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SPORTS MANAGEMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABILITY*

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Abstract. This paper explores the intersection of strategic sports management and sustainability, focusing on the perceptions and practices of Slovak sports managers. Through a comprehensive literature review, data analysis from a questionnaire survey involving 177 respondents and interviews with sports managers and sports professionals (n = 3), we identify the key factors influencing the integration of sustainability into sports management. The findings highlight the importance of stakeholder engagement, the challenges faced by sports organizations in implementing sustainable practices, and the role of marketing in promoting sustainability. Our results suggest that despite the growing awareness of sustainability, many sports managers lack the necessary background in management and economics, indicating a need for targeted educational resources. This study contributes to the broader understanding of how sustainability can be effectively incorporated into the strategic management of sports organizations.

Keywords: sports management; sustainability; strategy

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1. Introduction

The concept of sustainability has gained significant attention across various sectors, including sports management. As environmental, social, and economic challenges intensify, the need for sustainable practices in sports organizations becomes increasingly critical. Sustainability in this context refers not only to environmental stewardship but also to the ability of sports organizations to maintain long-term viability by addressing social responsibilities and economic realities.

This paper aims to explore how sustainability is perceived by researchers and implemented by sports managers. By examining the theoretical underpinnings of sustainability and its application within the sports industry, we seek to identify the factors that facilitate or hinder sustainable practices. The study also evaluates the current state of knowledge and practices among sports managers, emphasizing the importance of education and strategic planning in achieving sustainability goals.

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Our research is based on a detailed literature review and an empirical study involving a questionnaire survey of Slovak sports managers. The survey data, complemented by semi-structured interviews, provide insights into the practical challenges and opportunities faced by sports organizations striving for sustainability. This paper offers a framework for integrating sustainability into the strategic management of sports clubs, highlighting the role of stakeholder engagement, marketing, and innovative financial strategies.

2. Theoretical background

Despite its complex and multifaceted historical development, the concept of sustainability remains context-specific and ontologically open (Purvis et al., 2018). As defined by the Cambridge Dictionary (2024), sustainability refers to the ability to maintain something (such as the quality of a product) over time. In the context of the environment, sustainability is defined as the ability to cause minimal or no harm to the environment, enabling the entity to continue its operations for an extended period (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024).

In recent years, sustainability has emerged as a prominent concept driven by the need better to manage limited resources, address deteriorating environmental conditions, and tackle other societal challenges. This concept has permeated the management field, fundamentally transforming its principles and practices.

Barile and Saviano (2017) describe the approach to achieving sustainability, emphasizing that for a system (or an organization's system) to survive, it must establish relationships with other viable entities (suprasystems) that possess the resources necessary for its survival and effective functioning. To access these resources, decision-makers within the system must engage suprasystems (and subsystems) in a network of relationships. The effectiveness of this network depends on the ability to harmonize multiple, often divergent, interests and to involve actors in the process of value co-creation. It is crucial to focus management attention on stakeholders of critical importance to the enterprise.

Businesses bear social responsibility because of their economic power (Guevara et al., 2021; Daugaard & Ding, 2022). With economic power comes increasing societal expectations that companies will contribute to solving problems, whether on a global scale (such as addressing global warming) or on a local level (such as tackling recycling issues in the city where the company is based).

Businesses are responsible for addressing issues related to their impact on society (Daugaard & Ding, 2022). This means that companies should responsibly manage the externalities created by their activities. It is also suggested that business managers are guided by moral principles that motivate them to act responsibly. In response to the growing emphasis on sustainability, concepts such as ESG (environmental, social, and governance) are becoming more prominent (Li et al., 2021).

Stakeholder theory is closely related to the ESG framework since stakeholders form demands placed on the enterprise and control the scarce resources it needs. These demands can be environmental, social, or economic and may also include solutions to broader societal issues. The specific ESG outputs an enterprise delivers depend on the nature of its stakeholders (Daugaard & Ding, 2022). Stakeholder theory assumes that stakeholders are interested in various aspects of the enterprise, such as outputs, processes, and inputs. However, the relationship should be reciprocal; the enterprise must also address stakeholder requirements to achieve its goal of profitability. Therefore, a cooperative relationship between stakeholders and the enterprise is mutually beneficial, especially when pursuing social objectives.

