

# Implementation of the CSR Principles in the Czech Football Environment

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## **Abstract:**

*The goal of this article is especially to provide information about the current situation as it pertains to the application of CSR principles within the Czech football environment, both on the part of the executive bodies in Czech football (the Football Association of the Czech Republic – FACR and the League Football Association – LFA) and all the clubs participating in the top football competition in the Czech Republic. This article combines the conclusions from secondary data analysis, content analysis of websites (top managing bodies of Czech football and all participating clubs of the highest Czech football league) and the author's own empirical investigation based on a series of semi-structured interviews.*

**Keywords:** *Social responsibility in sport, football, the Football Association of the Czech Republic, the League Football Association, UEFA*

## INTRODUCTION

In recent years, more and more attention has been paid to the social responsibility of sport, both by the academic sphere and by the actors on the sports scene themselves. According to many experts (e.g. Babiak & Kihl, 2018; Hildebrandt, 2019; Ratten, 2011), professional sports clubs, like many other business entities, should strive to make corporate social responsibility (CSR) an integral part of their management processes and proactively develop their activities in this area.

The ever-increasing commercialisation, media coverage and globalisation of the professional sport, as well as the intensification of demands from stakeholders, have greatly influenced the behaviour of many sports entities (Valeri, 2019). In particular, sports clubs of the highest level are subject to intense interest and control by the mass media and the general public, the latter of which is constantly informed by the former about almost everything related to the activities of the clubs (Riggin et al., 2019). In everyday management, it is a matter of solving many related problems, presented for example by the increased attention towards the clubs' possible unethical practices or the growing interest of their fans in non-sporting aspects of the clubs' operation. Professional sports organisations that want to gain the long-term commitment of their key stakeholders and achieve success beyond the field of sports now need to focus on these issues much more closely. For their management, this also means that they have to take a multidimensional approach to creating their strategies. In other words, besides focusing on sporting success and economic sustainability, they also need to focus on the social and environmental aspects of their activities (Babiak, 2010).

Nowadays, sport is being more and more recognised as an effective tool that can help bring about positive change in society, be it internationally or at a national, regional or local level (Giulianotti, 2015). The positive impact of sport in global humanitarian, development and peace efforts is at the centre of the praise (Waardenburg & Nagel, 2019). For these reasons, a number of important top international organizations (e.g. the UN or the EU) have included sport in their agendas (Kunz, 2018). Also, many expert studies show that there are a lot of reasons to use sport as a suitable instrument of CSR. In their acclaimed 2007 scientific article, Smith and Westerbeek

even identified a number of unique features of sport in terms of its use as a suitable CSR tool, including the mass media interest, the attractiveness of sport for young people, the positive health effects of sport and its ability to improve cultural understanding and integration.

It is also pointed out that the application of the CSR principles in the daily management practice of professional sports organisations can bring them many benefits, such as (Baena, 2018; Levermore & Moore, 2015; Trendafilova et al., 2017):

- becoming more attractive for existing and potential partners;
- improving the positive image of sports organisations;
- improving relationships with key stakeholders; or
- contributing to a healthier organisational culture of sports organisations.

CSR is increasingly supported and widely developed in the sport environment. For example, in America, majority of the local clubs from the most famous professional league competitions (e.g. NBA, NHL, or MLB) have been involved in a wide range of CSR activities for decades (Barett et al., 2019). CSR has also gradually become an important part of the agenda of many sports governing bodies, including those with an international reach (e.g. the International Olympic Committee). Equally, the fame and worldwide viewership of major international sporting events is increasingly being used in conjunction with various CSR initiatives (Knott et al., 2017). CSR initiatives are also being more often developed in the football environment, both by international governing bodies (e.g. FIFA or UEFA) and by some football league competitions (e.g. Premier League or Bundesliga) and their clubs (Blumrodt et al., 2013).

The German football environment in particular has long been considered one of the most active and inspirational European sports environments when it comes to the implementation of and support for CSR. Moreover, the majority of the top league clubs have begun to approach their CSR activities much more strategically in the new millennium, so that they include the systemic evaluation of CSR activities or CSR reporting. Many clubs have also established their own charitable foundations, which mainly focus on working with children and young people, in the interests of making their CSR activities even more systemic. They mainly support educational and school projects where the clubs cooperate with various types of schools or other extracurricular projects that support physical activities for children (Hildebrandt, 2019).

