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3 **Ableism as a determinant of priorities for the development of disability football: A critique of**  
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5 **European National Football Associations.**  
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9

10 **Abstract**

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12 **Rationale** Drawing on a conceptual lens informed by *ableism* and Importance Performance  
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14 Analysis (IPA), the purpose of this paper is to discover how European National Football  
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16 Associations' (NAs) managers develop disability football.  
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18  
19 **Design** This study represents one of the few empirical analyses to date to explore the  
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21 development of disability football from the perspective of 37 European National Football  
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23 Association (NAs) managers. Results were based on a pan-European questionnaire that  
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25 assessed managerial viewpoints that subsequently identified the priorities across the region.  
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29 **Findings** Findings indicate that much resource has been dedicated to developing disability  
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31 football, in some cases suggesting over-allocation of finance, facilities and human resources.  
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33 A need to enhance levels of disability awareness and the competencies that underpin the  
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35 development of disability football exist.  
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39 **Practical Implications** Managers need to invest in developing competence through the  
40  
41 formation of inter-organizational partnerships with disability sports organizations.  
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44 **Research Contribution** This paper provides a novel and pragmatic review of the priorities for  
45  
46 disability football delivery in Europe. The results provide diagnostic support for quality  
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48 enhancement.  
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50  
51 **Keywords:** Ableism, mainstreaming, inclusion, integration, disability sport, Importance  
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53 Performance Analysis  
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56 **Word Count: 6370**  
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## Introduction

In recent decades, many football (soccer) associations, leagues, and clubs across Europe have begun to implement 'Football for All' for people with a disability (PwD) (Atherton & Macbeth, 2017). Disability football includes programs for a range of disability types; football for the blind (B1) or partially sighted (B2 and B3), Deaf football, for people with specific types of physical disability powerchair, frame or cerebral palsy football are offered, and football for people with an intellectual disability. In this paper, we use the term disability football to represent one or more of these types. As this is an emerging field of practice, the development of disability football and the specific programs offered varies across this region. For example, since March 2008 the Sepp-Herberger-Foundation, the German Disabled Sports Association and the German Association for the Blind and Visually Impaired have been operating a national (German) blind football league, where some teams are also affiliated to the top four (Hertha BSC (Berlin), FC St. Pauli, Schalke 04 and BVB Dortmund) Bundesliga (mainstream<sup>1</sup>) professional clubs ([www.blinden-fussball.de](http://www.blinden-fussball.de)). More recently, the Spanish LaLiga Genuine Santander for young players with intellectual disabilities was officially launched in the 2017-18 season. This is a national football tournament that brings together nearly all the professional clubs of LaLiga 1 and 2 (LaLiga.com, 2020). Nevertheless, in other European nations links between mainstream professional football leagues and clubs and their disability football counterparts are at a more embryonic stage and there is a lower level of vertical integration (Atherton & Macbeth, 2017).

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper we use the term mainstream as a reference to non-disabled social institutions, specifically football clubs/association that are transitioning into more inclusive organizations (Kitchin & Crossin, 2018).

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Football is just one sport that has received attention within a broader academic focus on disability and sport. Darcy et al. (2017) highlight that this literature base is dominated by medical and rehabilitation focused research (Damen et al., 2020; Jouira et al., 2021), psychological studies (McLoughlin et al., 2017; Townsend et al., 2020), and an increase in research into sport and physical activity for PwD as a mechanism to achieve personal (Blauwet, 2019; Robertson et al., 2018) and societal benefits (Blauwet, 2019; Kasum, 2019). Despite a growth in disability sport management literature that addresses a range of contexts over the past decade (Cunningham & Warner, 2019; Legg et al., 2009; Misener & Darcy, 2014; Patatas et al., 2021; Shapiro & Pitts, 2014; Wicker & Breuer, 2014), the development of structures and organization of disability football, one subset of the literature has so far lacked wider, pan-regional analysis.

Before outlining our aims and objectives, it is important to define what is understood by disability in the context of this paper and the model followed in our analysis. Disability is defined by the World Health Organization as an “umbrella term for impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions, referring to the negative aspects of the interaction between an individual (with a health condition) and that individual’s contextual factors (environmental and personal factors)” (WHO, 2011, p. 4). This definition attempts to reconcile the major models of understanding disability, the medical and the social. We adhere to the social model principles enshrined in the 2006 United Nations *Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (CRPWD). The CRPWD is based on the social model conceptualizations of disability and reinforces disability discrimination policies and legislation in many member countries. The social model posits that there are societal practices that transform an individual’s impairment into a socially constructed disability. At the time of writing, 177 nations out of the 193 member states of the United Nations have signed this global convention; however disability discrimination legislation can vary within regions; for example

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3 Europe. The CRPWD explains in detail the rights of PwD and sets out suggestions for its  
4 implementation through legislation, policy and administrative measures. Article 30.5 of the  
5 United Nation’s CRPWD enshrines the rights of citizens’ access to take part in a cultural life  
6 “on an equal basis with others” (UN, 2006, online). Participation in cultural activities such as  
7 recreation, leisure, the arts, tourism and sport enrich lives and provides multiple avenues for  
8 an individual’s choice and freedom of expression (UN, 2006). It is this commitment to the  
9 social model, particularly in our own role as non-disabled researchers that social  
10 conceptualizations of rights, access and barriers inform our analysis as we explore the priorities  
11 of disability football development.  
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### 26 **Research questions**

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28 Drawing on a conceptual lens combining *ableism* and Importance Performance Analysis (IPA),  
29 the purpose of this paper is to discover how European National Football Associations’ (NAs)  
30 managers develop disability football. Allied to this purpose, our aim is to explore areas of  
31 priority and to explicitly analyze the implications of these determinations in our conceptual  
32 frame. Once identified, we examined in more detail the assumptions held by those managing  
33 disability football within Europe. To achieve this purpose, we sought to address the following  
34 research questions:  
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44 **Research Question 1.** Where are the NAs priorities for increasing the inclusion of PwD  
45 within European football?  
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48 **Research Question 2.** Where are the NAs priorities for developing disability football?  
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50 **Research Question 3.** What resources and competencies are prioritized to underpin  
51 these developments?  
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54 **Research Question 4.** What are the implications of these priorities for the European  
55 National Football Associations’ management of disability football?  
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## Literature Review