Savio et al. (2023) investigated the association between the ESG concept and the COVID-19 pandemic. Their analysis revealed that most reviewed publications report a positive impact of robust ESG practices on stock prices. They found that a solid commitment to ESG values provides insurance during bear markets by fostering moral capital and building loyal stakeholder relationships. Specifically, ESG performance has been shown to offer a form of protection against economic declines during crises such as COVID-19. This is supported by studies showing that companies with low ESG performance, particularly those with higher carbon intensity in sectors such as oil extraction, aviation, and refining, experienced significant stock value declines (Savio et al.,

2023). Wang et al. (2023) also describe the positive effects of integrating ESG concepts into corporate culture. The pandemic crisis has underscored the critical need for individual sports organizations to adhere to business principles. This need existed even before the pandemic, as state budget support often fails to cover the total costs of these organizations. To ensure their sustainability, it is essential for sports organizations to explore new entrepreneurial concepts to achieve economic sustainability (Lindsey, 2008; Hu et al., 2016; Trail & McCullough, 2019).

Zhu et al. (2023) explored the significance of sustainability in sports club management, highlighting that renewable resources and environmental challenges have become central topics in academic debate and international discourse. They noted that research on improving renewable and environmental resources from various perspectives is gaining momentum. Zhu et al. conducted a questionnaire survey with 439 respondents from China, Iran, South Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Singapore, and Kazakhstan, disseminated through sustainability NGOs. The results revealed a consistent belief among respondents, regardless of their work experience, in the importance of greening sports management. Their research emphasizes the need to develop green financing tools, use various media to raise public awareness about sustainable sport management and promote green energy generation for sports venues such as stadiums and swimming pools.

Among the business aspects that require proper setup and continuous management, marketing is essential for sustainability. This involves marketing what can be described as a sports product (Vamplew, 2018; Siani et al., 2021). Typically, this product is a sporting event, with customers as spectators, either on-site or through broadcasts.

From a sustainability perspective, building a membership base and ensuring the long-term functioning of sports organizations is only possible with effective marketing strategies. These strategies should focus on gaining attention, reaching out, and recruiting new athletes from early childhood (Radojevic et al., 2011; Nemec et al., 2019). Emphasizing this aspect of sustainability is crucial for the continued existence and operation of sports organizations. It is also essential to consider the perceived popularity of different sports among various age groups. Differences in the popularity of sports among different age groups (Spehar et al., 2008; Petric et al., 2011) may indicate changing preferences among the younger generation.

McCullough et al. (2020) analyzed the web groups of 147 North American sports organizations and their associated web groups for environmental performance communication. They found that only one sports organization featured an environmentally themed message in its web group, while 42 sports organizations highlighted environmental initiatives through dedicated web groups for the respective team or match venue. These communications primarily focused on fan engagement initiatives (i.e., awareness and participation) but lacked goal setting, measurement metrics, or performance summaries. Therefore, sports organizations may need to be sufficiently addressing sustainability.

Approaches to sustainability vary depending on the size of sports clubs (Moon et al., 2022). For the most prominent sports organizations, such as international sports federations, sustainability is implemented in several ways:

- **Pilot sustainability events:** For example, at the 2018 ICF Canoe Slalom World Cup in Augsburg, Germany, the ICF distributed reusable bottles to athletes and glass bottles to volunteers and staff (Moon et al., 2022).
- **Partnering with non-profit organizations:** This approach is suitable for smaller sports organizations. Non-profits are interested in expanding sustainability, particularly environmental initiatives, while sports organizations aim to optimize costs, creating opportunities for natural partnerships.
- **Partnering with sustainability-focused consultancies:** This paid form of outsourcing requires a more significant monetary commitment and is likely more suitable for large sports organizations.
- **Establishing a sustainability committee or commission:** This approach requires sufficient financial and human resources, experience in sustainability, and senior management support and belief in

sustainability concepts (Moon et al., 2022). This concept is also primarily suitable for large sports organizations.

