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 Mine KIZILGÜNEŞ<sup>1</sup>  
 Funda KOÇAK<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Sport Sciences, Ankara University, Ankara, Turkey

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Sport Sciences, Ankara University, Ankara, Turkey

**Corresponding author:** M. Kızılgüneş  
*e-mail:* [kizilgunesmine@gmail.com](mailto:kizilgunesmine@gmail.com)

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## Investigation of Corporate Social Responsibility in Sports within The Scope of Corporate Sustainability

### Abstract

The idea of corporate social responsibility dates back nearly a century, but it is not long ago that the concept was put into action by organizations and studied by researchers. While the first official examination of the concept dates back to the 1950s, it was in the 1980s that people began to question and expect social responsibility practices from organizations. It was the early 2000 that the concept was examined in the field of sports and attracted the attention of researchers. When the corporate social responsibility studies carried out within the scope of sustainability in the field of sports are examined, it is seen that the importance of such practices in terms of organizations is mostly investigated topic. In the research papers, it was also examined how the corporate social responsibility activities carried out by professional sports organizations were received by sports fans and stakeholders. In our study, the place of corporate social responsibility in the field of sports was investigated within the scope of corporate sustainability. When examining studies in the field, it is seen that sport are a valuable tool for sustainable development and corporate sustainability, and that sports organizations should include corporate social responsibility activities in their strategic plans. Considering it's power to reach the society, it is thought that corporate social responsibility in the field of sports is an important field that needs to be worked on in order to ensure sustainable development and corporate sustainability.

**Keyword:** Corporate Social Responsibility, Sports, Sustainable Development, Corporate Sustainability.

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of social responsibility is explained as “Institutions and organizations considering the benefits of the society while performing their economic activities”. The concept of corporate social responsibility is defined as “The ways in which a business tries to align its values and behaviors with those of its various stakeholders” (Mallin, 2009). In this definition and in the concept of corporate social responsibility, the expression of stakeholder is explained as institutions and individuals who are affected by all actions taken by the institution, such as partners, associations, company employees and the customers (Keinert, 2008). It is thought that the definition of the concept of corporate social responsibility may vary according to the period of age it is in, it is highly influenced by the social values of the period and geographical locations. (Özüpek, 2013). The idea of corporate social responsibility first emerged in the early 20th century with business people who started donating to improve the welfare of society (Sheth & Babiak, 2010). It is thought that corporate social responsibility is compulsory for all organizations and that every organization should carry out a social responsibility activities when its strategic aspect is considered (Lantos, 2001).

The concept of sustainable development, which is examined within the scope of our study, is defined as taking into account all the consequences that it may create in the future when deciding to carry out an activity. (Sarıkaya & Kara, 2007). On the other hand, the concept associated with all these terms is corporate sustainability, can be defined as "Balancing the social, environmental and economic needs of both the company and society" (Epstein & Roy, 2001). Today, organizations are expected not only to produce products but also to carry out effective corporate social responsibility studies on social and environmental issues (De Witte & Jonker, 2006).

The aim of this study is to give information about corporate social responsibility studies in the field of sports by mentioning the importance of corporate social responsibility in the field of sports. For this purpose, first of all, the effects of sustainable development and corporate sustainability concepts on the sports field within the scope of corporate social responsibility practices were examined. In the next section, the importance of the concept of corporate social responsibility for professional sports organizations is emphasized, and the corporate social responsibility studies carried out by professional sports organizations are evaluated. In the last section, the studies carried out within the scope of corporate social responsibility in sports literature are investigated.

### **Sustainable Development and Corporate Sustainability**

Sustainability is defined as the use of all resources belonging to humanity without wasting, in accordance with its purpose and in the most efficient way (Gladwin et al., 1995). Sustainability practices are to make conscious changes in the way of living without changing the quality of life (Özmehmet, 2008). The idea of sustainability has been a concept that constantly changing as a result of research and political breakthroughs over many years, and the importance of the concept is constantly repeated by international organizations (Herzig & Schaltegger, 2011). Although the concept of sustainability is discussed in different fields of study, the concept actually has a single common purpose, which is use and protect all natural and artificial resources within the framework of ethical values (Tıraş, 2012).