### *Developing disability football*

Tracing the history of disability football, as Atherton and Macbeth (2017) argued, is a significant challenge due to the considerable diversity within the broad label of ‘disability football’, its low academic and public profile and extremely limited documentation of early developments. One of the earliest documented examples is the organization of a football club for the Deaf in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Scotland (Atherton et al., 1999; Atherton et al., 2001) and subsequent major tournaments like the International Silent Games (now the Deaflympics) in 1924 (Atherton & Macbeth, 2017; Brittain, 2010). However, this historical account of football for a particular impairment group such as Deaf people is the exception rather than the norm. As Brittain (2010, p. 7) stated “there is little evidence of organized efforts to develop or promote sport for individuals with disabling conditions” prior to World War II due to the general belief that “people with physical disabilities should not be involved in competitive sport” (Polley, 2011, p. 166). Parallel to the gradual broadening of disability sport in the 1970s, incorporating more people with different disabilities and increasing the range of sports available, inaugural world disability football tournaments only began to emerge in the 1980s after international and national football authorities started to be interested in their development. According to Atherton and Macbeth (2017), until this moment in time “disability football and disability footballers were at best marginalized and at worst totally ignored by national and international football authorities” (p. 280). These examples demonstrate how disability football competitions have evolved and grown, including cerebral palsy (CP) football in 1978 (IFCPF, no date), amputee football in 1984 (World Amputee Football Federation, no date), and more than a decade later, blind football (under IBSA - International Blind Sports Federation) in 1998 (IBSA, 2020a). Despite brief summaries of the development of football for particular

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3 impairment groups within specific nations (Frere, 2007; Kijanskiy, 2008; Macbeth, 2009;  
4 Macbeth & Magee, 2006; see also Atherton & Macbeth, 2017 for an in-depth analysis) detailed  
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6 histories of football played by these groups, other than people with hearing impairments, have  
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8 yet to materialize.  
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12 Although this body of work is expansive, the preponderance of research on  
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14 contemporary aspects of disability football has been dominated by a focus on the experiences  
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16 of players with a range of impairments: deaf people (Atherton et al., 2001); adults and girls  
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18 with intellectual disabilities (Stride & Fitzgerald, 2011); partially sighted footballers (Macbeth  
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20 & Magee, 2006; Macbeth, 2008, 2009; Powis & Macbeth, 2019); powerchair footballers  
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22 (Cottingham et al., 2018; Jeffress & Brown, 2017; Richard et al., 2017) and amputees (van der  
23  
24 Niet, 2010). Generally speaking, academic research of disability football has covered a range  
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26 of themes including the social, psychological and health benefits of football; socialization  
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28 experiences; inclusion and equality issues; empowerment; gender construction; and identity  
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30 work.  
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35 However, there is emerging literature regarding the organization of disability sport  
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37 focusing on the process of vertical integration, or mainstreaming (e.g. Hammond & Jeanes,  
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39 2018; Howe, 2007; Hums et al., 2003; Kitchin & Howe, 2014; Thomas & Guett, 2013; Wicker  
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41 & Breuer, 2014). Mainstreaming is defined as “the process of integrating the delivery and  
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43 organization of all organized sporting opportunities to ensure a more coordinated and inclusive  
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45 sporting system” (Kitchin & Howe, 2014, p. 66). Research from a management perspective  
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47 has, so far, centered on the development of inclusive (or not) experiences for disabled fans at  
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49 stadia of the main European football league clubs (Garcia & Welford, 2015; Garcia et al., 2017;  
50  
51 Paramio-Salcines & Kitchin, 2013; Paramio-Salcines et al., 2015). The exception is Kitchin  
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53 & Crossin’s (2018) study exploring how mainstream football clubs went about the process of  
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55 merging and/or incorporating disability football clubs at the grassroots. From their analysis,  
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3 clubs who could achieve integrative capacity tended to be larger and have well-established  
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5 brands.  
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8 This process of mainstreaming has led to mainstream football clubs having to take some  
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10 responsibility for the development of disability football and work with Disability Sport  
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12 Organizations (DSO) to increase opportunities for disabled footballers at both grassroots and  
13  
14 elite levels. Along with attempts to rationalize this development, tensions have arisen from  
15  
16 conflict between the priority for participation versus performance. In partially sighted football,  
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18 Macbeth (2009) found that the prioritization of performance logics as the NAs became more  
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20 involved, brought about several changes to the rules and organization of the game which  
21  
22 contravened aspects of inclusion. Research has further revealed barriers to participation  
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24 (Macbeth, 2009), changes to national talent development plans (Macbeth, 2009), the fast-  
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26 tracking of promising talent (Macbeth & Magee, 2006) and problems with classification (Powis  
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28 & Macbeth, 2019). Some of these issues exist, despite the process of mainstreaming. Others,  
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30 however, have arguably been a result of it. Either way, they represent issues that both NAs and  
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32 DSOs need to carefully negotiate to ensure that the empowering potential of disability football  
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34 is not threatened (Atherton et al., 2001).  
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41 Whilst this body of literature provides insights into challenges within the development  
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43 of disability football, it has focused on particular impairment groups, within specific nations  
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45 and largely from players' perspectives. What is lacking, as this study proposes, is a pan-  
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47 European analysis of disability football developments from the perspective of the NAs who are  
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49 increasingly becoming the dominant service providers. In any case, in order to contribute to  
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51 wider discussions about the development of disability sport the conceptual framework below  
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53 has been employed in our approach.  
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## Conceptual tools from disability studies and performance management: Ableism and IPA