- **Implementing a comprehensive sustainability strategy** involves appointing at least one full-time sustainability-focused manager, indicating the sports organization's commitment to taking the entire initiative on sustainability issues rather than outsourcing. This approach includes making critical strategic decisions, such as avoiding partnerships with companies in industries that could jeopardize the organization's image as an environmental leader.

Barbu et al. (2022) highlight the growing importance of sustainability concepts in research and practice within sports settings. They demonstrate that sports managers are committed to implementing social responsibility concepts and allocating resources to these activities. By doing so, sports organizations benefit financially, improve their reputation and image, increase fan loyalty, and attract new potential talent to their membership base. Acknowledging their dependence on the community, sports managers are motivated to put social responsibility concepts into practice. Specifically examining the Romanian sports market, Barbu et al. (2022) state that social responsibility and sustainability are essential for the sustainable management of sports organizations and significantly impact their economic performance.

Cury et al. (2022) addressed environmental sustainability in sport, identifying it as a recent and growing area. They emphasize that the urgency and complexity of environmental issues necessitate a global perspective and adopting methods and theories that foster closer collaboration between researchers and practitioners to develop and implement effective solutions. Implementing environmental concepts in the sports market can be challenging due to barriers such as the need for more relevant knowledge among sports managers.

Financial sustainability is also an important topic. For instance, modern football has seen tremendous growth in revenue, yet clubs face serious financial challenges (Ali, 2023). In 2010 UEFA's introduced Financial Fair Play (FFP) regulations due to financial instability among European clubs, many of which were operating at a loss. Effective regulation requires legislative authority, accountability, fairness, expertise, and efficiency. The core idea of FFP is to ensure clubs spend no more than they earn and pay their debts timely. As an effect of FFP, debt generally has tended to reduce substantially, with UEFA revealing that the combined net debt of Europe's top division clubs decreased from 65% of revenue in 2010 to 40% in 2018. (Dunbar & Middleton, 2022)

Sports organizations and federations need to develop strategies for innovation and implement strategic management to address long-term challenges and improve performance (Tjønndal, 2016).

Interestingly, as Ivašković & Čater (2018) found, the level of public funding influences non-profit basketball clubs to adopt strategies focused on community benefits rather than competitive sports success, which negatively affects their overall performance. Implications found in Varmus et al. (2023) suggest the future creation of a database that captures public sports funding, with established rules for its continuous operation and updating. To enhance transparency, this database could be powered by blockchain technology. These recommendations may lead to more sustainable sports systems.

Over the centuries, strategical management has been defined by many authors, each offering different interpretations, though many of these definitions agree on various points. For instance, David (2011) views strategic management as an art and science of formulating, implementing, and evaluating decisions that enable an organization to achieve its objectives. To achieve organizational success, strategic management integrates management, marketing, finance/accounting, production/operations, research and development, and information systems. Nag et al. (2007) view it as an attempt to identify optimal plans to achieve and maintain competitive advantages. It is an interdisciplinary field that deals with the behaviour of companies and other market participants. It involves their strategic behaviour, decisions they make regarding the organization of their production, mutual relationships, and competitive position. All this is based on a thorough understanding of the broader environment in which companies must operate (Nag et al., 2007). Wheelen et al. (2015) state that the core of strategic management consists of analyzing the organization as a whole and integrating various disciplines. It also involves studying the organization's competitiveness in the market and the industry in which

it operates. Concepts of corporate social responsibility and ethics are also applicable in strategic management. A study by Bezerra et al. (2024) found several of the most frequent keywords linked with the term strategic management are a process (sequence of steps to achieve a specific goal), an art (creativity, innovation), a knowledge (about an internal and external environment), a set (of people, or things, resources, actions), a system (a series of inputs transformed into products or results). All of these keywords point in a direction of what the term incorporates.

Strategic management is generally a process based on knowledge of one's organization and the external environment. Based on this knowledge, it is necessary to form a long-term plan (Adámik et al., 2021) for all organizational processes to be adapted. Additionally, strategizing means deciding whether to cooperate or compete with entities around sports clubs. It is essential to seek synergies in cooperation (Holubčík et al., 2023).

