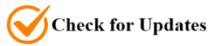


# Leave No One Behind: Social Sustainability through Sport in Local Authorities - The Case of Spor İstanbul

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**Abstract:** This study examines the contribution of Spor İstanbul Inc. to social sustainability goals through sport at the level of local authorities. Using a qualitative research design, it analyses institutional reports published between 2019 and 2025 using content analysis. The findings demonstrate that sport operates as more than a recreational activity; it functions as a strategic policy tool advancing social sustainability by fostering inclusion, health, education, and equality, directly addressing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Spor İstanbul's initiatives are particularly aligned with SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being), SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities). Operating with a public service mission rather than pursuing profit, the organisation evaluates the societal outcomes of its services through Social Return on Investment (SROI) reports. From this perspective, sport is positioned not only as physical activity but also as a strategic instrument for enhancing social well-being. By foregrounding this case, the study contributes to international debates on the governance of sport, demonstrating how municipal-level initiatives can embed social sustainability in practice and serve as models for other cities worldwide.

**Keywords:** Sustainable development, municipal subsidiaries, social benefit, social impact.

## 1. Introduction

Cities are dynamic and ever-evolving social organisms, shaped by the size of their populations, functional diversity, and administrative capacities. Serving as a crucial basis for development processes, cities are regarded by central governments as an appropriate scale for planning (Akpınar, Taşcı & Sarı, 2019). The increasing density of modern urban life underscores the importance of access to recreational spaces and sports activities, which enable urban residents to cope with everyday stress (Güler & Yaman, 2023; Uçar & Şemşit, 2019; Karaküçük & Gürbüz, 2007). The European Declaration of Urban Rights defines the right of all individuals regardless of age, ability, or income level to engage in sport and participate in recreational activities in healthy and safe environments as an international norm (Council of Europe, 2023). Hence, the availability and accessibility of sports facilities have become a significant area of urban policy. Within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) promoted by the United Nations since the 2000s (United Nations, 2015; United Nations, 2000;), sport has been recognised as playing a pivotal role in social progress and development (Triantafyllidis & Tortora, 2022; UN Sustainable Development Goals Fund, 2018; IOC, 1999). These developments have led to sport being regarded, both internationally and nationally, as a fundamental element in safeguarding urban rights and accelerating sustainable development processes. This central role of sport expands the scope and target audience of sports services provided by local authorities, particularly through municipal subsidiary companies, which take the lead in cultivating an inclusive and widely accessible sports culture.

Despite the growing international literature linking sport with social sustainability and the Sustainable Development Goals, limited attention has been paid to how municipal subsidiary companies operationalise these principles in practice in Türkiye. Most studies either address sport's contribution to sustainable urban development in general or focus on local governance dimension and leaving a gap regarding role of municipal sport organisations (Aydemir & Bayındır, 2024; Açıköz et al., 2021; Bal, 2021; Unvanlı, 2021; Kışali et al., 2021; İlgar, 2018). Spor Istanbul is chosen as the focal case not only because it is the largest municipal sports organisation in Türkiye, but also due to its distinct governance model and international recognition. Compared with other municipal subsidiaries across Europe and Türkiye, Spor Istanbul stands out for its comprehensive service provision, its established use of Social Return on Investment (SROI) reporting, and its association with major international designations such as Istanbul's status as European Capital of Culture (2010) and European Capital of Sport (2012). These elements render Spor Istanbul a compelling and representative case for analysing how local authorities utilise sport as a tool for achieving social sustainability, which also represents an important aspect of the study's original contribution to the literature.

