
Football industry strategic contextualisation and developmental choices: the case of Cyprus, EU

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Abstract: Transcending the confined perspective of football being a mere sport or activity, football is, at the very least, a business with massive financial influence. In Cyprus, football is considered a social phenomenon with a notable impact on public life and an essential part of its culture presenting certain traits. However, regardless of its growth, the industry is facing numerous issues that if not properly assessed and resolved, could create an unstable situation that may affect its sustainability and lead to a financial collapse. This research empirically examines the industry's critical parameters and recommends choices for its strategic development. Methodologically, the research adopted the qualitative approach, gathering data through 23 semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with clubs' high-ranked board members and senior staff, and with key industry stakeholders. The findings reveal that the industry is going through a long period of uncertainty and insecurity, with its sustainability under threat.

Keywords: football industry; strategic development; contextualisation; football management; Cyprus; sustainability; football clubs; strategic planning; financial planning.

Reference to this paper should be made as follows: Yiapanas, G., Thrassou, A. and Vrontis, D. (2022) 'Football industry strategic contextualisation and developmental choices: the case of Cyprus, EU', *J. Global Business Advancement*, Vol. 15, No. 3, pp.318–343.

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1 Introduction

Transcending the confined perspective of football being a mere sport or activity, football is, at the very least, a business with massive financial influence (Buck and Ifland, 2022). Even more than that, football is part of and a reflection of society, and it is a progressive force for social good. For billions of people, it is part of the fabric of their everyday life (Morrow, 2014). It provides more than an athletic competition, serving as a vehicle to strengthen culture and identities (Toma and Catana, 2021). Football, over the years, presents a significant growth (Acero et al., 2017; Litvishko et al., 2021), and it is undoubtedly the most powerful sport in the world, embedded with deep socio-cultural elements, having a direct impact on people's everyday lives (Hamil, 2017). It is often referred to as the 'global game', a game which has become increasingly commercial, and it has evolved into a multimillion industry, attracting the interest of media, sponsors and investors (Storm and Nielsen, 2012; Kartakoullis et al., 2013).

The sport has managed to reach almost every country in the world, making it unique among all the other sports in terms of revenues. According to Nielsen Sports (2018), nearly half (43%) of the world is interested in football, while the sleeping giants, China and India, are seriously increasing their interest, guaranteeing a successful future. According to FIFA's strategic plan, by 2026 more than 60% of the world's population will participate in football (Fédération Internationale de Football Association, 2016). Football is highly influential towards society, as it shapes the public discourse and generates strong emotions (Morrow, 2013b). It has a wider role to play, as it deeply contributes to social development in many aspects and directions (Thorpe et al., 2014; Fernández-Villarino, 2021).

It is a common belief that football presents unique characteristics. The industry is becoming more affluent and stronger every day, operating in a dynamic environment (Morrow, 2013a). However, this vast industry growth entails a wide set of risks and

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