Although numerous articles individually address strategic sports management and sustainability topics, more research is needed to integrate these themes into a comprehensive framework. While specific issues are often discussed in the literature, our study highlights the need for a more practical theory to guide professional sports managers in effectively addressing sustainability challenges.

3. Research aim and methodology

Annesi et al. (2023) identified clusters of sustainability-related studies and calculated their occurrence in sports-oriented literature: environmental sustainability – 27 %, social sustainability 9 %, economic sustainability 5 %, combined environmental, social, and economic sustainability – 13 % (including CSR). This shows sports management scientists are focused on environmental sustainability. However, a complex view of the whole ESG concept occurred in 13 % of cases. The true sustainability is only achieved when all the parts of ESG are addressed. Therefore, the authors of this article focus on the broader sustainability perspective. This article links context to sustainability and strategy based on a literature review.

Additionally, partial data from a questionnaire in which Slovak sports managers participated as respondents are provided. Responses were collected from early February 2024 to March 2024. 177 responses were collected. A 90% confidence interval corresponds to a statistical error of 6.06%. To assess the internal consistency and reliability of the questionnaire data, Cronbach's alpha test was used, with values ranging between 0 and 1. The test result had a value of 0.71, indicating that the questionnaire data was highly reliable. The claims and models are supported by validation through semi-structured interviews (n = 3) with practising sports managers and academic sports managers. The main focus of the interview was the model visualized in Figure 2, although general ideas and concepts in this article were also discussed.

Our research concluded that sports managers are generally not professionals and lack managerial or economic backgrounds. Therefore, we endeavoured to synthesize all the key sustainable and strategic management aspects. The outcome is an easy-to-follow map of steps designed to promote more responsible management, leading to the incorporation of sustainability into strategy.

This research aims to develop a comprehensive model that elucidates the key factors and processes involved in integrating sustainability into the strategic management of sports organizations. By employing a mixed-method approach that includes a detailed literature review, a questionnaire survey of Slovak sports managers, and semi-structured interviews, this study seeks to construct a practical and theoretical framework to guide sports managers in embedding sustainable practices into their strategic planning and operations.

4. Results and discussion

The majority of respondents (sports managers), approximately 59.32 %, indicated no distinction between the roles of manager and coach in their sports club. This can be attributed to the likelihood that the sample comprises predominantly small and medium-sized sports clubs, which may need more budgets to pay separately for a sports manager and a sports coach. Additionally, approximately 72.88 % of the respondents do not have a degree in economics and management, while 24.86 % indicated that they have a degree in this field. The remaining respondents reported having only basic education in this area. This suggests the need to provide contextual materials for sports managers. They need to see the broader perspective to understand the connections between various aspects of managerial work, which will enhance their ability to lead sports clubs toward sustainability.

First, to explain where the requirements for sustainability originate and to illustrate the direction of stakeholder demands for implementing CSR and sustainability concepts, visualization in Figure 1 is provided.