### 1.1. Social Sustainability and Sports Services in Local Authorities

In its broadest sense, sustainability aims to meet present needs by making the most efficient use of existing resources, while ensuring that future generations can benefit from these resources in an equitable manner (World Commission on Environment and Development [WCED], 1987). Initially addressed with a focus on its environmental dimension, the concept of sustainability has, over time, been embraced along with its social and economic aspects, within an understanding that they must be "protected and developed" (Leiserowitz, Kates & Parris, 2005). In recent years, inclusive approaches such as *Doughnut Economics*, which simultaneously consider the planet's limits and human well-being, have come to the fore (Raworth, 2017). This model envisages policymaking that establishes a "safe and just space" between a lower threshold which ensures the fulfilment of humanity's basic needs, and an upper threshold that prevents environmental degradation. Within this framework, the core objectives of social sustainability include equal and inclusive access to services, the enhancement of social participation and justice, and the integration of all segments of society (particularly disadvantaged groups) into social life (UN Global Compact, n.d.). A socially sustainable system seeks to guarantee access to basic services (education, health, sport, housing, security, etc.) by promoting social justice and equality, preventing social exclusion, and ensuring a satisfactory quality of life for individuals (European Parliament, 2020). It also involves political accountability, the strengthening of democratic participation mechanisms, and the promotion of a fair distribution of income (Harris, 2003). Although there are differing perspectives in the literature on the position and objectives of social sustainability (Hellberg, 2023), it is clear that the concept is centred on human and social development. For example, Weingaertner and Moberg (2011) highlight that the understanding of sustainability varies according to context, making it difficult to formulate a single universal definition. Nonetheless, they emphasise that social sustainability focusing on issues such as social justice, equality, cultural diversity etc. while also adopting a "future-oriented" perspective that encompasses intergenerational responsibility.

The social rights, equality, and citizenship elements embedded in this framework can be reflected in the field of sport. Indeed, the "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," which entered into force in 2015, recognises sport as a tool for achieving the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations, 2015). At UNESCO's 6th International Conference of Ministers and Senior Officials Responsible for Physical Education and Sport, sport was presented as a functional vehicle for advancing ten distinct SDGs (UNESCO, 2017):

- SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being
- SDG 4: Quality Education
- SDG 5: Gender Equality
- SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth
- SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities
- SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities
- SDG 16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions

Sport is not merely a game; as highlighted by the UN Office on Sport for Development and Peace in its *Olympic Truce* initiative, it can also play a role in pausing conflicts, disputes, and even wars (United Nations, 1993). Moreover, projects such as the *UEFA Foundation for Children*, which seeks to construct a healthy future for children and combat discrimination against those displaced by war, and *Play for Equality*, which supports girls facing barriers to sports

participation, are seen as milestones that demonstrate the unifying and integrative power of sport ([UEFA Foundation for Children, n.d.](#)). In addition, the sports sector makes significant contributions to socio-economic development by fostering entrepreneurship, creating employment, and supporting the preservation of cultural heritage. The *European Urban Charter III*, -first adopted by the Council of Europe in 1992 and updated in 2008 and 2023- lists many of thematic areas in urban governance, including environment, transport, housing, security, health, sport, socio-economic opportunities, and participation in city management ([Council of Europe, 2023](#); [United Nations, 2015](#)). In this regard, sport is now used as a component of state policy designed to generate social benefit. Although sports administration in Türkiye is organised at the central level, local authorities play a crucial intermediary role in delivering and expanding sports services to the public. Within the constitutional and legal framework, local authorities are among the key institutions responsible for ensuring that sports services reach large populations and for implementing the principle of “sport for all” ([Güler & Yaman, 2023](#)). In recent years, both international sports organisations and non-partisan institutions have sought to employ the organic relationship between sport and sustainability as a policy tool. In this context, Spor Istanbul contributes to the construction of social sustainability at the local level by organising sports services in line with both its institutional capacity and vision for social inclusion. Spor Istanbul Inc. was established in 1989 as a subsidiary of the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality. According to the sources examined, the company's mission is expressed as “spreading the love and awareness of sport by promoting the habit of engaging in sports” ([Spor Istanbul, n.d.](#)). Its priorities include providing opportunities for citizens to engage in sport; enhancing social interaction between different social groups through joint sporting events; promoting a widespread sports culture; encouraging volunteer activities; and ensuring the integration of disadvantaged individuals. These actions are consistent with the United Nations’ “**Leave No One Behind**” principle and align closely with Spor Istanbul’s socially inclusive mission ([United Nations, 2015](#)).

The motivation behind this study is to go beyond the limited SDG-focused case analysis conducted by [Bozaykut and Yılmaz \(2021\)](#), to assess subsequent developments in a broader context, and to present a holistic understanding of the role of Spor Istanbul, as a municipal subsidiary, in relation to social sustainability. Accordingly, the study examines, through the case of Spor Istanbul, how social sustainability can be implemented in local government practice via sport, focusing specifically on the goals of SDG 3 (*Good Health and Well-being*), SDG 4 (*Quality Education*), SD 5 (*Gender Equality*) and SDG 10 (*Reduced Inequalities*).