While the social CSR activities of the Bundesliga teams are most commonly realised at the initiative of the individual clubs, a number of environmental measures have often also been influenced and initiated in the past by the German government. The Bundesliga clubs were especially influenced by the government's Green Goal environmental program for the football world championships held in Germany in 2006 and 2011, when Germany endeavoured to utilise its position as the host nation for these significant sporting events to reinforce its image as an environmentally friendly country. Another of the highly inspiring environmental acts in German professional club football involves support for the public transportation of fans. Thanks to this, they can use their match tickets on public transport on the day of the match. This is a relatively traditional device that has been used by the majority of the Bundesliga clubs since the 1990s (Reiche, 2014).

The area of social responsibility has become an integral part of the management of the majority of Bundesliga clubs, which has also been projected into their organisational structures. Werder Bremen became the very first German football club to create a separate CSR department in 2002. In recent years, Bundesliga clubs have begun to be comprehensively involved in CSR reporting, while the first club to ever publish a CSR report was Hamburger SV in 2009. The fact that German clubs have been increasingly involved in CSR activities in recent years is also borne out by the fact that they dedicated an average of three full-time employees to the area of social responsibility in the 2017/18 season (Hildebrandt, 2019).

The supreme executive bodies of German football have also gradually adopted many diverse CSR activities, with which they are trying to further expand the overall CSR involvement in German football. The German Football League (Deutsche Fußball Liga – DFL) has also endeavoured to expand CSR involvement in the German football environment since the beginning of its existence. The establishment of the Bundesliga Foundation (DFL Stiftung) in 2008 was a significant act in this area on the part of the DFL. The German Football Association (Deutscher Fußball-Bund – DFB) has also established several foundations in support of CSR projects, the most significant of which is the DFB Sepp Herberger Foundation. Moreover, the DFB also created a Committee for Sustainability in 2010 and at the same time it also published its first joint CSR strategy with the DFL entitled the Path to Sustainability (Reiche, 2014).

A lot of varying activities in the area of CSR were also realised in English club football in the 1990s. The fundamentally significant initiative which was intended to connect football clubs with their local communities was the government's Football in the Community program. CSR activities are not only pursued in English football through this program by both the top football bodies and the larger Premier League clubs. The high degree of involvement in English club football has also been confirmed by the latest scientific research. For example, Rosca (2011) dealt with an analysis of the English Premier League clubs' CSR activities in the 2010/2011 season in his relatively comprehensive expert study (Rosca, 2011). The research has unequivocally confirmed the involvement of English clubs in this area, in that the Premier League clubs realised a total of 355 CSR programs in the given season (Rosca, 2011). The top five clubs with the greatest numbers of CSR programs included four from London (Chelsea 44 programs, Arsenal 34, Tottenham 31 and Fulham 24).

Like the Football Association, the English Premier has long initiated many different CSR programs (for example, Premier League Kicks or Premier League Primary Stars) that concentrate, for example, on supporting the physical fitness of students and their personal and social development. Increasing numbers of club fans are becoming involved in supporting CSR. For example, Manchester City has enabled its fans throughout the world to vote for one of six community football projects via its Citizens Giving CSR campaign since 2014 (Francois et al., 2019).

In addition to German and English football, the area of CSR is also supported in a number of other Western European football leagues, no matter whether this involves the Spanish La Liga, the Italian Serie A or the French Ligue 1. On the other hand, the individual clubs in the Eastern European football environment are mostly only starting to gradually develop their CSR activities, albeit that here too it is possible to find some inspiring examples in this area. For example, the leading Polish football club Legia Warsaw has been actively involved in CSR for a number of years, including via its Fundacja Legii club foundation. Its activities are mainly oriented towards education and leisure time activities for children and young people. The club foundation helps to provide primary school pupils aged 7 – 14, who mainly come from socially excluded families, with courses in Polish, English or mathematics, usually in a fun form that is somehow combined with football. The "Bez Barrier" program enables Legia fans with severe handicaps to request free entry to Legia home games. Special radio broadcasts have been prepared for blind fans (Chanvat et al., 2017).

