(Pregledni rad / Paper review)
DOI: 10.46793/ManagSport17-2.008R
UDK: 005:796
001.895:796.051

ADVANCED MODALITIES AND EVOLUTION OF ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE IN SPORTS SYSTEMS

Radosavljević Života[1]
Faculty of Business Studies and Law, Belgrade, Serbia
Radosavljević Milan[2]
Faculty of Business Studies and Law, Belgrade, Serbia
Anđelković Aleksandar[3]
Faculty of Business Studies and Law, Belgrade, Serbia

ABSTRACT

Every modality characterized as advanced is inherently complex and requires particular attention in research methodology. Today, sport has evolved into a powerful global industry. Its forms range from amateur and recreational activities to professional categories recognized by international sports associations and organizations, as well as from lower-tier to elite sports. The financial spectrum is equally broad: from low-budget disciplines to those that attract substantial financial resources and generate multimillion-dollar earnings for their stakeholders.

Sports organizations currently operate in a dynamic and turbulent environment that demand a high degree of agility and strategic adaptation. A pivotal innovation in advanced management systems reflects the abandonment of rigid bureaucratic hierarchy, which is typically characteristic of amateur organization, in favor of a corporate-entrepreneurial model. According to all relevant indicators, this model represents a higher level of organizational quality. It reflects trends observed across other contemporary economic sectors, where the emphasis has shifted from strict organizational structures and bureaucratic regulations (which are often autotelic) to the achievement of tangible results.

The aim of this paper derives directly from its title and is focused on establishing a balance between the theoretical and practical dimensions of sport management through the application of advanced methods in the organization and management of sports systems and organizations.

The study employs a multidimensional research approach based on reliable data. The primary research sources include documents of sports organizations

[1] zivota.radosavljevic@fpsp.edu.rs, ORCID 0009-0000-2715-3603
[2] milan.radosavljevic@fpsp.edu.rs, ORCID 0000-0001-6514-3625
[3] aca.andjelkovic@fpsp.edu.rs, ORCID 0000-0002-2777-2954

(such as rulebooks and statutes) and international sports regulations, while the collected material is examined through the perspective of systems analysis.

Keywords: sports evolution, sport management, agility.

NAPREDNI MODALITETI I EVOLUCIJA ORGANIZACIONE STRUKTURE U SPORTSKIM SISTEMIMA

APSTRAKT

Svaki modalitet koji nosi odrednicu „napredan“ složen je sam po sebi i zahteva posebnu pažnju u metodologiji istraživanja. Danas je sport postao moćna globalna industrija. Njegovi oblici variraju od amaterskih i rekreativnih do profesionalnih kategorija priznatih od međunarodnih asocijacija i organizacija, kao i od nisko rangiranih do vrhunskih sportova. Finansijski raspon jednako je širok: od niskobudžetnih disciplina, do onih koje privlače ogromna finansijska sredstva i svojim akterima donose milionske zarade.
Sportske organizacije danas posluju u dinamičnom i turbulentnom okruženju, koje zahteva visok stepen agilnosti i strateškog prilagođavanja. Ključna novina u naprednim sistemima upravljanja ogleda se u napuštanju rigidne birokratske hijerarhije, koja je po pravilu amaterskog karaktera, i prelasku na korporativno-preduzetnički model. Ovaj model, prema svim relevantnim pokazateljima, predstavlja viši nivo organizacionog kvaliteta. Reč je o refleksiji trendova iz drugih savremenih privrednih sektora, gde se fokus premešta sa striktne forme i birokratskih pravila, koja su neretko autotelična, na ostvarivanje konkretnih rezultata.
Cilj rada proističe iz samog naslova i usmeren je na uspostavljanje ravnoteže između teorijskog i praktičnog okvira u menadžmentu sporta, primenom naprednih metoda u organizovanju i upravljanju sportskim sistemima i organizacijama.
U radu je primenjen višedimenzionalni istraživački pristup zasnovan na pouzdanim podacima. Izvornu istraživačku osnovu čine dokumenta sportskih organizacija (pravilnike, statute i sl.), međunarodna sportska regulativa, dok je celokupna građa sagledana kroz prizmu sistemske analize.

Ključne reči: sportska evolucija, sportski menadžment, agilnost.

Introduction

Sport is one of the oldest forms of human activity and has evolved into a powerful economic sector in the contemporary world. Current estimates indicate that the global sports economy generates an annual turnover of several hundred billion euros, positioning sport among the world’s most developed industries. In addition to professional athletes and coaches, the sports industry sustains an extensive workforce that includes media professionals, healthcare specialists, experts in sports infrastructure and technology, and numerous other occupations. It is estimated that more than ten million people are directly or indirectly employed in the global sports industry. Moreover, sport is considered one of the fastest-growing economic sectors, with an average annual growth rate ranging from 5% to 10%. Revenues generated through commercial rights, particularly in women's sport, are increasing at an even faster pace (Deloitte & Gitnux, 2026).

The original purpose of sport lies in competition between individuals and teams, as well as in the continuous pursuit of physical excellence and the overcoming of personal limitations through the achievement of increasingly demanding performances. Human potential appears to be almost limitless unless constrained by psychological and cognitive barriers. This is evidenced by regional, national, and international competitions in which existing records and previous achievements are continually surpassed.

Sport has become a major generator of financial activity, while sporting events attract large numbers of domestic and international visitors. In this respect, sport functions as an important driver of globalization by creating opportunities for intercultural interaction and mutual understanding. Experience suggests that unfamiliarity with other cultures often contributes to misunderstanding and social conflict. Consequently, sport should be understood within a broader social context. A sporting event does not end when spectators leave the stadium; rather, its economic, social, cultural, and promotional effects continue long after the competition itself has concluded. In this context, sports organizations increasingly resemble modern service organizations that integrate technological, organizational, and managerial innovations and are governed according to principles similar to those applied in other sectors of the economy (Nešić, 2021).