Disability football is a socially constructed practice. In order to provide analysis beyond description we sought to undertake an assessment of performance management that was informed by a disability studies perspective. Our first key concept is *Ableism* which is “the ideology of ability, constitut[ing] a form of cultural imperialism” (Silva & Howe, 2019, p. 3) that creates and maintains attitudes, systems and procedures facilitated by individuals and organizations to foster actions that favor non-disabled people. Brittain et al., (2020) suggest that ableism can frame “both the impact of the environment and societal attitudes as forms of social oppression that can lead to barriers to participation” (p. 210). This is particularly applicable to organizational analysis as Brittain et al. go further to indicate that ableism acts as a regulatory mechanism that values everything by normative ideas and in doing so reinforces inequitable power relations. An example of this was revealed by Howe (2007) when a mainstream sports organization was reluctant to integrate their para-sport partner because of fears of diluting their funding pot – this fear being a manifestation of negative attitudes towards PwD. Questions have been raised over whether the sector is run *by* PwD, or *for* PwD – the consequence of the latter implies that PwD can be service users only, relegating them to positions of moderate or little power (Kappelides & Spoor, 2019). This further marginalizes PwD from view and negates the ability for cultures of disability to potentially inform the wider, normative-dominant cultures that inhabit many of our institutions (Goodley, 2014). The concept of ableism aligns with our social model, UN CRPWD informed approach in that devalues PwD and leads to “segregation, social isolation, and social policies [...] that can limit opportunities for full societal participation” (Brittain et al., 2020, p. 212).

Our second key concept is performance management, specifically the use of Importance-Performance Analysis (IPA). IPA charts a service providers’ perceived importance

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3 and performance of any given performance indicator and does so in a relational context  
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5 between other priorities (Levenburg & Magal, 2004). In this paper, the traditional use of IPA  
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7 analysis is designed to measure a manager's perspective on both the importance of indicators  
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9 that explore the development of disability football in mainstream organizations located across  
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11 the UEFA region, and then gauge their opinion on their organizations' performance against  
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13 those criteria. By considering both the importance and performance a manager attaches to an  
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15 attribute, these indicators can be mapped on an IPA chart resulting in one of four possibilities  
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17 (see Figure 1).  
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29 When both importance and performance scores are high the attribute is included in  
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31 Quadrant I and is deemed a 'system strength' and resources in this area should be sustained  
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33 (Azzopardi & Nash, 2013; Griffin & Edwards, 2012; Martilla & James, 1977). When the  
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35 importance of an attribute is high and the performance is low, the attribute is classified in  
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37 Quadrant II as 'concentrate here' suggesting that more resources are required. Quadrant III is  
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39 deemed 'low priority' and occurs when an attribute is rated low on both importance and  
40  
41 performance, suggesting that no change in resources should occur. Finally, when importance  
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43 is low and performance is high the attribute falls into Quadrant IV, 'overkill' which suggests  
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45 that resources could be curtailed and allocated to other areas.  
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50 The IPA framework has important practical implications for managers because as a  
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52 diagnostic device, it allows managers to see where their strengths lie, to focus attention on  
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54 specific areas of priority, to reduce resource allocation in areas of overkill and to critique and  
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56 reflect upon areas deemed low priority. By combining IPA with ableism, we wish to explore  
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58 how these mainstream organisations, originally set up to develop football opportunities for the  
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3 non-disabled majority, prioritise and perform when it comes to the development of disability  
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5 football. This conceptual lens will enable us to examine the extent to which ableism could be  
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7 reinforced and/or challenged.  
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### 12 **The context of the disability football industry in Europe**

14 As the study was conducted on disability football in Europe, it is important to outline the  
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16 context in which this takes place and the role of both mainstream football organizations and  
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18 DSOs. In Europe, the governance and management of European football remains within the  
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20 stewardship of the Union of European Football Associations' (UEFA), which has 55-member  
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22 NAs. The involvement of NAs in mainstreaming disability football is a relatively recent  
23  
24 occurrence (Atherton & Macbeth, 2017; Kitchin & Crossin, 2018; Macbeth, 2008). Prior to  
25  
26 this, disability football was provided predominantly by DSOs, most of whom have an  
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28 impairment-specific but multi-sport focus. Disability football has only just formed an  
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30 organizing structure that promotes the interests of the sport world-wide. Launched on 3  
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32 December 2020, on the UN International Day of Persons with Disabilities, the Para Football  
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34 foundation represents the interests of eleven international DSOs, including IBSA, World  
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36 Amputee Football Federation, Virtus - World Intellectual Impairment Sport, International  
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38 Committee of Sports for the Deaf (ICSF) and other representative organizations, to develop  
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40 football opportunities at both grassroots and elite levels for their respective impairment groups.  
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47 While only blind (5-a-side) football features at the Paralympic Games, the International  
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49 Paralympic Committee exerts influence on disability football in ensuring the sport's standards  
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51 are acceptable to the wider Paralympic movement. This was seen recently with IPC-led  
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53 alterations to blind football's classification system (Runswick et al., 2021) and also the  
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55 exclusion of cerebral palsy football from the Paralympic Games sporting program (Pavitt,  
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57 2019).  
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There are currently two football-specific DSOs operating internationally that focus on specific impairments. In 2006 the International Federation of Powerchair Football Association (FIPFA) was formed, with the European Powerchair Football Association (EPFA) representing the European region. As part of their mission, the FIPFA aims to develop opportunities and organize international competition for those with a “diagnosed, severe physical impairment that leads to a verifiable, permanent activity limitation, as a consequence the athlete needs the use of powered mobility in order to play a sport” (FIPFA, 2017). More recently, the International Federation of CP Football (IFCPF) was created in January 2015 to develop CP football independently after 37 years under the umbrella of the ‘Cerebral Palsy Sport and Recreation Association’ (CPISRA). Similarly, at European level, UEFA recommended the creation of a “disability football” unit in 2011. However, this is one of only two out of 15 recommendations from UEFA’s Football and Social Responsibility Strategy Review, that has not materialized (UEFA/Schwery Consulting, 2017). Instead, each of these international organizations oversee development and organize both world and regional football competitions for each impairment group. The only European-specific DSOs organizing pan-European leagues and cup competitions are the European Deaf Sports Organisation (EDSO) and the European Powerchair Football Association (EPFA). In partnership with UEFA, the IBSA Blind Football Development Project Europe began in 2012, with recent reports highlighting the support provided by IBSA to develop blind football in over 40 European nations (2018). As the only form of football in the Paralympic Games, blind football tends to receive more attention both nationally and internationally, with the first-ever Women’s World Championships announced for 2020 in Nigeria (IBSA, 2019); since postponed until 2021 due to the coronavirus pandemic (IBSA, 2020b). As this study illustrates, within each UEFA member nation differences can occur in relation to the management of disability football. For example, in England, the game is governed by the FA who, under the stewardship of a

