

Research Article

Comparative Analysis of Sports Club Management Models

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Abstract

The article explores contemporary models of sports club management functioning in different countries. It defines the essence of the Anglo-American, German, community-based, mixed, and franchising models. A comparative analysis is conducted based on ownership, objectives, funding sources, fan participation, and club autonomy. Conclusions are drawn regarding the applicability of the models within the Ukrainian context.

Keywords

Sports Club, Management Model, Governance, Comparative Analysis, Ownership, Autonomy

1. Introduction

Sports club management has become a critical field within sport science and physical education, reflecting the increasing professionalization and commercialization of sport worldwide. Various governance models have evolved, shaped by historical, economic, and cultural contexts. Understanding these models is essential for stakeholders aiming to improve organizational efficiency, financial sustainability, and social engagement within sports entities [3, 7, 12].

This article provides a comprehensive review of five dominant sports club management models: the Anglo-American, German, community-based, mixed, and franchising models. Each is analysed regarding ownership structure, governance mechanisms, funding sources, and stakeholder involvement. Particular emphasis is placed on their applicability to Ukraine, a transitional country with a complex sports infrastructure undergoing reform [2, 11].

The structure of this paper includes a detailed examination of each model, followed by a comparative analysis and discussion of practical implications for Ukrainian sports governance.

2. Theoretical and Methodological Framework

2.1. Theoretical Foundations

Understanding the governance of sports clubs requires a multidisciplinary perspective that integrates theories from sport management, organisational studies, economics, and sociology.

Institutional theory explains how differences in governance structures are influenced by legal regulations, cultural norms, and political systems (e.g., the “50+1” rule in Germany).

Stakeholder theory addresses how clubs respond to diverse interests (e.g., fans, players, investors).

Resource dependency theory suggests clubs adapt structures to secure critical resources, explaining hybrid/mixed models. Governance theory offers tools to evaluate transparency and accountability, as outlined by the Council of Europe and EU policy [8].

Governance theory offers tools to evaluate transparency

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and accountability, as outlined by the Council of Europe and EU policy.

2.2. Review of Relevant Literature

Research includes Chadwick and Hamil [4], Nauright and Parrish [5], and Shulha [3]. Innovation capacity and organisational readiness are also key for sustainable reform in non-profit sport organisations [1]. However, a unified theory-driven framework for both mature and transitioning systems remains underdeveloped.

2.3. Methodological Approach

This study applies QCA for comparing governance models based on criteria:

- 1) Ownership structure
- 2) Objectives
- 3) Funding sources
- 4) Stakeholder/fan involvement
- 5) Degree of autonomy
- 6) Legal framework
- 7) Strategic flexibility
- 8) Accountability mechanisms.

Examples are drawn from documented clubs/leagues per model. Criteria are guided by theory and UEFA's Club Licensing and Financial Fair Play Regulations [6].

3. Overview of Sports Club Management Models

3.1. Anglo-American Model

The Anglo-American model is characterised by private ownership and a strong profit-orientation. Clubs operate predominantly as business corporations, focusing on commercial success through diversified revenue streams such as ticket sales, broadcasting rights, advertising, merchandising, and player transfers [4, 5].

Originating from the UK and the USA, this model reflects liberal economic traditions where sports organizations are viewed primarily as commercial enterprises rather than social institutions. Clubs often function as limited liability companies or corporate franchises, with shareholders or owners controlling key decisions [4, 9].

A prime example is the English Premier League (EPL), which since its restructuring in the early 1990s has evolved into a global entertainment product generating billions in television revenue and attracting foreign investment. Clubs such as Manchester United, Chelsea, and Liverpool are owned by individual entrepreneurs, conglomerates, or listed on stock exchanges [4].

The National Basketball Association (NBA), National Football League (NFL), and Major League Baseball (MLB) in

the United States follow similar franchise models, with centralized league governance but considerable autonomy for individual clubs within league regulations [9].

While this model provides high financial efficiency and scalability, it faces criticism for limited fan engagement and democratic control. Supporters often have minimal influence on club governance, leading to tensions, especially when commercial priorities seem to conflict with local identities or ethical considerations. The European Super League controversy in 2021 illustrated such conflicts vividly [14].

Financial disparities are also a concern, as wealthier clubs dominate due to superior financial resources, creating competitive imbalances and potentially threatening the sustainability of smaller clubs [15].

From a regulatory perspective, this model typically relies on self-regulation and internal league codes, with limited state intervention. Transparency and accountability beyond investors and sponsors are less emphasized compared to member-based or public-private models [6, 12].

In contexts like Ukraine, where private capital markets and professional sports sectors are less developed, full adoption of this model is challenging. Nonetheless, selected features such as marketing innovation and brand management can be incorporated to enhance club performance and international visibility [2, 14].

3.2. German Model

The German model is a socially embedded governance approach based on member associations operating under the "50+1" rule, which guarantees that club members hold at least 51% of voting rights. This structure emphasizes democratic participation, community engagement, and long-term sustainability over short-term profits [3, 9].

Rooted in Germany's social market economy ("soziale Marktwirtschaft"), this model integrates economic efficiency with social cohesion and responsibility [7, 14]. The "50+1" rule protects clubs from full takeover by external investors, preserving their community roots and cultural identities [4].

Clubs like FC Bayern Munich and Borussia Dortmund exemplify this model, being financially robust yet accountable to their members, who elect boards and influence key strategic decisions. This participatory governance fosters strong fan loyalty and minimizes risks of alienation or governance scandals [3, 13].