Sport has also become an important cultural phenomenon that reflects the values of the society in which it takes place. A well-known example comes from FIFA World Cup tournaments, where Japanese supporters cleaned the stadium after every match and left it in the same condition in which they had found it. By contrast, the violent behaviour of British football supporters during previous decades became synonymous with football hooliganism. The introduction of strict legal measures has since led to a substantial reduction of violence at sporting events in the United Kingdom.

The high degree of standardization characteristic of modern sport requires strict compliance with universally accepted rules regardless of geographical location or the political, economic, religious, and cultural characteristics of the host country.

Today, this process is strongly supported by advanced technologies used both in athlete preparation and during competition. Artificial intelligence (AI) enables real-time identification of problems and provides effective decision-support tools. As competition continuously evaluates individual and team performance, as well as fundamental physical and psychological capacities such as strength, speed, and motivation, significant differences emerge between individual and team sports. Contemporary sport must therefore be analysed from psychological and sociological perspectives, which simultaneously challenge traditional organizational structures and outdated management models in sport (Gomes, Thuany, & Pereira, 2020).

In sport, outcomes always remain uncertain, even when one competitor appears to possess a clear competitive advantage. It is precisely this uncertainty that makes sporting competition unique.

The aim of this paper is to examine the organizational and managerial models of the most successful professional European football clubs, with particular emphasis on governance structures, ownership models, revenue diversification, decision-making processes, and organizational flexibility. The analysis focuses on the organizational structures of sports organizations, ownership models, the financial performance of leading European football clubs, and contemporary trends in the digital transformation of sport.

The study is based on a qualitative analysis of secondary data sources. Publicly available annual reports of European football clubs, Deloitte Football Money League reports, UEFA publications, and relevant academic and professional literature in the field of sport management were analysed. The selected clubs were chosen through purposive sampling because of their financial strength, organizational maturity, and strategic importance within European professional football, thereby providing an appropriate basis for comparing different governance and financing models adopted by sports organizations.

Evolution of the Organizational Structure of Sports Organizations

Sport has undergone numerous stages of social development throughout history. Although it has generally enjoyed broad public recognition and popularity, it has also, at various points in history and even today, been restricted or prohibited for political, economic, or wartime reasons. Its development has been driven by ideals of passion, endurance, and sportsmanship, as well as by the human desire for achievement and self-affirmation. This evolutionary path has led from amateur participation motivated by personal satisfaction to professional sport, in which athletic performance is rewarded financially. Today, material interests play a dominant role in professional sport, while athletes often spend their entire careers not only as competitors but also as coaches, managers, and sports executives. Owing to its dynamic nature, sport continuously adapts to changes in its environment, transforming from traditional organizational forms into modern management systems (Tomić, 2007).

Every organization, including a sports organization, develops a specific organizational structure in order to improve its effectiveness and long-term performance. This involves integrating key organizational components, establishing clear communication channels within the system, and aligning the organization with external environmental factors. The way an organization is designed directly influences its efficiency. This corresponds with the view that the essence of an organization lies in a dynamic process through which all of its elements are voluntarily integrated around clearly defined objectives and a shared organizational purpose (Radosavljević, 2006).

This principle applies not only to sports organizations themselves but also to sporting events as their primary product. In its early stages, sport was driven primarily by enthusiasm within small local communities before gradually expanding into urban centres. In this respect, sport represents one of the few human activities whose development progressed from local communities toward major cities. A similar evolutionary pattern can be observed in the transition from amateur sport, characterized by social interaction and the spirit of fair competition, to professional sport, marked by elite performance and substantial financial rewards. While physical activity was historically pursued for enjoyment or necessity, contemporary sport has evolved into a major economic sector and an important driver of both economic and social development. It has become a fully developed industry in which leading clubs frequently attain the status of national symbols, often associated with historical heroes or recognised as the sporting representatives of their countries.

Historical records describe competitions organized within tribal communities with the purpose of demonstrating physical strength and personal maturity. Contests were held between different tribes and clans, while victorious individuals or groups often became highly respected members of their communities and were frequently chosen as tribal leaders. The Ancient Olympic Games represented the first large-scale sporting events, attracting thousands of spectators to the stadiums of the time. Winning the title of Olympic champion, both in antiquity and today, remains the highest expression of sporting excellence and prestige. Contemporary sport is increasingly understood through a multidimensional perspective based on three fundamental pillars: professionalism, digital transformation, and ethical responsibility. This evolutionary development of sports systems was not a matter of luxury but rather a necessity for survival and a prerequisite for the growth and development of modern sports organizations (Radosavljević, 1994).

The evolutionary development of sport and the transformation of its organizational forms can be summarized and chronologically presented as follows:

Table 1. Evolutionary development of sport

Sports FROM	Sport TO
Non-profit sphere	Commercial and for-profit organizations
Volunteer model	Corporate Systems
Skill Acquisition Organization	An organization that learns
Relatively closed organization	Differentiation with new systems.
Bureaucratic Organizational Structure	Agile outsourcing and project teams
The Classic Role and Use of Objects	Digital Transformation and Big Data in Analysis
Local & National	Global Organizations and Bodies
Closed Funding	Transparent and controlled funding.

Source: Authors' compilation (2026).

