

EVALUATING ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE IN SPORTS CLUBS THROUGH THE BALANCED SCORECARD: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Abstract: This study examines the applicability of the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) as a multidimensional strategic framework for evaluating organizational performance in Romanian municipal sports clubs. Traditional sports performance models often emphasize isolated competitive or financial outcomes, offering limited insight into broader organizational effectiveness. To address this limitation, the research adapts the BSC by reconceptualizing the financial dimension as strategic sustainability, alongside stakeholder engagement, internal organizational processes, and learning and growth. A comparative strategic case study was conducted on three Romanian municipal sports clubs: CSM Craiova, CSM Drobeta – Turnu Severin, and CSM Pitești. Using comparative institutional analysis, governance structures, managerial complexity, and strategic capacities were evaluated through structural and scoring-based assessment models. Findings reveal substantial inter-club differences in governance sophistication, stakeholder integration, and strategic adaptability, confirming the practical value of the adapted BSC framework. The study demonstrates that multidimensional strategic evaluation offers a broader and more effective approach to sports club performance assessment than traditional fragmented models.

JEL classification: M10, M14, L83, Z20.

Keywords: Balanced Scorecard; sports management; organizational performance; strategic sustainability; governance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Modern sports organizations function within progressively intricate managerial landscapes, influenced by factors such as globalization, heightened competition, governance demands, stakeholder expectations, and the swift pace of digital transformation. Professional clubs, federations, nonprofit entities, and university sports organizations are no longer evaluated solely through competitive success or isolated operational outcomes, but through their broader capacity to generate sustainable organizational value across multiple strategic dimensions (Andreff, 2024; Parent et al., 2023; Stieger et al., 2025). This transformation reflects the wider professionalization of sport, where organizations function as hybrid structures combining economic, social, and institutional responsibilities (Ratten & Ferreira, 2016; van der Roest & Dijk, 2021).

Conventional methods of assessing sports performance have primarily concentrated on tangible results like wins, rankings, medals, or financial outcomes. While these metrics remain significant, they offer only a fragmented view of organizational effectiveness, often overlooking critical elements such as governance quality, stakeholder engagement, operational efficiency, and long-term sustainability. Consequently, isolated performance models are increasingly insufficient for capturing the multidimensional realities of modern sports organizations.

In this regard, the Balanced Scorecard (BSC), introduced by Kaplan and Norton (1992, 1996), provides a pertinent strategic framework that incorporates dimensions such as strategic sustainability, stakeholder engagement, internal processes, and learning, offering a comprehensive approach to organizational assessment. Previous studies have demonstrated its conceptual relevance for sports management and its adaptability to sport-specific indicators such as fan engagement, governance quality, sponsorship effectiveness, communication, and digital transformation (Barbu et al., 2018; Dumitru et al., 2025; Popescu et al., 2026).

While these developments are notable, empirical validation of the Balanced Scorecard as a cohesive tool for comparative performance evaluation in sports clubs remains scarce. Existing literature has emphasized conceptual adaptation more than systematic comparative testing across sports organizations (Sayed et al., 2022; Tawse & Tabesh, 2023). This gap is significant because the practical value of the Balanced Scorecard depends on its capacity to measure, compare, and explain organizational performance across diverse sports management settings.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Evolution of performance measurement

The evaluation of organizational performance in sports has evolved in response to increasing institutional complexity and stakeholder expectations. Early models focused primarily on competitive success, institutional stability, and rankings, offering only a limited perspective on organizational effectiveness (Bayle & Madella, 2002).

As sports organizations became more professionalized and commercially driven, broader frameworks became necessary to address governance requirements, strategic resource pressures, and stakeholder diversity. This transition was reinforced by performance management research emphasizing strategic alignment, governance, and integrated control systems (Ferreira & Otley, 2009; Franco-Santos et al., 2012).

Performance in sports management is now understood as a multidimensional construct that integrates strategic sustainability, governance quality, and stakeholder engagement. Consequently, performance measurement has shifted from retrospective control toward proactive strategic management.

The evolution of performance measurement created the foundation for multidimensional strategic evaluation systems in sports organizations.

2.2 Balanced Scorecard as a strategic framework

The Balanced Scorecard (BSC), developed by Kaplan and Norton (1992, 1996), addressed the limitations of traditional outcome-based performance systems by integrating strategic sustainability, stakeholder, internal process, and learning dimensions. For sports organizations operating under public or municipal governance structures, strategic sustainability may offer a more contextually relevant equivalent to traditional financial dimensions.

Its major contribution lies in transforming performance measurement into a strategic management system, where interconnected dimensions collectively support long-term organizational success (Kaplan & Norton, 1996).

