In modern football, tactics are relevant across all age groups and performance levels. Yet for a long time they have received little attention in the training process. This is why tactical performance today offers such enormous potential. In a new project, sport scientists at the German Sport University Cologne have been comparing the soccer-specific tactical performance of male and female players in Europe with the help of position data. The study is sponsored by the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA).

In the run-up to the Women’s World Cup a provocative advertising spot showed the German women’s footballers with a humorous text based on the cliché that many have probably encountered before: Women’s soccer is different from men’s. "Like amateur football, only in slow motion" says the ad. But humour apart, where objectively do the soccer-style differences lie between men and women, and how do these compare across Europe?

Prof. Daniel Memmert is Head of the study: “We are looking for similarities and differences between the tactical behaviour of women’s and men’s national teams with the aim of drawing comparisons between different countries in Europe. In order to avoid any gender-specific bias in the evaluation we rely on position data instead of the usual video data.” Newly developed key performance indicators and sport informatics analysis methods based on artificial neural networks have been used as objective analysis tools.

The project carried out by the Institute of Exercise Training and Sports Informatics was selected by UEFA as one of only six projects (approval rate: 10%) to receive funding. The study’s findings will enable objective conclusions to be drawn about the training of men and women players in their different cultures, thus contributing to the further development and professionalisation of women’s football in the field of tactics, while supporting efforts to promote public awareness of women’s football as an attractive sport on the basis of objective evaluation criteria.