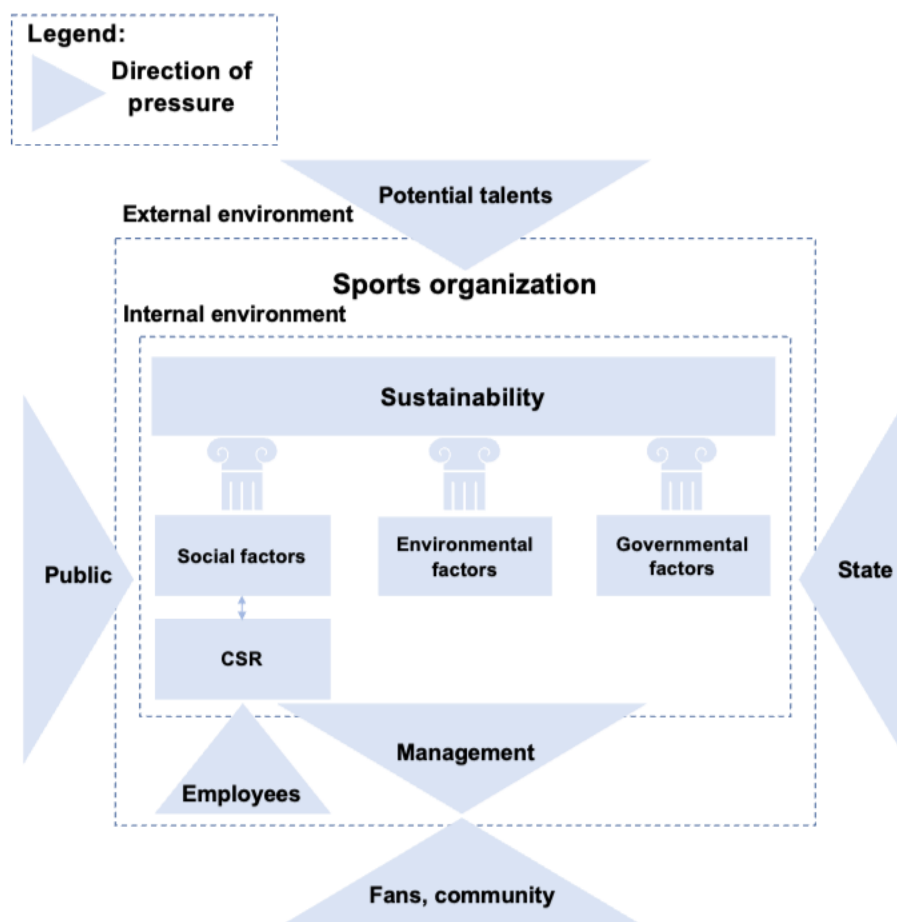


Figure 1. Impact on the Implementation of Sustainability Concepts in a Sports Organization

Source: Own elaboration

The centre of Figure 1 illustrates the pillars of sustainability derived from ESG, represented by social, environmental, and governance factors. Additionally, the CSR concept is shown to be closely related to the social factors of sustainability. CSR encompasses a set of tools for building a company's image as responsible towards its environment, particularly when the enterprise is strategically focused on long-term branding. The aforementioned concepts are enclosed within a dashed rectangle, representing a logical set in the context of the illustration. The larger dashed rectangle delimits the internal environment of the sports organization.

The figure's triangles represent the pressure direction from selected stakeholders, particularly those mentioned in the studied literature. Within the internal environment, employees may advocate for the implementation of sustainability. Conversely, the management of the sports enterprise can sometimes act as a barrier to implementing sustainability concepts, depending on their attitudes towards the issue. However, it is also in the management's interest to ensure the continuation of core processes within the sports organization (e.g., organizing training sessions, matches, etc.).

Therefore, management must prioritize resource allocation towards these core processes. As a result, management often needs to temper the expectations of other stakeholders based on the assumption that these expectations exceed the organization's capacity and willingness to implement sustainability concepts. This situation can occur even if management supports sustainability concepts but faces limited options, which other stakeholders may not always accept.

External stakeholders, including the public, fans, community members, potential members (or potential sporting talent), and the state, exert pressure on the organization to behave responsibly towards its environment and to adapt its processes to align with their expectations regarding social, environmental, and governance factors of sustainability.

The state, in particular, can legislate and enforce sustainability measures. Potential members (i.e., individuals considering membership in a sports club) can also base their decision-making process on these sustainability factors. As previously mentioned, the strength of the pressure to implement these concepts depends on the size of the sports organization itself.

Achieving sustainability is a long-term endeavour. Steering an organization towards sustainability requires setting strategies and goals, possibly adjusting the organizational structure, and changing the reward and motivation system, among other actions. The strategy and objectives must be coherent and aligned with the ultimate goal of sustainability. Given this task's complexity, the article's authors have mapped out the steps that need to be addressed or modified to guide the company towards sustainability. The model is illustrated in Figure 2.

