



Department of Sport Sciences

Course
Sport Governance – From Local to International Level
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**Sport Governance in European Football,
A Comparative Analysis of SvFF and
UEFA**

*Sportstyrning inom Europeisk Fotboll, En Jämförande Analys av
SvFF och UEFA*

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Introduction

« Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely » (Acton, 1887). As we all know, Football is one of the most powerful and economically influential industries in modern sport in the world. The decisions about how the game is organised, regulated and commercialised are increasingly taken by governing bodies operating far beyond the pitch. This structure creates important challenges in terms of transparency, accountability, democracy and social responsibility, which are central to contemporary debates on sport governance.

For my project, I will analyse and compare two key organisations within European football governance, the Svenska Fotbollförbundet (SvFF), the national governing body of football in Sweden, and UEFA, the continental governing organisation for European football. These two organisations are directly connected, as SvFF is a member association of UEFA and is therefore subject to UEFA's regulations, licensing systems, and competition requirements.

While the main focus of my analysis will be on SvFF and UEFA, it is also important to acknowledge the role of Swedish Elite Football (SEF) within the Swedish football system.

Indeed, SEF represents professional clubs in Sweden and acts then as an intermediary between club football, the national federation, and European-level requirements. Although I won't analyse SEF as a separate case, recognising its role helped me to better understand how the governance operates in practice across the different levels.

The purpose of this paper will be to examine how SvFF and UEFA perform in relation to the key principles of good governance, transparency, accountability, democratic processes, and responsibility and solidarity. In addition to that my analysis will consider how both organisations relate to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in terms of inclusion, equality, institutional integrity and sustainability.

By comparing a national football federation and a continental governing body, in this study I aim to show how governance challenges, power relations and responsibilities evolve across levels of the football system. The central question guiding my analysis is therefore: How do differences in governance structures between SvFF and UEFA affect democratic legitimacy, accountability and social responsibility within European football?

Analytical framework

Good governance is then the main analytical framework for my project in order to examine how these football organisations are structured, controlled and held accountable. Rather than focusing on sporting or economic performance, good governance is about how decisions are made, who has influence, and how power is exercised and constrained within sport organisations.

Good governance can be defined as « the clarification of the overall picture of the relationships between different organisations, between different levels within organisations and between organisations and their members, as well as the methods and instruments used to sustain these relationships in an ethical manner » (Persson, 2013). With this definition, we can see that governance is not limited to formal structures, but also concerns the relationships, mechanisms and ethical principles through which authority is exercised.

For my analysis, I used the four key dimensions of good governance from Playthegame.org :

- Transparency and public communication, referring to the extent to which organisational structures, rules and decision-making processes are visible and understandable to stakeholders.
- Accountability, which concerns the mechanisms through which decision-makers can be monitored, questioned and sanctioned, both internally and externally.

- Democratic processes, focusing on how stakeholders are represented, how decisions are taken, and whether leadership is selected through inclusive and legitimate procedures.
- Responsibility and solidarity, relating to how organisations recognise their broader social role, distribute resources, and contribute to inclusion and fairness within the football system.

In addition to good governance, I will use the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a complementary analytical perspective. They are not proper governance principles, but rather a framework for examining the social and societal outcomes of governance structures.

Therefore, the SDGs will be used to examine how governance arrangements within SvFF and UEFA translate into practices related to inclusion, equality, institutional integrity and sustainability. It will also be interesting to check how differences in governance structures at the national and continental levels shape the scope and credibility of SDG-related engagement.

SvFF Analysis

Transparency and public communication :

Transparency within SvFF is primarily oriented towards its members, including regional associations and affiliated clubs. Key governance documents such as statutes, regulations and organisational structures are publicly available, allowing stakeholders to understand how decision-making is structured. Also, informations related to elections, assemblies and policy decisions are communicated through official channels, reinforcing openness within the organisation.

This level of transparency reflects the Swedish tradition of openness in public and voluntary organisations. However, transparency is not only about access to information, but also about its

accessibility. While formal documentation is available, understanding complex regulatory frameworks may still require a certain level of institutional knowledge, which can limit transparency for less engaged stakeholders.

3.2 Accountability :

SvFF's accountability mechanisms are closely linked to its democratic structure. The organisation is accountable to its members through the General Assembly, which serves as the highest decision-making body. Leadership positions are subject to election, and decision-makers can be questioned or replaced through formal democratic procedures.

In addition to internal accountability, SvFF is subject to external forms of control. As a member of UEFA, it must comply with European regulations, licensing systems and ethical standards.

This dual accountability illustrates how national federations operate under both domestic democratic expectations and international governance requirements.

3.3 Democratic processes :

Democratic processes form a central pillar of SvFF's governance. Decision-making authority is ultimately derived from its members, with clubs and regional associations participating in the governance structure through representation and voting rights. Elections are held at regular intervals, and major decisions are taken collectively through formal procedures.

This system creates a strong sense of democratic legitimacy, as governance authority is rooted in participation and representation. At the same time, democratic decision-making can be time-consuming and consensus-driven, which may limit efficiency in certain situations. Nevertheless,

from a governance perspective, this trade-off reflects a deliberate prioritisation of legitimacy over speed.

3.4 Responsibility and solidarity :

SvFF places significant emphasis on its broader social responsibility. The organisation actively supports grassroots football, inclusion initiatives and equality-oriented programmes, reflecting its role not only as a regulator but also as a societal actor. These priorities are consistent with broader objectives related to participation, fairness and long-term development of the sport. Responsibility and solidarity are therefore embedded in SvFF's governance model rather than treated as separate policy areas. This integration highlights how governance structures influence the organisation's capacity to contribute to social goals, including those aligned with the SDGs, particularly in relation to inclusion and equality.