## 2. Materials and Methods

### 2.1. Research Design

This study was conducted using a qualitative research design grounded in the interpretivist paradigm, aiming to contextually understand social phenomena ([Creswell & Poth, 2018](#)). Within this framework, reports directly or indirectly related to Spor Istanbul covering the period from October 2019 to May 2024 were examined ([Spor Istanbul, 2025](#); [Spor Istanbul, 2024](#); [Spor Istanbul, 2023a, 2023b](#); [Marmara Municipalities Union, 2022](#); [Spor Istanbul, 2022](#); [Spor Istanbul, 2021a, 2021b](#); [Spor Istanbul, 2020a, 2020b](#)).

**Table 1.** Documents, Reports, and Research Examined within the Scope of the Study

Year	Report Type	Content
2020	Social Impact Report	Social impact measurement for 2020, reports on social benefit and feedback from participants.
2020	Social Impact Research and Report	Additional fieldwork and in-depth evaluations alongside the 2020 social impact analysis.
2021	Social Impact Report	Updated assessments of the social impact studies conducted in 2021.
2021	Social Return on Investment Report (SROI)	Measurement of the social benefit of 2021 investments through Social Return on Investment analysis
2022	Social Impact Report	2022 Social impact results, themes of public participation and sustainability.
2022	Marmara Municipalities Union Report	Current state of local authorities focused on SDGs, awareness, capacity, policies, and best practices.
2023	Social Impact Report	Social impact activities in 2023, new projects, and areas for improvement and development.
2023	Sustainability Report 2022	2022 Environmental and social sustainability strategies, performance analysis.
2024	Sustainability Report 2023	2023 Environmental and social sustainability strategies, performance analysis.
2025	Sustainability Report 2024	2024 Environmental and social sustainability strategies, performance analysis.

In this context, Spor Istanbul's practices and social impact in the sphere of social sustainability were assessed through a holistic approach, drawing upon both quantitative indicators and qualitative insights.

## 2.2. Data Collection and Analysis Process

As the primary data collection strategy, this research adopted the document analysis method, in which secondary data are systematically examined to generate meaningful information (Bowen, 2009). For the analysis of the data, content analysis was employed to explore the themes related to social sustainability within the reports. This method is based on the thematic coding and interpretation of meaning units in written texts (Mayring, 2015).

The analysis was carried out in two stages. In the first stage, reports relevant to the study were systematically reviewed through document analysis, and policies, practices, outputs, and indicators related to social sustainability were identified. Thematic areas constituting the social dimension of sustainable development such as good health and well-being, quality education, gender equality, and reduced inequalities were taken as the basis.

In the second stage, these preliminary findings were subjected to content analysis. The content of the documents was analysed using a deductive approach (Elo & Kyngas, 2008) and categorised under pre-defined development goals focused on social sustainability. These themes were evaluated in line with statements published on Spor Istanbul's official website. The coding process relied on identifying recurring expressions and patterns within the dataset, with the relevant themes interpreted in connection with the theoretical framework.

To enhance the reliability of the research, data sources were selected exclusively from official and institutional documents. The accuracy of the findings was tested by seeking consistency across different sections and years of the documents. These approaches strengthened both the internal validity and the interpretive reliability of the study.

## 2.3. Ethical Considerations

This study did not involve the collection of any human participant data or personal information that would require ethics committee approval; instead, only publicly available documents and reports were analysed. For this reason, the research did not require ethics committee approval.

# 3. Results and Discussion

## 3.1. Spor Istanbul Inc. and Sustainability Initiatives

First of all, with globalization, cities have increasingly used mega-events as tools to attract investment, capital, and tourists, transforming themselves into centres of attraction and branding (Grix & Brannagan, 2016). Among the major events that enhance Spor Istanbul's brand value, the intercontinental Istanbul Marathon, the Bosphorus Intercontinental Swimming Race, and the internationally qualified Tour of Istanbul cycling race stand out. Additionally, inclusive sports services open to public participation across various disciplines are offered citywide in Istanbul. These include nature camps, outdoor exercises, cycling tours, summer sports courses, and similar activities catering to participants of all ages (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Images from selected events organised by Spor Istanbul (Source: Spor Istanbul, n.d.)

In addition, within the framework of cooperation with non-governmental organisations, actions are supported in areas such as education, health, animal rights, and search and rescue, aimed at fostering social unity and cohesion. Therefore, the institution's purpose is not limited to promoting sport; it also encompasses multidimensional goals that enhance the quality of social life, such as strengthening inclusive and accessible social impact, focusing on the local community, and contributing to social benefit. It organizes these activities through sports and educational competitions, exhibitions, excursions, conferences, festivals and courses in municipal sports halls.