The concept of sustainable development was defined for the first time in the report called Our Common Future (Brundtland Report), published by the United Nations, as “process of change in

which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development, and institutional change are made consistent with future as well as present needs." (WCED, 1987). It has been emphasized that while carrying out sustainable development activities, organizations feel necessity by different reasons such as financial gain or reputation (Engin & Akgöz, 2013), but sustainable development is now an important concept not only for economic benefit but also for the potential results that may occur in the society and environment (Gür, 2012). Kuşat (2012) stated that the purpose of existence of organizations is profit, and when considered their purpose of existence, it should be accepted as a very natural way of behavior for organizations to feel necessity to perform the responsible behaviors expected by the society.

Harris (2000) explained and listed three different features that need to be protected in order to ensure sustainable development:

- **Economic:** In order to ensure economic development, it is stated that the all resources should be used in the most efficient way, unpredictable behaviors that may cause harm should be avoided, and the management in the financial area should be continuous.
- **Environmental:** Consuming the natural resources of the world to carry out production activities by using methods that may lead to negative consequences, can cause destruction, and as a result, major ecological problems may occur in the environment. It has been explained that when the production is carried out by keeping the environmental dimension in the foreground, the damage to the nature will be reduced and in this way the future generations can also be provide from natural resources.
- **Social:** It emphasizes the full provision of all the fundamental rights that people need in order to ensure a sustainable social life.

Sustainable development is related with the concept of corporate sustainability on the basis (Engert & Baumgartner, 2016). For many years, organizations have determined many corporate sustainability policies in order to keep environmental pollution minimal, to improve their relations with society, and to engage in positive exchanges with stakeholders (Crane, 2000). The concept of corporate sustainability has gained importance as companies realize the negative environmental and social effects they cause (Starik & Marcus, 2000). While creating a corporate sustainability strategy, all the benefits and harms of the planned activity are should determine (Baumgartner & Ebner, 2010). Kuşat (2012) explained the benefits that can be gained through corporate sustainability as decreases in production costs and financial relief, increase in competition level, increase in natural productivity, more efficient use of resources, positive developments in corporate reputation and increase in innovative activities.

It is believed that the concept of sustainability has a valuable position in the sports projects all over the world (Özbey et al., 2019). The important position of sports in society is an indisputable fact, and this position gains more value when evaluated together with the modern society (Stolyarov, 2011). The concept of sustainable development in the field of sports has been explained as allowing people to benefit from all sports facilities, maintaining their suitability for them many years and manage all responsibilities as a whole (Koçak, 2013; Koçak et al., 2013). Today, professional sports organizations are aware of their obligations and increasingly taking their place in corporate social responsibility projects (Babiak & Wolfe, 2006). Countries recently, support sustainable development projects planned by the government, in addition to goals such as elite athlete development or encourage the public to sport.

## Social Responsibility and Corporate Social Responsibility

When the concept of social responsibility is examined in terms of organizations, it is explained as acting fairly, in accordance with business ethics and morals, and not displaying behaviors that will deceive the consumer or harm their rights (Lee & Kotler, 2008). In the study conducted by Engin and Akgöz (2013), it was emphasized that it is important for institutions to act responsive in order to have a positive reputation in the eyes of the society, especially to carry out sustainable social responsibility activities related to the environment. The concept of corporate social responsibility is explained as an institution's attempt to use its own resources to improve the welfare of society through the execution of necessary business actions (Crampton & Patten, 2008). The inclusion of corporate social responsibility in the books was take place for the first time with Howard Bowen's "Social Responsibilities of Businessmen". In the book, he explained the concept as ""It refers to the obligations of businessmen to pursue those politics, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of actions which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of society"" (Bowen, 1953). Carroll (1991) developed one of the most important descriptions in the field and named the corporate social responsibility pyramid.



**Figure 1.** The pyramid of corporate social responsibility. Source: Carroll, A. B. (1991). The pyramid of corporate social responsibility: Toward the moral management of organizational stakeholders. *Business horizons*, 34(4), 39-48.

