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MAKING THE CASE FOR SUSTAINABILITY





INTRODUCTION

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The universality and global appeal of sport means that the IOC and the Olympic Movement have a special responsibility to promote a sustainable future for our world. (IOC Sustainability Report, 2018)

- The world has changed and is constantly changing. As an integral part of society, sports organisations too are facing major challenges such as climate change, loss of biodiversity or growing social inequalities and injustice, and at the same time, have at their disposal many new tools, (technical) possibilities, and innovative solutions.
- If we are to remain relevant in the future and keep fulfilling our role, we cannot continue to act in the same way. It's a matter of "change or be changed".
- The credibility of our organisations could soon be put at stake. We will not be criticised for trying to change our ways of doing things, or for trying to implement sustainability. "The worst course of action would be to do nothing and pretend it does not matter" ([IOC Sustainability Essentials: Introduction](#)).
- We have the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#), [Olympic Agenda 2020+5](#), [Olympic Charter](#), and the statutes of our respective organisations to base our approach on; we have the International Olympic Committee and the Olympic family to support us so that we can in turn support them to grow together as one movement, to keep making the world a better place through sport.
- Sustainability is increasingly becoming a key determinant of our organisations' image, brand and reputation among our stakeholders – athletes, participants, fans, sponsors or public authorities - who all have increasing expectations:
 - 75% of sports fans have an increased interest in brands who have shown themselves to be socially responsible ([Nielsen in sustainability.sport](#)).
 - Top athletes have grown increasingly vocal about social and environmental issues and demand that sports organisations follow suit (e.g. [Protect our Winters](#), [Big Plastic Pledge](#), [EcoAthletes](#), [Champions for Earth](#), COP 26 – [#DearLeadersOfTheWord](#) etc.)
 - "It's no longer a case of whoever pays the most money gets the biggest billboard or the most lucrative logo placement. We're starting to see brands unwilling to work with (and fans unwilling to support) organisations who are seen as untrustworthy when it comes to climate change, diversity, and inequality. For sports brands who don't prioritise ESG, the game could almost be up." ([Jonquil Hackenberg, in Forbes](#))





Sustainability is now a given; it is no longer an option. It should be seen as an opportunity, rather than a constraint. However, to be able to seize this opportunity properly, sustainability needs to be embedded in everything our organisations do, on every level, in every decision; it cannot be treated as a short-term, one-off matter. In other words, our organisations need a comprehensive sustainability strategy.

True sustainability goes much further than individual projects. It is about looking closely at what we do as organisations, the way we interact with society at large, and ensuring we have appropriate governance structures, policies and processes in place that will secure our long-term future for the benefit of our organisation, society and the environment ([IOC Sustainability Essentials: Introduction](#))

BENEFITS AND OPPORTUNITIES

**FOR SPORTS ORGANISATIONS
OF “GOING SUSTAINABLE”**



BENEFITS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR SPORTS ORGANISATIONS OF “GOING SUSTAINABLE”¹



BEING TRUE TO THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES OF OLYMPISM – WALKING THE TALK

- Olympic movement organisations are bound by the Olympic Charter. Fundamental principles of Olympism, including “social responsibility and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles” should be enshrined not just in the letter but, more importantly, in the way our organisations operate and deal with their everyday business.
- It means that we should strive to be responsible and accountable and seek to maximise positive impacts and minimise negative impacts in social, economic and environmental spheres.
- “Building a better world through sport” is not just through communications, but through everyday actions and through every aspect of our operations.



BEING FIT FOR FUTURE

- Sustainability is closely linked with the capacity of our organisations to innovate and remain agile in a rapidly changing environment. Therefore, sustainability leads the way towards continued relevance, impact, and appeal across generations.

- Besides the ability to adapt to changes in the physical environment or in rules and regulations, sustainable sports organisations will be better able to embrace, adapt to, and seize the opportunities presented by new trends in sport such as on-demand consumption, hybrid/digital sport experiences or the rise in popularity of urban sports.



INCREASED RESILIENCE

- By identifying the risks and (climate) vulnerabilities, preparing strategies to tackle them, and implementing those strategies when needed, our organisation will become more resilient and more effective in dealing with (future) environmental and social developments, including health crises such as the COVID-19 pandemics.
- Indeed, sports organisations depend on a healthy biosphere and stable climate for the very existence of their activities and events. By protecting the environment, and actively contributing to the mitigation of, and adaptation to climate change, sports organisation will not only do what is “right” and what contributes to the wellbeing of people and the planet but will also actively steer the development of their own sports and events.



