

Module 1. The foundations of sustainability in sport

Unit 1.1. Definition and evolution of sustainability in sport

Introduction

How as managers, professionals, enthusiasts in the sport industry can we start to comprehend sustainability in sport? As sustainability becomes a mainstream topic in all levels of the sport industry, it is suggested that current and future sport industry professionals not only understand sustainability, specifically environmental sustainability, but also its value to sport organisations and the natural environment. It is also suggested that sport professionals can be better equipped when understanding how to enact or operationalise sport environmental sustainability. Before diving into how to enact sport environmental sustainability, this chapter will first aim to touch on the relationship between sport and sustainability broadly, and on environmental sustainability more specifically. It will be important to cover the definitions of the concepts and to review the current state of research on sustainability in sport, specifically noting what is known about environmental sustainability in sport—which is also referred to as sport environmental sustainability and, when in reference to the movement, the environmental sport movement.

In fact, as claimed by various researchers in this intersection, most notably McCullough *et al.* (2016), this environmental sport movement has been pushed by key sport institutions establishing policies to internally promote environmentally responsible behaviours, while also integrating various initiatives into their sport organisations—to reduce their environmental impact dovetailed by leagues, federations, and clubs concentrating on ways to decrease their environmental footprints or impacts. As the movement has included even more entities and at more levels in the sport industry in the last years, there is a consensus that it is picking up even greater momentum, creating a collective voice for sport entities and actors who are committed to both lessening sports' detrimental impact on the natural environment and leveraging sports power as a platform and convener to inform its global audience about the severe environmental changes of such magnitude and urgency—which are driving the demand for sustainability. The increased involvement, engagement and enactment of the sport industry around environmental sustainability takes place at a time when world leaders have adamantly called for immediate and sweeping interventions to disrupt and reverse



negative environmental trends.

Sustainability defined

Mol (2010) observes that sustainability is highly fragmented and context dependent, and that is open to different interpretations. Sustainability remains a central concept in debates and discourse surrounding environmental action and advocacy. Across sectors, business and academia, one can find this concept explored. It is agreed by many that despite its prevalence in discourse, it is still an extremely ambiguous concept. There is no universal meaning behind the word that specifically tells us when it is happening, how it should happen, and how we can discern it. What is seen in the discourse is that—as there has been a shift in the role humans have played in the profound environmental, geological and overall planetary changes of the past two centuries, which has been described as the Anthropocene era—humans are now more centralised in our discussions about sustainability and sustainable development. The current relationship humans have with the planet and the emerging changes that continue to occur, has put greater emphasis on the need for altering the unsustainable ways we live, exist and develop.

According to the commonly referred to 1987 Brundtland Report, sustainability is defined as meeting “the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987, para. 27). This definition is broad by design and is also complemented by the notion that sustainability consists of three main elements or pillars: the environmental, social and economic. These three pillars are not independent of each other, but rather have an intersecting relationship. For example, if the aim is to gain a clearer understanding of environmental sustainability, it is advised to examine the social and economic considerations as well, with the notion of a triple bottom line or planet, people, and profits (Kellison and Kim, 2014). In a closer look at the ‘how’ behind sustainability, the concept has also been defined as the “process of maintaining and continuing positive change in the economic, ecological and socio-cultural realms of human and non-human life” (McCullough *et al.*, 2016, p. 145).

Environmental sustainability has become a common topic of discussion ranging from climate change, transferring our dependence on fossil fuels, to renewable energy resources and reducing our waste. In relation to organisations or businesses, environmental sustainability measures, approaches and practices aim to reduce the environmental impact, while also ensuring their own sustainability in that they should aim to ensure long-term success and overcome any reluctance to participation by various stakeholder groups (Etsy and Winston, 2009).

A deeper examination of environmental sustainability includes the version of sustainable development put forward by Selman (as cited in McCullough *et al.*, 2016), which is defined in ecological terms shaped by the following three forms of equity:



- intergenerational equity ensures that Earth is passed on to the future in the same condition as when it was inherited.
- Intragenerational equity means the needs of all peoples within a single generation are cared for.
- Transfrontier equity, which means living within the limits of local resources.

Together, these forms of equity encourage a shift in the way humans live, and a transformation of the relationship between humans and nature. Accompanying this concept of ecological sustainability are the terms light green and dark green, which represent different approaches to the environment. A light green approach is about maintaining the *status quo* by encouraging environmentalism within a paradigm of profitability and market forces. This light green perspective envisions economic and technological forces as the best solutions. In contrast, the dark green approach centres on an equity-based sustainability that involves equitable protection of all life and the priority on protecting the Earth's ecosystems (Baldwin- Sartore, as cited in McCullough and Kellison, 2020).

Sport environmental sustainability (sport-ES)

Despite indications of an environmental sports movement, it is important to note that, within sport management, the environmental sustainability research literature has not yet fully been explored, and is noted as being in its infancy (Walker and Parent, 2010). Within practice, it is important to note that the four levels of environmental sustainability related to sports can be accessed, including at the individual, community, organisational, and institutional level.

Drawing from the Brundtlandt definition of sustainability, there is a proposed concept of sport environmental sustainability (Sport-ES) which describes sport environmental sustainability to be the safeguarding of the critical natural environment for current and future generations of sporting participants. The safeguarding of the natural environment is a responsibility of all members within sport to ensure that safeguards are in place to maximise all practices for the enjoyment of the natural resources by sport in the future. This responsibility should be taken on by athletes, coaches, sport professionals, game officials, sport organisations, sport institutions, sport manufacturing industry, sport media, and so forth. Researchers and practitioners supporting this concept posit that, in order to meet the demands of sport environmental sustainability, we must enact environmental safeguards that support current sporting endeavours and the future of sport.

