1923 included sprints, jumps, throwing, tug-of-war, and relays. What changed in 1926–27 was the regular production of fixtures, results, and inter-organisational participation. Those features turned episodic activity into evidence that a governable competitive field already existed.²⁷

This chronology separates the beginning of practice from the beginning of official governance. Zaikos identifies women's competitions before 1928 and shows that clubs continued to organise while SEGAS hesitated. The organisational capacity brought into post-1922 Athens by experienced clubs helped convert scattered initiatives into a recurring programme. The federation's circular of March 1928 should therefore be read as a jurisdictional response to an established activity, not as the origin of Greek women's sport.^{28,29,30}

Volleyball as an institutional bridge

In April 1926 Panionios organised the first Athens Women's Volleyball Championship at the Panathenaic Stadium. Four educational and associational teams took part under recognisable rules. The event's institutional importance lies in the cooperation it required among separate organisations and in the public evidence it supplied that women's competition could be scheduled and administered before SEGAS had adopted a national policy.³¹

Volleyball functioned as an institutional bridge because it generated repeatable administrative practice. Clubs recruited teams, negotiated venues, fixed dates, applied rules, published results, and coordinated with schools and women's associations. These routines reduced the organisational uncertainty surrounding subsequent women's competitions. The term therefore refers to sequencing between sporting practice and formal governance, not to any intrinsic gender quality of the game.³²

The sequence soon extended beyond volleyball. In June 1926 a Panionios women's athletics demonstration at the Panathenaic Stadium brought together fourteen athletes from four organisations, and published performances gave the meeting the form of measurable competition. Volleyball did not cause the athletics initiative, but the earlier tournament had already supplied a working precedent for convening institutions and staging a women's event in a major public venue.³³

The championships continued in 1927 and later seasons, producing a recurring calendar rather than a single demonstration. For this study, recurrence matters because it strengthened the administrative case that women's competition required rules and coordination at federation level.³⁴

The 1927 championship also exposed the gap between public endorsement and federation action. Press accounts described a crowded event, and Prime Minister Alexandros Zaimis awarded a prize to a women's team, while the SEGAS board remained absent pending its committee's judgement on women's athletics. Club prestige, political attendance, newspapers, and spectators could thus confer recognition before the national governing body did so formally. By this stage, organisers also possessed tested routines for scheduling women's events, coordinating participating institutions, and reporting results.^{35,36}

5. SEGAS, medicalized resistance and the politics of jurisdiction, 1926–1928

The response of SEGAS demonstrates the distance that could separate sporting practice from governing authority. During the crucial years 1926–27 the federation did not lead the women's movement and at points resisted or ignored initiatives that were already attracting athletes and spectators. International developments nevertheless made continued inaction harder to defend. In August 1926 a Greek representative took part in discussions at The Hague over the proposed admission of women's athletics to the 1928 Olympic programme. The eventual international compromise - 100 metres, 800 metres, 4 x 100 metres relay, high jump and discus - provided a concrete institutional horizon. Greece thus participated in a vote that accepted women's Olympic athletics while its domestic federation had yet to establish an equivalent national policy.³⁷

The contradiction became sharper when SEGAS created a five-member committee late in 1926 to decide whether women's athletics should be introduced in Greece. The composition and arguments of this committee reveal how authority was framed. Senior male educators, doctors and sport officials debated the effects of competition on the female body. In the hostile evidence reconstructed by Zaikos, medicalised language presented specialised training and record-seeking as threats to women's reproductive function. One notorious contemporary formulation claimed that women athletes would lose their motherhood in 95 per cent of cases. The number had no credible empirical basis; its significance lies in the rhetorical work it performed. A cultural preference for female restraint was converted into an apparently scientific risk calculation, making exclusion appear protective rather than political.³⁸

The value of this episode is analytical rather than merely anecdotal. The 95 per cent figure functioned as a technology of authority. It translated a normative judgement - that specialised competition and record-seeking were incompatible with proper womanhood - into the language of medical probability. A similarly revealing press title in August 1927 argued that women's sport should avoid records. The target was therefore not exercise as such but the competitive logic of modern sport: specialisation, measurable improvement, rivalry and public comparison. In this discourse, moderate exercise could be praised while the female athlete as record-seeker remained suspect.³⁹

