



The impact of social responsibility practices on sustainable development in the sports and leisure sectors in the Lithuanian and Turkish context

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Annotation. This study distinguishes between the sectors of the sports and leisure industries and examines their characteristic sustainable development processes within the framework of social responsibility practices and principles. In recent years, the growing scale and social influence of sports and leisure activities have increased expectations for these sectors to operate more responsibly and sustainably. In this context, the role of social responsibility has become increasingly significant, as sports and leisure organizations are progressively undertaking initiatives that contribute to environmental protection, community well-being, and ethical governance. This study examines the interaction between corporate social responsibility and sustainable development in the sports and leisure sectors in Turkey and Lithuania. The empirical part of the research is based on qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with 30 experts, including 15 from Turkey and 15 from Lithuania. The sample consisted of sports club and federation managers, academics, and NGO social responsibility managers. The data were analysed through descriptive and content analysis using NVivo 14. The findings show that CSR practices in both countries are mainly associated with environmental awareness, healthy living, social inclusion, community well-being and ethical governance. At the same time, major barriers include insufficient financial resources, limited institutional cooperation, low social responsibility awareness, and weak policy support. The study emphasizes that social responsibility practices in these sectors extend beyond traditional organizational responsibilities and encompass broader contributions to ecological sustainability, social equity, and responsible management. Accordingly, it highlights how sports and leisure organizations integrate ecological initiatives, promote social inclusion programs, and adopt ethical business practices and principles across their operational and strategic activities.

Furthermore, the research reveals the impact of implementing social responsibility initiatives on sustainable development in the sports and leisure sectors, which involve and influence large groups of people. By examining these dynamics, the study contributes to a better understanding of how responsible management approaches in sports and leisure organizations can support long-term sustainability goals and generate positive environmental and social outcomes. The study demonstrates that CSR contributes to sustainable development not only through environmental practices but also through social equity, community participation, and inclusive governance in both sectors.

Keywords: social responsibility, sustainability, sports, leisure sector

JEL classification: M14, Q01, L83.

Introduction

Social responsibility research is carried out in a variety of contexts. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) refers to the ethical and voluntary actions that a business takes to contribute to the well-being of society and the environment beyond its core business operations and legal obligations. CSR involves a company's commitment to operating in an economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable manner, aiming to create positive impacts on various stakeholders, including employees, customers, communities, and the environment (Russo, Mataruna-dos-Santos, 2024). Research models are universal and allow you to determine the levels or ex-pression of social responsibility in activities by applying various models, but most often by ap-plying the (Carroll, 2016; Carroll, 2021). As Sardana *et al.* (2020) argue, concerns about CSR have expanded. The research focuses on a wide range of stakeholders (e.g., employees, communities, customers, governments, investors, suppliers and financial analysts, etc.) and covers a range of issues related to workforce diversity, occupational health and safety, corruption, environmental impact, ethical sourcing, community involvement, product safety, human rights, and product usefulness.

CSR motivation can be strategic (driven by consumer demand or regulatory compliance) or voluntary (i.e., in line with the norms of the social context). Alketbi, Ahmad (2024) point out that the impact of corporate social responsibility on the development of sustainable practices is manifested through the reduction of the harmful impact of business on society, the economy and the environment, CSR encompasses sustainability to build wider links between businesses and stakeholders, including the public and the community (Christensen *et al.*, 2019), The focus is on the entire value chain, from supply chain partners to customers. Both CSR and sustainability are about long-term needs; They are therefore linked through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Jain, Winner, 2016). Consistent implementation of CSR activities shapes sustainability development outcomes, as CSR targets areas of societal importance that need continuous improvement (Cowan, Guzmanas, 2020).

The impact of social responsibility practices on sustainable development in the sports and leisure sector's theme is relevant and significant, because it covers a number of important aspects:

1. Sustainable development – sustainability in sports and leisure is becoming increasingly important from both an economic, social, and environmental perspective.
2. Social responsibility – sports organizations, clubs and leisure industry participants are increasingly taking initiatives that contribute to community well-being, ecology and ethical governance.
3. Practical impact – this topic allows us to analyse how specific social responsibility strategies (e.g., ecological initiatives, social inclusion programs, ethical business practices) promote sustainable development in sectors involving large groups of people.

This topic can be examined from several perspectives. The impact of sports clubs, federations and events on local communities (Trendafilova *et al.*, 2017; Walzel *et al.*, 2018; Chung, 2018; Pfister, 2024; Anagnostopoulos, 2025; Russo, Matarunados-Santos, 2024; Stewart *et al.*, 2020; Falk, Hagsten, 2025) development of sustainable infrastructure in sports and leisure (Makara, Raton-Odor, 2025) social responsibility of businesses and sponsors in sports (Parent, 2018) activity models of sports and leisure institutions that ensure environmental protection and social inclusion (Puacharoen, Pocharee, 2024; Martínez, Signes, 2021; Zizka, 2022). The aim of the study is to determine the interaction between social responsibility and sustainable development in the Lithuanian and Turkish sports and leisure sectors. The study aims to clarify the experts' views on the concept of social responsibility and the impact of CSR on the sustainable development of the sports and recreation sectors.

The sports and leisure industries play an increasingly important role in the context of sustainable development due to their growing social visibility and their capacity to influence large groups of people. Organizations operating within these sectors possess significant potential to promote environmental awareness, strengthen social values, and disseminate ethical management practices. However, a review of the literature indicates that there are still notable gaps regarding how the sports and leisure industries contribute to sustainable development processes and to what extent these contributions are realized through social responsibility practices. In particular, systematic and analytical evaluations examining how environmental initiatives, social inclusion programs, and ethical management practices are integrated into sustainable development processes within these sectors remain limited.

Moreover, the sports and leisure sectors differ in terms of their structural characteristics. While the sports industry is often characterized by highly visible organizations and large-scale events involving broad audiences, the leisure sector primarily encompasses activities related to individuals' use of free time and serves diverse social groups. These structural differences high-light the need for a more comprehensive examination of how both sectors position themselves in terms of sustainable development and social responsibility practices. In this context, the main problem of this research lies in the insufficient clarification of how social responsibility practices in the sports and leisure sectors are related to sustainable development processes. In particular, the extent to which environmental initiatives, social inclusion programs, and ethical business practices support sustainable development, as well as how these practices influence large communities, emerges as an important area of investigation. Accordingly, this study aims to evaluate the role of social responsibility-based practices in sustainable development processes within the sports and leisure sectors from a holistic perspective.

The level of problem exploration in this study is based on a conceptual and analytical examination of the relationship between social responsibility practices and sustainable development processes within the sports and leisure sectors. The research addresses the existing gap in the literature regarding how social responsibility initiatives contribute to sustainability-oriented development in industries that influence large segments of society. In this context, the study explores the problem by focusing on key dimensions of social responsibility, including environmental initiatives, social inclusion programs, and ethical business practices. These dimensions are examined in relation to their potential to support sustainable development within sports and leisure organizations. The research further investigates how these practices are integrated into organizational structures and activities and how they contribute to broader ecological and social outcomes. Moreover, the study considers the structural and functional differences between the sports and leisure sectors. While the sports industry is characterized by highly visible events and organizations that reach mass audiences, the leisure sector primarily focuses on recreational activities that serve diverse social groups. By examining these sectoral differences, the study provides a

deeper exploration of how social responsibility practices may operate differently across these two contexts.

Overall, the problem is explored through a comprehensive conceptual approach that connects social responsibility practices with sustainability-oriented development in the sports and leisure industries. This approach enables a clearer understanding of the mechanisms through which responsible organizational practices can contribute to environmental sustainability, social well-being, and ethical governance within these sectors.

The aim of the study is to determine the interaction between social responsibility and sustainable development in the Lithuanian and Turkish sports and leisure sectors. The study aims to clarify the experts' views on the concept of social responsibility and the impact of CSR on the sustainable development of the sports and recreation sectors.

The article is prepared on the basis of the results of the research statistical analysis of the data was performed. In this context, in accordance with the nature of the social sciences, this study was conducted using qualitative research methods, specifically adopting a case study de-sign, and employing both descriptive and content analysis techniques. Qualitative methods allow researchers to examine a phenomenon or condition within its natural context, providing a comprehensive understanding of both its similarities and differences. Moreover, the presentation of findings in qualitative research emphasizes the direct representation of expert opinions rather than relying on quantitative data.