Sport environmental sustainability stems from a recognition of sports' interlinked relationship with the natural environment, considering sport is constrained by the natural



world's geophysical limits, with examples of winter sports depending on the mountain ranges, ski trails and water/ice, or the summer sports depending on clean bodies of water while many ball sports require the existence of green fields.

Natural resources are not only the location for sport activities: they are also required in the manufacturing of sporting materials. Overall, it is understood that sport activities have the capacity to adversely affect the natural environment.

Topics of inquiry in sport-ES

The sport industry has contributed a significant impact on the environment (Thibault, 2009). There are examples of this range that go from the clearing of land for ski slopes and resorts, solid wastes generated at sport venues, sports audiences and the demand for plastic, and sports contribution to climate change with greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuel use for travel and energy for sport facility hosting and cooling demands (Chard and Mallen, 2011). Importantly, research has demonstrated that sports environmental effects specifically occur at a much larger scale due to the scope of mega events (Dechano-Cook & Shelly, 2017). These examples and their corresponding research exhibit the topic concerning the environmental impact or 'footprint' of the sport industry. Within this discourse, there is not only a focus on how to measure and make sense of it, but what measures are needed to reduce it.

Another main topic of debate that has become even more salient with the effects of climate change and global warming is focused on the impacts of nature on sport. Existing research on environmental impacts on sport include the following research topics: climate change impact on major sport stadia, climate change on ice hockey tournaments, water use and sport organisations in a drought affected region, risk management issues in large scale sporting events, and water management in sport.

Phases of the sport environmental sustainability

Although there is a prominent perspective that the environmental sport movement is well underway, it is also key to understand briefly how it has developed over the years. McCullough *et al.* (2015) examined the progression of sport-ES and concluded that there have been three waves of development, namely those which involve the primary, secondary and advanced stages of awareness and action. Using specific examples and case studies, research finds that over the past two decades, sport and sport organisations have taken a great deal of responsibility in addressing their past, current, and future impact on the planet. Many sport organisations and sport leagues are now implementing environmental initiatives (Trendafilova *et al.*, 2013). Within the United States, for example, four major sports leagues have partnered with a national environmental group that advocates for the protection of natural resources. Regional and local sport leagues and organisations have also formed partnerships with the intent of implementing pro-



environmental strategies (Trendafilova *et al.*, 2014).

Actioning sport-ES

There is a lot of positive momentum around this growing movement to advance sport-ES (Szathmari, 2017); however, there is still a lot of work to be done. Examples of actioning or enacting sport-ES include the establishment of commissions in international sport federations, setting up of specific sport environmental conferences, research centres, as well as networks. Sport specific environmental organisations are popping up and creating networks of key stakeholders committed to climate action. At the elite level, sportsmen and sportswomen are stepping up and using their platforms and athlete networks to inform and influence their audiences.

Current state

After conducting an extensive review of research on sport-ES, Mallen and Dingie (2021) purport that there is a trend emerging towards awareness of the environmental issue, an understanding that solutions need to be found, and that sport must enact sport-environmental sustainability within their own networks. This responsibility of sport ties to its unique ability to communicate messages to a global, diverse social audience (Kaufman and Wolff, 2010).

In this way, the messages generate more awareness about key environmental issues. More than a communication platform, sport industry organisations can continue pushing for comprehensive and deeper environmental sustainability programmes, which cut across the organisation and foster an integrated approach to environmental sustainability within the organisation. As much as it is encouraged to celebrate the successes, good practices and leadership at this intersection of sport and environmental sustainability, the social, economic and political realities that could impede progress should not be ignored. Additionally, for the sport organisations which are not enacting sport-ES, an emphasis on mainstreaming environmental sustainability could lead to unengaged organisations being nudged through economic incentives, social pressures, or legal mandates. Still, sport sustainability scholars are critical of sport organisations' role in this space, asking the question whether they have the capacity level, skillset, knowledge and resources to be environmentally sustainable.



Unit 1.2. The business case for sustainability

Introduction

What is the justification for a sport organisation to spend financial and human resources on sustainability? In other words, what is the business case for sustainability?

According to Murray-Webster and Dalcher (2019), “A business case is a high-level justification for the undertaking of an activity, often a project or a programme. It evaluates the benefit, cost and risk of alternative options and provides a rationale for the preferred solution”.

Assessing alternative options and making a justified decision is what allows an organisation to develop or grow. A standard business case for sustainability does not exist. Every sport organisation should make its own by understanding the major sustainability issues related to their sport, the interests and expectations of their stakeholders, and the risks and opportunities the sport is facing.

This unit will discuss the business case for sustainability, assuming that an organisation’s sustainability programme needs to be justified in the context of its overall strategy. This should be true for a local football club that seeks to grow its member and fan base, as well as for a large event organiser that strives to be profitable.

Sustainability: a carrot or a stick?

A large European private sailing event was informed by its name sponsor that they could no longer associate themselves with the event, if the event would not have a solid sustainability programme in place. They were forced to invest in sustainability to not lose a significant yearly contribution from their sponsor. The organisation decided to develop a sustainability strategy for its events; in parallel, it discussed the extension of its partnership with their sponsor, and secured a new sponsorship deal for 4 years with its name sponsor.