Financially, German clubs employ a hybrid model combining revenues from ticket sales, sponsorship, merchandising, broadcasting, and membership fees, maintaining relatively conservative debt levels. They also invest heavily in youth development and community programs, supported by licensing standards from the German Football League (DFL) and the German Football Association (DFB) that enforce financial discipline and ethical conduct [6, 7, 12].

This model has demonstrated both sporting and social benefits, producing home-grown talent and reinforcing civic

identity through sport [13].

Challenges include constraints on attracting significant private capital, which may limit global competitiveness relative to Anglo-American clubs. Ongoing debates concern maintaining tradition versus adapting to globalization pressures [14].

For Ukraine, adopting elements such as stakeholder participation, legal safeguards against asset capture, and community-rooted governance offers a promising pathway for reforming sports club management [2, 10].

3.3. Community-based Model

The community-based model features ownership distributed among members of the community or founding stakeholders, with governance based on the one-member-one-vote principle. These clubs prioritize social objectives such as accessibility, youth development, health promotion, and inclusion over profit generation [3, 13].

Examples include Athletic Club Bilbao in Spain, where strong community ties and local player development policies prevail, and numerous clubs across Scandinavia, Canada, and parts of Latin America [5, 13].

Funding is diverse but modest, relying on membership fees, local government grants, small business sponsorships, and volunteer labor. While fostering inclusivity and transparency, these factors limit scalability and professionalization [13].

Governance typically adheres to nonprofit organization laws with variable enforcement of compliance and reporting standards. Many clubs voluntarily implement ethical codes to enhance legitimacy [11, 13].

For Ukraine, this model resonates with traditions of collective initiative and social solidarity. It is particularly suitable for amateur, youth, and rural sports settings, but requires robust support from local authorities and legal frameworks to protect collective ownership and promote public-private cooperation [2, 13].

3.4. Mixed Model

The mixed model combines public, private, and community participation in ownership and management. It is a flexible, hybrid approach adaptable to transitional economies where neither full state dominance nor complete privatization is feasible [2, 11].

Forms include public-private partnerships, state-supported nonprofits with commercial subsidiaries, or limited liability companies with community oversight. This allows leveraging multiple funding sources: public budgets, private investment, membership fees, and grants [2, 11].

Examples are found in France, where local governments often own stadiums and provide subsidies while private executives manage operations, and in Eastern Europe where municipal clubs blend public support and commercial ambitions. Ukrainian clubs such as Dynamo Kyiv and Shakhtar

Donetsk have historically combined public, oligarchic, and private capital within national federations [2, 11].

Governance involves coordination among stakeholders through joint committees or supervisory boards, fostering inclusivity but sometimes causing inefficiency or political interference [7, 10].

Advantages include financial diversification, simultaneous pursuit of social and commercial goals, and facilitation of urban development and youth sport programs [11].

Challenges encompass ambiguity in authority, accountability issues, and vulnerability to corruption without strong oversight mechanisms [10, 12].

For Ukraine, this model offers the most promise as a transitional governance solution, balancing state involvement with gradual integration of private investment and civic participation [2].

3.5. Franchising Model

The franchising model is characteristic of professional sports in North America (NBA, NFL, NHL, MLB), where clubs operate as franchises licensed by a central league. The league regulates key policies, including salary caps, revenue sharing, drafts, and competition formats, acting both as regulator and marketer [4, 9].

Leagues are closed systems without promotion or relegation, and franchise rights are valuable assets managed centrally. Revenues are generated through collective media contracts, sponsorships, merchandise licensing, and ticket sales, with mechanisms to ensure competitive balance and financial stability [4].

While commercially effective, the model has limitations: club autonomy is constrained, community engagement is minimal, and competitive incentives may be weakened due to lack of promotion/relegation [9, 14].

In Ukraine and broader Eastern Europe, direct adoption is limited by legal, institutional, and cultural factors. However, elements such as licensing systems, league-wide revenue management, and centralized marketing could be selectively integrated to improve financial sustainability and governance in elite leagues [2].

4. Comparative Analysis

Each model reflects distinct governance logics shaped by cultural, economic, and institutional contexts. The Anglo-American and franchising models prioritize commercial performance and capital generation, often at the expense of community engagement. The German and community-based models emphasize democratic participation, social mission, and local identity, sometimes limiting rapid commercialization.

The mixed model bridges these approaches, offering flexibility and inclusivity, which is particularly relevant for transitional countries like Ukraine facing challenges in state capacity, private sector development, and civil society strength [2, 11].

Ukraine's sports sector requires governance models that align with legal frameworks, resource availability, and institutional maturity. The mixed model's adaptive structure can facilitate gradual reform, integrating public support, private investment, and community participation while ensuring transparency and accountability [2].

Selective adoption of marketing, branding, licensing, and regulatory practices from the Anglo-American and franchising models can enhance professionalism in Ukrainian elite sports, while preserving social cohesion through community and member-based governance principles from the German and community models [14].

5. Conclusions

There is no universal solution for sports club management. Each model offers unique advantages and faces specific challenges. For Ukraine, the mixed governance model appears most suitable, balancing commercial viability with social responsibility and stakeholder inclusion.

Future research should focus on empirical studies of governance reforms in Ukrainian sports clubs, exploring mechanisms to improve transparency, stakeholder engagement, and financial sustainability.

Abbreviations

BMI	Body Mass Index
QCA	Qualitative Comparative Analysis
UEFA	Union of European Football Associations

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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