1. Theoretical Review

1.1. The Novelty of the Impact of Social Responsibility Practices on Sustainable Development in the Sports and Leisure Sectors

Social responsibility in the sports and leisure sectors is not a completely new concept, but in recent years it has acquired new significance and has become one of the main strategies for sustainable development. The novelty in this topic is determined by several main factors:

1. Shift from individual initiatives to a systemic approach. Previously, social responsibility in the sports and leisure sectors was mostly limited to individual philanthropic initiatives, such as charity or support programs. However, a systemic approach is currently being observed organizations are integrating social responsibility into their long-term strategies, operating models and governance structures (Hautbois, Desbordes, 2023; Trendafilova, Ziakas, 2025).
2. Application of sustainability standards in the sports industry. Increasingly, sports organizations are implementing international sustainability standards, such as ISO 20121 (the sustainable event management standard) or the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This shows that the sports and leisure sectors are actively contributing to global environmental and social changes (Assembly, 2015; Žičkienė *et al.*, 2019; Kroll *et al.*, 2019; Lohmann *et al.*, 2024; Campillo-Sánchez *et al.*, 2025).
3. Innovative solutions and the impact of technology. New technologies, such as the circular economy, renewable energy sources or sustainable building materials, are transforming sports and leisure infrastructure. Sports arenas are being built with environmentally friendly materials, digital tickets are being used at events to reduce paper consumption, and energy-saving technologies are being installed in stadiums (Prasanth, Nallavan, 2024; Bellotto, 2024; Tan *et al.*, 2025).

4. Growing pressure from society and sponsors. Sports and leisure organizations are increasingly facing public expectations for responsible operations. Sponsors and investors are demanding a socially responsible approach, and consumers are choosing products and services that meet sustainability criteria. Initiatives such as “green football” or eco-marathons are becoming increasingly popular (Silpaarcha, 2024; Adam *et al.*, 2025).
5. New research methods and approaches. New scientific research is helping to better understand how socially responsible practices contribute to sustainable development. To-day, more advanced data analysis methods are used to assess the impact of sports organizations on the environment, the economy and society, as well as to determine which initiatives are most effective (Silpaarcha, 2024; Byers *et al.*, 2021).

The novelty of this topic lies not only in the integration of social responsibility strategies into the sports and leisure sectors, but also in the technological, economic and social changes that shape a more sustainable future. Since this area is constantly changing and developing, it is necessary to delve into the latest practices, models and their impact on long-term sustainable development.

1.1.1. *Relevance of the impact of social responsibility practices on sustainable development in the sports and leisure sectors by sector*

Since the sports and leisure sectors are a broad area, it is worth separately distinguishing how social responsibility practices and their impact on sustainable development are manifested in different sectors. This will allow a more accurate assessment of the novelty aspect and highlight the most important trends. Social responsibility practices and their reflections in different sectors are presented in *Table 1* below.

Table 1. The novelty aspect and highlight the most important trends

Sectors	Relevance	Factors determining novelty	Indicative Sources
Professional sports	Professional sports have a significant impact on society - they promote an active lifestyle, form social values, and create economic benefits through events, clubs, and athletes. However, it also faces challenges such as environmental pollution from large events, inequality issues or financial opacity.	Sustainable stadium construction and energy-saving solutions (e.g., solar panels in stadiums). Green championships and the use of eco-friendly products in events. Social responsibility campaigns involving athletes in social projects (e.g., children's sports programs, combating discrimination).	Hautbois, Desbordes, 2023; Trendafilova, Ziakas, 2025; Pfister, 2024
Mass and amateur sports	Mass sports include various forms of physical activity - from running marathons to local community sports events. This sector is of great importance for improving health, promoting social inclusion, and popularizing an active lifestyle.	Organizing green sports events (e.g., reduced use of plastic, waste sorting). Social responsibility initiatives of sports clubs and organizations (e.g., special programs for socially vulnerable groups). Digitalization - virtual workouts, mobile apps to promote physical activity.	Walzel <i>et al.</i> , 2018; Chung, 2018; Stewart <i>et al.</i> , 2020

Table 1 (Continuation). The novelty aspect and highlight the most important trends

Organization of sports events	Sports events, especially large-scale ones (Olympic Games, World Cups), have a huge economic and social impact, but at the same time they pose sustainability challenges – energy consumption, waste generation, impact on local communities.	Factors determining novelty: Organization of ecological events (e.g., carbon-neutral events). Transport planning to reduce CO ₂ emissions. Long-term planning of sports infrastructure to avoid inefficient investments (solving the problem of “ghost stadiums”).	Assembly, 2015; Lohmann <i>et al.</i> , 2024
Sports business and industry (clothing, equipment, infrastructure)	The sports industry is one of the main sectors with an impact on the environment – sportswear and equipment are made of plastic, production processes create a large carbon footprint, and the development of sports infrastructure has an impact on ecosystems.	Reusable and recycled materials in sportswear (e.g., Nike Move to Zero, Adidas Parley from recycled plastic). Production of sustainable sports equipment (ecological alternatives for balls, shoes, clothing). Use of renewable energy in sports facilities.	Makara, Ráthonyi-Ódor, 2025; Prasanth, Nallavan, 2024; Tan <i>et al.</i> , 2025
Leisure sector (tourism, recreation, active recreation in nature)	Sports and leisure tourism (e.g., skiing, surfing, hiking) is extremely popular, but often has a significant negative impact on nature - high tourist traffic, disturbance of ecosystems, waste problem.	Development of ecotourism concepts (e.g., sustainable mountain trails, eco-hotels). Regulated management of tourist flows to protect nature. Sustainable transport alternatives for active leisure (e.g., electric bicycles, promotion of public transport when traveling to nature).	Puacharoen, Pocharee, 2024; Martínez, Signes, 2021; Falk, Hagsten, 2025; Zizka, 2022

Source: created by the authors.

In summary, the impact of social responsibility practices on sustainable development in the sports and leisure sectors is very diverse - from professional sports to eco-tourism. The latest initiatives, technologies and public pressure are driving change, which is why innovative solutions are increasingly being applied in this area. The integration of sustainability into the sports and leisure industries not only contributes to the global sustainable development goals, but also shapes a more responsible and greener future.

1.1.2. *The impact of social responsibility practices on sustainable development in the sports and leisure sectors*

In recent decades, social responsibility has become a fundamental principle in various areas of business and the public sector, and the sports and leisure industry are no exception. These sectors have a significant impact on the economy, the environment and society, therefore responsible organization of activities is becoming an important factor in sustainable development. Based on the analysis of the scientific literature, it is possible to distinguish trends in the development of sustainability by applying CSR principles and practices.

1. Growing need for sustainability. Sports and leisure activities are often associated with high resource consumption - from infrastructure construction to event organization. The increasing threat of climate change and environmental requirements encourage organizations to apply sustainable solutions, for example, reducing carbon dioxide emissions, using renewable energy, or efficiently managing waste (Tettamanzi *et al.*, 2024; Koenig-Lewis *et al.*, 2025).
2. Social inclusion and the well-being of communities. Sport and leisure can be a powerful tool for promoting social inclusion – through various programs, it is possible to reduce social exclusion, involve vulnerable groups and strengthen community ties. Organizations that support gender equality, the integration of people with disabilities or youth employment contribute to the creation of a sustainable society (Daddi *et al.*, 2025; Karstensen *et al.*, 2024; Oettle, Greiner, 2025).
3. Corporate responsibility and the importance of reputation. Modern organizations and sponsors increasingly value social responsibility practices to strengthen their reputation and build long-term relationships with consumers and investors. By implementing re-sponsible operating practices, sports clubs, event organizers and leisure institutions can not only increase their credibility but also attract more sponsors and partners (Pfister, 2024; Alferova, 2024; Montazeri, 2024).
4. International standards and regulations. Global agreements, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), encourage various industries, including sport and leisure, to adhere to the principles of responsible governance. Many international sports federations and organizations are already incorporating sustainability strategies into their operations, which is why this trend is becoming increasingly important at the local level (Kalsta *et al.*, 2024; Gusliana *et al.*, 2024).

In the light of these trends, it can be said that the application of social responsibility practices in the sports and leisure sectors is a key factor in achieving sustainable development, long-term economic benefits, and positive social impacts.