The case mentioned above is an example that sustainability can be both a ‘carrot’ and a ‘stick’ for an organisation. The ‘carrot’ symbolises the incentive that makes you do something. It is the foreseen reward for an organisation when they step up in their sustainability endeavours. New or renewed sponsorship opportunities are an example of a ‘carrot’. However, many organisations need a ‘stick’ to get started or change their existing behaviour. A message from your main sponsor could serve as a ‘stick’ or ‘wake-up-call’, but it can also be a new law or regulation that forbids single-use plastic in football stadiums.



Both the 'carrots' and the 'sticks' should be identified when creating your business case for sustainability. As indicated before, the business case should assess alternative options and provide a rationale for the preferred solution. Not doing anything and ignoring sustainability is one of the alternative options for a sport organisation. Identifying the sustainability 'carrots' and 'sticks' will allow a rational evaluation of the different options, and determine which of them will serve the mid- and long-term goals of the sport or sport organisation.

We will move on from the image of 'carrots' and 'sticks', and look into the concrete benefits and costs of sustainability.

The benefits and costs of sustainability

When looking at the costs and benefits of sustainability, it should firstly be acknowledged that there are two sides of the medal. Simply put, football (and sport in general) is both a victim and a wrongdoer (or contributor), when looking at the consequences of unsustainable behaviour. For example, football is a victim of climate change as an estimate of 25 % of the professional football clubs playing in the English Premier League (EPL) and English Football League (EFL) can expect partial or total annual flooding of their stadiums by 2050 (Goldblatt, 2020). However, the same study provides insight on the number of emissions produced by the EPL through its matches and transport of spectators to football games. The EPL, in this example, is therefore both a victim of and a contributor to the consequences of unsustainable behaviour.

Secondly, the impact of sustainability goes beyond the gates of the stadium. Society is confronted with major social and environmental problems, and the sports industry only plays a modest role in this. Although sport as a universal language can have a significant impact in the wider society (sustainability **through** sport), the remainder of this chapter will be limited to some of the concrete costs and benefits of the sports organisations themselves.

Benefits and costs of sustainability are strongly influenced by the nature of the sports organisation, its size and geographical location, legal form (for profit or non-profit), as well as the culture of the organisation. A discussion on benefits and costs should be considered in this context, which will elevate some points (e.g. staff loyalty for a large organisation), and reduce the importance of other points.

Cost versus investment

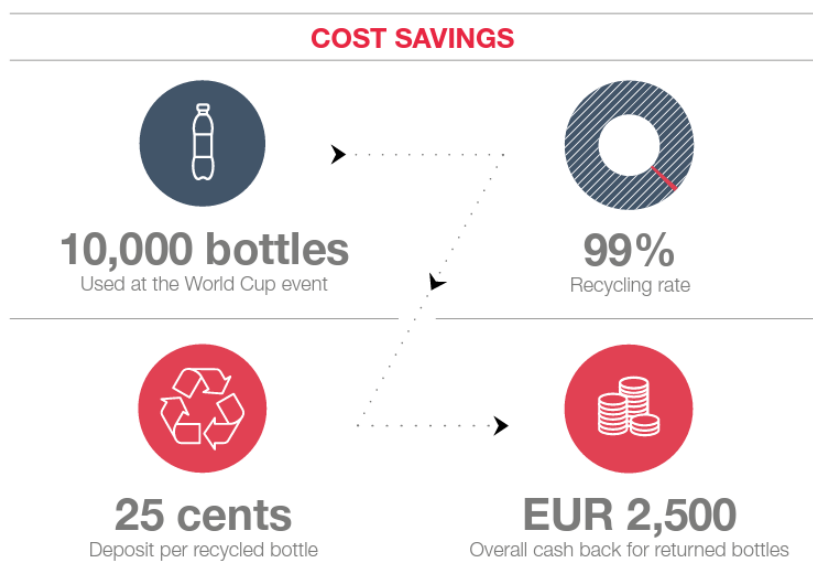
Sustainability is often perceived as a **cost** to a sport organisation or event, and not an **investment** that is necessary to allow growth. A survey amongst International Sports Federations (AISTS, 2017) highlighted a high variety in spending on sustainability programmes between sports. Outdoor sports tend to spend slightly more, whereas indoor



sports spend less than the overall average. Amongst the smaller sports, an average international federation spent an estimate of 5.7% of their annual budget on sustainability programmes. The absence of a definition of what was (not) included in these estimates can be interpreted as the limited understanding of sports organisations on the exact costs of sustainability.

Instead of a cost, sustainability can also be a **cost saver** as shown by, for example, World Archery, who saved EUR 2'500 by reducing the quantity of single-use plastic bottles at one of their World Cup events.

Figure 1. Cost saving through sustainability



From IF Sustainability Case Study, by International Olympic Committee and World Archery, 2017. <https://stillmed.olympics.com/media/Document%20Library/OlympicOrg/IOC/What-We-Do/celebrate-olympic-games/Sustainability/Case-Studies/2017/IF%20SCS-WORLD%20ARCHERY%20WATER%20BOTTLES.pdf>.

Benefits of sustainability efforts within sport can be both tangible and intangible, direct and indirect. Saving costs by re-using equipment is a tangible and direct benefit. Initiatives to increase sports participation for children from low-income groups might seem a cost in the short term, but can lead to indirect benefits such as ‘better health’, ‘reduced crime rates’, etc.