The pyramid created by Archie Carroll (1991) consists of four sections, and at each section, there are four different components that constitute corporate social responsibility. Economic responsibilities are at the first section of the pyramid. According to Carroll, "All other job responsibilities are based on the economic responsibility of the firm". In the second section, there are legal responsibilities of institutions, businesses are expected to perform their economic duties in accordance with the rules of law. When it comes to the third section, companies are expected to behave in accordance with ethical responsibility. At the top of the pyramid there are philanthropic (voluntary) responsibilities. It is believed that institutions want to help people through voluntary works. At each section in the pyramid, there are responsible behaviors that society expects from businesses. In the modern world, it is believed that companies cannot survive only by maintaining

their economic stability, but if they also fulfill the duties imposed on them by the society, they will provide corporate sustainability. In this context, the obligation valid for all other fields is also considered to be valid for organizations operating in the field of sports.

### **The Importance of Corporate Social Responsibility**

The concept of corporate social responsibility has gained increasing importance for organizations and managers from different fields (Walters & Tacon, 2010). With the recognition of the increasing importance of the concept by the organizations, the way it is usage has also diversified. Corporate social responsibility defines the roles and rules between organizations and the society, as well as explains the responsibilities that organizations have towards society (Keinert, 2008). In the past, corporate managers had to deal only with the economic outcomes of the actions they took (Anderson, 1989), but in today's management approach, if organizations want to maintain their existence, they need to constitute a successful corporate social responsibility strategy (Martín-Gaitero & Escrig- Tena, 2018). It is important for organizations to create the most efficient project that can be carried out simultaneously with the field in which they operate. Only profit-oriented behaviours are not sufficient for institutions to protect and maintain their place in society (Moyo et al., 2020). If it is planned to achieve corporate sustainability, it is thought that not only economic gains, but also breakthroughs that will increase the corporate reputation in the eyes of the society should be created.

Moyo et al. (2020), it is explained that institutions should pay attention to three basic factors in order to create a successful and sustainable corporate social responsibility strategy. First, internal factors were explained, it was said that all resources within the organization are important for institutions to create a sustainable social responsibility strategy. The second factor is external factors, all elements that cannot be controlled by the organization affect sustainability and should be taken into account when creating plans. All uncontrollable events such as the interest and awareness of the societies to corporate social responsibility, economic conditions, natural disasters can be given as examples of external factors. The third of the main factors is expressed as stakeholder participation. Projects carried out by different partners in the market, all acquisition and partnership plans, competitor investments can be given as examples of this factor. It is believed that stakeholder engagement is an element to be considered during the project creation phase. It is thought that corporate social responsibility projects developed by considering these three characteristics will contribute to corporate development.

Every social responsibility work carried out by organizations will create a different idea about the organization in the eyes of the society. Organizations will benefit from the concept of corporate social responsibility in the most real sense if they are aware of their position in the society, know the characteristics of the consumer group they address, and can foresee what the project they plan will bring them basically.

### **Corporate Social Responsibility in Sports**

Sport, with its superior unifying power, has managed to become one of the valuable elements of the national and international market today (Cappato & Pennazio, 2006). The main reason why governments and stakeholders support sports models can be explained as the acceptance of sports as a social and economic development tool for years (Schulenkorf et al., 2016). The acceptance of sport in the society continues to increase, due to relationship between corporate social responsibility

and its unique role and the way it approaches problems in society (Walters, 2009). Corporate social responsibility studies carried out in the field of sports started in the early 2000s, and with the acceptance of the changes that sports can create, the interest to the field has increased. Corporate social responsibility in sports is seen as a method to reach large stakeholders, a tool to improve the quality of social life, and a form of incentive to close economic gaps (Smith & Westerbeek, 2007). With all these features, sports have become a valuable tool for organizations.