The evolution of sport has clearly been influenced by developments in other sectors of the economy, while numerous innovations originating within sport have subsequently been adopted by traditional business organizations. Examples include teamwork, project management, specialised marketing strategies, and the management of large-scale events. At the same time, contemporary sports organizations have adopted corporate governance models and modern systems of accountability. Consequently, professional management teams now oversee sports clubs, replacing the former practice in which management positions were predominantly occupied by former athletes and enthusiasts. Whereas governing boards once consisted mainly of club supporters and personal associates, decision-making within modern organizational structures is increasingly entrusted to investors and professional executives, while supporters continue to participate within clearly defined governance frameworks (Sethi & Talvelkar, 2024).

A particularly illustrative example is FC Bayern Munich. Its Supervisory Board includes both legendary former football players and senior executives from some of the world's leading corporations, many of which are also shareholders of the club. The Supervisory Board is responsible for strategic decision-making and appointing executive management, while refraining from involvement in day-to-day operations. According to data from 2026, the Board is chaired by Herbert Hainer, former Chief Executive Officer of Adidas, while the sporting division is headed by the club legend Karl-Heinz Rummenigge. The remaining members of the Supervisory Board are distinguished business leaders, reflecting the widely accepted principle that "capital is a valuable economic resource that should not be entrusted to amateurs" (Strasser & Klein, 2016).

A comparison between Bayern Munich and leading English football clubs reveals the existence of a distinctive hybrid governance model in the German club. This organizational structure combines former football legends, prominent business leaders, and club members, who, under Germany's well-known *50+1 rule*, retain controlling voting rights and a decisive influence over strategic decisions. By contrast, English professional football is predominantly based on private ownership, where investors independently make strategic and managerial decisions. These governance models have significant long-term implications for organizational performance. Owing to its hybrid governance structure, Bayern Munich has consistently ranked among the most financially stable and sustainably managed football clubs in Europe (Deloitte, 2026).

Characteristics and Specific Feature of Sport as a Human Activity

Sport, as a distinctive form of human activity, differs fundamentally from other social activities. These differences are evident not only across various sports disciplines but also within individual sporting events. Every sporting event is inherently unique and cannot be replicated. Even when the same participants compete repeatedly, they do so under different emotional and motivational conditions, resulting in unpredictable outcomes and a constantly changing competitive dynamic.

One of the defining characteristics of sport is its voluntary nature. Participation is based on free choice rather than external coercion, threats, or sanctions. For this reason, individuals willingly invest considerable amounts of time, energy, and physical effort in sporting activities. Organizational and human resource management theory has long recognized that exceptional performance is achieved when individuals are motivated to transcend their own perceived limitations and voluntarily pursue goals that they would not otherwise set for themselves. Management based on pressure and authoritarian control is incompatible with contemporary organizational principles, particularly within elite sport. In this context, the conscious alignment of individual freedom with collective objectives ultimately strengthens both the cohesion and the collective capacity of the team (Radosavljević et al., 2022).

Active participation in sport is, by its nature, limited in duration. Professional athletic careers generally begin in childhood and, on average, continue until an athlete's thirties. Consequently, there are no conventional educational institutions dedicated to producing elite athletes. Instead, sporting excellence is developed through systematic training, long-term preparation, and extensive practical experience. Formal academic qualifications are not a prerequisite for becoming a world-class athlete, since exceptional talent can develop independently of higher education. Nevertheless, athletes with stronger educational backgrounds generally acquire new knowledge and skills more efficiently, adapt more readily to structured training environments, and demonstrate a higher level of awareness regarding sporting regulations and ethical principles.

Today, sport has become a truly global industry, particularly at the professional level. Sporting activities have evolved beyond recreational pursuits into full-time occupations that require specialised lifestyles, professional commitment, and sophisticated organizational systems. Spectators constitute one of the essential elements of every sporting event, as the social and economic significance of sport would be substantially diminished without them. Beyond simply observing competitions, spectators frequently influence club governance, managerial decision-making, the appointment of executives, and even professional staff such as coaches and sporting directors. Few other sectors exhibit such a strong interaction between consumers and organizational governance. As the popularity of a sport increases, so does the influence of its supporters.

The principles governing sport can also be successfully applied in traditional business organizations. This is particularly evident in teamwork, where success depends not on outstanding individuals but on cohesive and well-coordinated groups. Consequently, strategic decisions within corporate management teams should likewise be based on cooperation and collective responsibility. At the same time, sports organizations have increasingly adopted business practices characteristic of profit-oriented enterprises. They must generate sufficient revenue not only to cover operating expenses but also to finance future development. As a result, specialised academic disciplines have emerged, including sport management, sport ethics, sport event management, and sport marketing (Ratković & Dašić, 2018).

Every contemporary sports system also functions as a learning organization in which knowledge, practical experience, and professional competencies are continuously created, exchanged, and transferred. Sports organizations contribute not only to athletic development but also to the formation of responsible and socially engaged individuals, both during and after their competitive careers. While they place considerable emphasis on discipline, organizational order, and adherence to the rules of competition, they simultaneously promote solidarity, mutual respect, and empathy. This philosophy is reflected in the well-known sporting principle that "the greatest victory is to shake hands with and congratulate the better competitor," a value that has become increasingly rare in everyday life and particularly in the business environment.

The historical development of sport has followed a clear progression from amateur participation to professional competition. Whereas amateur sport is primarily driven by enthusiasm and personal satisfaction, professional sport has become a career through which individuals earn their livelihood. In contemporary society, sport is therefore no longer merely an end in itself but also a means of achieving broader personal, professional, and economic objectives.