In 2020, the UEFA worked with 25 European countries to estimate the return-on-investment of football in Europe. While not all of the savings can be contributed to sustainability efforts, it shows a cost saving of EUR 16.3bn in healthcare due to football’s contribution to the overall improvement of physical and mental health of people (UEFA Explainer: valuing European football's social return on investment, 2020).



Figure 2. The positive impact of football on society



From UEFA Explainer: valuing European football's social return on investment, by UEFA, 2020. <https://www.uefa.com/insideuefa/football-development/news/0264-10fe1ac0497c-ffe49c301d3e-1000--explainer-football-s-social-value/>.

The remainder of this chapter will discuss some concrete benefits of sustainability that a sport organisation should consider when developing the business case for sustainability:

- (1) saving costs.
- (2) Generating growth.

Saving costs

The total quantity of signage (banners, flag, etc.) at the UEFA EURO 2016 equalled to 200,000-m². Giving a second life to even a part of this material will not just be good for the environment, but also good for the economics of the event. But saving costs goes much beyond this, and should be considered in relation to 3 R's: resources, risks and retention.

1. Resource efficiency

Several examples have already been given on how sustainability drives a more efficient use of resources or, as it is often said about efficient waste management: "don't pay to throw away". Often this refers to direct saving for the event, but one should not include indirect benefits such as the management and storage (insurance costs) of it.

2. Risk reduction

International sustainability management systems, such as ISO 20121, provide organisations with an independent certification of their social, environmental, and economic practices. Requirements for this certification (e.g. fair labour practices, whistleblower procedures, etc.) can help to avoid costs for legal claims and litigation, as well as a reduction of reputational risk and negative publicity.

3. Staff and volunteers' retention

Compared to other industries, the sports industry is highly dependent on volunteers, and many sport clubs and events often have only a limited number of employed staff. Sustainability programmes support the overall loyalty and retention rate of volunteers and key staff members and, as a result, help reduce costs for recruitment and training. The Deloitte Global 2021 Millennials and Gen Z Survey highlights that “millennials are sensitive to company’s values and see the ones with purpose as more stimulating workplaces” (Deloitte, 2021).

Generating growth

The English football club Forest Green Rovers, playing in the English Football League, is arguably the most known club that has used sustainability to grow, showing that ‘doing good’ and ‘doing business’ can very well go together. In the past 10 years, the club has built a profile of being ‘the greenest team on earth’ (Forest Green Rovers named ‘greenest football club in the world’, 2018) through which it secured significant commercial partnerships. Forest Green Rovers has become a global brand in football, currently building a new stadium with a capacity of 10,000 people in their hometown that inhabits less than 6,000 people.

Sustainability programmes should be built to enable a sport or sport organisation to grow. It should meet the needs of the present, without compromising the needs of the future generations to meet their own needs (WCED, 1987). A few concrete examples on growth through sustainability.

1. Brand enhancement/media coverage

Sport and sport events are increasingly being challenged on their ‘licence to operate’, especially when they receive public funding. This leads to the opportunity for organisations that have a credible sustainability programme in place, to position themselves and receive positive (and sometimes free) media coverage. VfL Wolfsburg, playing in the German Bundesliga, for example, is widely known and praised as the leading football club in Germany on environmental sustainability (Bundesliga 2021 – English, 2021).



It should be noted that being perceived as a leading sport organisation in sustainability can also be a risk. Activities of these organisations are often followed critically by the media and general public. To reduce the risk of negative media coverage, organisations could consider certification of their programmes, measure, and communicate their actual impact and have a consistent communication strategy.

2. Increased sports participation

Climate change and the decrease in physical activity are well known to be risks for sports participation. Winter sports are faced with a shorter winter season due to global warming. The need for more artificial snow, amongst others, increases the costs for skiing which, as a consequence, makes families choose to do other activities instead of skiing.

One of the consequences of the past COVID-19 pandemic was the drive for people to practise sport, in particular outdoor sports. OC Sport, an outdoor sport events' organiser, realised that embedding sustainability within their business model allowed them to attract a bigger audience than before. In the middle of the pandemic, they launched the campaign 'ReThink Sport', emphasising their commitment to sustainability, while attracting more participants to their events.

Initiatives of the Royal Dutch Football Federation to promote women's football have contributed to a significant growth of the sport in the Netherlands. Besides numerical growth, this led to a significant increase in sponsorship value of the sport as well as media attention.

3. Stakeholder satisfaction

Sport is operating within a very diverse ecosystem of stakeholders, and sustainability initiatives should not be developed without having a good understanding of the interest and expectations of these stakeholders. A frequently used tool to support this is a materiality analysis which allows prioritising sustainability issues from the perspective of both the sports organisation, on one hand, and its stakeholders on the other hand. The outcome of a materiality analysis is a materiality matrix, which identifies what the most important topics are to both the sports organisation and their stakeholder. Equally important, however, is the insight it gives that certain topics might be important for the event organiser but not for its stakeholders (or vice versa).

Porsche, a sponsor of many golf tournaments, does a materiality matrix every two years (Annual and Sustainability Report of Porsche AG, 2021). The results of the analysis give insight on important topics for stakeholders, and certainly highlights that priorities for the sport organisation do not always match with priorities of its stakeholders.

Key stakeholders for sport organisations include athletes, host regions, suppliers, media, volunteers, spectators, etc. Understanding the priorities of these stakeholder groups will



allow sport organisations to reap benefits through sustainability.