Walker and Kent (2009) explained that the relationship between corporate social responsibility and sports has two basic themes. According to the first theme, corporate social responsibility enables organizations that produce commercial business in the field of sports to connect with their target audience through sports, and this theme contributes brand image and good reputation on the public, and as a result, it provides an increase in internal financial performance outputs. The second theme explains the relations between small groups that occur in the sports environment and larger stakeholder groups. With corporate social responsibility, it is said that all sports groups in the society, easily explain their existence and their obligations to the society.

Smith and Westerbeek (2007) presented seven important criteria to encourage the use of corporate social responsibility within sports organizations.

- Due to the global power and popularity of sports, it is believed that all corporate social responsibility activities carried out within the field of sports will easily take place in the mass media and will reach large masses.
- If the target audience of the corporate social responsibility project is determined as children, it is stated that a sports organization or a project with a popular athlete will always help attract children's attention more easily.
- One of the ways to achieve state of being healthy in the society can be through sportive corporate social responsibility activities.
- Activities done through sports will increase people's group participation and thus create social interaction.
- Sportive corporate social responsibility will enable to develop cultural awareness among people, to understand and adapt to different cultures more easily.
- Some sports events that include corporate social responsibility will increase awareness of the environment and environmental sustainability.
- Participation in sports activities will motivate people and therefore corporate social responsibility activities through sports can create well-being.

Sports clubs and organizations are aware of the importance of social responsibility activities and show an intense work in the field. When the studies carried out by sports clubs in the world are examined, it is seen that the FC Barcelona (2021) sports club carries out projects on solidarity, democracy, social integration. Real Madrid (2021), which is also a big club, carries out social responsibility activities in the fields of education and cultural activities, social assistance and sports activities. Paris Saint-Germain (2021) sports club stated in the annual report they published on their websites that they provided support to refugees and donated to charities. The NBA, on the other

hand, carries out social responsibility studies in the fields of health, education and family development, along with projects to increase the participation of young people in basketball (NBA, 2021).

When the corporate social responsibility studies in the field of sports are examined, it is seen that how social responsibility projects are perceived by the fans is mostly investigated (Walker & Kent, 2009; Lacey & Kennett-Hensel, 2016; Ullah et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2017; Morrison et al., 2020). In addition, the researchers focused on environmental protection-oriented social responsibility projects carried out by sports organizations in their studies (Trendafilova et al., 2013; Moyo et al., 2020; Trendafilova et al., 2014). Another focused research area is the corporate social responsibility studies carried out in professional sports (Sheth & Babiak, 2010; Babiak & Wolfe, 2009; Heinze et al., 2014; Chen et al., 2015). When the literature is examined, it can be said that studies in the field are carried out around limited subject. Considering the potential of corporate social responsibility in the field of sports, it is important to diversify and multiply the studies.

### **Professional Sports and Corporate Social Responsibility**

Due to the increasing popularity of sports and its professional business position that it has gained over the years, sports organizations, like all other organizations, are now expected to be institutions that perform beneficial activities for the society, beyond being a business that only works for their economic interests (Moyo et al., 2020). Professional sports clubs, which are aware of this valuable position, have been doing volunteer work for many years in order to keep the society physically active and to create a healthy lifestyle over the whole of society (Extejt, 2004). Sports organizations aim to provide benefits such as corporate reputation, emotional bonds and loyalty with fans, economic return, popularity and positive impact on society through social responsibility activities (Walker & Kent, 2009). Professional sports organizations provide many benefits to the society with their work.

It is stated that it will be beneficial for sports clubs to keep star athletes who have embraced their club and who are integrated with the club in the fan's point of view, in order to get the most efficient result from corporate social responsibility activities (Breitbarth & Harris, 2008). Professional sports organizations carry out responsibilities to benefit society in various fields. For example, the team named Charlotte Hornets was purchased by NBA (National Basketball Association) famous basketball player Michael Jordan in 2010, and the team foundation carries out social responsibility activities in the fields of education, fight against hunger, health and military care in America and also, they explain their work in their annual reports every year (NBA, 2021). Another example is the responsibilities carried out by UEFA (Union of European Football Associations) and presented under the title of "Creating positive social impact through football". UEFA carries out corporate social responsibility studies on environmental protection, health, peace, solidarity, human rights and child safety in order to increase social responsibility awareness by using football as a tool. (UEFA, 2021). Through all these projects, institutions both gain reputation and benefit the society in the same time.