In the Czech football environment, more attention has been paid to the field of CSR only in recent years, including the support of the governing bodies of Czech football (Czech Football Association, League Football Association). A number of clubs in the Czech top football competition have gradually developed various activities in the field of social responsibility. However, there are considerable differences in the degree of application of CSR principles in the management practices of individual clubs. Compared to most other football league competitions, not only from Western Europe, the involvement in all major areas of CSR is still lower. This is also evidenced

by the evaluation of the Czech football league in the prestigious Responsiball ranking, which has been annually evaluating the CSR in selected top professional league competitions since 2011 (Responsiball, 2020). Table 1 summarises all of the positions of the Czech football league to date in the Responsiball rankings.

**Table no. 1:** The evaluation of the top Czech football league in the Responsiball ranking (Responsiball, 2020)

Year	Number of evaluated football leagues	Czech league ranking	Total score (%)	Club management (%)	Community work (%)	The environment (%)
2011/12	16	14	9.85	18.00	11.00	0.00
2012/13	16	15	7.26	20.22	1.56	0.00
2013/14	16	15	6.46	11.00	9.00	0.00
2016/17	25	23	13.00	13.00	16.00	0.00

The top Czech football competition was last evaluated in the 2016/17 season when it ranked 23<sup>rd</sup> in the Responsiball ranking with a total evaluation of 9.95% (the maximum achievable evaluation was 100%). Only the Greek and Indian football leagues finished behind the domestic league in the total of twenty-five evaluated football league competitions (Responsiball, 2020).

It is clear from the table that Czech first-league football clubs are lagging behind, especially in the environmental area of CSR.

## METHODS

The author combines the conclusions of secondary data analysis, web content analysis and empirical research based on a series of semi-structured interviews. In order to determine the situation in the field of CSR in the Czech football environment, both the web pages of the governing bodies of Czech football ((the Football Association of the Czech Republic – FACR and the League Football Association – LFA) and of all participants of the highest domestic football competition were analysed.

The examination of CSR at two levels allowed for a more comprehensive view of the issue, i.e. it not only facilitated the identification of the main areas of CSR focus of domestic football clubs, but it also allowed for a more detailed insight into the CSR support by the highest governing bodies in the Czech football environment (FACR, LFA).

The research deals with a number of areas in the application of CSR in the Czech football environment, aiming in particular to:

- Identify the main focus of CSR activities in the Czech football environment, including the identification of the main target groups they are focused on (including analysis of the scope of activities, themes, messages, etc.)
- Uncover other deeper contexts – e.g. major differences in terms of strategic approach to CSR and systematic implementation, etc.
- Analyse communication of CSR activities in the Czech football environment – in terms of utilising the online environment.
- Determining the degree of involvement of the governing bodies in the Czech football environment, or its impact on the development of CSR in Czech football.

In the fourth quarter of 2019, own research empirical survey was conducted. In a series of individual semi-structured interviews, CSR and its application in their own management

practice was commented on by:

- Managers of fifteen first league clubs and one leading second league club (Dukla Praha) – these were mostly marketing managers. However, other persons were involved in the research, such as the club's CSR manager, a manager of community projects or a club's business director. Almost one half of the addressed club representatives have been working in their clubs for more than a year, more than one third of them have been working in their respective clubs for one to five years.
- Selected representatives of the top governing bodies of Czech football – manager of social projects of the Football Association of the Czech Republic (FACR) and director of communication and public relations of the League Football Association (LFA).

## RESULTS

The clubs' CSR programs are most frequently oriented towards the neighbouring community, whereby this very often involves children and young people. With regard to the focus of the CSR programs, Czech first-league clubs are mainly involved in charity projects, which can be ascribed to the fact that this constitutes one of the simplest methods of CSR engagement for them. The clubs often support such projects with charity auctions of football jerseys and other club artefacts. These projects are usually focused on helping selected ill or handicapped individuals or specific organisations. The clubs cooperate with a range of non-profit organisations ranging from children's homes (for example, FK Teplice, Viktoria Plzeň and FK Jablonec), organisations which help handicapped individuals (for example, SK Slavia and AC Sparta Prague work with the Jedlička Institute Foundation, FK Teplice works with Konto Bariéry and SK Č. Budějovice works with the Bazalka Centre) or senior citizens' organisations (FC Plzeň cooperates with the Peaceful Aging Home and AC Sparta works with the Sue Rider Retirement Home).