1.2. CSR Practice in the Sports Sector

Anagnostopoulos (2024) states that "the application of CSR in sport is a powerful catalyst that allows workers in the sports sector to find meaning, realize their creativity, achieve satisfaction and promote happiness through a love of sport and positively influence their favourite sport and society as a whole, and CSR acts as an ideal tool to achieve these goals". Social responsibility activities are particularly strongly integrated in relations with communities (Trendafilova *et al.*, 2017). Representatives of the sports industry actively joined the integration of CSR activities, for example, the International Federation of Football Associations (FIFA) became one of the first sports organisations to establish an internal corporate social responsibility unit, and shortly thereafter allocated a significant part of its revenue to related corporate social responsibility programmes (FIFA, 2005; Bradish, Cronin, 2009). Many sports leagues and teams feel the need to engage in various initiatives with unique goals and districts to create meaningful social change. For example, sports teams collaborate with charities and medical institutions to raise awareness through in-game ads, broadcast ads, and online presence without fundraising (Chung, 2018). Leagues and sports organizations often rely on stakeholder governance, so collaboration between teams and athletes is essential to the success of many league-led social responsibility initiatives. Sports teams integrate into their local communities and offer much more than just entertainment. The impact of professional sport on local businesses, politics and socio-economic variables is multifaceted. Partnering with charities is one of the most important ways that teams and leagues can participate in social responsibility (Parent, 2018).

Pfister (2024) defines three main areas of CSR impact in sport – societal impact, ethical governance, and diversity inclusion. The role of athletes, the complexity of the management of the problem of corruption and racism are particularly important, therefore the involvement of stakeholders and the integration of sustainable practices are identified as essential factors driving positive changes in society. Anagnostopoulos (2025) argues that the management of sports institutions that have undertaken the integration of social responsibility into sports activities has a significant impact on the quality and impact of the sports programmes and interventions developed, and therefore on the (end-users). Walzel *et al.* (2018) discussed social responsibility practices in the sports sector, highlighting how professional sports organizations can contribute to social and environmental goals. Professional team sports organizations (PTSOs) have a significant impact on our society, can shape public discourse about the norms of responsible behaviour, both positively and negatively in relation to communities. It is argued that the managers of a talented company cannot ignore the need to implement some or most of the social responsibility policies for the attractiveness and competitiveness of the company in the market, therefore human resource management is an increasingly relevant topic in the context of CSR and sustainability due to the implementation of common goals and principles. To address the problem of socially responsible human resource management, Rodríguez-Sánchez *et al.* (2020) proposed a model of action to maintain human resources through work-life balance strategies. The plan proposed by the authors can be used as a guide for managers in human resource management.

The role of sponsors in the context of social responsibility and sustainability development becomes very significant and due to the mutual benefits for both companies and communities. Russo and Matarunados-Santos (2024) point out that in a changing environment, companies are increasingly recognizing the importance of sport and youth in their CSR initiatives on a global scale. By actively supporting sports and youth education programs, organizations can increase the well-being of local communities and foster values such as teamwork, discipline, and respect. Large investments in sports and youth support bring positive results to their brand. Prioritizing social welfare and sustainable development strengthens the image of the organization. Kokkonen (2024) discussed the growing awareness of private sector sports clubs and their sponsors and the impact of positively evaluating the components of social responsibility. Tavares *et al.* (2023) affirm that sponsors' understanding of positivity in the application of CSR practices in sports clubs has a positive impact on fans' perception of the club. Fans contribute to positive communication about the club. Makara and Raton and Odor (2025) note that in recent years, an increasing number of sports equipment and sportswear manufacturers have joined the application of CSR to promote sustainable economic and social cohesion. The sportswear industry has a significant impact on both the social and natural environment, and it is inevitable that companies will have to take drastic measures to reduce their environmental footprint.

CSR standards are high in all areas, but due to the deep emotional connection between professional sports teams and sponsors, the level of CSR in this industry is particularly high and clearly visible to the entire sports community. Sports teams integrate into their local communities and offer much more than just entertainment. The impact of professional sports on local businesses, politics, and socio-economic variables is multifaceted (Stewart *et al.*, 2020). Many sports organisations are now incorporating CSR-related practices into their core values and are taking concrete steps to promote responsible behaviour. Individual player behaviour and sporting performance are valued by both the heads of organisations and the public, and professional athletes are expected to adhere to social and ethical guidelines (Stewart *et al.*, 2020). According to Parent (2018), partnering with charities is one of the most important ways in which teams can participate in social responsibility. A team or league can support a non-profit organization by

providing brand recognition and financial resources to reach new audiences or perform better. The club or league can then leverage its relationships with the charity to improve its reputation with stakeholders, fulfil its social commitment, increase fan loyalty, and possibly even attract new sponsors who are interested in the non-profit's goal.

1.3. CSR Practice in the Leisure

Niu *et al.* (2024) recognises that consumers' purchasing decisions are increasingly influenced by a comprehensive understanding of health and environmental issues. This strategic adaptation not only elevates companies as leaders in sustainable development, but also develops the consumer base. As consumers increasingly prefer sustainable consumption in the post-pandemic period, it becomes apparent that such behaviour is driven by participation in environmentally friendly or health-enhancing leisure activities. In addition, the publicity of the interaction between health and environmental awareness in the purchasing decisions of organic and sustainable products has a significant impact. Puacharoen and Pocharee (2024) the study provides an example of uniquely balanced economic development, environmental responsibility, and social well-being as successful sustainable sports tourism initiatives.

The findings of the study can be used as key data for the government or the private sector to develop sports tourism practices or development policies that will create a balance between the economy, society, and the environment. Martínez and Signes (2021) states that. Companies related to the tourism, leisure and hospitality industries have many sustainability management practices aimed at creating a greener service or product, increasing resource efficiency related to energy and water consumption, and reducing waste. From a social point of view, CSR practices are focused on increasing the well-being of the community or employees, often combining the promotion of both local employment and training, and from an economic point of view, ensuring cost-saving initiatives. The study by Falk and Hagsten (2025) examines the interdependencies of commitments with the Sustainable Development Goals reported by travel and leisure companies participating in the United Nations Global Compact program. Statistics show that SDG 8 "Growth and decent jobs" (88%), SDG 13 "Climate action" and SDG 5 "Gender equality" (SDG 5) (78% each) and SDG 12 "Sustainable production and consumption" (75%) are the targets that are most often committed, but the results show that a company committed to a single SDG, it is also likely to pursue other sustainability goals.

Zizka (2022) highlighted the problem in the findings of the study, that higher education institutions should be leaders in sustainability initiatives, but this is not the case now. The hospitality industry, whose impact is particularly significant as a global workplace, should reflect sustainability actions and initiatives perhaps even more than anyone else". Higher education institutions can take advantage of the situation and implement innovative sustainability-based programs. In addition, the problem of modern companies providing tourism services is the development of digital competences of employees. According to Zhao, Li (2024), Digitalization allows for an analysis of cooperation between the sports and leisure industries, identifying the links between sustainable tourism and sports. Innovative digital approaches can support sustainability practices in the sports and leisure sector.

1.4 The Relationship between CSR Practices and Sustainable Development Goals in the Sports and Leisure Sectors

Corporate social responsibility in the sports and leisure sectors should be interpreted not only as an organizational ethics framework but also as a practical mechanism that contributes to the realization of several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In the sports sector, CSR initiatives often support SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) through the promotion of active lifestyles, public health, and physical

participation; SDG 5 (Gender Equality) through women’s participation and inclusive programming; SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) through programs targeting disadvantaged groups; and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities) through community-based sport projects and socially responsible local engagement.

In the leisure sector, CSR practices are strongly associated with SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 13 (Climate Action), particularly in relation to sustainable tourism, eco-friendly leisure services, waste reduction, and environmentally responsible consumption patterns. Previous research has shown that travel and leisure companies most frequently commit to SDG 8, SDG 13, SDG 5, and SDG 12, indicating that CSR in this sector is closely connected to both social and environmental sustainability.