The committee's rejection in 1927 did not end the matter because it collided with an expanding social practice. Clubs continued to organise, women continued to train, and the press continued to cover competitions. This is precisely where the concept of regulated recognition becomes useful. Governing bodies are often most likely to recognise a new constituency when they can no longer plausibly deny its existence and when recognition allows them to regain jurisdiction over it. On 16 March 1928 SEGAS issued circular no. 10/1106 formally accepting the women's sporting movement under its direction and supervision. The circular referred not only to athletics but also to tennis, fencing, shooting, hunting, ball games, wrestling and boxing. The breadth of the language is striking it declared an administrative claim over a field that had developed partly outside the federation's initiative.⁴⁰

The wording of circular 10/1106 is especially revealing. SEGAS announced that, to spread sporting spirit and Olympism among women, it had accepted and taken the women's sporting movement under its 'direction and supervision'. The list was broad, extending beyond athletics to tennis, fencing, shooting, hunting, games and even combat sports. What had changed was therefore not simply an opinion about female capacity. The federation made an explicit jurisdictional claim. It recognised the movement at the very moment that it asserted authority over its future form. The language provides unusually clear contemporary evidence for what this article terms regulated recognition.⁴¹

Recognition was therefore both an opening and an appropriation of authority. For athletes and clubs, federation acceptance offered legitimacy, rules and the possibility of official competition. For SEGAS, it transformed an autonomous and sometimes inconvenient movement into a governable domain. This dual effect parallels the international relationship between the FSFI and the male-dominated athletics establishment. At both levels, women's success in creating competitions strengthened the case for inclusion but also reduced the institutional autonomy of the organisations that had created the pressure. The chronology is particularly suggestive: SEGAS changed course in March 1928, only months before women contested Olympic athletics in Amsterdam. It would be too strong to describe the Greek decision as a direct consequence of Amsterdam, but the international shift clearly altered the environment in which a continued categorical rejection had to be justified.⁴²

Recognition also exposed a material limit that institutional histories can easily miss: access to facilities and training. In March 1928, women interviewed in the press complained that female sporting activity still depended heavily on private initiative and that public gymnasia for women were lacking. The problem was classed as well as gendered. If training required fees, time and access to private facilities, working women faced barriers different from those encountered by women from wealthier families. Formal recognition by SEGAS thus did not automatically create the infrastructure necessary for mass participation or international preparation.⁴³

6. After recognition: institutional fragility and the limits of implementation, 1928–1930

Formal recognition did not end disagreement over the proper scope of women's athletics. The committees created after 1928 could themselves reproduce restrictive assumptions. Zaikos shows that, in 1929, proposals within the women's athletics administration sought to exclude races longer than 150 metres as too severe for women and to remove the shot put because of its supposedly excessive exertion. Contemporary critics immediately noticed the contradiction: at the very moment international women's athletics was broadening its competitive repertoire, Greek administrators could recognise the field in principle while narrowing the events considered suitable. This episode demonstrates that regulated recognition was not a single decision but an ongoing process of boundary-making.⁴⁴

The organisational weakness of the new regime was equally evident in the international sphere. From 1929 the FSFI and foreign federations invited Greece to send women athletes abroad, including to the 1930 Women's World Games in Prague. Yet the administrative structures created by SEGAS remained fragile, and the Greek team did not appear in Prague. Contemporary commentary contrasted the existence of regulations and committees with the lack of coaching, facilities and sustained preparation. Recognition had produced paperwork and jurisdiction more rapidly than it produced the material conditions of high-performance participation. This gap helps explain why Greece could formally accept women's sport in 1928 and still send all-male Olympic teams in both 1928 and 1932.⁴⁵

At the same time, the movement was spreading beyond Athens. Zaikos records women's athletics meetings during 1928–29 in Thessaloniki, Chios and Xanthi, as well as activity in Cyprus and Alexandria. By 1930 the Greek press was also producing recognisable female sporting personalities such as Sofia Benardi, Laura Bachomi and René Armaou. The descriptions were often ambivalent, combining admiration for performance with detailed commentary on looks, character and femininity. Nevertheless, the emergence of named champions mattered. It supplied women's sport with continuity, memory and identifiable protagonists, moving public discussion beyond the question of whether anonymous women should exercise to the achievements and careers of specific competitors.⁴⁶