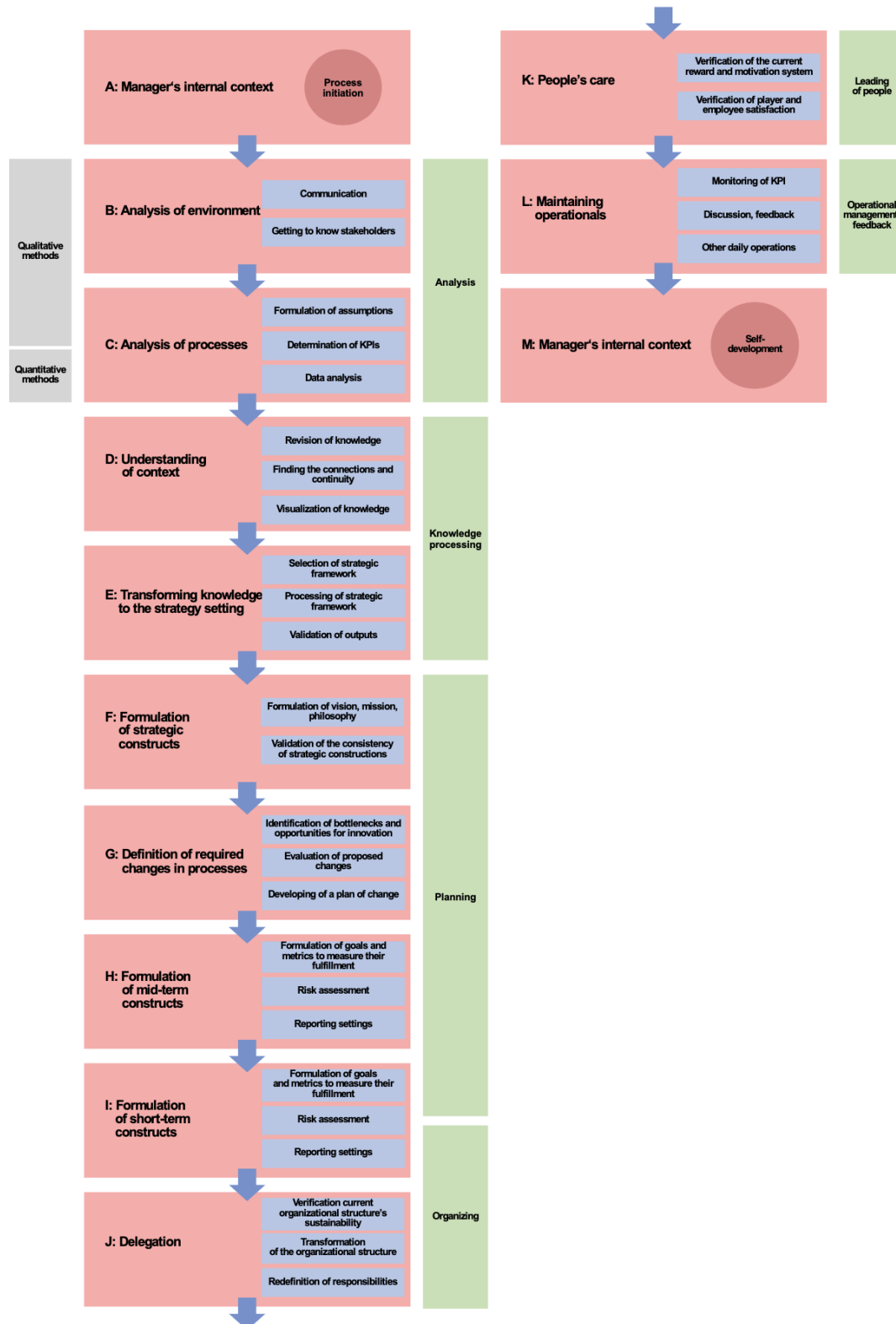


Figure 2. Map of Actions for Moving Towards Sustainability
 Source: Own elaboration

The red formations represent the downstream process. The green units categorize processes according to basic management activities (analysis, planning, organizing, leading people, etc.). The grey services are shown only for the analytical part, categorizing analytical methods. Here, qualitative methods (interviews, observation, and analysis of existing documents such as accounting documents) dominate and are recommended to sports managers as they are typically less costly. The blue departments briefly describe some key process activities.