Across both sectors, CSR also intersects with SDG 4 (Quality Education) by increasing awareness, promoting values-based learning, and supporting educational activities that strengthen sustainability literacy. Therefore, CSR in sports and leisure should be considered a multidimensional governance approach that links environmental responsibility, social inclusion, ethical management, and long-term sustainable development outcomes. In this respect, the CSR–SDG relationship provides a useful analytical framework for comparing Lithuania and Turkey, as it makes it possible to evaluate how sector-specific practices contribute to globally recognized sustainability targets.

2. Methodology of the Research

In accordance with the nature of the social sciences, this study was conducted using qualitative research methods, specifically adopting a case study design, and employing both descriptive and content analysis techniques. Qualitative methods allow researchers to examine a phenomenon or condition within its natural context, providing a comprehensive understanding of both its similarities and differences (Hendren *et al.*, 2023). Moreover, the presentation of findings in qualitative research emphasizes the direct representation of expert opinions rather than relying on quantitative data (LaMarre and Chamberlain, 2022; Stewart, 2022).

The case study approach contributes to an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of how a specific system functions, utilizing multiple data sources for triangulation (Åhlén *et al.*, 2025; Chmiliar, 2010). In case study-based research, participants or experts included in the study can express their views freely and objectively, which enhances the generalizability and scope of the findings (Tossi *et al.*, 2022; Sassanelli *et al.*, 2021; Yıldırım and Şimşek, 2016, p. 64).

2.1. Sample Group

In order to gain in-depth insights within the scope of this study, a purposive sampling method was employed to construct the sample group, which consisted of experts from Turkey and Lithuania. This method is based on the selection of individuals who possess sufficient knowledge and expertise relevant to the research topic. Through this approach, it becomes possible to obtain informed and comprehensive responses to the research questions. Accordingly, rather than relying on random selection, the primary principle of this sampling strategy is the identification of appropriate and reliable sources of information pertinent to the research subject (Nyimbili, Nyimbili, 2024; Büyüköztürk *et al.*, 2018, p. 262).

The frequent use of purposive sampling in qualitative research is largely due to its emphasis on the selection of participants with high representational capacity, its contribution to the acquisition of objective findings, and its ability to serve as a rich source of detailed information (Andrade, 2021; Makwana *et al.*, 2023; Thomas, 2022).

In line with the principles of purposive sampling, the sample group was limited to a total of 30 participants—15 from Turkey and 15 from Lithuania. Prior to and during the research process, the participants were informed about the objectives of the study, the interview schedule was communicated, and the necessary interviews were conducted. The sample group consisted of sports club and federation administrators, academics and researchers working in the relevant field, and managers of social responsibility projects from non-governmental organizations. De-tailed information about the sample group is presented in *Table 2* below.

Table 2. Composition and demographic profiles of the expert sample group

	Category	Turkey (n=15)	Lithuania (n=15)	Total (N=30)
Gender	Male	9	10	19
	Female	6	5	11
Age	25-34	3	4	7
	35-44	7	6	13
	45-54	2	4	6
	55+	3	1	4
Occupation Group	Managers of Sports Club	2	4	6
	Managers of Sports Federations	3	1	4
	Academics	5	5	10
	NGO Social Responsibility Manager	5	5	10
Education	Bachelor's Degree	8	7	15
	Master's Degree	2	3	5
	Doctorate (PhD)	5	5	10
Experience	0-5 years	4	3	7
	6-10 years	5	6	11
	11-15 years	3	3	6
	16 years+	3	3	6

Source: created by the authors.

2.2. Data Collection Tool

To identify expert perspectives on the impacts of social responsibility practices within the sport and leisure industry on sustainable development—and to conduct comparative analyses within the contexts of Turkey and Lithuania—semi-structured interviews were conducted. For this purpose, a semi-structured interview form was developed by the researchers. The preparation of this form was grounded in an extensive review of the relevant literature. The finalized form was subsequently reviewed and validated by field experts and language specialists.

The semi-structured interview form serves as a data collection tool that allows the researcher to gather in-depth information from participants based on a set of predetermined key questions (Belina, 2023). While it includes open-ended questions prepared in advance, this method also provides flexibility for the interviewer to pose follow-up questions and elaborate on participants’ responses during the interview process (Karatsareas, 2022). This approach enables a deeper analysis of participants’ experiences, thoughts, and emotions, thereby expanding the scope of the research (Adeoye-Olatunde, Olenik, 2021). The questions included in the interview form used in this study are as follows:

Contemporary Challenges and Innovations in Sustainability Assessment and Environmental Management

1. How do you define the concept of social responsibility, and do you think it contributes to sustainable development in the sports and leisure sectors?
2. What are the most significant social responsibility practices implemented in your organization or sector, and how do you observe their impact on sustainable development?
3. How do you evaluate the development of social responsibility practices and the main challenges they face in the contexts of Lithuania and Turkey?
4. What strategies or policies should be developed to ensure more effective implementation of social responsibility in the sports and leisure sectors?
5. How do you see the future of social responsibility projects in terms of sustainable development, and what are the most critical areas that need improvement in this field?

To enhance methodological transparency and demonstrate the analytical logic of the data collection process, *Table 3* presents the structure of the semi-structured interview form and shows how each interview question was aligned with the core dimensions of CSR and sustainable development.

Table 3. Structure of the semi-structured interview form and analytical focus

Interview question	Analytical dimension	Relevance to CSR	Relevance to sustainable development
How do you define the concept of social responsibility, and do you think it contributes to sustainable development in the sports and leisure sectors?	Conceptual understanding of CSR	Ethical responsibility, social responsibility awareness, organizational responsibility	Sustainability orientation, conceptual link between CSR and sustainable development
What are the most significant social responsibility practices implemented in your organization or sector, and how do you observe their impact on sustainable development?	Operational practices and observed outcomes	Ecological initiatives, social inclusion practices, ethical management practices	Practical contribution to sustainable development, social and environmental outcomes
How do you evaluate the development of social responsibility practices and the main challenges they face in the contexts of Lithuania and Turkey?	Contextual development and barriers	Institutional capacity, policy support, awareness level, inter-institutional coordination	Sustainability constraints, country-specific implementation challenges
What strategies or policies should be developed to ensure more effective implementation of social responsibility in the sports and leisure sectors?	Governance and policy recommendations	CSR implementation mechanisms, stakeholder collaboration, legal and institutional support	Long-term sectoral sustainability, strengthening implementation capacity
How do you see the future of social responsibility projects in terms of sustainable development, and what are the most critical areas that need improvement in this field?	Future orientation and improvement areas	Continuity of CSR practices, strategic development of projects, future priorities	Sustainable development potential, long-term impact and improvement needs

Source: created by the authors.

2.3. Data Analysis

The processing and analysis of the data obtained from the interviews conducted with the sample group of 30 experts from both countries were carried out using the NVivo 14 software. The data were transformed into findings through descriptive and content analysis methods. Since the focus in qualitative interview analysis and content evaluation is not on numerical expressions but rather on the statements of the participants, the views of managers included in the interview group were directly quoted (Creswell, Plano, 2011, p. 74).

To improve methodological transparency and to show that the analysis was conducted through a structured interpretive process, Table presents the analytical coding framework developed in NVivo 14. The *Table 4* summarizes the main themes, sub-themes, and analytical foci used during descriptive and content analysis.

Table 4. Summary of the analytical coding framework

Main Theme	Core Codes	Analytical relevance
Understanding of CSR	Ethics, community welfare, environmental responsibility	Explains how participants conceptualize CSR
Contribution to sustainable development	Healthy living, awareness, social inclusion	Shows the perceived outcomes of CSR practices
Barriers and challenges	Financial limitations, weak policy support, low awareness, poor coordination	Identifies the main constraints affecting CSR implementation
Strategies and future needs	Education, funding, legal support, partnerships	Indicates how CSR can be strengthened for long-term sustainability

Source: created by the authors.

3. Results of the Research

In this section of the study, the findings obtained from the interviews conducted in line with the aim of the research are presented. The responses provided by the participants during the interviews conducted through the interview form were compiled by the researchers and are presented in the table below. Additionally, to gain in-depth insights, the participants' views and opinions expressed during the interviews were directly quoted and presented, in accordance with the principle of transparency in data sharing.

The following question was posed to sports club and federation managers, academics working in the relevant field, and civil society organization representatives from Turkey and Lithuania: "How do you define the concept of Social Responsibility (SR), and do you think it contributes to sustainable development in the sports and leisure sectors?" The responses provided by experts from both countries were analysed using content analysis and evaluated, with the results presented in *Table 5* below.