Sport has become a major global business and, in many cases, an important element of national identity. Investments in sports infrastructure and elite athletes often generate substantial financial returns, with a single player transfer sometimes exceeding several hundred million euros. Consequently, investments in professional sport are increasingly evaluated through return on investment (ROI) indicators. According to Nielsen Sports (2024), the return on investment achieved through sports sponsorships can reach as much as 300%. Furthermore, Deloitte reports that digital transformation contributes significantly to the financial resilience of sports organizations, even during periods of economic uncertainty.

Based on the above, it can be concluded that contemporary sport has evolved into a global phenomenon possessing numerous characteristics that distinguish it from other forms of human activity. Its development has progressed from enthusiasm and voluntary participation toward professionalism and commercialization. Sports organizations are not merely institutions that develop athletes; they are also environments in which individuals acquire knowledge, practical skills, mutual trust, integrity, and ethical values that are increasingly important in modern society. Coaches therefore assume roles that extend well beyond technical instruction, becoming educators who contribute to the personal and social development of athletes. Many organizational principles and management practices developed within sport can also be successfully transferred to the business sector. Just as no business organization can survive without customers, no sports organization can sustain long-term success without the support of its spectators and members, whose commitment ultimately represents one of its most valuable strategic resources.

Innovations in the Sports Industry

Following the global transformation toward a digital society, the sports industry has undergone a profound shift across virtually every aspect of the sporting ecosystem. This transformation encompasses the application of advanced technologies in athlete preparation, spectator experience management, executive decision-making, and the intelligent operation of sports infrastructure, including stadiums, arenas, and multifunctional sports facilities. Artificial intelligence (AI) has become an integral component of contemporary sport, enabling personalized services, real-time monitoring of spectator flows to optimize logistics, greater accuracy in refereeing through technologies such as the Video Assistant Referee (VAR) system, and the integration of advances in sport psychology and sports medicine.

In the third decade of the twenty-first century, technology is no longer an auxiliary component of sport but a fundamental infrastructure without which elite competition can scarcely be imagined. It has become embedded within the very fabric of modern sport, generating new technological, organizational, legal, and ethical standards. The distinction between the digital and physical dimensions of sporting events is becoming increasingly blurred, with both dimensions functioning as an integrated system. Consequently, the role of management has shifted from retrospective data collection and analysis toward real-time interpretation, predictive analytics, and immediate decision-making (Milojević, Gligorijević, Savičević, & Milašinović, 2025).

Ownership structure remains one of the most significant determinants of governance within the sports industry, as it directly influences decision-making processes and the composition of governing bodies. Economic theory has traditionally favoured private ownership over state ownership or the former system of socially owned enterprises characteristic of the former Yugoslavia. Nevertheless, contemporary practice demonstrates that organizational success depends less on ownership itself than on the quality of professional management. Regardless of the ownership model, sports organizations achieve sustainable results when managed by qualified executives or specialized asset management institutions. Today, the majority of leading football clubs operate under private ownership, most commonly through investment funds or private investors, while governments within the European Union generally do not participate directly in ownership or operational management. Contemporary sports organizations are therefore increasingly managed by multidisciplinary professional teams possessing specialized expertise and internationally recognized managerial competencies (Radosavljević et al., 2015).

This raises an important research question regarding the ownership structure of European football clubs and the extent to which ownership models influence organizational performance. Equally important is the broader impact of these governance structures on economic development and society as a whole. Table 2 presents the ownership models of selected European football clubs together with the geographical origin of their investment capital.

Table 2. European Football Clubs by Ownership Model and Country of Capital Origin

Club name	Form of ownership	Ownership	Owner's capital country
Real Madrid	Common	Club members	Spain
FC Barcelona	Common	Club members	Spain
Bayern Munich	Hybrid	75% fans	Deutschland
Paris Saint-Germain	Nationally	Qatar Sports Invest	Qatar
Manchester City	Government/ Private	Abu Dhabi United	UAR/USA/ China
Manchester United	Private	The Glazer Family	USA/UK
Liverpool FC	Private	BlueCO-Todd Biehly	USA
Arsenal FC	Private	Kroenke Sports	USA
Chelsea FC	Private	BlueCo	USA
Inter Milan	Private (Fund)	Oaktree Capital Management.	USA

Source: Authors' compilation based on reports presented at club annual general meetings for the 2025/2026 season and data from the Deloitte Football Money League.

The presented data indicate that most of the analysed European football clubs operate under either *private ownership* or *hybrid public-private ownership* arrangements. Among the leading clubs, private investment funds and family ownership structures predominate, while only one club combines state and private ownership.

Within this context, the concept of *member ownership* refers to organizational structures in which club members and supporters exercise governance rights. A notable exception is Paris Saint-Germain, which is wholly owned by the Qatar Sports Investments sovereign investment fund. At the same time, the analysis reveals a clear geographical concentration of investment capital, with the majority of ownership interests originating from the United States, followed by Spain.

These findings confirm that football has become one of the most attractive industries for private investment. Private ownership enables clubs to finance their own development, whereas organizations operating outside the private sector are generally more dependent on public funding. For many years, privately owned clubs have dominated European football, largely because private investors possess greater financial capacity to recruit elite players, enhance commercial competitiveness, and strengthen long-term supporter loyalty. Consequently, strategic leadership based on contemporary business models has become increasingly important in elite sport, representing a significant departure from the traditional governance structures that historically characterized sports organizations (Qarouach et al., 2026).