The clubs also often cooperate with kindergartens and primary schools (stadium tours or meetings with the players – for example, the “Viktorka in Schools” project operated by FC Viktoria Plzeň), while only a few of them have established cooperation with secondary schools or universities (for example, the cooperation between FK Teplice and J. E. Purkyně University). A number of clubs have also endeavoured to realise CSR sports programs (for example the “Whoever is playing has no time for mischief” CSR project operated by SK Č. Budějovice) which range from football tournaments for the pupils of kindergartens and primary schools to other sports activities, during which the clubs endeavour to make use of their own resources and abilities with regard to both sports facilities and qualified coaches. Moreover, the sports programs focused on children also provide the clubs with the opportunity to acquire new talented footballers into their youth teams. In addition to this, the clubs also prepare a number of other programs for children and young people, in which the clubs not only endeavour to help them have fun in their free time (for example, Sparta's Kite Day or the Children's Day at Letná), but also to bring them, for example, to conscious fandom (for example, the “Polite Supporters” project operated by AC Sparta Prague). Moreover, a number of clubs also keep entire families with children in mind, not only by offering them entertainment programs at matches, but also, for example, through the construction of so-called family stands (for example, SK Č. Budějovice or AC Sparta Prague). Only two Czech first-league clubs (Mladá Boleslav and SK České Budějovice) have publicly joined the program against racism (FARE).

Some league football clubs have also become involved in CSR programs aimed at supporting health and a healthy lifestyle, such as the cooperation of Viktoria Plzeň with the National Register of Bone Marrow Donors or support for blood donation (for example, FK Teplice). Cultural in-

tegration programs focused on the integration of citizens of different nationalities have yet to be realised within the Czech football environment. Similarly, none of the Czech clubs has yet joined any social integration programs which could simplify, for example, the provision of assistance to individuals who have difficulty in the job market or the integration of some groups of individuals who have been excluded from society (homeless people, recidivists or drug addicts). Unlike Western European football clubs, which have mostly created independent foundations to support their CSR activities, only AC Sparta Prague has created an independent club foundation in the Czech Republic to date. It was established in 2013 with the objective of supporting former club players who had found themselves in medical or social need. Environmental CSR has been relatively rare among Czech football clubs to date and it is usually related to either securing the operations of the clubs, in which case this mainly involves measures aimed at saving energy and searching for more ecological solutions, such as the use of so-called “green energy” (for example, FK Teplice) or the acquisition of a fleet of thirty hybrid vehicles at FC Ostrava. In addition, FK Jablonec, for example, supported the “Let’s Clean the Jizera Mountains” environmental project with the active participation of the players from the A-team and their families.

The analysis of the clubs’ CSR communication through their websites showed that information about their CSR activities is most often concentrated under the “club” tab (e.g. Jablonec, Plzeň, Olomouc, Dukla, Sparta, Plzeň). Only two clubs (Teplice and Zlín) have a separate main section on their website dedicated to their CSR activities. Furthermore, the websites of some clubs (Sigma Olomouc, Zlín and FK Teplice) also list the charities with which the club cooperates. Regarding the comparison of club websites in terms of communication of their CSR activities, it is especially FK Teplice that can be praised in this area. On its website, there is a separate main CSR section, which is called “More than football” and it is the most comprehensive presentation of a club’s activities in this area in the Czech Republic. Furthermore, it also presents CSR initiatives of international football associations FIFA and UEFA. An integral part of it are the club’s CSR strategy or ethical codes (player, coach and parents); it also comprehensively introduces the organisations with which the club cooperates on CSR projects. There are also subsections called “write us” and “whom you can currently help”, which seek to involve the club’s stakeholders and the general public in supporting CSR activities in the region.