Table 5. The concept of Social Responsibility (CSR) and its contribution to sustainable development

Country	Social Responsibility Definition	Contribution to Sustainable Development
Turkey	✓ Projects for community welfare and the environment.	✓ Healthy living
	✓ Research on sports' benefits to education and health.	✓ Environmental awareness.
	✓ Responsibilities to improve community welfare.	✓ Healthy living ✓ Social benefit ✓ Community ties.
Lithuania	✓ Ethics, sustainability, and social inclusion in education.	✓ Future leaders
	✓ Ethical, transparent, and sustainable services.	✓ Public awareness
	✓ Acting ethically and responsibly toward society and the environment.	✓ Community well-being ✓ Social participation
		✓ Environmental awareness ✓ Healthy living ✓ Social benefits

Source: created by the authors.

Similarities and differences in the understanding of corporate social responsibility and sustainable development can be observed between Turkey and Lithuania. Based on the views of experts from both countries, it is understood that social responsibility projects impact elements such as social welfare and community ties, environmental awareness, and healthy living. Sports club/federation managers and academics in both countries emphasize the need to increase awareness of healthy living, environmental consciousness, and social awareness.

According to the views of experts from Turkey, there is a prominent opinion that social responsibility projects have increased healthy living, social welfare, and environmental awareness. In relation to these three factors, experts indicate that greater contributions to sustainable development can be made.

Social responsibility activities organized through sports clubs are crucial in enhancing social welfare. Based on the feedback we have received, environmental sensitivity is also being developed among participants, along with the development of a healthy living mindset. (Club Manager in Turkey-3). Healthy living! Participants are happiest at this point. They become more aware and happier. We also receive feedback that their quality of life has increased. (Federation Manager in Turkey-2). Especially, targeting environmental awareness, the understanding of healthy living, and social benefit through these organizations plays an important role in sustainable development at the national level. (NGO Manager from Turkey-2).

In Lithuania, an approach focused on education and research is more prominent. In Lithuania, particularly academics, researchers, and civil society organization representatives emphasize the importance of promoting sustainable development through education and creating social change. While environmental awareness and social participation are similarly emphasized in both countries, elements such as promoting local culture and encouraging ethical behaviour are more prominently highlighted in Lithuania.

"We can train the leaders of the future. By doing so, it seems possible to direct social change through educational activities by raising experts who understand and value the principles of sustainability, ethics, and social responsibility" (Academics in Lithuania-2-3). "Additionally, we would be promoting research and innovation that helps create sustainable and socially responsible sports products and services" (NGO

Representatives in Lithuania-4). "Social responsibility practices can directly impact the sustainability of Lithuania's development and growth" (Federation Manager from Lithuania-2).

The understanding of social responsibility in the sports and recreation sectors of Turkey and Lithuania shows both similarities and differences. Both countries place great emphasis on projects that promote healthy living, environmental awareness, community ties, and social benefit. Turkey particularly focuses on educational initiatives aimed at youth and raising awareness through media. Lithuania, on the other hand, prioritizes the integration of ethics and sustainability principles into educational programs and aims to nurture future leaders with a strong sense of social responsibility.

The following question was posed to sports club and federation managers, academics working in the relevant field, and civil society organization representatives from Turkey and Lithuania: *"What are the most important social responsibility practices implemented in your country, and how do you observe their impact on sustainable development?"* The responses provided by experts from both countries were analyzed using content analysis and evaluated, with the results presented in *Table 6* below.

Table 6. Social responsibility projects and their contributions to sustainable development

Country	Social responsibility projects	Impact on sustainable development
Turkey	Organizations for the adaptation of migrants	✓ Social integration
	✓ Accessible seating areas (Inclusive stadiums)	✓ Equal opportunities
	✓ Inclusivity and equality initiatives	✓ Support for individuals with disabilities
	✓ Football for the community	✓ Social equality
	✓ Tournaments targeting girls.	✓ Environmental sustainability
	✓ Green stadiums and zero waste initiatives	
Lithuania	✓ Tournaments targeting disadvantaged groups.	✓ Social integration
	✓ Organizations for the adaptation of migrants	✓ Equal opportunities
	✓ Special Olympics	✓ Support for individuals with disabilities
	✓ Inclusivity and equality initiatives	✓ Social equality
	✓ Programs aimed at supporting youth employment and education.	✓ Employment opportunities
	✓ Erasmus Project	✓ Increasing educational opportunities and ensuring inclusivity

Source: created by the authors.

The views of the experts participating in the research indicate that social responsibility in Turkey and Lithuania pursues similar goals in contributing to sustainable development. In both countries, it is understood that projects are implemented with similar objectives, such as supporting disadvantaged groups, promoting social integration for individuals with disabilities, women, and girls, and ensuring that youth benefit from educational opportunities. At this point, it can be observed that efforts are made to contribute to sustainable development by focusing on equal opportunities, social integration, environmental sustainability, and equality of opportunity in education and employment.

Football for the community is one of the key projects we have implemented. We are especially trying to organize a football event targeting youth and migrants. In this way, social integration and cohesion seem achievable (Federation Manager in Turkey-1). Increasing social responsibility awareness in society and

diversifying projects to address different segments of the community are areas that need the most improvement (NGO Managers in Turkey 1-3).

To reduce the negative environmental impacts in stadiums, we have implemented zero waste practices. Through this initiative, we aim to raise environmental awareness by minimizing waste production before and after the matches with the slogan Green Stadium (Club Manager in Turkey-4).

In Lithuania, the understanding of social responsibility also involves the implementation of projects and initiatives with similar content, such as supporting disadvantaged groups, promoting equal opportunities, youth education and employment, and social integration.

Through social responsibility projects, we aim to promote social integration through various sports programs and events, thereby creating equal opportunities for disadvantaged groups in society and contributing to the easy adaptation of migrants to our country's culture (Federation Manager in Lithuania-1). "Partnerships with local communities promote inclusivity and social dialogue (Federation Manager in Lithuania-1). In our organization, special attention is paid to the education of students, the spread of a healthy lifestyle, physical activity, and cooperation with social partners (NGO Manager in Lithuania-4, Academic in Lithuania-5).

It is understood that both countries aim to support social integration, the assistance of disadvantaged groups, and the education and development of women and girls through these projects. Additionally, in Turkey, initiatives such as "green stadium" and "zero waste" projects are observed, aiming to raise awareness about environmental sustainability.

The following question was posed to sports club and federation managers, academics working in the relevant field, and civil society organization representatives from Turkey and Lithuania: "How do you evaluate the development of social responsibility practices and the main challenges they face in the contexts of Lithuania and Turkey?" The responses provided by experts from both countries were analysed using content analysis and evaluated, with the results presented in Table 7 below.

Table 7. The main challenges they face in the contexts of Lithuania and Turkey

Country	Main Challenges
Turkey	Lack of
	✓ awareness
	✓ policies
	✓ resources, and institutional cooperation.
Lithuania	Lack of
	✓ awareness
	✓ financial resources and seeing SR as a burden.
	✓ information, institutional cooperation.

Source: created by the authors.

Based on the experts' views, it is understood that the challenges encountered in the process of social responsibility practices in Turkey and Lithuania are similar. In both countries, inadequate policies, lack of financial resources, low levels of awareness and knowledge about social responsibility, and deficiencies in inter-institutional coordination are highlighted as the main challenges.

Experts from both Turkey and Lithuania have expressed similar issues regarding the implementation of social responsibility projects. These issues include a significant lack of information and awareness, weak

institutional collaborations, and insufficient resources and policies. Experts from both countries have stated the following expectations for the widespread adoption and effectiveness of social responsibility projects: increasing awareness in society, ensuring coordination among institutions, supporting adequate resource allocation, and strengthening legal frameworks.

Social responsibility projects are rapidly spreading in Turkey, but the lack of awareness in society and the insufficiency of supportive policies remain significant barriers. Additionally, the lack of resources and limited institutional collaboration restrict the effectiveness of these projects (NGO Manager in Turkey-3). Significant steps are being taken, particularly in involving youth in sports and raising environmental awareness. However, the lack of financial support and the insufficient social responsibility awareness in society are among the biggest challenges. Moreover, I believe more effort is needed in terms of institutional collaboration and volunteer participation for such projects (Club Managers in Turkey-1-2).