European Football Clubs with the Largest Membership Bases and Their Impact on Total Revenue

Sport management theory frequently advances the view that the size of a club's membership base directly determines the overall strength of a sports organization. A larger number of registered members, supporters, and followers generally implies greater social influence, since sporting events are primarily organized to meet the expectations and interests of this specific audience. From an economic perspective, however, the key question is whether and to what extent the size of a club's supporter base and match attendance correlate with total revenue and profitability. Relevant conclusions can be drawn from an analysis of empirical data obtained from official financial statements and annual accounts for the 2025 financial year, as presented in the following table.

Table 3. Ranking of European Football Clubs by Number of Members and Total Revenue

Rank	Club	Country	Nicholas Smith	Total Revenue (million euros)
1.	Bayern Munich	Deutschland	432.000	978
2.	Benfica	Portugal	400.000	260
3.	Borussia Dortmund	Deutschland	220.000	526
4.	Schalke 04	Deutschland	200.000	167
5.	Sporting CP	Portugal	180.000	140
6.	FC Porto	Portugal	170.000	150
7.	FC Barcelona	Spain	150.000	975
8.	Eintracht Frankfurt	Deutschland	150.000	389
9.	Real Madrid	Spain	105.000	1.185
10.	Hajduk Split	Croatia	101.000	50

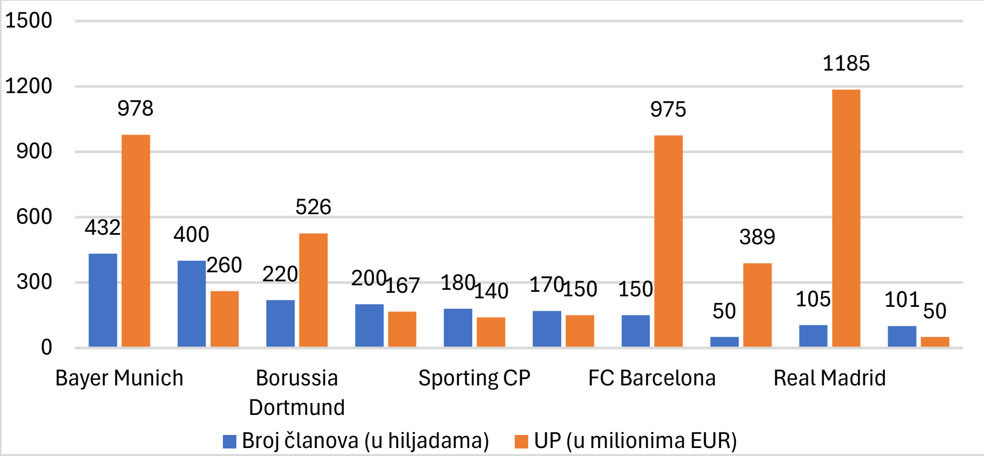
Source: Authors' compilation based on reports presented at club annual general meetings for the 2025/2026 season and data from the Deloitte Football Money League.

The data were analysed using descriptive and comparative methods. The findings are illustrative in nature and are intended to identify dominant trends in the organization and financing of football clubs. It should be noted that reported membership figures may vary depending on whether they are published at annual general meetings or through official club platforms. Club financial reports are publicly available, while their disclosure is governed by relevant legal and regulatory requirements.

The data indicate that the largest proportion of the analysed clubs with the highest membership figures comes from Germany. Of the ten clubs included in the analysis, 40% are German, while 30% are Portuguese. The inclusion of Hajduk Split is particularly noteworthy, as the Croatian club has slightly more than one-quarter of Bayern Munich's registered membership.

A comparative analysis of registered membership figures and financial performance suggests that there is no simple and direct causal relationship between these two variables. This indicates that the size of a club's membership base was not the primary driver of total revenue growth in 2025. The empirical data show that clubs with significantly smaller formal membership bases may generate substantially higher revenues than clubs with larger memberships. Commercial success therefore appears to depend more strongly on global market positioning, broadcasting rights, sponsorship agreements, commercial activities, and the use of sports infrastructure than on the size of the local supporter base alone. The relationship between club membership and total revenue is presented in the following figure.

Figure 1. Relationship Between Club Membership and Total Revenue



Source: Authors' compilation based on reports presented at club annual general meetings for the 2025/2026 season and data from the Deloitte Football Money League.

The data show that Real Madrid generated the highest total revenue in 2025. Although the Spanish club had approximately four times fewer registered members than Bayern Munich, it generated around 21% more revenue. Similar discrepancies can be observed among other European clubs, confirming that a larger membership and supporter base does not necessarily result in higher revenue or greater profitability. Borussia Dortmund, for example, has approximately half as many members as Benfica but generates slightly more than twice its total revenue.

Real Madrid became the first European football club to generate more than one billion euros in total revenue within a single financial year. Together with Barcelona, it ranks among the financially strongest clubs in European football. Real Madrid's stable financial position has also been reinforced by the renovation and modernization of the Santiago Bernabéu Stadium, which is used throughout the year for a wide range of commercial, cultural, tourism, and entertainment activities. This enables the club to generate additional revenue beyond matchdays.

Club members may exercise considerable influence over governance, particularly in organizational models in which they hold voting rights and participate in the appointment of governing bodies. Membership fees also provide a relatively stable and predictable source of income, which is important for the financial security of any organization. Clubs that rely less heavily on membership income tend to focus more strongly on alternative revenue streams. Benfica, Porto, and Sporting generate substantial revenue through participation in European club competitions, player transfers, sponsorship agreements, and commercial activities, while Hajduk Split derives a significant share of its revenue from commercial and marketing activities, membership fees, ticket sales, and the support of its fan base.

Financing Europe's Football Clubs

In addition to membership fees, Europe's leading football clubs generate revenue from a variety of sources, including player transfers, ticket sales, broadcasting rights, commercial activities, and other business operations. The composition of these revenue streams differs considerably among clubs, as illustrated by the data for the 2025 financial year (Deloitte, 2026).