On its official website, Spor Istanbul presents its sustainability initiatives in chronological order, as shown in the table below (Spor Istanbul, n.d.).

**Table 2.** Milestones of Spor Istanbul's sustainability development

Date	Milestones
2020 (February)	The Change Theory was established.
2021 (October)	The Sustainability Committee was established.
2022 (September)	Spor Istanbul became a signatory to the United Nations Global Compact.
2023 (May)	The 2022 Sustainability Report was published.
2023 (May)	Spor Istanbul became a signatory to the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs).
2023 (August)	The Sustainability Committee convened.
2024 (May)	The 2023 Sustainability Report was published.
2025 (August)	The 2024 Sustainability Report was published.

Spor Istanbul established a sustainability committee in 2021, bringing together individuals from different professional disciplines. In 2022, it became an active participant in the United Nations Global Compact (UN Global Compact, 2024). Within the framework of this agreement, it has declared its commitment to adhering to, and reporting on, the ten universal principles defined under the headings of environment, human rights, labour standards, and anti-corruption. In parallel, the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality is among the signatories of the "2020 Deadline" agreement (C40 Cities, n.d.). Consequently, the environmental and economic sustainability policies implemented by the Istanbul city administration directly guide the actions of Spor Istanbul. In this context, SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 13 (Climate Action) are also to be associated with its core activities (Spor Istanbul, n.d.).



**Figure 2.** Key SDG focus areas of Spor Istanbul Inc.

Spor Istanbul's primary field of activity is sport; however, its initiatives for the social integration of disadvantaged individuals, the promotion of a culture of volunteering through sport, the advancement of gender equality, efforts to bring together different social groups, and the implementation of international collaborations all point to an organisation centred on social sustainability. Accordingly, under thematic headings, how certain Sustainable Development Goals relevant to the social dimension of sustainability are implemented within Spor Istanbul.

### 3.2. SDG-3: Good Health and Well-being

The third of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, “Good Health and Well-being”, is directly related to the contribution of sport and physical activity to public health. As clearly emphasised in the UN 2030 Agenda, sport promotes health at both individual and societal levels ([UN Sustainable Development Goals Fund, 2018](#)). Spor Istanbul’s sustainability reports focus on increasing beneficiaries’ exercise habits, improving their physical and mental health, and supporting the physical and psychosocial development of disadvantaged individuals ([Spor Istanbul, 2024](#)).

Spor Istanbul’s multidimensional activities serve not only to promote mass participation in sport and to improve community health, but also to generate long-term impacts for society. At this point, the concept of “social impact” comes to the fore; the organisation’s services must be analysed not only in terms of the number and diversity of participants, but also in terms of the social, environmental, and economic value they create. Social Return on Investment (SROI) is a framework for measuring the value of the social, environmental, and economic outcomes produced by an organisation’s activities. According to the SROI report published in 2021, Spor Istanbul defines itself as a “preventive health institution” ([Spor Istanbul, 2021b](#)). In this context, the organisation focuses on its primary mission of promoting mass participation in sport. A survey conducted during the preparation of the report revealed that 74.8% of Istanbul’s residents either do not participate in sport at all or do not do so regularly. According to the most up-to-date World Health Organisation regional data from 2022, the population of Istanbul is 26% younger on average than that of Europe, yet unfortunately ranks first in obesity rates ([World Health Organisation \[WHO\], 2022](#)). These findings illustrate the extent to which Spor Istanbul works with a social benefit orientation in pursuing its goal of fostering healthy individuals through sport, and in defining itself as a preventative health institution.

In conclusion, the initiatives undertaken within the framework of SDG 3 enable the spread of a healthy lifestyle culture at not only the individual but also the societal level, thereby strengthening the public service function of sport as one of the cornerstones of sustainable development.

### 3.3. SDG-4: Quality Education

The fourth of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, “Quality Education”, aims to ensure inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all, and to promote lifelong learning opportunities ([Lemke, 2016](#)). The United Nations and its affiliated bodies emphasise that physical education and sport are fundamental components of inclusive and quality education, and are directly linked to the achievement of this goal ([United Nations, 2016](#)). [UNESCO \(2019\)](#) defines sport as a tool capable of involving children and young people in both formal and non-formal educational settings through innovative, holistic, and participatory approaches that differ from traditional teaching methods. In particular, the *Kazan Action Plan* and the *2030 Agenda* stress that quality physical education and sport are fundamental right and core educational outcome for children’s development. [UNESCO \(2017\)](#) highlights the following impacts of sport in education:

- Reduces absenteeism in formal education and increases student motivation.
- Develops life skills such as teamwork, leadership, self-discipline, and empathy.
- Facilitates the integration of children with disabilities and disadvantaged children into education.
- Encourages out-of-school learning and lifelong learning.
- Contributes to the elimination of gender inequalities through inclusive and equitable programmes.