One of the main challenges is the lack of public and sector knowledge about how social responsibility can be implemented in practice and what benefits it can bring. Some sports organizers still believe that social responsibility is just an additional burden, rather than a strategic component that can help attract more participants, investors, and public support. Another challenge is the lack of financial resources for social responsibility initiatives. Often, sports organizations face budget constraints and cannot invest in sustainable projects, so this remains a secondary priority (Federation Manager in Lithuania-2). In sports organizations, when attempting to implement social responsibility initiatives, significant challenges are encountered primarily due to a lack of funding, information, and collaboration. Additionally, raising public awareness is crucial to provide more support and participation for these programs (NGO Manager in Lithuania-4). Sports organizations often face financial deficiencies when trying to develop sustainable practices (Researcher in Lithuania-4).

It is possible to state that the issues encountered before and after the implementation of social responsibility projects in Turkey and Lithuania are similar. Experts from both countries highlight key challenges such as lack of financial resources, low social responsibility awareness, and deficiencies in resources, legal frameworks, and inter-institutional coordination. Another important point is the necessity of taking steps to address the aforementioned issues during this process.

The following question was posed to sports club and federation managers, academics working in the relevant field, and civil society organization representatives from Turkey and Lithuania: "*What strategies or policies should be developed to ensure more effective implementation of social responsibility in the sports and leisure sectors?*" The responses provided by experts from both countries were analysed using content analysis and evaluated, with the results presented in *Table 8*.

Similarities in the proposed solutions are also evident in both Turkey and Lithuania, just as there are shared challenges. It is clear that solutions such as increasing financial support and motivation, the need for legal regulations, action plans to raise awareness, and supporting collaborations are necessary. Experts emphasize the following steps that need to be taken for social responsibility projects to serve their purpose:

Table 8. Strategies to ensure more effective implementation of social responsibility

Country	Key Strategies
Turkey	✓ Awareness-raising promotional activities
	✓ Direct resource allocation
	✓ Legal regulations
	✓ Supporting inter-institutional collaborations
Lithuania	✓ National strategies should be developed.
	✓ Financial support should be increased.
	✓ Legal regulations
	✓ Collaborations should be strengthened

Source: created by the authors.

It is essential to focus on solving the issues identified in the previous question. For example, to increase participation in these projects, awareness campaigns should be conducted, advertisements and promotions should be made, and informative activities should be carried out so that people become conscious and show participation (Researcher in Turkey-2). Most of the time, the organizations we organize are incomplete. One of the main reasons is the lack of financial resources. We manage this situation for a while through sponsors, but at the end of the day we get stuck (Club Managers in Türkiye-1-2). There should be a separate, independent budget (NGO Manager in Türkiye-2). Our social responsibility projects do not receive the necessary attention from our people. It is necessary to increase the number of projects that encourage community participation and raise awareness on platforms such as social media. In addition, if policy makers can put these projects on a legal basis through laws, regulations or official practices, I think people will show more interest and participate (Researcher in Türkiye-2).

A national strategy for sports and tourism social responsibility should set clear goals and action plans. Promoting partnerships between educational, sports, tourism, and government institutions is key (Federation Manager in Lithuania-3). Money! One of our most important problems is the budget. From time to time we experience this problem very intensely, but we try to overcome this problem with personal efforts. Is it enough? No, definitely not. Financial support should be provided to small and medium-sized organizations lacking resources for implementing these practices. (Club Manager in Lithuania-2). National or regional policies should be developed to promote social responsibility in the leisure sector, focusing on sustainable infrastructure, inclusion, and environmental standards for events and services. Cooperation between the public, private sectors, and NGOs should be encouraged for a unified and effective approach. (NGO Managers in Lithuania-1-4).

The strategy suggestions for more effective implementation of social responsibility in the sports and recreation sectors in Turkey and Lithuania show many similarities. In both countries, there is an emphasis on developing local partnerships, increasing financial support, and promoting environmentally friendly practices. Additionally, the implementation of educational programs and raising awareness about social responsibility in the community are also common strategies.

Table 9. The Future and areas for improvement of social responsibility projects

Country	Future and Areas for Improvement
Turkey	✓ Strengthening legal regulations
	✓ Increasing financial support
	✓ Developing collaboration strategies
	✓ Assessing long-term outcomes
	✓ Increasing public and private sector support
Lithuania	✓ Supporting local collaborations
	✓ Innovative project ideas should be developed.
	✓ Emphasis should be placed on environmentally friendly practices.
	✓ Awareness should be raised regarding public health.
	✓ Social integration and adaptation should be highlighted.
✓ Importance should be given to the education of children and youth.	
	✓ Opportunities for international collaboration should be created

Source: created by the authors.

The experts from Turkey and Lithuania were asked, "How do you see the future of social responsibility projects in terms of sustainable development, and what are the most critical areas that need improvement in this field?" The responses provided by experts from both countries were analysed using content analysis and the results are presented in the Table 9 below.

While experts in Turkey focus more on financial support, legal regulations, increasing partnerships, and expanding public-private sector support, in Lithuania, emphasis is placed not only on environmental sustainability, youth education, social integration, and public health, but also on the need to explore international cooperation opportunities.

Social responsibility projects are expected to be more visible and effective in the future. However, for these projects to succeed, it is essential for the government and the private sector to provide more support. Additionally, increasing social responsibility awareness in society and diversifying projects to address different segments of society are the areas that need the most improvement (Federation Managers in Turkey-1-3). Increasing participatory processes and expanding the understanding of corporate responsibility requires a major strategy. Furthermore, developing new policies and legal regulations to encourage volunteer participation is also of significant importance (Academic in Turkey-5). While the future of these projects looks quite promising, increasing the budget and financial support for these initiatives is inevitable to raise social responsibility awareness in society (NGO Manager in Turkey-2).

Experts in Lithuania emphasize the need to increase innovative projects, promote environmentally friendly practices, and enhance social cohesion, public health, and education for youth. They also highlight the importance of participating in international projects and being partners or stakeholders in these initiatives.

The future of social responsibility projects and the most important areas for improvement: In the future, it is important to develop educational programs, promote mutual understanding and include various groups of society, including disabled people, in sports and leisure activities. The aspect of sustainable development must be strengthened, including environmental protection and resource use (NGO Manager in Lithuania-4). To improve social responsibility projects, it's essential to develop initiatives that meet local needs, strengthen international cooperation, and share best practices. Key improvements should focus on

reducing environmental impact, ensuring accessibility for all, promoting ethics and transparency, and enhancing youth education and wellness (Academic in Lithuania-2/Researcher in Lithuania-2). Sustainable development goals should be integrated into leisure service strategies. Innovative social responsibility projects addressing local needs should be developed, services should become more accessible, and environmental friendliness should be prioritized. Additionally, promoting healthy lifestyle principles is crucial (Club Managers in Lithuania-3-1).

There are similar views in Turkey and Lithuania that social responsibility projects offer an important opportunity for sustainable development. Experts in both Turkey and Lithuania emphasise the need to better analyse the long-term impacts of projects. In addition, both countries emphasised the importance of developing strategies to raise awareness of social responsibility in society, to strengthen public and private sector cooperation and to make projects appeal to a wider audience.

4. Discussion

4.1. Insights in the Lithuanian Context: Sports and Leisure

As the sports and leisure industry continues to grow rapidly on a global scale, participation in events and activities organized in this sector has been steadily increasing in both Turkey and Lithuania—the two focal countries of this study. In parallel with this rising engagement, the significance of corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives within the industry has also become more prominent. This study provides an opportunity to examine the impact of CSR projects in the sports and leisure sector on sustainable development and allows for a comparative analysis between Turkey and Lithuania. The findings are presented through an analytical lens that considers the cultural and socio-economic differences between the two countries.

An in-depth examination of the perspectives of sports club and federation managers, academics working in the field, and representatives of non-governmental organizations in Turkey and Lithuania reveals noteworthy differences in the conceptualization and implementation of CSR projects. In contrast, CSR initiatives in Lithuania tend to prioritize the cultivation of future leaders, the enhancement of public awareness, and the promotion of social participation, with a clear emphasis on generating broader social benefits. When considered in the context of both countries, it is evident that these CSR efforts have the capacity to contribute directly to sustainable development. The divergence in these approaches may be attributed to varying societal needs, institutional priorities, and historically rooted contextual differences.