The results of a research survey among representatives of first-league football clubs and one leading second league club (Dukla Praha) showed that the addressed representatives of clubs perceive the socially responsible behaviour of their clubs to be, above all, represented by the impact of their activities in areas not related to sport. At the same time, they are aware of their considerable influence on the surrounding society, especially on the young generation. Some representatives of clubs (e.g. Slavia Praha) emphasised that socially responsible clubs should try to inspire their fans with their behaviour and provide a good example for the society. According to all respondents, socially responsible clubs should, within their means, support public benefit projects that help where they are needed. Representatives of clubs think that in addition to the clubs proactively initiating these charitable projects themselves, they can also support third-party projects, especially by providing their relatively great communication reach. According to some of the addressed representatives, in addition to the publicity of various charitable activities, the clubs should also focus on promoting other necessary social issues, including, for example, promoting a healthy lifestyle or fight against all forms of inequality and violence. The above is also evident from some statements of the addressed clubs’ representatives, such as the following:

- “A socially responsible club uses the power of its brand to make positive changes in society, especially in its surrounding community.” (Sparta)
- “A CSR club is characterised by a healthy internal culture, condemnation of any signs of corruption and by fair play behaviour both on and off the pitch.” (FK Teplice)

- “We perceive the social responsibility of our club mainly in the good work of our coaches with young people.” (MFK Karviná)

Almost all respondents perceive their clubs as socially responsible (except for two club representatives who believe that their clubs are not socially responsible). None of the respondents believe that socially responsible activities are completely irrelevant for their clubs, and only one of the clubs considers CSR to be a rather marginal issue. In the area of social responsibility, the clubs focus mainly on the support of handicapped and ill people and on work with children and youth, including cooperation with children's homes. More than half of the club representatives contacted believe that most of the first-league domestic football clubs are actively involved in the field of social responsibility. The addressed representatives perceive AC Sparta Praha, Slavia Praha, Viktoria Plzeň and FK Teplice as the most active first-league football clubs in the area of social responsibility. Likewise, some of the projects of these clubs are considered the most successful CSR projects in the Czech football environment. These are in particular the following: Viktoria Plzeň's project supporting registration in the bone marrow donor register; FK Teplice's Žlutomodrá splněná přání (yellow and blue wishes granted) charity project; and the regular audio descriptive commentary of AC Sparta Praha's matches on its website. In addition, some clubs praised the Green Life CSR project of the League Football Association.

Clubs' representatives are convinced that their involvement in the field of social responsibility brings to their clubs, in particular, an improvement in reputation. The representatives of the clubs are rather sceptical regarding the impact of CSR activities on attracting new fans. In the area of social responsibility, clubs focus their attention on supporting selected organisations rather than specific individuals. The clubs' representatives consider their CSR activities in the social field, especially the charitable projects, to be the most successful socially responsible projects. Some clubs (e.g. Ostrava, Opava) emphasised that they are striving for greater involvement in the environmental part of CSR, be it issues related to efficient waste management plan or energy savings. None of the clubs yet implement a CSR programme dealing with the social inclusion of at-risk groups. The addressed football clubs in the Czech Republic support socially responsible projects mostly by providing their communication power. If partners find any of the socially responsible projects interesting, they participate in its support primarily financially or materially. Representatives of clubs were optimistic about the future role of CSR in Czech football. None of the respondents think that CSR in Czech football will be a rather marginal issue or an area with no interest whatsoever in the future.

The Football Association of the Czech Republic (FACR), which organises the lower football competitions in the Czech Republic, incorporates 3500 registered clubs and over 330,000 players and is also in charge of the Czech national football team or indoor football, has initiated some activities corresponding to the principles of the CSR concept in recent years. The FACR supports the development of amateur football via a so-called grassroots program, whose central tenet is to give everybody the chance to play football regardless of their gender, age, race or lifestyle. The main part of this program involves youth football, but also increasingly popular sports such as indoor football, women's football or beach football. The program has also had a substantial social impact and it supports football for senior citizens and veterans, for players with physical and mental handicaps and for children from children's homes and for homeless people. For example, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Czech championship in walking football for senior citizens and the 16<sup>th</sup> year of the tournament for children from children's homes (the Children's Home Cup) were both held in 2019. The FACR was also one of the partners in an international tournament for people with mental handicaps (the 2019 EASI Cup) which was held in Prague in July 2019. The FACR hosts a gala evening for grassroots football every year in Prague, during which the best amateur footballers ranging from youth players to senior citizens receive awards. As far as the FACR's support for

youth football is concerned, it is possible to consider the My First Goal project, which the FACR has organised in this area in recent years, to be a significant and inspiring activity. The European football union (UEFA) even named the “My First Goal” project the best grassroots project of 2015 from all of its member countries. This project focuses on young boys and girls starting out in football and especially on continual support for the recruitment activities of football clubs and the footballing youth in the Czech Republic.