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3 Disability Football Manager, manage seven elite disability England squads (The FA, no date)  
4 and elements of grassroots disability football. However, there is no uniform approach to  
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6 developing disability football at a national level.  
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## 10 11 12 **Method**

### 13 14 *Participants*

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16 A survey was administered online by email, due primarily to issues of time, cost saving and  
17 accessing to a large and diverse sample (Andrew et al., 2011), to staff responsible for the  
18 development of disability football in the 55 NAs that are members of UEFA between  
19 November 2016 and April 2017. In discussions with UEFA, the specification of the person  
20 responsible to complete this questionnaire was not prescribed and as such, names and email  
21 addresses were not collected. While this could have added another layer to the analysis, our  
22 primary goal was to increase the sample size and it was felt by UEFA that this level of detail  
23 would reduce the response rate. Details were collected on job title, but as this was a non-  
24 compulsory field only 22 respondents completed this question, four of these were generic titles  
25 such as, consultant, project manager or the Head of Licensing Department and Technical  
26 director. We chose to survey the entire population, meaning that our sample was limited to  
27 those who responded. Out of 55 NAs, a total of 37 NAs managers completed the online survey,  
28 which represents an initial response rate of 67.2%. From this sample, 33 responses were  
29 deemed usable, reducing the overall response rate to 56%<sup>2</sup>. Figure 2 shows a map of the total  
30 number (33) of NAs that completed the survey. According to Andrew et al. (2011), the typical  
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56 <sup>2</sup> Surveys were deemed unusable as they were significantly incomplete, in one case only the  
57 demographic data was supplied, in the other 3 the respondents had indicated some importance scores  
58 only with no corresponding scores for performance. Despite SPSS being able to handle missing data,  
59 we felt too much data was missing from these 4 responses.  
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3 level of response rate for emailed questionnaires tends to range between 10 and 20 percent and,  
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5 as such, our response rate was relatively strong.  
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#### 14 *Data Collection*

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17 In order to ensure a pan-European reach, we chose a self-administered online survey design  
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19 using IPA and followed the principles devised by Martilla and James (1997) and in accordance  
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21 with the approach used by sport management scholars such as Zhang et al., (2011), the selection  
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23 and testing of the questionnaire/online survey content involved four steps: defining the areas  
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25 of interest (indicators), selecting a panel of experts, having those experts evaluate the  
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27 questionnaire, and selecting the appropriate items for each indicator.  
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31 The initial questionnaire was designed by three members of the research team working  
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33 iteratively from the literature review and in discussion with industry personnel, and by drawing  
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35 on data from semi-structured interviews from previous publications (*names anonymized for*  
36  
37 *blind review*) resulting in 28 attributes covering the development of European disability  
38  
39 football.  
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43 The questionnaire was initially tested for face validity across a panel of six experts  
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45 involved in disability football, disability rights and academia – some of whom had personal  
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47 experience with disability. The panel of experts provided useful feedback on the final indicators  
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49 and items to include in the survey, such as rewording for clarity, the exclusion of certain  
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51 attributes and the inclusion of additional ones. The final survey consisted of 36 items covering  
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53 the following seven indicators: (i) disability awareness, general issues in social responsibility  
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55 in relation to disability football; (ii) disability football, containing items about its promotion,  
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57 conduct and evaluation; and a series of resource indicators (iii) financial resources; (iv)  
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3 physical resources; (v) intellectual resources, containing items specific to the branding of  
4 disability football; (vi) human resources; and (vii) competencies, items about how the various  
5 resources are implemented. The items first asked respondents to assess their perception of  
6 importance, anchored on a 5-point Likert-type scale (where 1=definitely unimportant,  
7 3=neither not important nor important, and 5=definitely important). The items then asked  
8 respondents to assess their perception of performance, anchored on a 5-point scale (where  
9 1=we could do better, 3=satisfactory, and 5=we excel).

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The questionnaire was divided into three sections to facilitate the interpretation and response process of the indicators. Section 1 consisted of 4 background questions including name, job title, organization, and the history of the respondents' involvement in the provision of disability football. Additionally, 6 IPA items focused on the disability awareness were included. Section 2 consisted of 9 IPA items related to the disability football indicator. Section 3 presented 21 IPA indicators examining the resources and competencies indicators, including financial (2 IPA items), physical (3 IPA items), intellectual (4 IPA items), human (5 IPA items) resources and competencies (7 IPA items) that supported disability football. Table 1 shows the sections and items of the questionnaire.

#### **Insert Table 1 about here**

Due to the pan-European nature of the research, the survey was translated from English to three different languages (French, Spanish and German) to increase the accessibility across the European football industry. Back-translation performed by us, this was limited to NA name and job role, all of the IPA items consisted of quantitative data.

