



SUSTAINABLY STRENGTHENING WOMEN IN MEDIEVAL COMBAT

**ENHANCING MEDIEVAL COMBAT TRAINING FOR WOMEN
THROUGH CROSS-BORDER EXCHANGE AND JOB SHADOWING**



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WHY THIS PROJECT?

Medieval Combat as a sport is still strongly male-dominated. Women face sporting, social and organisational barriers - from entering the sport and accessing suitable equipment to a lack of female role models, training culture, competition opportunities and long-term club retention. In non-urban areas, accessibility, infrastructure and smaller club structures create additional challenges. VgVK Wien therefore wanted to understand which training, club and framework conditions can sustainably attract, develop and retain women in the sport.

OUR APPROACH

Learning through observation, joint training, workshops, tournament observation, expert discussions and direct reflection with partner organisations in Germany. The identified good practices were assessed for their transferability to everyday club practice in Vienna.

THE LEARNING JOURNEY



MUNICH

Women's competition, event logistics & team dynamics



FLORSTADT

Gender diversity, access & non-urban context



OSNABRÜCK

Medieval Combat ↔ HEMA, onboarding & coaching



INGOLSTADT

Differentiation, SAF & inclusive training practice



NUREMBERG

Training for women, retention & leadership

Guiding questions

How can we create low-threshold entry pathways? • How do we promote performance, safety and self-confidence? • What strengthens retention and belonging? • How do pathways into coaching and leadership emerge? • Which framework conditions improve access in urban and non-urban settings? • Which club structures protect and support participants?

PROJECT OBJECTIVE

Move from individual women-focused measures towards transferable good practices and practical approaches for inclusive, performance-oriented, safe and accessible Medieval Combat training and sustainable club development.



KEY LEARNINGS

Across all mobilities, a consistent picture emerged: supporting women is not a single measure, but a process of quality development across training, culture, organisation and access.

1. Use women-only spaces strategically

Women-only training sessions and workshops make it easier, especially at the beginning, to ask questions, exchange experiences, build self-confidence and discuss body- or equipment-related topics. They create spaces for entry and networking, but should not permanently separate participants from regular training.

2. Gender-sensitive means individual

Good coaching does not mean “easier training for women”. What matters are clear explanations, structured progression, individual feedback and appropriate training load: challenging without overwhelming. This improves learning and safety for everyone.

3. Belonging drives retention

It is not enough for women to be “allowed to take part”. They need to experience that their athletic development is genuinely wanted and supported. Beginner pathways, mentoring, transparent expectations and a constructive feedback culture strengthen retention and a sense of security.

4. Equipment, competition & support are structural issues

Suitable equipment is not always available. Access, adaptation options, competition support, and reliable organisation and logistics are important framework conditions.

5. Role models open pathways into responsibility

Female coaches, officials and experienced athletes make development visible. Advanced athletes do not need to be “elite” before taking responsibility: coaching and leading are learning pathways in their own right.

6. Safeguarding also means autonomy

Clear contact persons, transparent reporting pathways and respected boundaries create safety. Athletes’ boundaries and decisions must also be respected when it comes to training intensity, partner choice in training and the decision to compete.

7. Inclusion goes beyond gender

In Ingolstadt, it became clear how exercises, communication and tasks can be adapted to different experience levels as well as physical or cognitive requirements. Differentiation is a quality feature of professional coaching.

8. Transfer methods - do not copy them

HEMA and Medieval Combat are related forms of physical activity, but fundamentally different sports. They differ in origin, movement patterns, objectives, rules, competition logic and governance structures. Methods can inspire, but must be adapted to the logic of the respective sport.

9. Access is also an infrastructure issue

Training venues must not only be accessible, but also suitable in terms of privacy. Wherever possible, separate changing and/or private spaces for women and men should be available. If not, the conditions should be communicated transparently before the first training session - especially in non-urban areas.

10. Supporting women improves training for everyone

Learnings from women-focused formats - such as a more open feedback culture, clearer communication, mentoring, differentiation and safeguarding structures - can be transferred into mixed training and improve the quality of the entire club.



PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are intended as transferable guidance for Medieval Combat and related combat-sport clubs. They can be adapted to local structures, resources and participant needs.

1. Structured onboarding

Ask new athletes about goals, previous experience, expectations and support needs; explain entry pathways transparently.

2. Accessible progression

Use Soft-Sword training and clearly structured technical steps before increasing intensity and complexity.

3. Mentoring & peer support

Connect new women deliberately with experienced female athletes or reliable contact persons.

4. Dose pressure appropriately

Notice stress reactions and manage load so that challenge leads to learning - not merely "surviving".

5. Support equipment & competition

Systematically make knowledge about fit, protection, adaptations, competition preparation and practical support accessible.

6. Women-led formats

Use workshops or training sessions led by women for women as dedicated spaces for learning, exchange and networking.

7. Normalise leadership

Make women visible early as coaches, mentors, officials and club function holders, and enable them to take responsibility.

8. Safeguarding & autonomy

Make contact persons, standards of conduct and reporting pathways visible; respect athletes' boundaries and decisions.

9. Access & local partnerships

Consider accessibility, changing and private spaces, and privacy; communicate limitations transparently in advance. Use local networks and partnerships.

10. Embed learnings across the club

Transfer feedback culture, inclusive methodology and good safeguarding structures deliberately into mixed training and internal coach development.

FOUR LEVELS FOR TRANSFER

TRAINING

Are methodology, communication, differentiation and load management inclusive?

CLUB

Are onboarding, mentoring, culture, safeguarding and leadership clearly embedded?

ENVIRONMENT

Are venues accessible, do they offer sufficient privacy, and are spatial limitations communicated transparently in advance?

SPORT STRUCTURE

Are competitions, equipment, networking, visibility and support accessible?



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EUROPEAN ADDED VALUE

Cross-border exchange made different training, club and framework conditions visible and created a protected space for critical reflection. The host organisations contributed complementary strengths – from long-established competitive events for women and event support to access strategies for non-urban regions, interdisciplinary exchange with HEMA, inclusive coaching and women-led leadership. At the same time, VgVK Wien contributed its own experience, including prevention and safeguarding structures. Peer learning therefore worked in both directions.

PROJECT CONCLUSION

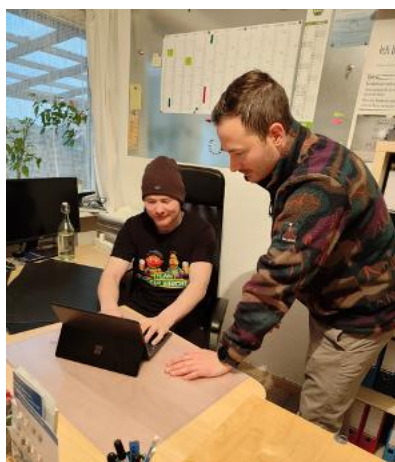
Supporting women in Medieval Combat is sustainable when access, training, performance, safety, belonging and responsibility are considered together. Specific women-focused formats can open important spaces - long-term impact occurs when inclusive quality, autonomy and practical accessibility are embedded in regular training and everyday club life.



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