The model comprises thirteen sections, labelled alphabetically from A to M. Throughout the model, it is assumed that the sports club budget is severely constrained. Data analysis is recommended for quantitative methods primarily focused on analyzing the current state of processes (how they meet objectives, key drivers, etc.). The approach depends on the size of the club and other factors. In larger clubs, a sports manager might delegate data analysis to a data analyst or reporting staff member. However, in smaller clubs with limited staff, the sports manager should endeavour to conduct the data analysis personally if time permits. Data analysis should not be omitted or neglected.

The model is designed from a managerial perspective, providing practical steps that can be followed or adapted to specific environments. One key idea of the model is that the manager is involved at the beginning, throughout, and at the end of all processes. The manager's internal context influences all processes and stakeholder groups. Managers need to be aware of this.

The manager is responsible for the business's performance and determining the sports club's direction. Managers should understand how their behaviour affects those around them and adjust their attitudes, decisions, and communication styles accordingly. Therefore, the manager's internal context (A, M) is present at the model's beginning and end.

This model can be helpful for managers joining a new sports club, long-standing managers revising processes, or individuals without a management background who have accepted a managerial role. The latter situation is common, as small sports clubs often need more resources to differentiate between coaching and organisational roles, or the managerial role is assumed by individuals without formal management training.

The manager initiates all processes. Analyzing the state of the environment is an essential starting point for managing the enterprise. The manager gets to know the people or representatives of various stakeholders, continuously adjusting their internal context based on new insights. Qualitative methods are primarily used in this phase. Qualitative and quantitative methods, such as data analysis, are utilized to understand how different processes work. If comprehensive data analysis is not feasible, examining accounting documents is crucial. The primary focus should be on cash flow and the state of the most liquid funds of the sports club. Understanding the sources and amounts of incoming and outgoing funds is essential. Prioritizing the settlement of liabilities with the shortest maturity is necessary. Focusing on deleveraging is vital for long-term sustainability if the sports club is indebted. The manager must learn about the sports club's operations during the analytical phase (as indicated in the green box to the right of analytical sections B and C). Decision-making, strategy setting, planning, and objective setting should only occur when the manager is confident in their understanding of the complex environment in which they operate.

It is beneficial to visualize the sports environment using modelling for internal purposes. Writing notes on findings or documenting the processes of learning about the environment and processes is advisable. A whole category of processes is dedicated to forming an understanding of complex contexts (Part D). This activity, along with translating understanding into the setting of strategic constructs (Part E), falls under knowledge processing. In Part E, the manager selects frameworks, standardized models, sequences, and other tools to translate their understanding into knowledge that others can grasp. For example, they may use SWOT analysis or follow ISO standards and similar frameworks. The goal is to process knowledge more efficiently, preparing it for setting strategic constructs such as philosophy, mission, and vision. Once the knowledge is processed, it moves to the next category of activities: planning. This involves using a funnel effect, starting with long-term constructs, followed by medium-term and then short-term plans. These plans comprise a set of various objectives.

The level of goal-setting intervention by a manager depends on the organizational structure. If a single manager manages a sports club, they must set short-term or operational goals themselves. If another manager is responsible for operational objectives, the supervisor delegates the setting of these objectives to that manager. It is also necessary to define how processes will evolve. The manager analyses the processes, processes the knowledge about them, and identifies their strengths and weaknesses. If the SWOT analysis is used, the manager identifies strategic directions for managing the sports club. If weaknesses dominate, processes should be adjusted to address and strengthen these areas. The manager leverages their knowledge (derived from their internal context, including education and awareness of trends in sports management) to suggest process changes. The definition of process changes is part of Part G, which follows Part F, where the long-term direction of the sports club is established.