7. Olympic recognition without national immediacy, 1928–1936

Formal recognition did not produce immediate Olympic representation. Greece sent no women to Amsterdam in 1928 and none to Los Angeles in 1932. The absence is important because it exposes the difference between accepting women's sport in principle and investing in a pathway to international competition. Domestic competitions could exist while selection structures, finance and institutional priorities remained overwhelmingly male. The international visibility of women's athletics therefore did not erase national asymmetries; it created a standard against which those asymmetries became more visible.⁴⁷

This gap between formal acceptance and Olympic representation is essential. It demonstrates why 1928 should not be treated as a clean institutional break. A federation could recognise women's sport, encourage club sections and supervise competition without immediately reallocating resources, selection opportunities or international travel in ways that produced female Olympians. Recognition changed the legal-administrative status of the field, but sporting capacity still depended on training structures, competitive depth and the priorities of male-led institutions. The absence of Greek women from Amsterdam and Los Angeles is therefore not an anomaly to be explained away; it is evidence of the limits of recognition itself.⁴⁸

By the mid-1930s, however, the Greek field had changed substantially. Women had a longer competitive record, named champions and a public history on which to build. At Berlin in 1936 Domnitsa Lanitou competed for Greece in the 100 metres and the 80 metres hurdles, reaching the semi-finals in the hurdles. Olympedia identifies her as the first woman to represent Greece in Olympic track and field. Her appearance was a symbolic culmination of a trajectory that had begun well before federation recognition: from small competitions and club initiatives to official domestic governance and, finally, Olympic representation. The fact that her sister Ismene Lanitis was entered in the high jump but did not start further indicates that women's presence had become thinkable within the national Olympic delegation even if still exceptional.⁴⁹

Yet 1936 should not be written as a simple endpoint of emancipation. Greek press research shows that female athletes could still be marginalised in reporting or subjected to moral scrutiny that exceeded the scrutiny

applied to men. The regulation of women extended beyond training and competition into judgements about social behaviour and respectability. This continuity matters for interpreting Lanitou's Olympic presence. The achievement was real, but it existed within a system that had not abandoned the premise that women athletes required special supervision. In this sense, Greece arrived at the same paradox visible in the Olympic movement more broadly: the woman athlete was now institutionally visible, but the terms of her visibility remained gendered.⁵⁰

Lanitou's participation nonetheless altered the symbolic scale of the Greek story. During the 1920s advocates had argued over whether women should enter organised competition at all; by 1936 a Greek woman was representing the nation in the most visible international sporting arena. That transition cannot be credited to a single institution. It depended on the accumulation of club practice, public competitions, press controversy, federation recognition and the wider normalisation of women's Olympic athletics. The result was not equality, but it made a return to total institutional exclusion progressively less plausible.⁵¹

8. Discussion

The comparison between Olympic governance and interwar Greece supports four related conclusions. First, women's sporting inclusion was produced by practice before it was secured by regulation. The FSFI made an international women's athletics movement visible before the IOC and IAAF provided a satisfactory Olympic place for it; Panionios and allied Athenian networks staged women's competition before SEGAS accepted responsibility for the field. In neither case should recognition be narrated primarily as enlightened reform from above. It followed the accumulation of sporting facts - athletes, events, audiences, records and organisations - that raised the political and institutional cost of continued exclusion.⁵²

Second, the Greek material suggests the value of distinguishing between admission and jurisdiction. The usual language of 'progress' focuses on access: women were excluded, then admitted. Yet admission also brought women under the administrative authority of institutions from which they remained largely absent as decision-makers. Amsterdam 1928 is exemplary. The five-event athletics programme represented a historic opening but also a negotiated limitation, and the removal of the 800 metres after the Games demonstrated how quickly regulatory power could reassert gendered boundaries. SEGAS's 1928 circular performed a comparable double movement. It recognised a social reality created outside its leadership while asserting supervision over it. The gain in legitimacy was therefore accompanied by a redistribution of authority away from autonomous or club-based initiatives.⁵³

Third, the two cases reveal an asynchronous convergence rather than straightforward diffusion. Greek women's sport was not merely waiting for Amsterdam to modernise it. Women's volleyball and athletics had already developed meaningful competitive practices in Athens, and a Greek representative had participated in the 1926 international discussion over Olympic women's athletics. At the same time, international recognition supplied domestic reformers with a powerful comparative frame. The interaction ran in both directions between local practice and international legitimacy. This interpretation helps move Greek sport history away from a centre-periphery model in which innovation is imagined originating only in western European institutions and then arrive belatedly in Greece.