There are two limitations of the IPA approach that urge readers to use any findings with relative caution. The first limitation concerns the placement of the grid lines that determine the quadrants using the scale-centered approach (Azzopardi & Nash, 2013). To ensure the most accurate position a solution is to use the data-centered approach using the mean scores of

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3 both the importance and performance scores to place the crosshairs (Rial et al., 2008). The  
4 diagnostic implication of crosshair placement is important as indicators (see Figure 3 in results)  
5 that fall very near the crosshairs may or may not require further action. Below our results will  
6 show that no indicators fell on the crosshairs. The second limitation is the definition of  
7 importance and its impact on validity (Azzopardi & Nash, 2013; Eskildsen & Kristensen,  
8 2006). In our design, we drew upon direct importance measurement using a Likert-type scale,  
9 which Bottomley et al., (2000) deem superior to other techniques.

### 21 *Data Analysis*

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23 In the first step of the analysis, the internal reliability of particular indicators of the survey were  
24 tested for internal consistency through Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) coefficients. Alpha values of 0.70  
25 or higher were considered acceptable as a general guideline (Cronbach, 1951). In a second step  
26 of the analysis, the overall mean scores of importance and performance levels were calculated  
27 for each of the seven indicators under study. In step three, the differences between the perceived  
28 importance and the performance level of respondents were calculated for each indicator, using  
29 paired *t*-test for comparison purposes. The Bonferroni correction was applied to account for  
30 the multiple comparisons of the seven indicators under analysis, with a *p* value less than 0.0071  
31 considered statistically significant (i.e. the original *p* value of 0.05 divided by 7 tests being  
32 performed). Effect sizes were calculated using Cohen's *d* and their interpretation was based on  
33 the following criteria:  $0.20 \leq d < 0.50$  small,  $0.50 \leq d < 0.80$  medium,  $d \geq 0.80$  large (Cohen, 1988).  
34 Finally, in step four, the corresponding IPA grid was plotted to visually depict the respondents'  
35 ratings for each indicator according to its means scores of importance and performance. The  
36 overall mean values of importance and performance were set as the reference values of the y-  
37 axis and x-axis respectively. The statistical package SPSS version 20.0 (IBM Corp., Armonk,  
38 NY, USA) was used for the analysis.



## Results

Table 2 shows Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficients of each indicator for the importance and performance scores. For all cases except one, the results showed Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficients above 0.76 (ranging from 0.794 to 0.958), offering evidence of fairly high to excellent internal consistency (Taber, 2018). In the case of the Physical Resources indicator (3 items) and the performance scores, the Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficient was 0.689, slightly below the acceptable value of 0.7, which could indicate a problem with the items of the indicator (e.g. need to delete a specific item). However, the corrected item-total correlation coefficients ranged from 0.446 to 0.757, all above the 0.2 value recommended for including an item in a scale (Streiner & Norman, 1995).

### **Insert Table 2 about here**

The initial analysis of the history of the respondents' involvement in the provision of disability football revealed that each National Association has been delivering disability football for different time periods with an average of 10.4 years ( $SD=8.67$ ). Of all respondents that reported, 36% ( $n=12$ ) had between 0- and 5-years' experience, while 9% ( $n=3$ ) reported over 21 years' experience.

Table 3 presents the overall mean scores of importance and performance for the seven indicators under analysis and the statistics and effect sizes of the tests performed. The results showed that the importance level was greater than their performance level for all the indicators, with importance-performance gap scores ranging from 1.09 to 1.62 points. The results showed that these differences were statistically significant for all the indicators once the Bonferroni correction was applied (all  $p<0.0071$ ). Large effect sizes ( $d\geq 0.80$ ) were found for all tests.

### **Insert Table 3 about here**

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3 Figure 3 shows the IPA chart that enables the classification of disability football indicators  
4 according to their importance and performance. Sections 1 and 2 are standalone indicators both  
5 appearing in the *Concentrate Here* quadrant, whilst section 3 contains 4 indicators, spread  
6 across three quadrants. Consistent among these results is higher performances in resource  
7 allocation than in areas of competence and training.  
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17 **Please insert Figure 3 about here**  
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## 21 **Discussion**