Subsequent research confirmed the BSC's adaptability across sectors, including public and nonprofit organizations, while also emphasizing its relevance for governance, sustainability, and strategic alignment (Hoque, 2014; Tawse & Tabesh, 2023).

The Balanced Scorecard provides a robust multidimensional framework for strategic organizational evaluation beyond traditional isolated performance indicators.

2.3 Balanced Scorecard in sports clubs

The application of the Balanced Scorecard in sports clubs reflects the sector's need to manage multiple strategic objectives simultaneously, including competitive performance, strategic sustainability, stakeholder engagement, and governance quality.

Within sports organizations, strategic sustainability dimensions involve resource capacity, institutional resilience, and operational continuity, stakeholder dimensions emphasize fan engagement and communication, internal processes focus on governance and operational efficiency, while learning dimensions address innovation and adaptability (Barbu et al., 2021; Dowling et al., 2018).

These dimensions are increasingly recognized as interdependent components of overall organizational effectiveness.

Thus, the Balanced Scorecard offers sports clubs an integrated strategic framework capable of aligning sporting, commercial, and institutional objectives.

2.4 Conceptual framework for empirical analysis

Based on Balanced Scorecard logic, sports club performance can be conceptualized as a multidimensional system integrating strategic sustainability, stakeholder engagement, internal processes, and organizational development. In the context of municipal sports organizations, traditional financial dimensions were reconceptualized as strategic sustainability in order to better reflect institutional viability, governance continuity, and long-term organizational resilience.

Figure no. 1 Adapted Balanced Scorecard framework for evaluating organizational performance in sports clubs



Source: Adapted from Kaplan and Norton (1996), Niven (2008), Barbu et al. (2021), and Popescu et al. (2026).

The adapted Balanced Scorecard framework preserves the original strategic cause-and-effect logic while integrating governance, stakeholder, and innovation dimensions specific to contemporary sports organizations. Learning and growth capacities strengthen internal organizational processes, which improve stakeholder and fan-related outcomes, ultimately supporting long-term strategic sustainability.

These dimensions collectively reflect institutional viability, external legitimacy, governance effectiveness, and long-term adaptive capacity, forming an integrated structure for comparative organizational analysis. Consequently, this framework provides the theoretical basis for empirical evaluation of sports club performance through multidimensional strategic assessment.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research objectives and hypotheses

The main objective of this study is to evaluate organizational performance in Romanian sports clubs through an adapted Balanced Scorecard framework and to assess whether relevant strategic differences exist between clubs across key performance dimensions. The research examines the practical applicability of the Balanced Scorecard as a multidimensional organizational evaluation system within sports management.

The study compares selected sports clubs using strategic indicators related to strategic sustainability, stakeholder and fan engagement, internal organizational processes,

governance structures, and learning and growth capacities. It also explores broader strategic relationships between these dimensions in order to assess organizational effectiveness beyond traditional competitive outcomes.

The empirical investigation is guided by three central hypotheses:

H1: Relevant differences exist between Romanian sports clubs regarding organizational performance across adapted Balanced Scorecard dimensions.

H2: Sports clubs with stronger stakeholder engagement, governance structures, and broader strategic capacities demonstrate higher comparative performance levels.

H3: Multidimensional strategic evaluation offers a broader assessment of sports club effectiveness than traditional competitive indicators alone.

These hypotheses reflect the assumption that sports club performance is multidimensional and strategically interconnected. By examining these relationships, the study contributes to the applied strategic adaptation of Balanced Scorecard research in sports management while supporting evidence-based organizational evaluation of sports clubs.

3.2 Research design

A comparative strategic case study design is used to evaluate organizational performance in Romanian sports clubs through an adapted Balanced Scorecard framework.

Research is based on comparative institutional analysis derived from organizational documentation, strategic indicators, strategic sustainability dimensions, governance structures, and measurable management variables. The methodological structure supports descriptive and comparative evaluation of strategic performance patterns across selected sports clubs.

Analysis is organized around four adapted Balanced Scorecard perspectives: strategic sustainability, stakeholder and fan engagement, internal organizational processes, and learning and growth, consistent with the strategic architecture of the Balanced Scorecard framework (Kaplan & Norton, 1996). These dimensions are operationalized through strategic variables relevant to sports club management and institutional evaluation.

This methodological framework enables empirical assessment of sports club performance beyond traditional competitive indicators alone.

The study analyzes three Romanian municipal sports clubs selected to reflect diversity in organizational structure, governance complexity, and strategic institutional development across different sports management contexts: Club Sportiv Municipal Craiova (CSM Craiova), Club Sportiv Municipal Drobeta – Turnu Severin (CSM Drobeta – Turnu Severin), and Club Sportiv Municipal Pitești (CSM Pitești). These clubs were selected due to their comparable municipal governance status while presenting relevant variations in managerial hierarchy, administrative diversification, stakeholder structures, and strategic organizational adaptability.