The League Football Association (LFA), which is an interest association of professional football clubs in the Czech Republic, also implements three key projects within the Czech highest football competition, which reflect the principles social responsibility concept. The first of them is a CSR program called Green Life which has been in operation since 2013. The programme focuses not only on informing about the socially responsible activities of the participants of the highest football competition in the Czech Republic, but it also tries to combine some activities of clubs in this area and to generate funds that are subsequently used for a good cause. Therefore, the LFA has created a separate Green Life Endowment Fund, the aim of which is to support children, youth and disabled people, especially by providing for their social, medical, sports and cultural needs. The support from the Green Life Endowment Fund is mainly intended for young footballers aged 5-15 who are growing up in difficult economic and social conditions. An allowance of up to ten thousand CZK per year can be used, for example, to buy sports equipment, pay for membership fees or to participate in training camps. The Governing Board of the Foundation decides on the granting of support based on an application basis. A round of the Czech football league has been regularly dedicated to the Green Life programme in every league season since 2013, it is called a Green Round and the players wear green colours in order to draw attention to selected social issues; they also financially support a certain selected project to help the people in need. Since 2015, the LFA has also organised another CSR project in the top Czech football competition called Fathers’ Weekend, under which one league round in autumn and one in the spring part of the season is dedicated to fathers and their children. This not only involves discounted ticket prices, but also various entertainment programs and competitions or autograph sessions with the footballers, for example. The last significant CSR project undertaken by the LFA to date, which began in the 2018/19 season in cooperation with the general partner of the top football competition in the Czech Republic, the Fortuna company, is the Fortuna Fair:Play initiative. As part of this project, the representatives of the top football competition in cooperation with the wider public endeavour to recognise clients or individuals from the environment of professional football who honour the rules of fair play and in doing so spread the idea of fair play throughout the game.

The answers of the addressed representatives of the governing bodies of Czech football (FAČR, LFA) also showed that they consider involvement in the field of CSR to be important. This is also evident from the statement of the FACR CSR project manager: “The Football Association of the Czech Republic, within the framework of its social responsibility, provides everyone with the opportunity to play football, regardless of age, race, gender or any handicap, whether health-related or social. In practice, this means that the FACR supports large social projects where football can be played by the blind, the deaf, the mentally handicapped, but also by children from children’s homes, homeless people and people with other disabilities. In the same way, we also strive to make football a sport for all stages of life, i.e. from the smallest children to the elderly”.

Representatives of the governing bodies of Czech football consider the LFA’s Green Life charity project to be one of the most successful CSR initiatives in the Czech football environment. According to the FACR representative, most clubs in the Czech Republic are involved in CSR and when compared to other European countries, the Czech football environment is the more active in this field (this is also based on feedback from UEFA). The LFA representative consid-



ers FC Viktoria Plzeň, FK Teplice and AC Sparta Prague to be the most active clubs in the field of CSR in the Czech Republic. According to the respondents, greater involvement in the field of social responsibility in Czech football can bring, in particular, an improvement of its image and improved relations with existing sponsors. They believe that CSR projects should continue to focus on a wide range of target groups from children and the disabled to the elderly, ex-athletes in need of assistance and the socially disadvantaged. The governing bodies of Czech football strive to support CSR initiatives mainly financially and at the same time by providing their communication power. The addressed representatives stated that so far only a minority of their main partners are involved in the socially responsible projects implemented by them and that their support is mainly financial or material (e.g. sports equipment). According to the respondents, important football events should also be used for socially responsible campaigns, be it international football events (e.g. European Championships, friendly matches of the Czech national team) or domestic football events (e.g. MOL Cup final, Fortuna League superstructure, etc.). According to the opinions of both representatives of the governing bodies of Czech football, CSR in Czech football will be a rather important area in five to ten years.