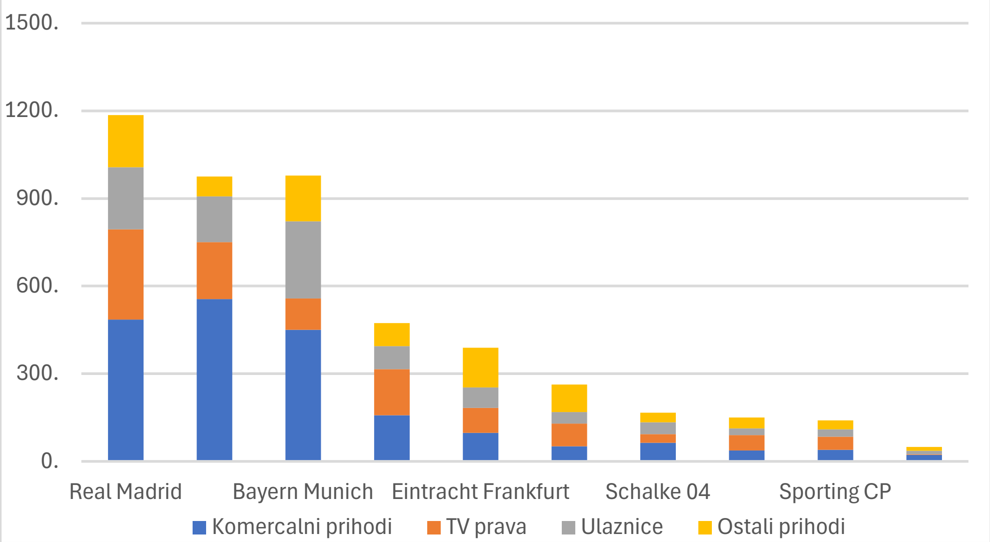
Table 4. Revenue Structure of European Football Clubs (%)

Club	**Commercial revenues in %**	**Broadcasting rights (%)**	**Matchday revenue (%)**
Real Madrid	41	26	18
FC Barcelona	57	20	16
Bayern Munich	46	11	27
Borussia Dortmund	30	30	15
Eintracht Frankfurt	25	22	18
Benfica	20	30	15
Schalke 04	38	18	24
FC Porto	25	35	15
Sporting CP	28	32	18
Hajduk Split	44	5	24

Source: Authors' compilation based on reports presented at club annual general meetings for the 2025/2026 season and data from the Deloitte Football Money League.

The revenue composition varies considerably across the analysed European football clubs. The relative contribution of each revenue category is illustrated in the following figure.

Figure 2. Revenue Structure of European Football Clubs



Source: Authors' compilation based on reports presented at club annual general meetings for the 2025/2026 season and data from the Deloitte Football Money League.

The data indicate that commercial activities constitute the largest source of income for most of the analysed clubs. The share of commercial revenue ranges from 20% to 57% of total revenue. FC Barcelona records the highest proportion of commercial income (57%), followed by Bayern Munich (46%) and Hajduk Split (44%). By contrast, Benfica reports the lowest share of commercial revenue (20%), while Eintracht Frankfurt and FC Porto each derive 25% of their revenue from commercial activities.

According to the available data, FC Barcelona surpassed Real Madrid in terms of the proportion of commercial revenue generated during 2025. This performance can be attributed to the expansion of the club's retail network, increased sales of official merchandise, and the conclusion of new sponsorship agreements. Real Madrid, on the other hand, complements its commercial and sponsorship revenues through the extensive use of its modernised stadium for concerts, cultural events, tourism, and other commercial activities throughout the year.

Football clubs also generate a substantial share of their income from broadcasting and media rights. This source of revenue is particularly important for internationally recognised clubs, as extensive media exposure significantly enhances the commercial value of sporting events, especially in elite European competitions. Among the analysed clubs, the share of broadcasting revenue ranges from 5% to 35% of total income. Hajduk Split records the lowest proportion (5%), which may be associated with its more limited participation in major European competitions and the comparatively lower market value of its broadcasting rights. The highest shares of broadcasting revenue are reported by FC Porto (35%), Sporting CP (32%), and both Benfica and Borussia Dortmund (30%) (UEFA, 2025).

The identified trends are also reflected in matchday revenues, which include ticket sales, hospitality services, premium seating, and a wide range of complementary commercial activities. Bayern Munich remains one of Europe's leading clubs in this segment, primarily owing to consistently high attendance levels and the near-full utilisation of stadium capacity throughout the competitive season. Europe's largest football clubs, particularly Bayern Munich, also benefit from long-term sponsorship agreements that provide significant financial support for recruiting elite players.

Player transfers constitute another important source of revenue for many professional clubs. In some cases, the transfer of a single player generates income exceeding one hundred million euros, representing a substantial inflow of capital. Nevertheless, transfer income should be interpreted separately from the primary operating revenue categories presented in reports such as the Deloitte Football Money League, as these transactions are not always included within the regular operating revenue structure.

Overall, the findings indicate that European football clubs differ considerably with regard to ownership structures, governance models, and dominant revenue sources. In some organizations, club members and supporters retain significant voting rights and actively participate in governance, whereas others are controlled by private investors, investment funds, or professional executive management. Regardless of the ownership model adopted, long-term sustainability depends on maintaining a balanced combination of commercial revenue, broadcasting rights, sponsorship agreements, matchday income, and other market-based sources of financing.