Fourth, volleyball and athletics followed different institutional pathways. Club organisers could establish volleyball fixtures through cooperation among existing teams and venues before SEGAS defined a national policy. Athletics more directly implicated federation authority over events, records, eligibility, selection, and Olympic representation. The comparison matters because these different administrative requirements produced different routes from local practice to national control, not because either sport possessed an inherent gender character.⁵⁴

The 800 metres controversy at Amsterdam and the Greek '95 per cent' motherhood claim belong to the same wider epistemic pattern. In both contexts, bodily exertion was interpreted through prior assumptions about sexual difference. Contemporary accounts could transform fatigue into evidence of incapacity or convert speculation about reproductive health into administrative caution. Historical scholarship has shown that the 1928 race was later surrounded by exaggerated narratives of collapse; the persistence of the story demonstrates how effectively a gendered interpretation could become institutional memory. The Greek evidence adds a national example in which pseudo-medical certainty was used before a governing decision. The comparison therefore highlights not only sexism as attitude, but the production of apparently authoritative knowledge about women athletes.⁵⁵

Comparison with Poland clarifies the Greek contribution. Zmuda Palka and Siwek show how internationally successful Polish athletes acquired national prominence and challenged discrimination. In Greece, domestic competitions and federation debate preceded sustained female Olympic representation. The contrast indicates that interwar institutionalisation did not follow a single order: international success could drive domestic legitimacy, but a national competitive structure could also develop before Olympic visibility.⁵⁶

The concepts proposed here are intended for cautious comparative use. Asynchronous convergence directs attention to timing when local and international reforms develop without simple diffusion. Regulated recognition directs attention to authority after admission: who writes rules, allocates facilities, validates records, and selects representatives. Institutional bridge directs attention to the organisational precedent created when one discipline establishes fixtures, cooperation, and reporting routines before a governing body formalises a wider field. Together, the concepts distinguish inclusion from the mechanisms that administer it.⁵⁷

This reframing also sharpens the meaning of 1936. By Berlin, women were no longer an optional presence that Olympic organisers could plausibly remove in their entirety. In Greece, Lanitou's participation made Olympic female representation concrete. But the achievement did not dissolve structural inequality: programmes remained smaller, administrative power remained overwhelmingly male, and media representation remained capable of subordinating performance to judgements of femininity and respectability. The period 1896-1936 should thus be understood as foundational not because it completed emancipation, but because it changed the institutional question. After decades of contest, the issue was increasingly no longer whether women could be athletes, but who would govern their sport, which events they would be allowed to contest and under what gendered conditions.⁵⁸

The Greek case therefore contributes a national study of Olympic governance rather than a local supplement to an international chronology. Paris 1900, the FSFI, Amsterdam 1928, and Berlin 1936 acquire different meanings when compared with the timing of Greek club competitions, SEGAS deliberations, administrative circulars, and Olympic selection. The comparison shows how transnational legitimacy and national jurisdiction could interact without moving simultaneously.

9. Conclusion

Between 1922 and Berlin 1936, Greek women's competitive sport moved through a sequence of club practice, federation recognition, incomplete implementation, and eventual Olympic representation. International developments supplied standards and precedents, but they did not determine the Greek timetable. The FSFI and Amsterdam strengthened the legitimacy of women's athletics, while Greek competitions had already created an administrative problem that SEGAS could no longer treat as hypothetical.⁵⁹

SEGAS's circular of 16 March 1928 was the critical jurisdictional act. By accepting the women's sporting movement under its 'direction and supervision', the federation recognised an existing field and asserted authority over its future organisation. Subsequent restrictions on events, weak preparation for international invitations, and the absence of Greek women from the 1928 and 1932 Olympic teams show that formal admission did not ensure implementation. Domnitsa Lanitou's appearance at Berlin in 1936 marked Olympic representation, the last of the four stages identified here.

Greece did not simply adopt an international model in 1928. Local practice and Olympic legitimacy converged asynchronously. Volleyball supplied an institutional precedent for recurring women's competition; athletics forced clearer decisions about records, event programmes, and selection; SEGAS converted an active movement into a supervised domain; and Berlin demonstrated both the reach and the delay of that process.⁶⁰

Regulated recognition captures the central contradiction. Inclusion gave athletes official status and made national representation possible, while governing authority remained concentrated in institutions where women had little influence. Recognition, jurisdiction, implementation, and representation must therefore be analysed separately. Their chronology explains how a federation could accept women's sport in principle yet postpone the resources and selections required for international participation.