A standard business case does not exist, but the combination of both tangible and intangible benefits of sustainability should outweigh the costs in order for a sport organisation to have a sustainable business case.



Unit 1.3. Getting started with sustainability: dos and don'ts

How to get started with sustainability

Once it is understood what sustainability means and how it impacts your organisation, one needs to reflect on how to get started. Most organisations who start their 'sustainability journey' do not have a dedicated person responsible. In many cases, the responsibility for sustainable development is often added to someone's job description. An Olympic sports federation assigned this role to the Marketing & Communications Director, as she had an interest in the topic, hence was given 10 % of her time to develop and implement a sustainability strategy. Furthermore, there was not yet an understanding from the Board on the importance of sustainability, and a budget was not available. An intern was recruited to develop a sustainability strategy without any direction 'from the top'. Unfortunately, the organisation did not succeed, which meant an even stronger 'push back' from the Board to dedicate more resources to sustainability.

In this chapter, we will discuss how to get started with sustainability. What are the key elements, the pieces of the puzzle, that an organisation needs to be successful in its sustainability endeavours?

1. Management support
2. Finance
3. Education
4. Stakeholder engagement



Figure 3. Key elements for a successful sustainability programme



Source:own elaboration

Management support

The first steps towards establishing a successful sustainability strategy are, for the executive leadership in an organisation, to acknowledge and understand how social issues such as climate change, diversity and community engagement impact the sports industry, and consequently change the perception of all related stakeholders like fans, sponsors, broadcasters and, in general, all related industries and providers.

Clearly, football is not simply a passive target of climate change, and, in recent years, many clubs have started their journey steadily increasing their attention towards sustainable measures, challenging themselves to simply consider how their tournaments and events could be adjusted to drive sustainability in many different aspects. More specifically on the topic of climate change, re-thinking how stadiums, events, supply chains, travel, and waste will have to be transformed, has become more and more the focus point for clubs, federations, and leagues all around the world.

A fundamental message will be not to consider sustainability as an isolated function within your organisation, but rather ensure that basic principles are embedded in all core activities, from tenders to advertising campaigns.

Finance

Acting on sustainability and social justice cannot be longer considered as marginal actions, but will have to be embedded in the organisation's annual budget. Goldblatt (2020) suggested that 25 % of top-league English football teams can expect partial or total annual flooding of their stadiums by 2050, if we do not take drastic measures. This will imply some costs in the short term, but avoid enormous losses in the longer term. Reputational damage is hard to put in a number, but, when turning it around, reputational gain can be a very valuable outcome of a sustainability programme. The Ocean Race, a 2-year sailing event, has built a solid sustainability strategy and reputation in approximately 6 years, which currently leads to the fact that an estimate of 70 % of new sponsorship contracts is related to the sustainability efforts of the race.

Despite all longer term costs-savings and new revenue structures, it should not be ignored that an initial budget is required to establish a sustainability programme. In securing this, the potential of value-in-kind and contributions through grants and private foundations should not be underestimated. Especially not-for-profit sports organisations can apply for funding through, for example, the European Union Erasmus+ Sport programme or private foundations that like to associate with sport. The US Soccer Foundation received, for example, a EUR 1,000,000 grant from the OAK Foundation "to expand the Soccer for Success programme with the goal of impacting the lives of one million youths each year by 2026" (US Soccer Foundation, 2018).

Education

Sustainability without education can be dangerous. The right people need to be educated in the right manner on the right content. Most obvious is for the organisation's sustainability champion to take an online course, such as this one from the Barça Innovation Hub. However, other people in the organisation should not be neglected. For example, the spokeswoman of the World Championship skiing was trained in sustainability to ensure the external messaging, received by the media, was correct and aligned with the sustainability strategy developed for the event. A football club organised a workshop for its commercial staff to train them on how to present the club towards potential sponsors, ensuring that new sponsors or partners would not be conflicting with the club's strategy.

An important part of education is also to avoid re-inventing the wheel. In the past 10-15 years, a lot of resources have been made available through online sustainability toolkits. Recent examples include www.sustainability.sport, www.sustainabilitytoolbox.com or



www.eventsustainability.com. Membership organisations such as the Green Sports Alliance, Sports and Sustainability International (SandSI), provide an excellent opportunity to learn, share and allow sports organisations to build on good practices from others.

Engagement

Engagement starts with the involvement of key stakeholders and understanding their priorities and challenges. Building from here does provide a solid base for your strategy and allows going back to stakeholders when support is needed. A good example is the International Canoeing Federation (ICF) who started their sustainability journey 'from scratch'.

The organisation used a meeting with key stakeholders of one of their World Cup events to discuss and brainstorm on sustainability. This led to a selection of actions that were put into place at the event. Note that this was done before a strategy was developed and mostly with value-in-kind support. An important aspect here was that the decision on activities was taken together, which led to strong and broad support of the stakeholders. This approach allowed the ICF to realise a few "quick-wins" which helped secure a modest sustainability budget.

Elite players were interviewed about their (personal) connection with the topic of sustainability and videos were published on the organisation's website. Based upon initial experiences, a very simple 'quick start guide' was developed and translated into Romanian to be available for the Romanian organisers of the next canoeing event. A very important element was the collection of data (by local students) to enable reporting on quantitative facts. The ICF decided to follow the Global Reporting Initiative as a standard for their sustainability report, which provided them with a credible structure for their first-ever sustainability report.