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23 As this paper represents an attempt to engage research in the practice space, our results  
24 stimulate a discussion on the priorities for the development of disability football across Europe.  
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26 When considering these results within our conceptual framework we urge reader caution in  
27 assuming anything that falls within a ‘low priority’ or ‘concentrate here’ is somehow evidence  
28 of poor practice. To determine this outright, further research is required and we outline this in  
29 the section that follows.  
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38 To address research question one (Where are the NAs priorities for increasing the  
39 inclusion of PwD within European football?), the indicator of *Disability Awareness* was  
40 positioned in the ‘concentrate here’ quadrant. Greater investment in developing the importance  
41 of this area is needed. Disability awareness training has been proven important in employment  
42 and educational settings in overcoming barriers that PwD face (Hayward et al., 2019), and by  
43 educating non-disabled staff in institutional settings about ableist oppression (Laviani &  
44 Broderick, 2013; Townsend et al., 2020). Furthermore, it can positively influence hiring  
45 practices (Houtenville & Kalargyrou, 2012), suggesting that it can help redress the  
46 underemployment of PwD in all workplaces (Darcy et al., 2016) and begin to erode non-  
47 disabled privilege. These results provide evidence of the underlying importance of transferring  
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3 not just the administrative responsibilities that comes with mainstreaming (Thomas & Guett,  
4 2013), but developing awareness and investing in competencies that have the potential to  
5 challenge institutionalized ableism (Kitchin & Crossin, 2018; Macbeth, 2009). It is plausible  
6 to suggest that investment in ongoing disability awareness training for all members of NA staff,  
7 not just those who work in disability football is needed to develop broader understanding of  
8 disability within NA's that would enhance competencies across the organizations.  
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11 For research question two (Where are the NAs priorities for developing disability  
12 football?), results indicate that disability football is in the 'concentrate here' quadrant. Caution  
13 is urged as the margins between the mean lines in Figure 3 are minimal and the possibility of  
14 being scored a 'system strength' could have been achieved. Given the diversity of programs  
15 offered that comprise disability football an organization's level of resourcing can be stretched  
16 between many types of program. Full provision of all types of disability football would require  
17 access to a combination of indoor and outdoor pitches across a variety of surfaces along with  
18 various accessible amenities (support networks and facilities, see Darcy & Taylor, 2009) to  
19 support this. For example, football for people with different types of physical disabilities  
20 (cerebral palsy, amputee, spinal injury) requires that each has access to certain specialized  
21 equipment and facilities that may not be available to all NAs, depending on their size and  
22 resources.  
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45 The third question asked what resources and competencies are prioritized to underpin  
46 these developments? The results suggest some inconsistencies. While there are strengths in  
47 providing resource allocation to the area disability football – particularly in the area intellectual  
48 resources - there is a 'Low Priority' score for the competencies that underpin equality.  
49 Additionally, some resource allocations are 'Possible Overkill' – where performance is rated  
50 than importance. While the availability of finance, facilities and staff should underpin all other  
51 areas, this 'overkill' reflects the importance of an area has not been matched in its performance.  
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3 In other words throwing resources at disability football does not lead to a system strength  
4 because suitable investments in organizational competencies appear to be of relative low  
5 importance and performance. Therefore to develop competence, perhaps a greater focus on  
6 inter-organizational partnerships is required to capitalize on this knowledge. We know that  
7 from previous research the challenges faced in prioritizing objectives are difficult when internal  
8 stakeholders view them as outside their sport's traditional remit (Howe, 2007; Macbeth &  
9 Magee, 2006; Rowe et al., 2018). Macbeth and Magee (2006) studying the English context of  
10 partially sighted football development found that conflicting objectives exacerbated  
11 interorganizational tensions. In England, the DSO for partially sighted football's need to  
12 develop the grassroots was mostly incompatible with the NAs quest for performance-focused  
13 competitive success. Furthermore, Thomas and Guett (2013) regarded National Sports  
14 Organizations as autonomous bodies that were generally poor at accepting the new  
15 responsibilities of mainstreaming disability sport (see Howe, 2007). As previous evidence  
16 from this context suggests that non-sport organizations from the disability community have  
17 expertise that enhance the services of mainstream sports organizations (Kitchin & Crossin,  
18 2018; Macbeth, 2008), we suggest that inter-organizational partnerships in this area are  
19 therefore vital.

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22 In addressing the final research question (What are the implications of these priorities  
23 for the European National Football Associations' management of disability football?) we  
24 consider the implications of these priorities. Without appropriate disability awareness training,  
25 or inter-organizational partnerships that can facilitate competence development, then decisions  
26 regarding resource allocation are likely to be ill-informed and do little to undo or challenge  
27 long-standing ableist practices and transform these mainstream organizations into inclusive  
28 ones. Perhaps the lack of prioritization for disability awareness and the competencies that  
29 underpin genuine integration (Hums et al., 2003; Kitchin & Crossin, 2018) require more direct  
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3 influence from the regional governing body. If UEFA genuinely attempts to champion  
4 diversity, inclusion, and accessibility in football (UEFA, 2019) instead of simply increasing  
5 the number of people playing disability football, then they need to invest increasing disability  
6 rights awareness. This would acknowledge that ableism is the “guiding frame-work for how  
7 disability sport is organized” (Hammond et al., 2019, p. 319) and that ableist beliefs are present  
8 in the football workforce. Indeed Townsend et al. (2015, p. 93) suggest these beliefs treat PwD  
9 as a “homogenous group” and, the presence of a variety of disability football programs, further  
10 engagement with partners will broaden the football workforce’s understanding of disability.  
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### 23 **Conclusions, limitations, and further research**

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25 The findings from this novel study demonstrate that the development of European disability  
26 football has particular strengths and weaknesses. Strengths includes the NAs leveraging their  
27 intellectual resources to promote disability football across their countries and the wider UEFA  
28 region. We also revealed some weaknesses that could be addressed by investment in better  
29 training or the creation of better inter-organizational partnerships. We informed the analysis  
30 of these performance findings through the lens of ableism to explore the possibilities of its  
31 influence on priorities. We do not attempt to say that ableism is the reason why the results are  
32 the way they are, however, NAs should realize that investments in the competencies of their  
33 staff and systems around diversity, equity and inclusion can increase the social awareness of  
34 the football workforce to achieve these principles in a broader general sense. This broader  
35 sense could champion the human rights of not just PwD, but those of women, ethnic minorities,  
36 first nations people and LGBTQI+ communities. While our analysis was focused on NAs in  
37 the UEFA region, we argue that investment in the competencies that underpin sport  
38 development are relevant for all mainstream sports organizations and their efforts to develop  
39 disability sport, or indeed sport for any marginalized community.  
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3 Our primary limitation in this research was that it was conducted by a group of non-  
4 disabled researchers. The principle of Nothing About Us, Without Us (Charlton, 1998) was in  
5 part covered by consulting with the industry experts who were also PwD so that we could  
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10 ‘ground’ the research instruments to those with personal experience of disability, however our  
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12 approach and perspective is influenced by our non-disabled status. As with all quantitative  
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14 surveys, there are some limitations in our approach. In line with the aims of this study,  
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16 purposive sampling was used to obtain a sample from the NAs, mainstream football  
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18 organizations within to the UEFA region. The absence of France and Spain from these results  
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20 was disappointing as insights from these two large nations and the specific contexts of  
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22 disability football in each lessens the overall picture. Nevertheless, we were able to attract  
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24 NAs from across Europe both large (the inclusion of England, Germany and Italy covers 3/5  
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26 of nations who have the ‘big leagues’) and small. Future endeavors will seek to ensure that  
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28 even more countries within this region are included.  
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33 There are a number of avenues for further research in this and related areas. Firstly,  
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35 the ableism-IPA conceptual lens has provided and contextualized areas of importance, areas to  
36  
37 improve and refine, and a number of areas which are deemed low priority. Secondly, this study  
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39 has focused upon the managerial perspectives of those within NAs and, as such, the  
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41 perspectives of the participants and the organizational partners (DSOs, clubs, leagues, charities,  
42  
43 etc.) are needed on a similar scale to provide additional data for a more holistic understanding  
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45 of the area. Nevertheless, these findings provide a foundation for both further research and  
46  
47 practical action in the development of disability football across Europe. Thirdly, more  
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49 partnership work at the grassroots with DSOs is required, ensuring that not only players but  
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51 staff too can experience and learn from different cultural approaches to the development of  
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53 disability football. We posit that if current exchanges of DSO and NA staff occurs solely at  
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55 major tournaments, then this limits the possibility of sharing knowledge around grassroots  
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3 football cultures, which as a separate area of practice could benefit coaches' competencies  
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5 (knowledge and understanding of disability). This learning could then ensure that NAs provide  
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7 'Football for All' that is not based on the normative expectations of the non-disabled majority  
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9 who have always organized football, but could led to the creation of a grassroots opportunity  
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11 for football culture and disability sport culture to learn from each other.  
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Table 1. The final survey indicators and items