An examination of Spor Istanbul’s action plans and social impact reports indicates a consistent upward trend in inclusivity, participation, and social impact in education from 2020 to 2025.

- Inclusive, interdisciplinary, and socially beneficial educational models have been adopted in both schools and out-of-school environments.
- Educational opportunity equality and lifelong learning opportunities have improved both quantitatively and substantively.
- Children with disabilities, girls, and individuals from different socio-economic backgrounds have been integrated into education through sport.
- Achievements in areas such as educator development, volunteering, and social learning have shown steady improvement.

Within the scope of Quality Education, Spor Istanbul offers open, accessible, and inclusive educational environments not only for children and young people but for all members of society, progressing in an integrated manner with social, physical, and cultural development. The reports, backed by official data, document steady quantitative increases, strengthened inclusivity, and tangible achievements in educational equality. Clearly, the positive effects of sport extend beyond the educational process to bolster social participation and sustainable lifestyle habits. Indeed, the sub-goal of ensuring access to sport and education regardless of gender demonstrates that gender equality policy has been adopted as a linked objective and that actions are being aligned accordingly ([Council of Europe, n.d.](#)).

### 3.4. SDG-5: Gender Equality

Sport stands out as a strategic tool in supporting gender equality and empowering women. In relation to the fifth United Nations Sustainable Development Goal, “Gender Equality”, it is emphasised that regular participation in sport and physical activity enables women and girls to strengthen not only physically but also psychosocially ([United Nations, 2016](#)). Women’s active participation in sport constitutes a structural challenge to traditional gender norms and stereotypical roles ([Engin, 2024](#); [UNESCO, 2017](#)), while also contributing to participants’ self-esteem and self-confidence ([UN Women, 2021](#); [Hayhurst, 2013](#)). Moreover, sports environments can foster gender awareness among male participants ([Meyer and Roche, 2017](#)), thus laying the groundwork for building fairer and more inclusive social relations ([Chong et al., 2022](#); [Dudfield & Dingwall-Smith, 2015](#)).

In 2023, Spor Istanbul became a signatory to the United Nations Women’s Empowerment Principles, thereby committing to take steps towards the development of company policies that promote gender equality. An examination of sustainability reports ([Spor Istanbul, 2024](#); [Spor Istanbul, 2023b](#)) reveals a range of multidimensional actions undertaken in line with the gender equality goal: increasing women’s participation in sport; providing opportunities for female trainers and managers; improving access to sports services for women with disabilities and those from disadvantaged backgrounds; supporting the inclusion of girls in sport; promoting women’s volunteering; and raising public awareness through a women-focused inclusive communication approach. It has also been observed that regular policy updates are carried out to ensure greater female representation in managerial positions ([Spor Istanbul, 2023a](#); [Spor Istanbul, 2022](#)).

### 3.5. SDG-10: Reduced Inequalities

The tenth United Nations Sustainable Development Goal, “Reduced Inequalities”, seeks to reduce structural inequalities based on factors such as gender, age, disability, ethnicity, and income ([United Nations, 2015](#)). Its central motto, “**Leave No One Behind**”, is noteworthy. Prior to the adoption of the SDGs, the [European Commission \(2007\)](#) highlighted the potential of sport to support the social integration of disadvantaged groups, promote social cohesion, and provide equal opportunities by fostering participation across all segments of society. Through accessible sports facilities, low-cost events, and inclusive sports policies, sport can be a means of combating discrimination and enhancing psychosocial well-being. In 2015, the principle of reducing inequalities was adopted as one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, with an emphasis on sport’s unifying role.

In this context, local authorities’ investments in inclusive sports infrastructure and the implementation of projects specifically designed for vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities, women, and migrants contribute to equitable growth and ensure that no segment of society is left behind ([United Nations, 2015](#)). For residents of cities, the primary functions of local authorities in this area are to develop mechanisms that guarantee the equitable provision of opportunities and resources to all segments of society, to foster multi-stakeholder governance and participation, and to design context-specific models responsive to local needs ([Güler & Yaman, 2023](#)).