Finally, results were published on social media, at events and on the organisations' website. Non-conformities, such as the presence of single-use plastic in the VIP-area, were addressed as soon as possible in a constructive manner and, when possible, resolved during the event.

For more information: <https://www.canoeicf.com/sustainability>

To finish this unit, we will provide you with some concrete tips (dos and don'ts) on sustainability that can be used when advancing on your sustainability journey.



Concrete tips for sustainability in sport

What does it concretely mean to embed sustainability in the different functional areas or departments of your sports organisation? Here are 10 concrete tips from an operational point-of-view:

1. don't pay to throw away and only buy things that you will surely use.
2. Always plan ahead. Act today and plan for tomorrow.
3. Align your communication strategy with your sustainability strategy.

Example: MLS Greener Goals Tips ([Greener Goals Sustainability Tips | MLSSoccer.com](https://www.mlssoccer.com/greener-goals)) are a good and easy-to-understand example, communicating about sustainability to football fans, with practical and easy to adopt examples.

4. Publish a yearly sustainability report on your website, and share your progress on social media.
5. Sharing 'lessons learned' is not a sign of weakness: it can increase your credibility and help to build trust with your fans.
6. Use a credible and standardised ranking system to show the progress being made towards the previously established goals.

Example: UEFA publishes their annual Football and Social Responsibility report using the global reporting initiative, an international reporting standard used by sport and non-sport entities.

7. Use change management theories (for example theory U) to inspire and overcome organisational resistance.
8. Monitor and analyse your sustainability data all year round, adjusting your objectives based on real feedbacks from your key stakeholders.
9. Research affordable eco-friendly solutions and smart alternatives to unsustainable options.
10. Ensure formal and public commitment of senior management by joining industry initiatives.

Example: Juventus became the first Italian football club to sign up to the UN Sports for Climate Action Framework (Juventus signs UNFCCC Sports for climate action framework and climate neutral now pledge, 2020).



Common mistakes: what not to do!

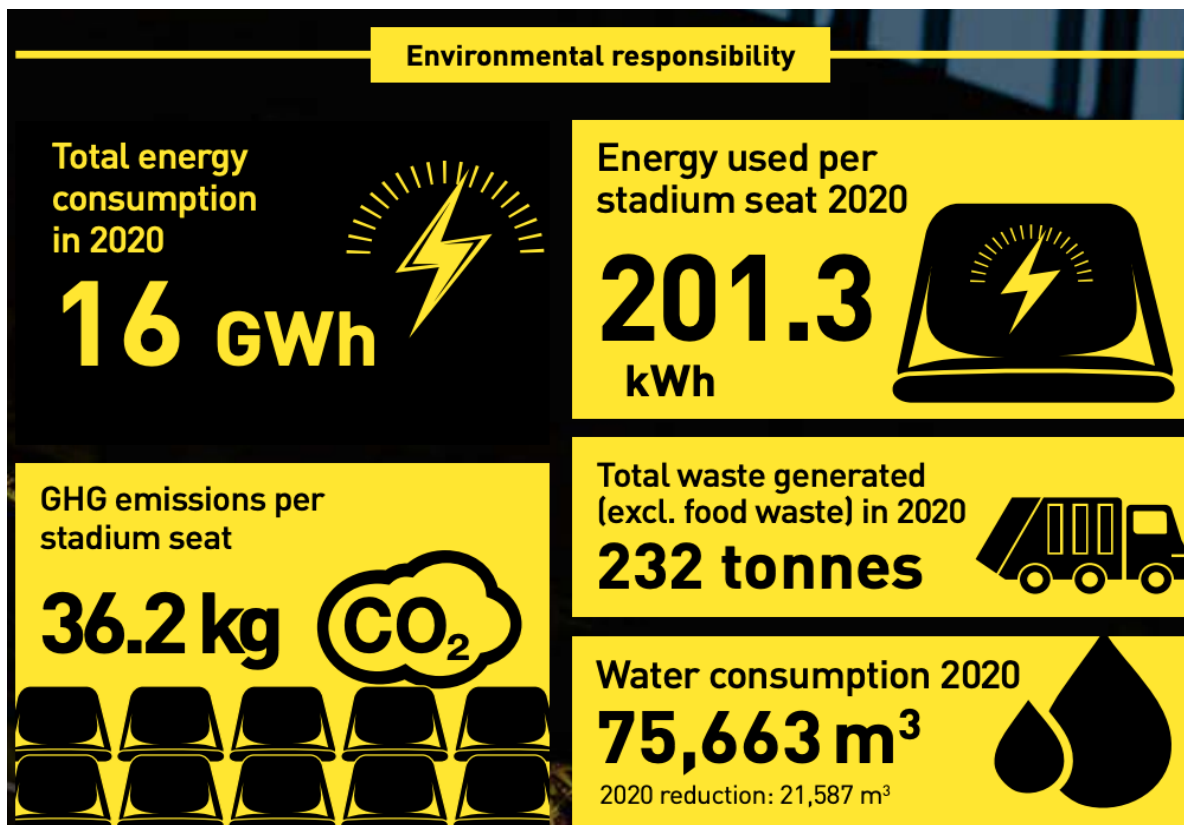
- Considering recycling as good sustainability practice. Recycling material should be an event's last resort, if all other options are exhausted. Start with **refuse** (do **not** purchase things), followed by **reduce** (minimise the quantity) and **reuse** (find a second life for used products). When there is no other option, **recycling** is plan D.
- Claiming to do it all! Be realistic on your sustainability targets. Where does your area of influence end? How much can you do with available resources, and what data is available to prove your impact?