OPTIMISED TALENT

- Sustainable organisations are open, diverse and inclusive. This allows people from different backgrounds, genders and abilities to contribute more effectively and bring new perspectives and ideas, which in turn can generate a sense of engagement, greater motivation and even pride.
- Harnessing and empowering collective talent is probably the most tangible way of securing the opportunities and benefits of adopting sustainability ([IOC Sustainability Essentials: Introduction](#)).
- The impact of diversity and gender equality in management, governance and staff on the image and reputation of an organisation and on the generation of profit (business sector) has been widely researched and recognised. Significant research has shown, for example, that diverse teams can develop more innovative ideas (i.e. when people from different contexts work together, their unique perspectives often lead to greater creativity) and that a diverse workforce signals an attractive work environment for talent ([Harvard Business Review](#))



ENHANCED IMAGE, REPUTATION, and CREDIBILITY

- “Going sustainable” has the potential to change how an organisation is seen and what impact it has on its community. Achieving credible recognition for sustainability is a key part of building a level of acceptance and trust among stakeholders.

- The image of sport has been badly tarnished in recent years in relation to highly-publicised cases of match fixing, doping, corruption, excessive costs etc. In the majority of cases, sustainability will not make those issues go away, but it is part of the solution and supports good governance, accountability and transparency, which are vital for securing public approval.

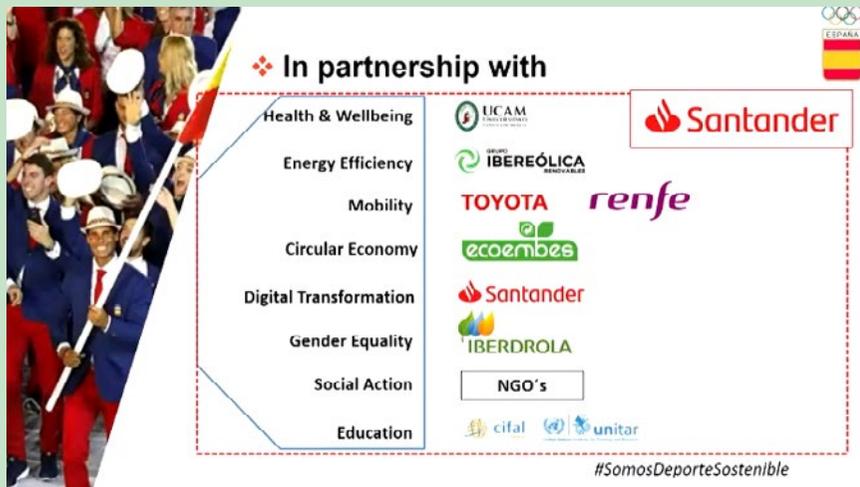


REVENUE GENERATION AND ENHANCED PARTNERSHIPS

- Commercial sponsors are attracted to organisations that complement their brand identity. As the private sector gradually takes up sustainability and aligns its operations with SDGs, it seeks partners who “speak the same language” and “walk the same talk” to activate their brands. “Going sustainable” can thus open the doors for new/enhanced partnerships and new ways of working with partners.
- Furthermore, innovative forms of funding and investment (e.g. public-private funding models, impact investment etc.) are often linked to sustainability performance/projects and can therefore be better unlocked by organisations with (strong) sustainability credentials.
- Showing to government/public institutions that we are leading the way can not only improve current relationships and help build new contacts with sustainability-related public institutions/ministries but, at the same time, can also unlock new avenues for public funding (national, regional, municipal, EU).

- “Going sustainable” can also help establishing (new) partnerships and cooperation arrangements with various NGOs active in the fields of environmental protection, circular economy, human and social rights etc. The possible synergies can bring clear benefits not only to the respective organisations, but also to local communities and society at large.
- In general, sustainability should not be seen as a “cost centre”, but as a revenue generation and partnership building opportunity.

- Spanish Olympic Committee has adopted a sustainability strategy based on creating new partnerships and enhancing the current ones with the view to implementing a number of SDGs.
- The new partnerships not only allow the NOC to implement its sustainability initiatives by creating new revenue streams, but also help them develop the organisation in general and boost its image and brand.



ANOC GA 2021, Manuel Parga, Marketing Director, Spanish NOC



COST SAVINGS

- “Going sustainable” can bring direct savings and efficiencies in resource consumption (energy, fuel, water and consumables), minimise waste, and optimise the lifetime value of goods and materials through effective sourcing and re-use strategies. *“Planning, design and permission processes will work more smoothly and cost-effectively with a strong sustainability focus, while risks from pollution incidents, fines, protests, complaints and allegations can also be mitigated more effectively”* ([IOC Sustainability Essentials: Introduction](#)).
- Through a green office audit and subsequent improvement of internal processes, sport organisations can make substantial savings on energy consumption or waste management as shows the example of the [International Equestrian Federation](#).