Read alongside the Polish case, the Greek evidence widens the comparative history of interwar women's sport. It identifies a route in which domestic organisational practice preceded sustained Olympic prominence and in which recognition reorganised authority as well as access. Women's inclusion was consequently neither a single decision nor a linear passage from prohibition to participation. It was a contested redistribution of jurisdiction among clubs, national federations, and international sporting organisations.⁶¹

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- [5]. Nikos Zaikos, '«Αι γυναίκες αθλήτριαι κατά 95% χάνουν την μητρότητά τους». Ο Σύνδεσμος Ελληνικών Γυμναστικών και Αθλητικών Σωματείων και η αποδοχή του κλασικού αθλητισμού γυναικών στην Ελλάδα,' *Γυναίκα & Άθληση* XI, no. 1 (2019): 74–113, esp. 77–96.
- [6]. Krieger, Krech and Parks Pieper, '"Our Sport"', 451–469; Zaikos, 'Αι γυναίκες αθλήτριαι,' 74–113.
- [7]. International Olympic Committee and Organising Committees, *Official Reports of the Olympic Games, 1896–1936*, IOC Olympic Studies Centre; Allen Guttman, *The Olympics: A History of the Modern Games* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992); Gertrud Pfister, 'Women and the Olympic Games,' in *Women in Sport*, ed. Barbara L. Drinkwater (Oxford: Blackwell Science, 2000).
- [8]. Zaikos, 'Αι γυναίκες αθλήτριαι,' 77–79. Zaikos specifically identifies the loss or incompleteness of the SEGAS archive and explains the compensatory use of the political and sporting press.
- [9]. For the principal press corpus and full bibliographical details, see Zaikos, 'Αι γυναίκες αθλήτριαι,' 107–113. Relevant items include 'Ο γυναικείος αθλητισμός εν Ελλάδι. Εύγε εις τον Πανιώνιον Σύλλογον,' *Αθλητικός Κόσμος*, 27 June 1926, 1; 'Ο γυναικείος αθλητισμός εθιράμβευσε εις το Στάδιον,' *Βραδυνή*, 20 March 1927, 6; and 'Ο γυναικείος αθλητισμός αναγνωρίζεται επισήμως,' *Ελληνική*, 17 March 1928, 2, all identified and discussed by Zaikos.
- [10]. Zmuda Palka and Siwek, 'Female Athletes as Pioneers,' 281–303.
- [11]. MacAloon, *This Great Symbol*; David C. Young, *The Modern Olympics: A Struggle for Revival* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Guttman, *Women's Sports*; Pfister, 'Women and the Olympic Games.'
- [12]. Leigh and Bonin, 'Pioneering Role,' 72–83.
- [13]. Florence Carpentier, 'The First Women's Olympic Games, Paris 1922,' *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 43, no. 7 (2026): 898–918, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2026.2684481>; Krieger, Krech and Parks Pieper, '"Our Sport"', 451–469.
- [14]. Krieger, Krech and Parks Pieper, '"Our Sport"', 451–469.
- [15]. World Athletics, 'Evolution of Olympic Women's Athletics, 1928 to the Present Day,' 29 July 2008; *The Official Report of the Games of the IX Olympiad Amsterdam 1928*.
- [16]. Leigh and Bonin, 'Pioneering Role,' 72–83; Krieger, Krech and Parks Pieper, '"Our Sport"', 451–469.
- [17]. *The Official Report of the Games of the IX Olympiad Amsterdam 1928*; World Athletics, 'Evolution of Olympic Women's Athletics.'
- [18]. Lynne Emery, 'An Examination of the 1928 Olympic 800 Meter Race for Women,' *North American Society for Sport History proceedings* (1985), 30. Emery found that all nine finalists completed the race, several in record-breaking times.
- [19]. Emery, 'Examination of the 1928 Olympic 800 Meter Race'; Wamsley and Pfister, 'Olympic Men and Women,' 103–125.
- [20]. Krieger, Krech and Parks Pieper, '"Our Sport"', 451–469; Zaikos, 'Αι γυναίκες αθλήτριαι,' 93–99.
- [21]. Hargreaves, *Sporting Females*; Wamsley and Pfister, 'Olympic Men and Women,' 103–125.
- [22]. Cahn, *Coming on Strong*; Hargreaves, *Sporting Females*.
- [23]. Cahn, *Coming on Strong*; Hargreaves, *Sporting Females*.
- [24]. Pfister, 'Women and the Olympic Games.'
- [25]. Zaikos, 'Αι γυναίκες αθλήτριαι,' 80–103; Sailakis, 'Ρητορική μίσους απέναντι στις Ελληνίδες αθλήτριες,' 70–82.
- [26]. Zaikos, 'Αι γυναίκες αθλήτριαι,' 74–113. For the Panionios/volleyball history, one author of the present article has published related research; identifying details are withheld here for double-anonymised review.
- [27]. Zaikos, 'Αι γυναίκες αθλήτριαι,' 80–85. Zaikos discusses earlier female gymnastics and sport, and records 1923 competitions that included 60 metres, long jump, stone throwing, tug-of-war and relay events.