The selected clubs represent comparable public municipal sports institutions operating under Romanian administrative governance, allowing relevant comparative strategic analysis while controlling for broader institutional governance similarities.

Sports clubs are examined as institutional analytical units through four adapted Balanced Scorecard dimensions: strategic sustainability, stakeholder and fan engagement, internal organizational processes, and learning and growth.

Data collection is based on comparative institutional analysis using organizational documentation, institutional sustainability indicators, governance structures, and strategic

performance variables. The empirical analysis was based on comparative institutional documentation, managerial structures, organizational governance indicators, and strategic diagnostic data extracted from Romanian sports club case studies. Given restricted access to standardized quantitative datasets, comparative institutional structure was utilized as a strategic proxy for multidimensional organizational performance assessment.

Descriptive and comparative analysis is used to evaluate organizational performance across selected Romanian sports clubs through the adapted Balanced Scorecard framework.

Comparative analysis identifies differences between clubs across strategic sustainability, stakeholder and fan engagement, internal organizational processes, and learning and growth dimensions. Strategic analysis examines broader organizational patterns in order to assess comparative effectiveness, governance structures, and long-term performance capacity.

This analytical structure supports multidimensional evaluation of sports club performance while enabling broader strategic interpretation beyond isolated traditional performance indicators.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Comparative organizational findings

Comparative organizational analysis revealed significant differences among Romanian sports clubs regarding governance structures, stakeholder engagement, and strategic development capacities. Clubs characterized by more complex organizational structures and clearer managerial hierarchies demonstrated stronger internal coordination and broader strategic adaptability.

Table no. 1 Comparative organizational structures of selected Romanian sports clubs

Organizational Dimension	CSM Craiova (High-Complexity Structure)	CSM Drobeta – Turnu Severin (Moderate-Complexity Structure)	CSM Pitești (Simplified Structure)
Governance Leadership	President + Executive Board + General Manager	President + General Manager	President / Single Manager
Managerial Hierarchy	Multi-level departmental coordination	Medium hierarchical coordination	Limited hierarchical levels
Administrative Departments	Administrative and Financial Management, Marketing, Technical, HR, Operations	Administrative and Financial Management, Technical, Administrative	Basic administrative functions
Stakeholder Management	Extensive sponsor, fan, and community structures	Moderate stakeholder integration	Limited stakeholder specialization
Strategic Capacity	High institutional adaptability	Moderate adaptability	Restricted strategic flexibility
Organizational Complexity	Advanced	Intermediate	Basic

Source: Adapted from comparative institutional documentation, managerial structures, and governance profiles extracted from Romanian sports club case studies.

The comparative analysis of selected Romanian municipal sports clubs reveals significant strategic differences in governance structures, managerial complexity, and multidimensional organizational capacity. As illustrated in Table no. 1, CSM Craiova demonstrates the highest degree of organizational complexity, characterized by advanced managerial hierarchies, diversified administrative departments, and stronger stakeholder integration mechanisms. This structure reflects broader institutional adaptability and enhanced strategic capacity.

CSM Drobeta – Turnu Severin occupies an intermediate position, combining moderate governance complexity with functional managerial structures. While demonstrating adequate strategic potential, its institutional diversification remains comparatively lower than that of Craiova, indicating more limited multidimensional development.

CSM Pitești presents the most simplified organizational framework among the analyzed clubs, characterized by reduced administrative specialization and narrower governance structures. Although such simplification may enhance operational flexibility, it may simultaneously constrain broader strategic planning, stakeholder diversification, and long-term developmental capacity.

These findings confirm that Romanian municipal sports clubs differ substantially in organizational design and strategic architecture, supporting Hypothesis H1 regarding relevant inter-club differences across adapted Balanced Scorecard dimensions.

To strengthen comparative strategic interpretation beyond structural organizational analysis, an adapted scoring framework was applied across the four Balanced Scorecard dimensions: strategic sustainability, stakeholder engagement, internal organizational processes, and learning and growth. This evaluative model provides a structured approximation of multidimensional organizational performance based on comparative institutional evidence, governance complexity, stakeholder structures, and developmental capacities. Following the organizational comparison, strategic performance was further assessed using a scoring system based on a five-point evaluative scale, where 1 represents very limited performance and 5 reflects very high multidimensional strategic performance. The final comparative strategic profile summarizes the broader institutional strategic positioning of each club.