Proposed changes in processes should be directed towards fulfilling strategic goals; they should align with the sports club's philosophy, vision, and culture. The defined changes need to be included and described in setting the medium and short-term goals and plans that follow in sections H and I of the Comprehensive Model. Part I, i.e., setting short-term constructs, already extends into the category of organizing. Here, however, Part J, delegation, is central. At this point, the manager knows the people, their character and abilities (resulting from the analysis of the environment and the processing of knowledge about the environment) and accordingly delegates duties, responsibilities, and authority to persons suited to the positions. Leading people follow the category of organizing. Here, the manager is concerned with the motivation of staff and athletes, the reward system, and the general satisfaction of staff and athletes in the environment. These activities are described in section K - care of players and staff. At this point, the manager already understands who has what motives and what individuals' personal goals are and also understands how to motivate individuals to perform better. This knowledge also comes from the getting to know the environment section. Based on this knowledge, the manager will adjust employees' and players' rewards, motivation, and learning. After setting up processes, goals, and strategies, making metrics to measure performance and measuring the fulfilment of goals, it is possible to move on to operational management or managing the running of the sports club. Activities falling under this category are included in Part L - Maintaining the Smooth Running of the Business. In principle, the manager's daily activities must align with the set objectives and strategies, which should then be integrated into the club's activities. The manager performs various daily tasks, such as tracking key performance indicators (KPIs) and monitoring cash flow, but effective communication is paramount.

The manager is the central communication hub for any business or sports club, necessitating interaction through various communication channels with different stakeholders. The manager must align activities and schedule them to suit each stakeholder. Developed management communication skills are a key predictor of a sports club's success. Therefore, the model begins and ends (Part M) with the manager and their internal context. It is essential for the manager to develop both personally and professionally continually. The manager should adapt their personality to circumstances and reflect on the effectiveness and appropriateness of their communication. On the knowledge side, the manager should stay informed about new concepts that reshape management perspectives. They should also keep up with technical trends in sports, scientific publications, training opportunities, and the political landscape. Managers should also follow technical trends that permeate sports, take an interest in scientific publications, engage in training, and stay informed about the political situation, among other areas. The manager should maintain a broad outlook but be able to identify key concepts that warrant more time and attention, considering the economics of time. To save time, sports managers may utilize e-learning concepts, described as an innovative approach to providing well-designed, individually oriented, interactive learning environments (Koman et al., 2024). This method supports individual growth for both themselves and their employees. For larger sports clubs, it may be beneficial to create an e-recruitment style web page targeting new employees or potential sports talents, as Koman et al. (2023) suggested for organizations. Larger sports clubs should also be interested in Big Data solutions to enhance managerial decision-making, as Koman et al. (2023) suggest.

Feedback from sports professionals on the model indicates that the content is valuable for sports managers. However, presenting the information in an even simpler context is advised. Sports managers often lack the time and motivation to educate themselves on complex topics.

Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the complex relationship between strategic management and sustainability in sports organizations. Despite a growing recognition of the importance of sustainable practices, many sports managers in Slovakia face significant challenges, primarily due to a lack of formal education in management and economics. This gap necessitates the development of targeted educational programs and resources to equip managers with the necessary skills and knowledge.

Our research reveals that stakeholder engagement is crucial for successfully implementing sustainability initiatives. To achieve their sustainability goals, sports organizations must foster cooperative relationships with key stakeholders, including fans, community members, and government entities. Additionally, effective marketing strategies are essential in promoting sustainability and enhancing the public image of sports clubs. The study also highlights the importance of financial sustainability, particularly in modern sports, where revenue generation and cost management are critical. Integrating ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance) principles and innovative financial tools can help sports organizations navigate their economic challenges.

In conclusion, achieving sustainability in sports management requires a multifaceted approach that includes education, strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, and financial innovation. By addressing these areas, sports organizations can enhance their sustainability and ensure long-term success.

In conclusion, this study contributes novel insights into integrating sustainability within sports management by developing a model that identifies and prioritizes critical factors influencing sustainable practices. The practical value of this research lies in its ability to provide sports managers with a structured approach to embedding sustainability into their strategic planning, thereby enhancing their capability to effectively address environmental, social, and economic challenges.

However, this research has certain limitations. The study is primarily based on data collected from Slovak sports managers, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other contexts. Additionally, the interview sample size was relatively small, which might affect the depth of qualitative insights.

Future research should validate and refine the proposed model across different geographical regions and types of sports organizations. Longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into the long-term impacts of sustainable practices in sports management. Moreover, exploring the role of technology and innovation in promoting sustainability in sports could be a promising direction for further investigation.

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