Spor Istanbul is a municipal subsidiary, structurally affiliated with local government. Constitutional duties assigned to municipalities such as creating healthy living environments and enhancing public well-being are fulfilled through this organisation, funded by the municipal budget and partnerships (including sponsorships). Consequently, Spor Istanbul’s activities are distinct from the profit-driven motives of private sports organisations. Moreover, as the activities of such organisations are subject to the oversight and supervision of relevant local authority committees, they also constitute a domain of public service for the political party governing the municipality. The organisational structure and scope of activities of Spor Istanbul are therefore situated on both public and political grounds, serving the fulfilment of citizens’ constitutional rights as well as the pursuit of political advantages ([Atali, 2019](#)).

With regard to reducing inequalities, Spor Istanbul offers free or low-cost programmes that facilitate access to sport for children, women, persons with disabilities, and socio-economically disadvantaged groups; strengthens community participation through sports schools, outdoor exercise sessions, and volunteering projects. Social Impact Reports indicate that beneficiaries' participation in sport has contributed to feeling healthier and better in their daily lives, while also improving their social relationships (Spor Istanbul, 2022) and increasing their sense of social belonging and self-esteem (Spor Istanbul, 2023a). In addition, the number of facilities adapted for accessibility by persons with disabilities has been shown to increase each year. The findings also show that through its sports schools, Spor Istanbul plays an influential role in initiating children into sports (Spor Istanbul, 2024). An examination of SROI analysis results shows that, given the majority of beneficiaries belong to economically disadvantaged groups, the social value multiplier's societal impact dimension is high.

To sum up, this holistic approach aligns both with the principle of equality in service provision upheld by local authorities and with the broader goal of generating social benefit enshrined in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

#### 4. Conclusions

This study has clearly demonstrated that the social dimension of sustainability plays a key role in advancing the other dimensions of sustainable development, particularly in terms of fostering individual development and establishing social justice. From this perspective, sport is positioned not only as physical activity but also as a strategic instrument for enhancing social well-being. The analysis conducted through the case of Spor Istanbul shows that making public sports services provided by local authorities accessible to all segments of society generates significant physical, social, and psychosocial benefits for disadvantaged groups especially women, children, persons with disabilities, and low-income individuals. The findings reveal that sport is a driver of social sustainability, directly contributing to gender equality, strengthened social cohesion, and the establishment of equal opportunities. In particular, low-cost/free sports opportunities, volunteering projects, and investments in accessible facilities have been found to be effective in reaching groups at risk of marginalisation and in contributing to the achievement of SDG 3 (*Good Health and Well-being*), SDG 4 (*Quality Education*), SDG 5 (*Gender Equality*), and SDG 10 (*Reduced Inequalities*).

Viewed holistically, Spor Istanbul emerges as a pioneering model in focusing on the social dimension of sustainability and contributing to the Sustainable Development Goals in Türkiye through sport. In highlighting this case, the study contributes to international debates on the governance of sport, demonstrating how municipal-level initiatives can embed social sustainability in practice and serve as models for other cities worldwide. It also aligns with the shared vision of the United Nations and the IOC in using sport as a tool for development and in upholding the “**Leave No One Behind**” principle.

Accordingly, the following recommendations are proposed for local authorities and policymakers:

- The successful social sustainability practices of Spor Istanbul should be promoted for wider adoption by other metropolitan municipalities through the development of comprehensive collaboration mechanisms. These mechanisms could include regular inter-municipal meetings for knowledge and experience exchange, joint projects, and structural arrangements for resource sharing. Such approaches would facilitate the adaptation of effective practices to diverse urban contexts, thereby enhancing social inclusion and community participation.
- Regular social impact analyses, such as Social Return on Investment (SROI) assessments, alongside comprehensive satisfaction surveys, should be systematically conducted to ensure that sports services remain current, inclusive, and effectively responsive to the evolving needs of diverse community groups. These assessments can enable policymakers and local governments to dynamically adapt strategies and maximize positive social outcomes.

#### Limitations

This study is limited to the objectives, targets, and findings presented in the relevant reports. It does not cover activities outside the time period of the reports, nor does it consider changes in Spor Istanbul's objectives and goals during the

course of implementation. Furthermore, the focus on social sustainability is confined to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 3, 4, 5, and 10, which constitutes another limitation.

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