Section	Indicator	Survey items
S1	Disability Awareness	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The promotion of disability awareness training for individuals or groups</li> <li>2. The facilitation of disability awareness training for individuals or groups</li> <li>3. The funding of another’s provision of disability awareness training for individuals or groups</li> <li>4. The inclusion of etiquette training as part of disability awareness training</li> <li>5. Monitoring the impact of disability awareness training on services</li> <li>6. Evaluating the impact of disability awareness training on services</li> </ol>
S2	Disability Football	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The promotion of football for people with disabilities</li> <li>2. The facilitation of training courses to make coaches and athletes aware of football for people with disabilities</li> <li>3. The facilitation of football for people with intellectual disabilities</li> <li>4. The facilitation of football for people with physical disabilities</li> <li>5. The facilitation of football for people who are blind or partially sighted</li> <li>6. The facilitation of football for people who are Deaf or hard of hearing</li> <li>7. The facilitation of football for people with mental ill health</li> <li>8. Conducting research into effectiveness of training courses on football for people with disabilities</li> <li>9. Conducting research into effectiveness of playing programs for people with disabilities</li> </ol>

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3 S3 Resources and  
4 Competencies  
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7 Financial Resources

- 8 1. Direct funding of promotional activities
- 9 2. Direct or 'seed' funding of disability football programs

10 Physical Resources

- 11 3. The provision of accessible amenities (toilets, concession stands, Changing Places toilets)
- 12 for people with disabilities
- 13 4. The provision of transport for participants in elite disability football
- 14 5. The provision of equitable sports science support for elite disability footballers

15 Intellectual Resources

- 16 6. A dedicated program of activity aimed at increasing the engagement of people with
- 17 disabilities
- 18 7. A knowledge-bank of good practice for engagement of people with disabilities
- 19 8. A disability football program managed at National Level
- 20 9. National Association supported opportunities to share your best practices with others

21 Human Resources

- 22 10. A national coordinator responsible for the engagement of people with disabilities in football
- 23 11. The coordinator should at least be a member of the middle management team
- 24 12. A dedicated staff member responsible for developing participation opportunities for people
- 25 with disabilities
- 26 13. A core team of staff (employed) responsible for the delivery of these opportunities
- 27 14. A core team of staff (voluntary) responsible for the delivery of these opportunities

28 Competencies

- 29 15. Staff training in disability awareness
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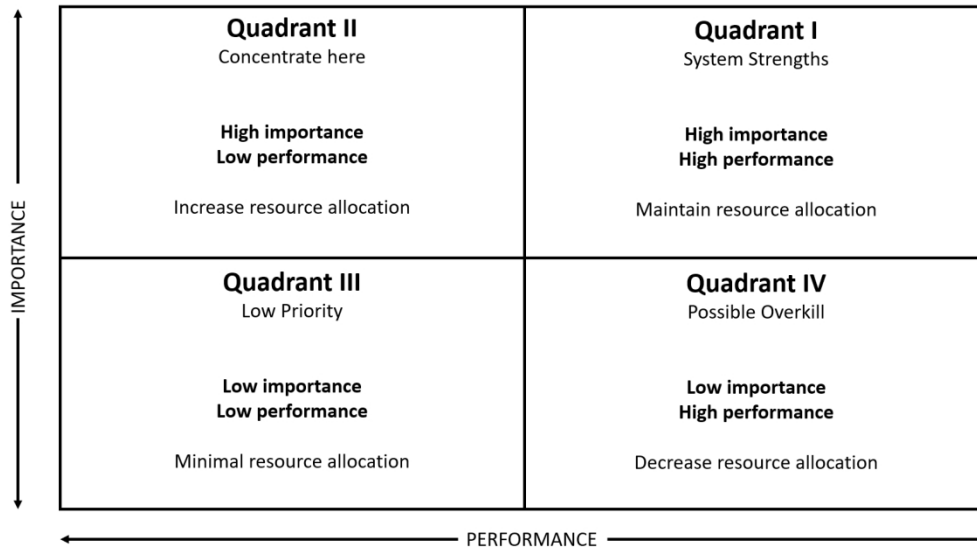
- 16. Staff training on causes of discrimination and social inclusion
  - 17. Staff training in disability football coaching
  - 18. Staff training in workplace integration
  - 19. Staff training in the monitoring of program effectiveness
  - 20. Staff training in the evaluation of program effectiveness
  - 21. Opportunities for specialist staff to present their work at workshops or conferences
-

Table 2. Cronbach's  $\alpha$  coefficients of each indicator under study for the importance and performance scores.