Example: German football club Borussia Dortmund claims that its sustainability programmes contribute to 10 out of the 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals (2020/2021 Sustainability Report, 2021). It is better to be concrete on an organisation's impact to a limited number of targets, than to claim an organisation addresses every single environmental or social problem.

- Developing a sustainability strategy in isolation. A sustainability strategy should be holistic and address (and support) the entire organisation.
- Considering all sustainability data (e.g. carbon footprint) as internal and confidential. Publicly communicating your emissions is not a sign of weakness, it becomes one if an organisation does not show a plan and concrete progress on reducing its negative impact over time.



Figure 4. Borussia Dortmund environmental impact



From Sustainability Report for the 2020/2021 season, 2021. https://ungc-production.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/attachments/cop_2021/505823/original/EN_BVB%20Nachhaltigkeitsbericht%2020202021.pdf?1639131852.

Sustainability is increasingly becoming a source of new revenues, innovation, and the initiation of new business opportunities. These developments cannot succeed in isolation; hence, the importance of a cross-functional approach and executive commitment. Sustainability has three dimensions: environment, social and economy and, like a triathlon, an organisation needs to excel in all three disciplines or dimensions if it wants to win the game.

Unit 1.4. Trends and key challenges

Sport is one of the players within society that is making use of the world's natural and social capital. Many outdoor sports use nature (lakes, mountains, forest, etc.) as their 'field-of-play'. Social capital might be less obvious in sport, but take the example of a sport as golf which is a rather expensive sport with, in some cases, strict entry requirements. As a result, golf is known to be a luxury sport for people of a certain socio-economic group. Many industries, including the sports industry, have considered that social and natural capital was something 'free'—or at least not something for which you were responsible. This perception has rapidly changed in the past decades and this trend is likely to continue as the social and natural resources have become 'expensive', and sport is expected to take its responsibility in using them.

This unit will discuss trends in sustainability that are 'game changers' for sport, both in the positive and a negative sense. We will use the illustration of a football match to summarise some of the key trends and divide them in two trends:

1. **the rules of the game.** Sports organisations experience a change in principles which used to determine the rules for 'how the game was played'.
2. **The field of play.** The way to practise, experience, and grow sport differs from what has been common in the past.

The rules of the game have changed

Sport organisations must remain 'fit for purpose', which includes they must showcase a stronger sense of awareness and contribution to societal issues such as inclusion, integrity, climate change, etc. The core mission of a football club remains to grow the sport, by providing more people with the opportunity to play, watch, and follow football. To do this, a strong purpose-driven approach is essential, one which respects people and the planet, to ensure shared and durable prosperity, while not ignoring the ultimate goal to grow the sport.

A diversity of recent (and ongoing) scandals are also changing the rules of the game for sports organisations, who are expected to embrace responsibility and accountability. Unequal prize money or salaries for men and women is no longer common sense, and national football leagues or federations in several countries have introduced significant changes (i.e. raise in salaries for women).



Figure 5. The weekly wage of Samuel Umtiti is said to be about €231,000 while highest-paid female player Lieke Martens makes around €180,000 per year



From Revealed: Women Barca top earner's annual wage is similar to Umtiti's weekly salary, by König, K., 2021. <https://tribuna.com/en/news/fcbarcelona-2021-05-18-revealed-women-barca-top-earners-annual-wage-is-similar-to-umtiti-weekly-salary/>.

Finally, COVID-19 has shaken up sport and, in a post-pandemic world, the sports community will need to bounce back and gain momentum, relevance and impact. Many sport events and organisations are in 'survival-mode' due to the interruption of economic and sporting activities during the pandemic. This requires sport organisations to evolve from a traditional and isolated CSR/social responsibility approach, to a more fundamental and systematic integration of sustainability principles throughout all activities of the organisation.

On a global and political level, one can say that the new 'rules of the game' have been defined in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). A roadmap with 17 concrete goals which have been accepted by nearly every government in the world. The role of sport to accomplish SDGs is modest; however, sport organisations (and their sponsors) are increasingly using them 'as a language' to report on their sustainability endeavours.

Figure 6. Sustainable Development Goals



Source: own elaboration

The field of play has changed

Until some years ago, the definition of football was never questioned. Former attacker of the English Football team, Gary Lineker, said “Football is a simple game, 22 men chase the ball and at the end the Germans win.” However, the way we practise and enjoy sport has changed significantly in the past years, hence the definition of sport has become a topic of discussion.

The unprecedented growth of esports in the past years have challenged the International Olympic Committee to reflect on the place of esports amongst traditional sports formats. The barrier between traditional sports and esports has been broken down by the top athletes themselves during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the reduction in possibilities to practice sports in the traditional way was compensated by playing the e-version of their sport. Not only did we see a steep increase in esports: digitalisation of sport also changed fan engagement. AC Milan, for example, had to cancel a promotion tour through China due to the health pandemic, and replaced this with a virtual tour and digital experiences which got more than 20 million views.

The trend of digitalisation (or digitization) goes beyond esports, and includes the use of artificial intelligence to manage traffic flows around stadiums, provide virtual and personalised signage instead of printed banners, etcetera.

Digital signage, more efficient traffic control, virtual fan experiences, etc., are all related to the sustainable development of the sport. Not only do they allow a reduction of the carbon emissions (traffic control) or waste, but new technologies can also support the inclusivity of an event. Traditional signage and fan engagement, for example, often excluded people who are (colour) blind or deaf, but this no longer has to be the case when using new technologies.