Public-private partnerships also play an important role in the development and management of sports infrastructure across European football. Their implementation, however, varies considerably between countries. In many cases, local governments lack sufficient financial resources to independently finance the construction, renovation, and maintenance of large stadiums, while football clubs themselves are often unable to bear these costs without private investment.

France represents one of the leading examples of the successful application of public-private partnerships in sports infrastructure. Numerous stadiums have been constructed or modernised through long-term concession agreements with private operators. Under these arrangements, private partners finance, construct, or maintain stadiums over concession periods that may extend to thirty years, while municipalities retain formal ownership of the facilities.

The German model differs in that sports infrastructure is frequently owned by municipalities, which establish dedicated public companies responsible for stadium management. Nevertheless, concession agreements are also widely employed, allowing private partners to operate sports facilities for periods ranging from twenty to fifty years. Such arrangements enable municipalities to reduce maintenance costs while simultaneously benefiting from a share of the revenue generated by stadium operations (Reis & Cabral, 2017).

Across the European Union, public-private partnerships are subject to comprehensive regulatory oversight. The European Commission may review concession agreements and infrastructure projects to determine whether state aid has been granted in violation of European competition law. Particular attention is paid to transactions involving land or public assets transferred below market value. Several well-known investigations involving Real Madrid and a number of Dutch football clubs illustrate the importance of ensuring transparency and compliance with European state aid regulations.

Application of Advanced Technologies in Sports

Throughout history, sport has undergone numerous transformations, ranging from periods in which sporting activities were prohibited to the present day, when entire countries may be excluded from major international competitions for political reasons. Such restrictions affect the FIFA World Cup, the UEFA European Championship, and the Olympic Games, which represent the world's largest sporting events. Despite these challenges, sport has endured by continuously adapting to changing political, economic, and social circumstances. Its longevity demonstrates a remarkable capacity for resilience in the face of external pressures. In contemporary sport, it is impossible to discuss organizational development without placing advanced technologies, digital innovation, and artificial intelligence (AI) at the centre of analysis (Anđelković & Radosavljević, 2025).

Although the sports industry has experienced a technological revolution in the organization, production, and delivery of sporting events, comparable progress has not always occurred in the fields of strategic governance and institutional organization. This imbalance is particularly evident in transition economies where the privatization of sports clubs has not yet been fully implemented. Consequently, many organizations remain subject to strong state influence, reflected in governance structures, politically influenced appointments to executive positions, and substantial financial dependence on public funding.

Machine learning models have become indispensable tools for coaches and sports executives in match preparation, performance analysis, and tactical decision-making. Artificial intelligence enables coaches to modify tactical strategies during competition, assess physical fatigue, estimate injury risk, and identify behavioural patterns that may indicate an increased likelihood of disciplinary sanctions. Such information provides valuable support for real-time decision-making by coaching staff.

The application of advanced analytics has also transformed athlete nutrition. Instead of applying identical dietary programmes to all competitors, clubs can now develop individualized nutritional plans based on each athlete's metabolism, physiological profile, workload, and recovery requirements. On the field of play, smart balls equipped with embedded sensor technology assist in determining goals, ball position, and other match situations, while the Video Assistant Referee (VAR) system provides additional support for refereeing decisions. Technological progress has also significantly improved time measurement, allowing performances to be recorded with millisecond precision (Midoul, El Mohajir, El Hichami, & Souri, 2026).

Major sporting events increasingly rely on advanced multi-angle camera systems capable of synchronised recording from multiple perspectives. Modern stadiums also employ automated technologies for monitoring soil moisture and maintaining natural grass surfaces, while digital ticketing systems have become the standard for controlling spectator access and improving event security.

The operation of indoor sports facilities is increasingly based on automated Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning (HVAC) systems designed to maximise energy efficiency. Many contemporary stadiums integrate renewable energy sources to reduce operating costs and minimise environmental impact. In addition, several sports venues have introduced waste management and recycling systems that contribute both to sustainable resource management and to raising environmental awareness among spectators.

Leading football clubs are increasingly integrating artificial intelligence into training management and tactical preparation. AI-driven simulation models enable coaching staff to evaluate alternative tactical scenarios against specific opponents before matches take place. At the same time, digital twins are being adopted to reproduce previous performances, simulate future match situations, and identify the strengths and weaknesses of opposing teams with greater precision.

The international mobility of athletes and coaches has also facilitated the transfer of professional knowledge. Serbian football players and coaches employed by foreign clubs have acquired valuable expertise that has subsequently been applied within Serbian football organizations. The transfer of knowledge also occurs in the opposite direction, as Serbian coaches have contributed significantly to the success of numerous European clubs through the experience and professional competencies developed in domestic football (Radosavljević, 2002, pp. 11–22).

Conclusion

The sports industry has become one of the fastest-growing sectors of the global economy. According to the data presented in this study, its estimated value approached EUR 500 billion in 2025 and is expected to exceed EUR 520 billion in 2026. This expansion has substantial economic and social implications worldwide. While the overall industry is growing at an average annual rate of approximately 5%, the e-sports sector records growth rates approaching 8%.

The growth of the sports economy has been driven not only by ticket sales and membership fees but also by broadcasting rights, commercial partnerships, sports betting, sponsorship agreements, and the development of smart stadiums. Consequently, sport has evolved into a global platform that integrates entertainment, culture, technology, and business while simultaneously functioning as a dynamic learning environment in which knowledge, innovation, and professional expertise are continuously generated and exchanged.

The principal finding of this study is that contemporary sports organizations must progressively replace traditional organizational models with more advanced governance structures capable of responding to the demands of an increasingly complex and technology-driven environment. The analysis presented in this paper identifies the organizational practices that have contributed to the long-term success of Europe's leading football clubs. Particular attention has been devoted to FC Bayern Munich, whose governance model has consistently demonstrated high levels of organizational efficiency, financial stability, and sporting success.