A review of the existing literature reveals that social responsibility projects cannot be evaluated independently of the host country's socio-cultural structure. Matten and Moon (2008) emphasize that CSR practices are inherently shaped by the cultural and institutional context in which they are embedded. For instance, the emphasis by Lithuanian experts on promoting and enhancing support for education as a key driver of sustainable development aligns with the broader post-socialist societal transformation in Lithuania, where education has traditionally played a central role in all forms of collective action (Morkevičius, Jakubavičienė, 2019). Thus, the instrumental role of education in social transformation is directly linked to long-term sustainable development planning in Lithuania and is considered a significant component in the reconstruction of society.

Given their inherent nature, sports and leisure activities serve as powerful tools for fostering social cohesion and adaptation. Thus, CSR practices in these sectors are particularly effective in supporting and integrating vulnerable and marginalized groups into social life—an outcome that reflects the evolving role of CSR in the industry (Walker, Parent, 2010). Furthermore, in both countries, efforts to improve access to

education and enhance the social participation of women and girls appear to follow similar trajectories. These efforts not only align with universal human rights principles but also directly contribute to the United Nations' "leave no one behind" principle (Charway *et al.*, 2025; Masdeu Yélamos *et al.*, 2019; Mensah *et al.*, 2022; Leo *et al.*, 2018). Ultimately, these practices aim to promote social cohesion and reduce inequalities between different societal groups (United Nations, 2016).

As highlighted above, there are necessary steps to be taken and measures to be implemented to ensure the successful execution of social responsibility projects and the realization of their anticipated benefits in both countries. According to findings derived from expert opinions in Turkey and Lithuania, common recommendations for the success of social responsibility projects include increasing knowledge and awareness, securing financial resources, policymakers taking steps to establish legal frameworks, and supporting collaboration and partnerships. Additionally, in Lithuania, particular emphasis is placed on the education of youth and the exploitation of international cooperation opportunities, which stand out as distinctive considerations.

Another critical aspect is the need to support collaboration and partnerships among the public sector, private sector, and civil society organizations. Particularly in Lithuania, experts emphasize the importance of enhancing these partnerships to ensure the effective implementation of organized projects and their reach to wider audiences. They also highlight that the involvement of multiple stakeholders in projects can foster opportunities for international cooperation. Indeed, the United Nations, under SDG-17 "Global Partnerships," promotes cooperation among different countries and communities (United Nations, 2015). Through SDG-17, the UN aims to enable locally implemented social responsibility projects to reach broader populations, thereby achieving more impactful outcomes. Lithuanian experts especially underscore the significance of international collaboration, as joint projects across borders facilitate cultural exchange, knowledge sharing, and multifaceted interaction, all of which contribute to sustainable development goals (Castillo-Villar, 2020; Baur, Schmitz, 2012). Participation from diverse countries not only enhances the efficiency of social responsibility projects but also significantly supports their dissemination to larger audiences (Stanberry *et al.*, 2024).

Finally, experts in Lithuania highlight the necessity of prioritizing the education of the young population for the success of social responsibility projects. The United Nations' SDG-4 explicitly focuses on improving education quality and promoting lifelong learning (Shabalala, Ngcwangu, 2021; Unterhalter, 2019; United Nations, 2015). Lithuanian experts indicate that the main target group of social responsibility projects is the youth. Societal development and transformation are closely linked to the education of young populations in the long term, which is also crucial for achieving sustainable development goals. Therefore, raising youth awareness of social responsibility and supporting their education through such projects can pave the way for sustainable development (Ahmad *et al.*, 2023; Alasmari, 2021; Lee, 2017; Pasaribu *et al.*, 2024).

4.2. Insights in the Turkish Context: Sports and Leisure

An in-depth examination of the perspectives of sports club and federation managers, academics working in the field, and representatives of non-governmental organizations in Turkey and Lithuania reveals noteworthy differences in the conceptualization and implementation of CSR projects. In Turkey, CSR projects are often shaped by strong expectations regarding public health, environmental awareness, and social welfare—factors that have the potential to directly contribute to sustainable development. When considered in the context of both countries, it is evident that these CSR efforts have the capacity to

contribute directly to sustainable development. The divergence in these approaches may be attributed to varying societal needs, institutional priorities, and historically rooted contextual differences.

In contrast, CSR initiatives in Turkey are approached more pragmatically, with a focus on tangible and measurable contributions to sustainable development. Projects frequently emphasize public health, healthy living, and environmental awareness (Tiltay *et al.*, 2021; Özgen, 2007). Carroll (1991) similarly asserts that CSR initiatives with observable and quantifiable outcomes are socially functional and more likely to generate meaningful societal impact. When evaluating both countries, it is evident that fostering environmental awareness and encouraging social participation align with the global objectives of sustainable development, reflecting a development-oriented understanding of CSR. This orientation is also considered a key factor that directly influences both cultural and moral responsibility (Babiak, Trendafilova, 2011).

An evaluation of the perspectives of sports club and federation managers, academics working in relevant fields, and representatives of non-governmental organizations from Turkey and Lithuania regarding the most significant CSR practices implemented in their respective countries and their impact on sustainable development reveals a shared motivation: to contribute directly to sustainable development. In both countries, CSR initiatives are frequently aimed at supporting disadvantaged groups, including individuals with disabilities, women, girls, and youth. This commonality indicates that CSR efforts are not limited to financial or environmental dimensions but also encompass crucial social dimensions that align with the broader goals of sustainable development.

Increasing awareness and informational efforts regarding social responsibility is of critical importance for both countries. The successful implementation and achievement of objectives in such projects are largely contingent upon high levels of awareness among the public and project stakeholders (Carroll, 2016). Elevated knowledge and awareness within society and target groups facilitate the purpose of social responsibility initiatives, garner support, and contribute to the attainment of sustainable outcomes. Enhancing awareness about the content and goals of projects in both countries is expected to positively influence the realization of anticipated benefits during and after the implementation processes (Özdemir, 2018). In line with SDG-4, which emphasizes quality education and lifelong learning, social responsibility projects contribute to increasing awareness for sustainable development (United Nations, 2015). Carroll (1999) further asserts that increased knowledge and awareness specific to projects can play a critical role in garnering societal support and facilitating communication and engagement across broader audiences.

Another significant finding relates to the need for financial support and budget allocation in social responsibility initiatives. Insufficient resource allocation in both countries restricts the scope and impact of social responsibility practices, impeding the achievement of expected outcomes. This limitation may negatively affect the development and dissemination of social responsibility awareness and, concomitantly, hinder progress toward sustainable development goals (Heal, 2005; Hinze, Sump, 2019; Porter, Kramer, 2006; Xu *et al.*, 2020). Accordingly, the extent to which relevant projects and initiatives reach wider audiences is directly proportional to increased financial contributions from both the private sector and the government. Simultaneously, policymakers' support through legal regulations can enhance the breadth and impact of social responsibility projects (Halkos, Nomikos, 2021; Kotler, Lee, 2005; Sobczak, 2007).

In this context, it is imperative to enact necessary regulations particularly considering SDG-4 (Quality Education), SDG-8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and SDG-17 (Partnerships for the Goals) (United

Nations, 2015). In both Turkey and Lithuania, the most prominent challenge concerning social responsibility projects remains the insufficiency of financial resources. This shortfall risks diminishing the effectiveness of ongoing projects, obstructing the attainment of expected results, and potentially threatening the sustainability of social responsibility practices.

4.3. Comparative Evaluation of CSR and Sustainable Development in Lithuania and Turkey

An evaluation of the perspectives of sports club and federation managers, academics working in relevant fields, and representatives of non-governmental organizations from Turkey and Lithuania regarding the most significant CSR practices implemented in their respective countries and their impact on sustainable development reveals a shared motivation: to contribute directly to sustainable development. In both countries, CSR initiatives are frequently aimed at supporting disadvantaged groups, including individuals with disabilities, women, girls, and youth. This commonality indicates that CSR efforts are not limited to financial or environmental dimensions but also encompass crucial social dimensions that align with the broader goals of sustainable development.