A final trend, related to digitalisation, is the use of data to drive sustainable behaviour. Not only does it support transparency in decision-making, it also allows (real-time) monitoring of indicators related to the sustainable performance of a sports organisation. The Paris 2024 Summer Olympic Games used data from previous mega-sport events, such as the UEFA EURO 2016, to calculate the material footprint of the Olympic Games. Using high volumes of data allowed them to analyse the entire 'flow' of all materials needed to organise the Olympic Games. For example, where events traditionally look at recycling food waste, the material flow analysis allowed to reduce the quantity that was bought, which saved not only costs but also reduced the waste post-event.

The flipside of the digitalisation of society and, with that, sport, is the physical inactivity and reduced interest to practice traditional sports. This leads to a loss of physical and social benefits related to sport, as well as increased sedentary behaviour across all ages.

Key principles to respond to changes and challenges

Trends come with risks and opportunities; as football-legend Johan Crujff said: 'every disadvantage has an advantage'. This paragraph aims to give some generic direction to sport organisations to be both sustainable and successful amidst the rapidly changing sports industry.

1. Use sustainability as compass for your strategy

Sustainability is a 'responsibility compass' to help sport organisations focus on purpose-driven missions and goals, which support the entire community and enhance sport's relevance in society and in the economy. Sustainability in action helps to set the right priorities, with a view to our shared mid- to long-term interests. By leveraging on the UN SDGs, it also serves in positioning sport as an important enabler and contributor to the 17 goals.

2. Measure and communicate your impact

Sustainability is no longer an option—it has become a key determinant of a sport organisation's image, brand and reputation towards its many public and private stakeholders. However, sustainability must be adopted as a genuine and credible working principle that generates trust in and enhanced value for the organisation, and its stakeholders, and not just as a trend or a PR exercise. To be credible, sustainability must be translated into key focus areas and programmes, with dedicated resources, specific metrics, and transparent assessment and reporting.

3. Learn, lead and live sustainability

Sustainability in action is not a theoretical framework, it is a set of policies, priorities and initiatives that an organisation needs to live out on a daily basis, to contribute to



inclusivity, respect, diversity, climate awareness and sport's unique capacity to teach values and to be a school of life for many. Leading by example through applying sustainability principles across the aspects of an organisation, will make this organisation more relevant and appealing both internally (employees, volunteers) as well as externally. In turn, sport organisations should learn from good practices and (especially) lessons learned from other organisations. Industry-specific initiatives, such as the UNFCCC Sports for Climate Action Framework, are an excellent opportunity to learn from other sports organisations and avoid reinventing the wheel as much as possible.

Figure 7. Juventus, the first Italian football club

Juventus is the first Italian football club and the 150th signatory of the [UNFCCC Sports for Climate Action Framework](#). FIFA, UEFA and the IOC (International Olympic Committee) are already signatories, together with many other prominent sport teams all around the world.

The Framework brings together the global sports community to combat climate change by mapping a clear trajectory and setting standards for verifying emission reporting in line with the Paris Agreement.

Source : www.juventus.com

Retrieved from <https://www.juventus.com/es/sustainability/environmental-impact#:~:text=Juventus%20is%20the%20first%20Italian,teams%20all%20around%20the%20world>. Screenshot by author.

4. Do not separate sustainability from brand management

Sustainability must support sport organisations and their brand to engage a variety of audience groups. Being credible as an organisation and leveraging on sport to contribute to social, environmental or economic challenges, will help to gain in appeal, credibility and responsibility. Public and commercial partners express growing demands towards sport organisation's roles and contributions to a more sustainable planet, and the well-being of diverse and inclusive communities. Sustainability is also a great tool to educate and empower young talents in the local communities.

5. Identify new revenue streams through sustainability

Sustainability must be seen as an asset to support the competitiveness and long-term revenue streams of the organisation. Commercial plans with little consideration for the environmental or social impacts will be challenged in a world which pays growing attention to those matters. Sustainability is even considered as a new, innovative channel of funding for partners that focus on particular SDGs or target groups.

Illustrative case study: the use of sport post-pandemic

From March to May 2003, the severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) struck Hong Kong, with a total of 1,718 identified cases and an average death rate estimated to be about 15%. As a result, schools were prompt to close, hundreds of people to be quarantined and Hong Kongese's general wellbeing and happiness to drop to the lowest. Sport has been used as a major leverage to bring back a feeling of pride, confidence, and excitement in the region. It was also a means for the population to improve their mental health, wellbeing, and sense of freedom.

In August 2003, a football match was organised between the Real Madrid and Hong Kong League XI. It brought glamour, joy, and the most talented football players of their generation to Hong Kong after the devastating pandemic. Through positive press, benefits for local businesses and a stadium packed with 40,000 people helped rebuild society's confidence, and brought hope to the people of Hong Kong.

Shortly after the event, the Hong Kong population embraced outdoor sports. Masses of people took (public!) transport to head for green space and clear air to exercise. This led to the government granting permission to outdoor events to be held in the public parks of Hong Kong. Nowadays, trail running events, adventure racing and triathlons are amongst the most popular events in the country.

Source: SportWorks. (2020, May 6). "*The role of sport in a post - virus society - learning from the 2003 SARS crisis*" - Guy Horne [video file]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=gG6Lwfd-ykY&t=746s>.

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