The findings further indicate that rigid hierarchical structures are gradually being replaced by more flexible organizational arrangements based on horizontal coordination, integrated management, and digital decision-support systems. Depending on national legislation and ownership structures, sports clubs may be governed by members, private investors, investment funds, or professional executive management. Regardless of the governance model adopted, sustainable development requires financial independence, organizational adaptability, and continuous innovation.

Finally, the organizational evolution of contemporary sport is increasingly shaped by artificial intelligence, data analytics, digital platforms, and intelligent management systems. The findings of this research may therefore serve not only as a useful framework for improving the governance of sports organizations in Serbia but also as a valuable reference for organizational development in other sectors of the economy.

References

1. Anđelković, M. & Radosavljević, Ž. (2025). *Menadžment znanja i inovacija: Od preduzetništva do maestralnosti i dalje*, Fakultet za informacione tehnologije i Fakultet za poslovne studije i pravo, Univerzitet „Union Nikola Tesla“, ISBN - 978-86-6102-144-2, COBISS.SR-ID - 180083209
2. Deloitte (2026). *Deloitte Football Money League 2026*. Available at: https://www.deloitte.com/uk/en/services/consulting-financial/analysis/deloitte-football-money-league.html.
3. Deloitte & Gitnux (2026). *Global Sports Industry Outlook (Report) 2026 – Technology, Media and Telecommunications sector*, https://www.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/industry/technology/technology-media-telecom-outlooks/sports-industry-outlook.html.
4. Gomes, T. N., Thuany, M., & Pereira, S. (2020). Sports Performance and Systems Theories. *Encyclopedia*. DOI: 10.3390/encyclopedia.pub.2667.
5. Midoul, K., El Mohajir, B.E., El Hichami, O. & Souri, A. (2026). “Methodological trends in machine learning for sport – a systematic and quantitative review (2020-2026)”, *Journal of Human Sports and Exercise*, 21(3), str. 978-995.
6. Milojević, S., Gligorijević, N., Savičević, D., & Milašinović, M. (2025). Integracija veštačke inteligencije u istraživački proces sportskog menadžmenta: Potencijali i izazovi. *Menadžment u sportu*, Vol 16, Issue 2, DOI: 10.46793/ManagSport16-2.156M.
7. Nešić, M (2021*). Menadžment sportskih organizacija*, Fakultet za sport i turizam -TIMS, Univerzitet Educons, Novi Sad, ISBN - 978-86-85871-48-1, COBISS.SR-ID – 38059273.
8. Qarouach, A. et al. (2026). Strategic Leadership in Elite Sport Organizations: A Systematic Review of Governance, Leadership, and Performance System, *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living*, https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/sports-and-active-living/articles/10.3389/fspor.2026.1780254/abstract.
9. Radosavljević, D., Radosavljević, M. & Anđelković, A. (2022). *Upravljanje ljudskim potencijalima: Teorija, Praksa, Iskustva*, Fakultet za poslovne studije i pravo, Univerzitet Union Nikola Tesla, ISBN: 978-86-6102-053-7, COBISS-ID: 57978633.
10. Radosavljević, M. & Radosavljević, Ž. (2015). *Menadžment: Teorija i praksa*, Fakultet za poslovne studije i pravo, Univerzitet Union Nikola Tesla. ISBN: 978-86-87333-55-0, COBISS-ID: 218361356.

11. Radosavljević, Ž. (2002). *Tajne uspeha velikih imena svetskog biznisa*. DP Pronalazaštvo. COBISS-ID: 512286370.
12. Radosavljević, Ž. (2006). *Teorija organizacije*, Fakultet za trgovinu i bankarstvo, Alfa Univerzitet (Teaching material).
13. Radosavljević, Ž. (1994). *Savremeni menadžment,* Pronalazaštvo, Beograd, COBISS.SR-ID – 30050316.
14. Ratković, M. & Dašić, D. (2018). *Marketing u sportu sa elementima industrije sporta*, Visoka škola modernog biznisa, ISBN: 978-86-87677-17-3, COBISS-ID: 267586316.
15. Reis, C. J. O., & Cabral, S. (2017). *Public-private partnerships (PPP) in mega-sport events: A comparative study of the provision of sports arenas for the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil*. Brazilian Journal of Public Administration (Revista de Administração Pública), 51(4), 551–579, DOI: 10.1590/0034-7612158071.
16. Strasser, P. & Klein, G. (2016). *Uli Hoeneß. Eine Biografie*, Riva Verlag.
17. Sethi, S. & Talvelkar, S. (2024). A Comprehensive Review of Emerging Trends in Sports Management, *Multidisciplinary Reviews*, 7(4). DOI: 10.31893/multirev.2024068.
18. Tomić, M. (2007). *Sportski menadžment,* Data Status, Fakultet sporta i fizičkog vaspitanja, Univerzitet Mediteran, Novi Sad, ISBN: 978-86-7478-049-7, COBISS-ID: 144149260.
19. UEFA, (2025). *European Club Finance and Investment Landscape.* Available at: https://cdn.vev.design/private/BtTnX3Tn4aZIHco9Lmn27s3YNbm2/1nsbp2-the-european-club-finance-and-investment-landscape-2025.pdf.
20. Nielsen Sports. (2024) Top Trends in Sport 2024. https://www.nielsen.com/insights/2024/tops-2024-sports/.

Recived: 22.04.2026.
Revised: 07.07.2026.
Accepted: 15.07.2026.