Hamil and Morrow (2011) stated that sports clubs are one of the most convenient elements to create and develop a corporate social responsibility strategies. One of the most important reasons why sports is a very important concept for corporate social responsibility activities is the fact that there is an invisible link between professional sports clubs and society and through this bond, organizations get the benefits they want to achieve more easily (Walker & Kent 2009). When creating

corporate social responsibility projects, the sport fans should be allowed to benefit from the project. For example, investments focused on the renovation of sports facilities used by the community will be an important type of responsibility project (Porter & Kramer 2006).

In addition to its financial returns, corporate social responsibility is now used by institutions in order to ensure sustainability in terms of social and environmental protection (Hennigfeld et al., 2006). The commitment of sports to the environment is an indisputable fact, and based on this commitment, sports have responsibilities on the environment that cannot be denied (Smith & Westerbeek, 2007). Being aware of this responsibility, sports organizations have started to direct their attention to environmental sustainability projects in recent years. For example, in the sustainability report published in 2020 by the International Olympic Committee, which runs one of the largest organizations in the world, five important sustainability work plans were announced under the headings of infrastructure and natural areas, resource finding and resource management, mobility, workforce and climate. Implemented or planned practices such as creating appropriate stakeholder partnerships, using more sustainable materials when creating Olympic fields, creating special projects to raise awareness of sustainability over the athletes in order to reduce the damage to the environment are explained in the report (IOC Sustainability Report, 2020).

Organizations have accepted that every social responsibility work they do for the society will provide positive feedback to them (Margolis & Walsh, 2003). It is believed that sports contribute to a unifying and sustainable power on society. It can be said that both organizations and society gain profits through corporate social responsibility.

## **Sports Organizations and Corporate Social Responsibility**

When the literature in the field is examined, it is seen that sports organizations that include corporate social responsibility practices in their strategic planning can create a positive image if they reflect the performance and projects they produce to the society in harmony, regardless of the size and audience they appeal to. Many researchers have concluded that corporate social responsibility activities carried out in the field of sports have a positive effect on the fans. Nyadzayo et al. (2016) examined the role of corporate social responsibility in establishing relationship quality in the context of sports organizations. In the study, a questionnaire was applied to the season ticket holders of a professional sports club, consisting of approximately 6,000 participants. According to the results of the survey, it was determined that corporate social responsibility activities created a positive increase in the quality of the relationship between the fans and the club. Another study by Anşın and Şentürk (2020) examined the effect of corporate social responsibility practices on club and brand reputation on Beşiktaş Gymnastics club professional football team. Within the scope of the research, 460 fans were selected by random sampling method. A questionnaire was applied with three different scales. As a result, it was determined that the social responsibility activities carried out by the club has a significant effect on the fans. In a similar study, Güneş and Koçyiğit (2018) examined the effect of corporate social responsibility activities on club and brand reputation in the context of sports marketing by conducting a face-to-face survey method on Konyaspor fans (Professional sports club). As a result, it was determined that the activities carried out made a positive contribution to the club and brand reputation. In another study related to the field, Kim et al. (2018) examined how the corporate social responsibility activities carried out by the American National Baseball League (MLB) were viewed by the society, and as a result, it was found that the social responsibility projects of the teams in the league had a positive impact on the public. Kargün et al., (2017)

investigated the reasons affecting the corporate reputation of sports clubs. As a result of the study conducted with the survey method, they concluded that the factors that make up the reputation can vary according to the demographic differences of the individuals. In addition, they found that social responsibility projects, carried out by sports organizations, have a positive effect on club reputation.