## DISCUSSION

In recent years, a number of clubs in the Czech top football competition have gradually developed various activities in the field of social responsibility. It is quite clear that overall, compared to most other football league competitions, not only from Western Europe, the involvement in all major areas of CSR is still lower. There are considerable differences in the degree of application of CSR principles in the management practices of individual clubs. While some Czech football clubs show that CSR has become a strategic part of their club management (e.g. AC Sparta Praha, FK Teplice or Viktorie Plzeň), most Czech football clubs are still implementing only partial CSR activities mainly in the charity field, without much connection with the key management systems of the respective clubs.

The clubs' CSR programs are most frequently oriented towards the neighbouring community, whereby this very often involves children and young people. Most CSR activities of Czech clubs are developed mainly in the social field and the clubs are still mostly involved in charity projects. This finding can be attributed to the fact that this type of CSR programmes represents one of the simplest ways for clubs to help their surrounding communities financially or materially (without higher demands on the necessary human resources and competencies for this area). Clubs often provide their support via charity auctions of jerseys or other club merchandise.

Activities to support handicapped fans are being gradually developed. In addition to barrier-free entrances to football stadiums, other activities in this area are starting to emerge, such as steward services for the disabled or activities for blind fans, which have been common in the top league competitions in Western Europe for many years.

Unlike Western European football clubs, which in most cases already have independent foundations to support their CSRs, in the Czech Republic it is so far only AC Sparta Praha that has created a separate club endowment fund that seeks to support former club players who find themselves in need of health-related or social assistance.

The representatives and governing bodies of Czech football are aware of football's considerable potential for influencing the surrounding society and especially the young generation, which stems from its media attention. The addressed representatives of the governing football bodies would also like to use important football events for socially responsible campaigns in the future, including, for example, matches of the Czech national football team or the MOL Cup final. Most

of the addressed representatives of football clubs in the Czech Republic are convinced that their clubs should, within their capabilities, support public benefit projects. They perceive their social responsibility relatively intensively also in connection with the quality and comprehensive education of young people in their clubs, including the systematic incorporation of the principles of fair play into the value system of young people. Representatives of Czech football clubs are convinced that their involvement in the field of social responsibility brings to them, in particular, an improvement in reputation and a partial improvement of relations with existing sponsors or municipalities.

## CONCLUSION

While it has been possible to find a series of expert studies (e.g. Blumrodt et al., 2013; Reiche, 2014; Rosca, 2011) dedicated to CSR in the football of a number of Western European countries, including the situation in their leading clubs, in recent years, this area has not been examined more deeply in the majority of Eastern European countries. The same is also true for the Czech Republic. This article is the very first in the Czech Republic to concern itself with the current state of the application of the CSR concept in the management of domestic premier league football clubs.

The achieved findings may constitute a valuable reflection on the further targeting of CSR initiatives, not only on the part of the managers of clubs which are active in the top domestic football league, but also on the part of the representatives of the football governing bodies in the Czech Republic (the Football Association of the Czech Republic and the League Football Association).

The further development of CSR involvement in the Czech football environment requires the top bodies of Czech football to develop their own comprehensive strategic approach to this area that will simultaneously help the majority of Czech first league football clubs to become involved in a wide variety of CSR activities. They can take inspiration, for example, from the top management in German football which has not only created strategic documents and structures for sustainability (for example, the DFB has created a Committee for Sustainability, as well as the “Path to Sustainability” CSR strategy with the DFL). The English Premier League and the majority of its clubs can also inspire the Czech football environment from the point of view of the different types of CSR projects that have long been developed there, no matter whether this involves educational projects or projects in support of integration into society.

Some other CSR activities that have been developed in the domestic ice hockey environment may also be inspiring for Czech professional football clubs as well as for the top management of Czech football. It is possible to state the joint CSR projects developed by the management of Czech ice hockey in conjunction with the main partner of the Czech Extraliga (for example, the 50:50 charity tombola, the proceeds of which are used to support the CSR projects of the majority of the ice hockey clubs in the Czech Extraliga).

Increased CSR involvement in the Czech football environment has also been confirmed by tens of activities in support of the needy as part of the COVID 19 program against the coronavirus, which has not only been realised by the majority of Czech first league clubs, but also by the League Football Association.

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