Indicator	Number of items	Cronbach's $\alpha$ Importance	Performance
Overall score	36	0.979	0.976
Disability awareness	6	0.934	0.932
Disability football	9	0.956	0.952
Financial resources	2	0.833	0.916
Physical resources	3	0.794	0.689
Intellectual resources	4	0.946	0.947
Human resources	5	0.955	0.916
Competencies	7	0.958	0.948

Table 3. Statistics and effect sizes of the tests for the overall mean scores of importance and performance for the seven indicators under analysis.

Indicator	Importanc e	Performanc e	I-P gap	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>d</i>
Disability awareness	3.88	2.39	1.49	7.079	0.000	1.232
Disability football	4.06	2.44	1.62	9.697	0.000	1.688
Financial resources	3.83	2.64	1.19	5.087	0.000	0.885
Physical resources	3.72	2.55	1.17	6.570	0.000	1.143
Intellectual resources	3.97	2.52	1.45	6.945	0.000	0.966
Human resources	3.62	2.53	1.09	5.354	0.000	0.931
Competencies	3.71	2.35	1.36	6.708	0.000	1.167

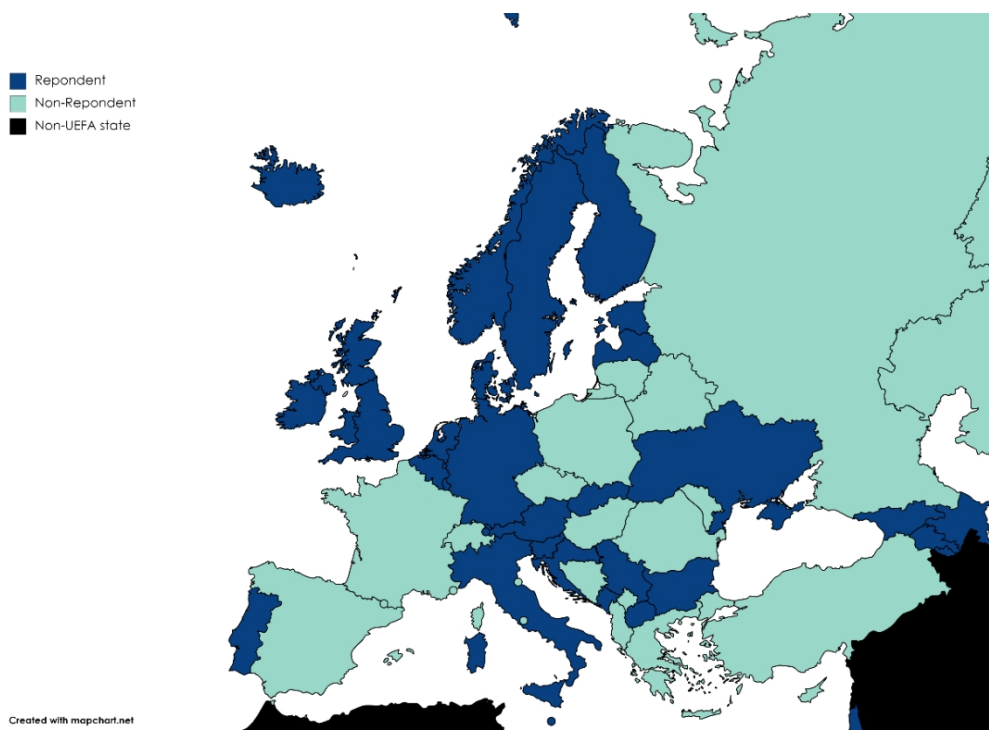


An Importance Performance Chart  
Source: Adapted from Martilla and James (1977)

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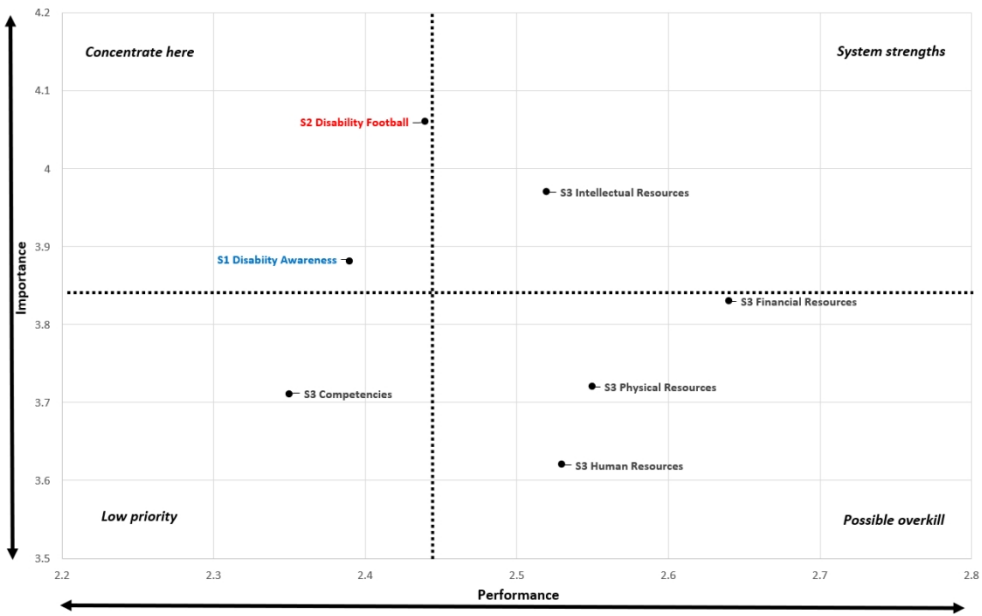
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The UEFA region and repondent National Associations  
Source: Authors adapted from mapchart.net

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Overall position of indicators in IPA chart  
Source: Authors

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