Within the scope of corporate sustainability, the study subjects about how the corporate social responsibility practices in sports are determined by the managers and which goals they are focused on are also seen as a scope area by the researchers. François and Bayle (2015) examined the corporate social responsibility activities and practice methods of organizations on French professional sports clubs. Within the scope of the study, a total of 30 professional sports club managers and club stakeholders were interviewed. As a result of the collected data, it has been determined that the factors that lead the clubs to implement corporate social responsibility practices are the pressure felt by the rival clubs and the demand from the local authorities. Sönmezoğlu et al. (2013), the corporate social responsibility practices of Fenerbahçe Sports Club (Professional sports club) were examined. In the study, a semi-structured interview form was created, and data were collected by interviewing the president of the club and the manager of the club associations. As a result of the study, it can be said that Fenerbahçe sports club has effects such as creating a positive image on the society, increasing the fan base and loyalty, and improving the brand profile.

Due to the high number of people reached within the scope of mega sports events, it is thought that it is important to plan and manage corporate social responsibility activities more carefully while a large-scale event is being held. Dowling et al. (2013) investigated how organizations carry out their corporate social responsibility practices through sports, in the context of mega sports events, in particular for the 2012 London Olympics. In the study method, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the national governing bodies and with the managers of the organizations. As a result of the research, it is seen that attention is paid to innovative, creative, harmonious, right timing and right activity selection while managing the relationship between corporate social responsibility and sports.

Another subject of corporate social responsibility studies carried out in the field of sports is the comparison of how social responsibility is perceived and used in management systems in different countries. François et al. (2019), a multi-level analysis of the implementation and execution of corporate social responsibility on professional sports clubs in France and the United Kingdom was carried out. Within the scope of the research, mixed methods approach was used to analyze the social responsibility practices of 66 professional football and rugby clubs in the 2017-2018 season with qualitative and quantitative methods. As a result, differences were determined between the activities carried out by the two countries. It has been concluded that while the practices carried out by the United Kingdom are aimed at praising and highlighting social responsibility behaviors, the activities carried out by French sports clubs are aimed at increasing the value of sports.

Fifka and Jaeger (2020) analyzed 72 academic articles examining the relationship between football and sports social responsibility in order to strategically integrate corporate social responsibility studies into professional European football. As a result, the researchers emphasized that the concepts of community, human capital, fans and stakeholders, commercial space, harmony and nature are all phenomena that organizations should consider when creating a corporate social responsibility strategy in football.

## CONCLUSION

It is emphasized that corporate social responsibility activities carried out in the field of sports have a more advantageous position compared to other fields. Sport is thought to be one of the most efficient tool for corporate social responsibility activities within the scope of corporate sustainability, with its ability to reach people of all ages, and its ability to offer different options compatible with everyone's needs and interests. In our study, a literature review was carried out on the articles investigating sports and corporate social responsibility activities within the concept of corporate sustainability.

In this age, organizations are more aware of the importance of corporate social responsibility activities (Breitbarth et al., 2015). Researches explain that corporate social responsibility practices have a difficult planning phase and that the targeted profit may vary in parallel with the level of the organization (Maon et al., 2010). When planning corporate social responsibility activities, sports organizations should determine and evaluate different parameters (e.g., organization size, budget, development goals) that may affect the implementation outputs. Every sports organization that carries out a social responsibility project creates stakeholder participation at the same time. With stakeholder participation, sports organizations can get in touch with organizations from different segments and find the opportunity to create different business potentials. For this reason, every corporate social responsibility project is important because it will benefit the participating stakeholders, the sports organization and the society. In line with all these effects, it can be said that corporate social responsibility activities benefit the corporate sustainability of sports organizations. Appropriate and consistent management of corporate social responsibility activities is important to create a sustainable corporate entity.

When the literature is examined, it is seen that the number of studies comparing the perspectives of different cultures on corporate social responsibility activities is insufficient, and it is noteworthy that the number of researches in this field needs to be increased. Another determined study area is that the number of studies investigating the planning stages and objectives of corporate social responsibility activities, which organizations include in their sustainability strategies, is insufficient in the literature. It is thought that increasing studies on this subject can create new perspectives for both sports managers and researchers. Similarly, another subject of study, is corporate social responsibility studies that will contribute to environmental sustainability. It is important to raise awareness of institutions on the subject by increasing the number of studies on this field.

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