

Football, Economics, and Environmental Sustainability: The Communicative Power of Professional Football in Portugal

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ABSTRACT

Sport is increasingly recognised as a major economic and social force, with football standing out as the most commercially influential and globally followed sport. In Portugal, football occupies a central position in national life, generating significant economic value while shaping cultural identity and social cohesion. Its contribution extends beyond stadiums, influencing employment, media, tourism, and urban development, while its symbolic and communicative power offers a platform for promoting social awareness and collective responsibility. This dual role - economic and cultural - places the sport in a privileged position to influence behaviours and attitudes towards pressing global challenges, including environmental sustainability.

This paper aims to describe the economic relevance of Portuguese professional football, whose business model relies predominantly on the development and transfer of players, and to discuss how, given its strong cultural and social influence, the sport can serve as a vehicle for promoting sustainable behaviours and environmental awareness. The study draws on secondary data from five consecutive seasons (2016–2021), including financial

and operational reports from EY and Liga Portugal, as well as institutional documents and sustainability initiatives.

Findings reveal that Portuguese clubs depend heavily on player transfers as their main revenue source, unlike major European leagues that rely on broadcasting, ticketing, and sponsorships. This dependence increases exposure to market volatility and player-related risks, highlighting the need for sustainability-oriented management. Moreover, initiatives by the Portuguese Football Foundation – Portugal League, such as National Water Day, Final Four – Sustainability on the Pitch, illustrate how football can foster ecological awareness and collective action, aligning competitiveness with social responsibility.

Keyword: Portuguese professional football; sustainability strategy; social responsibility.