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[Go to printer-friendly version](#)[Read Celia Brackenridges letter to the editor](#)[Read more in English at idrottsforum.org](#)**Response to Celia Brackenridge:**

”The World Village of Women Sports is committed to gender equality”

**Mårten Hedlund**

Founder of World Village of Women Sports

In conjunction with the International Sport Research Conference *Centers and Peripheries in Sport*, held in Malmö, 8–12 April 2010, the World Village of Women Sports (WVWS) was introduced to the conference participants. WVWS is a unique enterprise focusing on women's sports, and will manifest itself in a huge international women's sports center in central Malmö. Through the center, female athletes will be given the same opportunities as men to develop. The cost to build this center for research and development and training is estimated at €200 million. Sports organizations and clubs from around the world will come together with world leading scientists in medicine, physiology and social and cultural sciences, and with Swedish and international companies offering products and services in medicine, nutrition and sports equipment.

One of the keynote speakers at the conference who listened to WVWSs presentation was Professor

Celia Brackenridge from Brunel University. In a [letter to idrottsforum.org's editor](https://www.idrottsforum.org), published in the forum's summer update, she expressed concern that the grandiose ambitions and plans would eventually be relinquished at the altar of commercialism, and she offered a set of principles and commitments that, if they are built into the business and organization models, would ensure that "a truly gender – in reality female – perspective" would guide the activities and the running of the center.

In a response, which we are pleased to publish in this update, Mårten Hedlund, founder and CEO of WVWS, welcomes the discussion initiated by Professor Brackenridge's letter. He stresses that WVWS will be an open, global meeting place for the world of sports, academia, and relevant parts of the sport business. And at the center of operations is women's sport and female athletes, their wellbeing, their performance development, their right to equal conditions and opportunities in sports.

To begin with I would like to say how much I appreciate the type of critical analysis put forward by Professor Brackenridge. Questioning, commitment and a dialogue is just what we need in order to wield an influence and change societal structures.

From an historical gender equality perspective the conditions for men and women have always been unequal regardless of occupation, social standing and traditions. With regard to the attitude towards gender equality, Sweden as a nation has come a long way, particularly with regard to improved conditions on the job market. The view of the sportswoman from a global perspective has also begun to change in a positive direction.

Before I take this opportunity to respond to Professor Brackenridge, I would like to make clear that World Village of Women Sports is a meeting place for all worlds, the scientific as well as the social and sporting worlds. Interplay between the commercial sectors will also be a natural process. The whole concept is based on a holistic approach.

Notoriously, sport has an unlevel playing field. The unfair allocation of resources is just one of the things that our organisation is aiming to put right, so all contributions are more than welcome. Our basic philosophy is that a person is a person regardless of gender. The same goes for performance levels.

The reason that three people took the initiative to World Village of Women Sports in 2007 was that women's football in Malmö could not attract sponsors. We realised that things could not continue in that way.

A steering committee was formed with an equal representation of skills and gender. We then added an advisory board of individuals in high positions in international research, the private sector and sporting world, people with a global perspective. It is from this platform that we are now proceeding, and we welcome an open dialogue that contributes to giving women's sport and all that engulfs it a sporting chance to progress. We work every day to make World Village of Women Sports the crucial hub and innovative environment that is absent in the world today. We are in the middle of the planning stage. Issues that have been taken up will continue to be discussed in, for example, the Advisory Board.

1. Recruitment

On the question of how the recruitment process will be secured with regard to staff for World Village of Women Sports, all operative activities including staff recruitment will be directly managed by partner companies, organisations, companies and not least the universities involved.

2. Education & progress

As to how we will collaborate with the universities and how the educational programme will be shaped, we are currently in talks with all eleven universities in the Öresund region, partly through the partner organisation that exists, but also directly with a number of universities and faculties. However, it is important to emphasise that each university will form and manage their own courses, and the same goes for the research bodies.

We have entered into dialogue with ten universities around the world with the aim of attracting two prominent universities from each part of the world within each research field. We also welcome Brunel University, where Professor Brackenridge works, to a progressive dialogue.

Through the World Village of Women Sports Foundation, which we have set up, we will finance and initiate a large number of research projects.

WVWS will not have any educational activities of its own. Our role is to provide the prerequisites.

3. Services and social service

The venture puts demands on the services and facilities required to provide the users of WVoWS with optimal conditions. Also here discussions are ongoing with companies, organisations and universities on how this can be shaped according to the vision that we work from. Those who are selected to run the operations here will recruit their own staff. But all will strive towards the same goal regardless of their areas of activity: to improve the conditions for women's sport. This is important to know.

4. Collaboration with organisations

In reply to how we will collaborate with global and even national organisations within women's sport and sport in general, the WVoWS has excellent contacts. We have an international executive advisory board made up of people from world-leading organisations. This advisory body will, in the near future, be expanded with more people, people with deep international roots. A scientific council is also being set up to pursue research issues. Naturally, the Advisory Board and Scientific Council will be made up of 50 per cent women. One of the women sitting on the Advisory Board is Professor Kari Fasting. Kari Fasting has been President of the WomenSport International (WSI) since 2005, a body that Professor Brackenridge also mentions as a vital collaboration partner. Kari's research fields include sports sociology, sport and gender, and sport and women.

I would like to take this opportunity to say that we willingly invite strong international organisations, scientific and academic spheres, and sports organisations to step into the framework of the World Village of Women Sports. We welcome anybody who wishes to assist us in actively pursuing its basic goals.

5. Marketing and sponsorship

On the question of the process of selecting partners who stand for sustainable core values from women's and social perspectives, we meet more and more company cultures with social responsibility and gender equality as cornerstones of their business activities. It is a vital part of the companies' brands.

We have been in contact with a number of international companies that are very interested and who welcome the venture. We have come a long way in our discussions and recently announced that Philips, with one of the largest corporate research organisations in the world, is entering the project as a strong player. Several similar collaborations are in the pipeline.

Historically, the products and services on the global market have been developed from a male perspective. This basic fact means there is a latent demand to develop products that emanate from the needs and conditions of women. Such an environment will give rise to new products and new research, which will pave the way for vibrant and sustainable business that contributes to improved welfare for many people, not only sportswomen but also those who make a living from these companies and organisations.

There are 3.5 billion female reasons for why World Village of Women Sports will be a success.

I hope this dialogue continues, gladly here on idrottsforum.org, but also in other contexts and networks as it concerns many people and businesses around the world.

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World Village of Women Sports will give sportswomen of the world the same opportunities to develop as their male counterparts. A total of €200 million is to be invested in this research development and training centre now taking shape in Malmö, Sweden, 20 minutes from Scandinavia's largest airport.

The initiative to this international research development and training centre was taken in 2007 by Swedish entrepreneurs Mårten Hedlund, Kent Widding Persson and Dan Olofsson. The concept is to bring together the sporting and academic worlds and the private sector to create optimal conditions for developing women's sport and sportswomen, regardless of nationality, religion and sport.

As the name implies, World Village of Women Sports is a truly global project. The centre will be an asset for all countries, all sports and all those who have businesses connected to sport from a women's perspective.

The bricks and mortar venue is in Malmö, Sweden, but the centre and the knowledge it produces will benefit the entire international sporting movement. World science should be able to gather under the wing of World Village of Women Sports.

The goal is a complete offering within sports sciences and medicine providing optimum injury prevention and developing training methods, products and services. The recently founded World Village of Women Sports Foundation has the task of supporting and promoting scientific research and development relating to women's sport.

Further details: www.womensportvillage.com