- [28]. Zaikos, 'Αι γυναίκες αθλήτριαι,' 80–88. Zaikos records official women's competitions from 1923 and the acceleration of club-led women's athletics in 1926–27.
- [29]. Hargreaves, *Sporting Females*; Zaikos, 'Αι γυναίκες αθλήτριαι,' 80–95.
- [30]. Zaikos, 'Αι γυναίκες αθλήτριαι,' 77–96; [Author], 2025, reference details withheld for double-anonymised review.
- [31]. Zaikos, 'Αι γυναίκες αθλήτριαι,' 85–88. The tournament ran from 4 to 11 April 1926 and included the Gynaikēios Omilos Ellinidon, American College for Girls, Young Women's Christian Association and School of Gymnastics.
- [32]. Zaikos, 'Αι γυναίκες αθλήτριαι,' 85–88. A contemporary commentator described volleyball as overwhelmingly dominant within women's sport in Greece and emphasised its lack of bodily contact; the formulation is reproduced and analysed by Zaikos.
- [33]. Zaikos, 'Αι γυναίκες αθλήτριαι,' 85–90; 'Ο γυναικείος αθλητισμός εν Ελλάδι. Εύγε εις τον Πανώνιον Σύλλογον,' *Αθλητικός Κόσμος*, 27 June 1926, 1, as identified and reproduced in Zaikos.
- [34]. Zaikos, 'Αι γυναίκες αθλήτριαι,' 89–91; 'Ο γυναικείος αθλητισμός εθριάμβευσε εις το Στάδιον,' *Βραδυνή*, 20 March 1927, 6; 'Οι γυναικείοι αγώνες βόλεϋ μπολ Αθηνών,' *Βραδυνή*, 28 March 1927, 2, as identified in Zaikos.
- [35]. Zaikos, 'Αι γυναίκες αθλήτριαι,' 90–91; 'Οι αυριανοί γυναικείοι αγώνες εις το Στάδιον δια το πρωτάθλημα βόλεϋ μπολ Αθηνών,' *Βραδυνή*, 18 March 1927, 4; 'Ο γυναικείος αθλητισμός εθριάμβευσε εις το Στάδιον,' *Βραδυνή*, 20 March 1927, 6, as cited by Zaikos.
- [36]. Zaikos, 'Αι γυναίκες αθλήτριαι,' 85–95; Hargreaves, *Sporting Females*.
- [37]. Zaikos, 'Αι γυναίκες αθλήτριαι,' 88–93; World Athletics, 'Evolution of Olympic Women's Athletics.'
- [38]. Zaikos, 'Αι γυναίκες αθλήτριαι,' 91–94. The notorious 95 per cent claim appeared in the 1927 debate reported in 'Το μέγα ζήτημα του γυναικείου αθλητισμού. Η κατάχρησις των σπορτ καταστρέφει την μητρότητα,' *Κυριακή του Ελευθέρου Βήματος*, 17 July 1927, 15, as reproduced by Zaikos.
- [39]. 'Ο γυναικείος αθλητισμός πρέπει ν' αποφύγη τα ρεκόρ,' *Κυριακή του Ελευθέρου Βήματος*, 7 August 1927, 15, and related 1927 press material catalogued and analysed in Zaikos, 'Αι γυναίκες αθλήτριαι,' 91–95.
- [40]. SEGAS Circular no. 10/1106, 16 March 1928, reproduced in 'Ο γυναικείος αθλητισμός αναγνωρίζεται επισήμως,' *Ελληνική*, 17 March 1928, 2, and transcribed in Zaikos, 'Αι γυναίκες αθλήτριαι,' 95–96.
- [41]. SEGAS Circular no. 10/1106, 16 March 1928, quoted in Zaikos, 'Αι γυναίκες αθλήτριαι,' 95–96. The circular was published by *Elliniki* on 17 March 1928.
- [42]. Krieger, Krech and Parks Pieper, "'Our Sport'," 451–469; Zaikos, 'Αι γυναίκες αθλήτριαι,' 95–99.