Indeed, findings from both national contexts are consistent with several of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), all of which point to the direct contributions of CSR to both the overarching goals and the societal dimension of sustainable development (United Nations, 2015). As emphasized in the SDGs, CSR initiatives should not be grounded solely in environmental or financial sustainability but must also be based on values such as justice, inclusivity, and equality within societies (Doh, Guay, 2006; Scheyvens *et al.*, 2016).

Another significant finding of the study indicates that both Turkey and Lithuania face similar structural challenges in the implementation of corporate social responsibility (CSR) practices. The primary components of these challenges include inadequate public policies, limited financial resources, low levels of awareness and knowledge regarding CSR, and insufficient inter-institutional coordination. These issues can hinder the potential of CSR initiatives to contribute effectively to global sustainable development goals in both countries. For CSR projects to fulfill their intended purpose and achieve success, it is essential that the public sector, alongside private sector initiatives, assumes appropriate responsibility and actively supports such efforts. Moreover, policymakers must play a facilitative role in fostering collaboration between sectors (Yakovleva, 2022; Popescu, Ciurlău, 2023). Since CSR initiatives are generally based on voluntary participation, the lack of governmental incentives and the absence of financial and political support are perceived as critical threats to the sustainability of these projects, ultimately reducing their contribution to sustainable development (Morsing, Spence, 2019).

Although CSR practices are becoming increasingly institutionalized across European Union countries, including Lithuania, a report by the European Commission (2023) highlights that local-level cooperation, partnerships, and coordination remain weak, and financial support is considerably insufficient. In the case of Turkey, Aydın (2021) similarly notes that cooperation among public institutions, the private sector, and civil society organizations is notably limited, which in turn significantly restricts the effectiveness and impact of CSR initiatives.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically SDG-17 “Partnerships for the Goals” and SDG-16 “Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions,” emphasize the collaboration among public institutions, the private sector, and civil society organizations to generate social, economic, and

environmental outcomes (Cooper, French, 2018; Cruz, 2023; Amaruzaman *et al.*, 2022; Ramcharan, 2021). Additionally, the lack of knowledge and awareness regarding social responsibility projects is addressed under SDG-4 “Quality Education,” which aims to enhance the education and awareness of the public, particularly employees in the public and private sectors (Boeren, 2019; D’Amato *et al.*, 2022; Zuva, Zuva, 2020). Consequently, the successful implementation of social responsibility projects in both countries is directly linked to stakeholder education, increased financial support, and the expansion of collaborative partnerships. Through legal support from policymakers, provision of financial incentives, and educational initiatives aimed at raising knowledge and awareness, the effectiveness and impact of social responsibility practices can be significantly enhanced.

As highlighted above, there are necessary steps to be taken and measures to be implemented to ensure the successful execution of social responsibility projects and the realization of their anticipated benefits in both countries. According to findings derived from expert opinions in Turkey and Lithuania, common recommendations for the success of social responsibility projects include increasing knowledge and awareness, securing financial resources, policymakers taking steps to establish legal frameworks, and supporting collaboration and partnerships.

Turkey and Lithuania are countries that differ considerably in economic, social, and cultural terms. However, the findings reveal similar outcomes regarding social responsibility projects and their impact on sustainable development. Expert opinions converge on numerous points concerning the implemented projects, encountered challenges, and proposed solutions. Consequently, the proliferation and expansion of the impact of social responsibility projects—an essential factor for sustainable development goals in both countries—are inevitable. Social responsibility initiatives can substantially contribute to enhancing societal benefits, supporting the education and development of youth, and fostering societal progress and transformation.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This study aimed to reveal the social responsibility practices in Türkiye and Lithuania and their impacts on sustainable development, offering an opportunity for a comparative analysis between the two countries. According to expert opinions from both nations, it is understood that social responsibility projects in Turkey and Lithuania pursue similar goals and implement comparable activities. It is particularly evident that both countries share common concerns regarding the integration of disadvantaged groups into social life, their participation in social activities, environmental sustainability, and access to and participation in education. These findings align with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. It appears that through social responsibility projects, both countries aim to contribute to SDG-4 Quality Education, SDG-5 Gender Equality, SDG-10 Reduced Inequalities, SDG-13 Climate Action, and SDG-17 Partnerships for the Goals.

Although similarities are observed in the goals and objectives, differences exist in the implementation of projects in the two countries. In Lithuania, the understanding of social responsibility is predominantly planned around the education, development, and academic goals of young people, whereas in Turkey, practices are observed to focus on individual/societal health and environmental sustainability.

As with the goals and objectives, the barriers and challenges encountered in the implementation of social responsibility practices in both countries exhibit similarities. These issues include the lack of legal regulations, financial constraints, insufficient knowledge and awareness of responsibility, and weak cooperation and partnerships among public institutions, the private sector, and non-governmental organizations. These challenges undermine the impact of social responsibility projects on sustainable

development and hinder the achievement of their intended benefits. Experts have indicated that strengthening legal frameworks, securing adequate financial support, enhancing information dissemination and awareness, and expanding cooperation and partnerships could significantly contribute to the achievement of sustainable development goals. In line with these views, it can be stated that Türkiye requires more planned, long-term, and systematic approaches in the field of social responsibility, whereas in Lithuania, there is a significant need to transform the ethical and educational approach of social responsibility projects into more concrete and broadly participatory initiatives.

In conclusion, contributing to sustainable development through the implementation of social responsibility projects is regarded as a fundamental objective in both countries. Although the goals are similar, differences in implementation are prominent. These differences can be attributed to the distinct economic, social, and cultural structures of the two countries. Nevertheless, it can be stated that Türkiye and Lithuania have practical experiences from which they can learn through mutual exchange of knowledge and expertise. Developing and implementing joint social responsibility projects would enhance the impact and contribution of such initiatives to sustainable development.

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SOCIALINĖS ATSAKOMYBĖS PRAKTIKŲ POVEIKIS TVARIAM VYSTYMUISI SPORTO IR LAISVALAIKIO SEKTORIUOSE LIETUVOS IR TURKIJOS KONTEKSTE

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Santrauka. Šiame tyrime išskiriami sporto ir laisvalaikio industrijų sektoriai bei nagrinėjami jiems būdingi tvaraus vystymosi procesai socialinės atsakomybės praktikų ir principų kontekste. Šiame kontekste vis reikšmingesnė tapo socialinė atsakomybė, nes sporto ir laisvalaikio organizacijos vis aktyviau įgyvendina iniciatyvas, prisidedančias prie aplinkos apsaugos, bendruomenės gerovės ir etiško valdymo. Straipsnyje analizuojama socialinės įmonių atsakomybės ir tvaraus vystymosi sąveika sporto ir laisvalaikio sektoriuose Turkijoje ir Lietuvoje. Empirinė tyrimo dalis pagrįsta kokybiniais duomenimis, gautais iš pusiau struktūruotų interviu su 30 ekspertų, iš kurių 15 buvo iš Turkijos ir 15 iš Lietuvos. Tyrimo imtį sudarė sporto klubų ir federacijų vadovai, akademikai ir nevyriausybinų organizacijų socialinės atsakomybės vadovai. Duomenys buvo analizuojami taikant aprašomąją ir turinio analizę naudojant „NVivo 14“ programą. Rezultatai atskleidė, kad socialinės atsakomybės praktikos abiejose šalyse daugiausia siejamos su aplinkosauginiu sąmoningumu, sveika gyvensena, socialine įtrauktimi, bendruomenės gerove ir etišku valdymu. Tuo pačiu metu pagrindinės kliūtys yra nepakankami finansiniai ištekliai, ribotas institucinis bendradarbiavimas, žemas socialinės atsakomybės suvokimo lygis ir silpnas politinis palaikymas. Tyrime pabrėžiama, kad socialinės atsakomybės praktikos šiuose sektoriuose peržengia tradicinių organizacinių atsakomybių ribas ir apima platesnį indėlį į ekologinį tvarumą, socialinį teisingumą bei atsakingo valdymo principus. Įmonių socialinė atsakomybė prisideda prie tvaraus vystymosi ne tik per įvairią aplinkosaugos praktiką, bet ir per socialinį teisingumą, bendruomenės dalyvavimą bei įtraukią valdyseną abiejuose sektoriuose.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: socialinė atsakomybė; tvarumas; sportas; laisvalaikio sektorius.