Table no. 2 Comparative strategic assessment across adapted Balanced Scorecard dimensions

Sports Club	Strategic Sustainability	Stakeholder Engagement	Internal Processes	Learning & Growth	Comparative Strategic Profile
CSM Craiova	5	5	5	5	Advanced
CSM Drobeta – Turnu Severin	4	3	4	3	Moderate
CSM Pitești	2	2	2	2	Basic
Scale	1 = Very Limited	2 = Low	3 = Moderate	4 = High	5 = Very High

Source: Author's comparative strategic scoring based on institutional governance documentation, organizational structures, stakeholder integration mechanisms, and developmental indicators.

The strategic comparative scoring further reinforces structural findings by illustrating clear multidimensional performance disparities among the analyzed sports clubs.

CSM Craiova consistently achieved the highest scores across all dimensions, reflecting superior governance sophistication, stakeholder integration, internal coordination, and organizational adaptability. CSM Drobeta – Turnu Severin demonstrated moderate strategic performance, while CSM Pitești exhibited comparatively limited multidimensional strategic development. These results strengthen the practical validity of the adapted Balanced Scorecard framework by operationalizing organizational complexity into comparative strategic performance patterns.

4.2 Strategic implications of Balanced Scorecard application

The comparative findings demonstrate that Romanian municipal sports club performance extends beyond isolated competitive indicators and requires broader multidimensional strategic evaluation. Clubs characterized by stronger governance structures, more diversified managerial systems, and broader stakeholder integration demonstrate superior institutional adaptability and long-term strategic capacity.

The adapted Balanced Scorecard framework proved effective in capturing these differences by integrating governance, stakeholder engagement, internal organizational processes, and learning capacities into a unified comparative strategic model. Organizational complexity was consistently associated with stronger multidimensional performance potential, particularly in governance effectiveness and strategic coordination.

These findings confirm Hypothesis H1 by demonstrating substantial inter-club differences across strategic organizational dimensions. Hypothesis H2 received partial support, as governance effectiveness, stakeholder orientation, and internal managerial complexity emerged as major contributors to broader organizational effectiveness. Hypothesis H3 was strongly supported, as multidimensional strategic assessment provided a substantially more comprehensive evaluation framework than traditional isolated performance indicators.

The study highlights the practical value of Balanced Scorecard adaptation for sports management by offering managers an evidence-based strategic instrument capable of supporting comparative evaluation, institutional planning, governance optimization, and long-term organizational sustainability.

The study extends previous theoretical and applied Balanced Scorecard research in sports management toward comparative strategic evaluation of sports club performance.

By adapting institutional performance data to a multidimensional strategic framework, the research demonstrates the practical applicability of the Balanced Scorecard for evaluating sports clubs across strategic sustainability, stakeholder, internal organizational processes, and developmental dimensions.

This methodological approach supports evidence-based strategic evaluation while providing a structured framework for comparative performance assessment, managerial analysis, and long-term organizational planning in sports club management.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrates that the Balanced Scorecard represents a valuable multidimensional strategic framework for evaluating organizational performance in Romanian municipal sports clubs. By integrating governance structures, stakeholder engagement, internal organizational processes, and learning capacities, the adapted model provides broader strategic insight than traditional isolated performance indicators.

Comparative findings revealed substantial differences among analyzed sports clubs regarding organizational complexity, managerial diversification, governance architecture, and strategic adaptability. CSM Craiova demonstrated the strongest multidimensional strategic capacity, while CSM Drobeta – Turnu Severin and CSM Pitești reflected progressively lower degrees of organizational complexity and strategic institutional development. These differences confirm that sports club performance is significantly influenced by governance quality, stakeholder integration, and broader managerial structures.

The research confirms the practical applicability of the Balanced Scorecard as a comparative strategic evaluation instrument within sports management. Hypothesis H1 was confirmed through substantial inter-club strategic differences, Hypothesis H2 received partial support through the relevance of governance and stakeholder dimensions, and Hypothesis H3 was strongly supported by the superiority of multidimensional evaluation over traditional fragmented evaluative models.

From a managerial perspective, the study highlights the value of Balanced Scorecard adaptation for supporting institutional planning, governance optimization, strategic coordination, and long-term sustainability in sports organizations. The framework provides sports managers with an evidence-based strategic instrument for comparative evaluation, governance enhancement, and long-term organizational development.

Limitations of the study include reliance on comparative institutional documentation, restricted access to complete institutional sustainability datasets, and the exploratory scope of selected case studies. Additionally, the absence of direct stakeholder perception data and quantitative operational metrics may limit the broader generalizability of findings. Future research should expand this framework through broader quantitative samples, stakeholder surveys, and longitudinal comparative analyses across additional sports disciplines and organizational contexts.

The present research strengthens the scientific foundation for Balanced Scorecard application in sports management while contributing to the development of integrated strategic evaluation systems capable of improving organizational effectiveness, governance quality, and sustainable institutional performance.

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