- [43]. Zaikos, 'Αι γυναίκες αθλήτριαι,' 94–96, discussing interviews in *Patris* in March 1928 and the problem of women's access to public training facilities.
- [44]. Zaikos, 'Αι γυναίκες αθλήτριαι,' 98–100, including discussion of the 1929 restrictions proposed within the women's athletics administration.
- [45]. Zaikos, 'Αι γυναίκες αθλήτριαι,' 99–103. Zaikos records invitations to the 1930 Prague Women's World Games and contemporary criticism of inadequate organisation, facilities and coaching.
- [46]. Zaikos, 'Αι γυναίκες αθλήτριαι,' 98–103, especially the discussion of competitions outside Athens and the press profiles of Sofia Benardi, Laura Bachomi and René Armaou.
- [47]. Olympedia, 'NOCs at the 1928 Summer Olympics,' entry for Greece (23 men, 0 women), and 'NOCs at the 1932 Summer Olympics,' entry for Greece (10 men, 0 women), accessed 13 September 2026.
- [48]. Zaikos, 'Αι γυναίκες αθλήτριαι,' 95–113; Olympedia, Greece entries for the 1928 and 1932 Games.
- [49]. Olympedia, 'Domnitsa Lanitou-Kavounidou' and 'Greece at the 1936 Summer Olympics,' accessed 13 September 2026. Lanitou competed in the 100 metres and 80 metres hurdles and reached the hurdles semi-final; Ismene Lanitis was entered in the high jump but did not start.
- [50]. Ilias Sailakis, 'Ρητορική μίσους απέναντι στις Ελληνίδες αθλήτριες κατά την περίοδο του Μεσοπόλεμου: Ανασκόπηση και κριτική-θεματική ανάλυση στον πολιτικό και αθλητικό τύπο (1923–1940),' *Πολιτισμός-Σύνορα-Κοινωνικό Φύλο/Μελέτες* 1 (2026): 70–82.
- [51]. Zaikos, 'Αι γυναίκες αθλήτριαι,' 74–113; Olympedia, 'Domnitsa Lanitou-Kavounidou.'
- [52]. Krieger, Krech and Parks Pieper, "'Our Sport'," 451–469; Zaikos, 'Αι γυναίκες αθλήτριαι,' 74–113.
- [53]. World Athletics, 'Evolution of Olympic Women's Athletics'; SEGAS Circular no. 10/1106, 16 March 1928, as reproduced in Zaikos, 95–96.
- [54]. Zaikos, 'Αι γυναίκες αθλήτριαι,' 85–95; Hargreaves, *Sporting Females*.
- [55]. Emery, 'Examination of the 1928 Olympic 800 Meter Race'; Zaikos, 'Αι γυναίκες αθλήτριαι,' 91–95.
- [56]. Zmuda Palka and Siwek, 'Female Athletes as Pioneers,' 281–303; Zaikos, 'Αι γυναίκες αθλήτριαι,' 74–113.

- [57]. For related approaches to gender, governance and institutional control, see Hargreaves, *Sporting Females*; Krieger, Krech and Parks Pieper, "'Our Sport',' 451–469.
- [58]. Olympedia, 'DomnitsaLanitou-Kavounidou'; Sailakis, 'Πητορικήμίσους,' 70–82.
- [59]. Leigh and Bonin, 'Pioneering Role,' 72–83; Krieger, Krech and Parks Pieper, "'Our Sport',' 451–469; Zaikos, 'Αγωναίκες αθλήτριαι,' 74–113.
- [60]. SEGAS Circular no. 10/1106, 16 March 1928, as reproduced in Zaikos, 95–96; Olympedia, 'DomnitsaLanitou-Kavounidou.'
- [61]. Zmuda Palka and Siwek, 'Female Athletes as Pioneers,' 281–303.