Ultimately, integrating sustainability into their operations, events and projects in a strategic manner will help sports organisations become more agile, resilient, effective, and better able to respond to (future) risks, changes, and challenges.

Competition for limited resources is increasingly leading to conflict, climate action is at a tipping point, and the interdependency between healthy people and a healthy planet is unmistakable. Amidst this evidence, sport has been recognised as an important enabler of sustainable development. We have the opportunity to make a real difference through our contribution to the UN Sustainable Development Goals ([Olympic Agenda 2020+5](#)).

POSSIBLE RISKS AND CHALLENGES

CAUSED BY NON-ACTION



POSSIBLE RISKS AND CHALLENGES CAUSED BY NON-ACTION²



PUTTING THE CORE OF SPORT (AND ATHLETES) AT RISK

- An increasing number of sports and sporting events are directly affected by:
 - **Climate change, loss of biodiversity, and pollution** – e.g. damage to playing surfaces due to extreme temperatures, extended periods of drought or flooding; damage to buildings and other infrastructure due to violent storms; coastal erosion and rising sea level directly affecting sports properties in seaside areas; warmer winters and lack of natural snow threatening ski resorts at lower altitudes; unseasonal rainfall forcing cancellation or abandonment of sport matches ([Game Changer report](#)); heat waves forcing changes to timing of sport events; increased injuries to players from heat exhaustion and impact injuries from harder playing surfaces etc.
 - **Societal changes and challenges** - increasing overweight and obesity rates, increasing challenges to mental health and psychosocial well-being, an increasing array of other types of entertainment, changing viewers and consumers' preferences, increasing economic inequality etc.
 - **Economic challenges** – increasing energy prices and inflation, overreliance on public funding and the risk of cuts, sponsors shifting to other sectors/organisations etc.
- The inability to mitigate and adapt to these changes may result in a greater risk to the very existence of many sports and sport events, including the

growing unavailability of appropriate locations or increasing health risks for athletes, participants and fans.



LOSING RELEVANCE AND APPEAL (TO YOUNG PEOPLE)

- According to a recent [Amnesty International](#) survey of 10 000 people aged 18-25 in 22 countries around the world, climate change is their most pressing concern; the most important issue facing the world.
- This is reflected in youth activism (e.g. Fridays for Future, Extinction Rebellion, Greta Thunberg's activities), but also in consumer choices and in what and whom young people (including athletes) support and follow.
- If sports organisations and their activities are at odds with the beliefs and concerns of young people (regarding climate and the environment, social justice, gender equality etc.), they will turn to other organisations, and possibly to different (non-sport) activities altogether.



UNDERMINING, AND POSSIBLY LOSING, TALENT

- The inability to meet the needs of the staff (including the lack of clear career pathways or training and education possibilities etc.) can create dissatisfaction leading to significant staff turnover.

- The absence of clear guidelines, code of conduct, ethical guides etc. and/or non-compliance with such internal rules, can lead to the inability of the organisation to (efficiently and justly) deal with any misconduct and unethical behaviour leading to the risk of, among other things, damaged reputation, negatively impacted organisational culture, loss of people and talent, or even legal repercussions.



DAMAGING REPUTATION

- Difficulty in attracting sponsors – no longer speaking “the same language”, no longer representing the same values and priorities.
 - Becoming at odds with the Agenda 2020+5 and the Olympic Movement’s societal and environmental obligations and its mission.
- Major sponsors of US Soccer including Coca-Cola, Budweiser and Visa have condemned the federation and demanded meetings after the group’s lawyers argued women players on the national team should not be paid the same as men because they are not as skilled and work less-demanding jobs.
 - Football clubs/teams (e.g. Arsenal, German national team) were heavily criticised for flying to nearby cities (2h by train in both cases) for their matches.



GOVERNMENTAL PRESSURE AND LEGAL COMPLIANCE RISKS

- Changing due to external pressure, according to “external” rules, i.e. “being changed”.
- If left too long, the response to government pressure will have to be very fast – no time to adjust in the way our organisations would want to.
- Inability to influence the implementation of policies or legislation.
- Risk of non-compliance with (future) public funding rules. In some countries, the disbursement of (a part of) public funding to sports organisations is already now subject to their compliance with good governance and sustainability criteria.
- Lack of sustainability in economic terms and the overreliance on public funding can present a risk in itself as in some territories, changes of and within, governments can lead to unforeseen (negative) changes to public funding of sport organisations.





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