Taken together, these good governance characteristics illustrate how the SvFF operates as a member-based federation within a multi-level governance system, where democratic legitimacy is primarily built through proximity to members, but also while regulatory obligations are increasingly shaped by European-level requirements.

UEFA Analysis

Transparency and public communication :

UEFA demonstrates a high level of formal transparency through the publication of statutes, regulations, governance structures and financial reports. These documents outline the roles of

key bodies such as the UEFA Congress, the Executive Committee and various standing committees, providing an official overview of how decisions are structured.

However, transparency at the UEFA level is strongly shaped by organisational complexity.

While information is publicly available, its accessibility for non-expert stakeholders remains limited. Understanding how decisions are made in practice often requires substantial institutional knowledge, which can reduce the practical transparency experienced by clubs, players and supporters.

Accountability :

Accountability within UEFA is primarily ensured through formal and legal mechanisms. The organisation relies on internal audit structures, ethics and disciplinary bodies, and compliance procedures designed to monitor behaviour and decision-making. In addition, decisions taken by UEFA can be challenged externally through the Court of Arbitration for Sport, reinforcing legal accountability.

Compared to national federations, UEFA's accountability is therefore less rooted in direct democratic control and more dependent on procedural and juridical oversight. This reflects the organisation's transnational character, where traditional member-based accountability mechanisms are more difficult to apply consistently.

Democratic processes :

Democratic processes within UEFA are mainly exercised through the UEFA Congress, where national football associations are represented and vote on key decisions, including leadership

elections and statutory changes. This system provides formal democratic legitimacy at the level of member associations.

At the same time, democratic participation at UEFA operates through indirect representation. Clubs, players and supporters do not participate directly in decision-making, but are represented through their national associations. This creates a greater institutional distance between decision-makers and grassroots stakeholders, raising questions about democratic proximity and inclusiveness at the continental level.

Responsibility and solidarity :

UEFA's responsibility and solidarity are largely expressed through redistribution mechanisms and structured social initiatives. Revenue generated from elite competitions is redistributed to national associations and clubs, supporting football development across Europe. In addition, UEFA engages in social and sustainability-related programmes, including initiatives aligned with environmental responsibility and broader societal goals.

However, these responsibilities coexist with a strong commercial environment. UEFA's governance decisions are closely linked to media rights, elite competitions and financial growth, which can create tensions between social responsibility, economic efficiency and democratic legitimacy.

Overall, these characteristics show how UEFA builds legitimacy primarily through regulatory authority, formal accountability mechanisms and redistribution, while democratic participation is exercised indirectly and shaped by organisational scale and commercial power.

Comparative Analysis

A first major difference I have observed concerns the sources of governance legitimacy. SvFF primarily derives its legitimacy from member proximity and democratic participation. Decision-making authority is rooted in clubs and regional associations, and leadership is legitimised through elections and collective decision-making processes. This creates a governance model where legitimacy is closely tied to representation and participation.

UEFA mainly builds legitimacy through regulatory authority and functional performance. Its legitimacy is closely linked to its capacity to organise major competitions, enforce regulations and redistribute resources across Europe. While democratic procedures exist through the UEFA Congress, legitimacy is less based on proximity and more on the organisation's ability to govern a complex and commercially powerful football system.

The comparison also reveals distinct accountability mechanisms. Indeed, SvFF relies largely on democratic accountability, where leaders are answerable to members and can be challenged or replaced through formal internal procedures. Accountability is therefore closely connected to participation and representation.

UEFA, on the other hand, depends more heavily on formal, procedural and legal accountability. Audit structures, ethics bodies and external arbitration mechanisms play a central role in controlling decision-making. While these mechanisms provide oversight, they operate at a greater distance from grassroots stakeholders.

This shift from democratic to legal accountability reflects how governance mechanisms evolve as organisations operate across broader and more heterogeneous contexts.

Finally, I have noticed how governance tensions increase with power and commercialisation, because SvFF's governance is primarily oriented towards serving its members and supporting football development within a national context, with some commercial considerations existing but remaining secondary compared to the UEFA who operates in a highly commercialised environment, where governance decisions are closely linked to media rights, elite competitions and financial redistribution. This concentration of economic power amplifies governance challenges, particularly in balancing efficiency, accountability and democratic legitimacy.

SDGs Perspective

What I mainly realized while studying these two organisations is that the SDGs are approached as governance-related outcomes, whose credibility and effectiveness depend on organisational design, accountability mechanisms and decision-making processes.

In the case of the SvFF, engagement with the SDGs is largely integrated in core governance practices rather than articulated through explicit SDG strategies. SvFF's focus on grassroots football, inclusion, equality and participation contributes indirectly to several SDGs, particularly SDG 5, « Gender Equality », SDG 10, « Reduced Inequalities », and SDG 16 « Strong Institutions ».

These contributions are closely linked to SvFF's governance model with a decision-making that is member-based and democratically structured. Social priorities tend to reflect collective values within the Swedish football community rather than top-down strategic commitments. In this sense, SDG-related outcomes emerge as a consequence of governance choices rather than as externally defined policy goals. However, this implicit approach can also limit visibility and external evaluation because while social responsibility is integrated into practice, it is not always

framed in terms of measurable SDG targets, which can reduce transparency regarding the impact.

At the continental level, the UEFA engages with the SDGs in a more formalised and explicit manner. SDG-related objectives are primarily addressed through redistribution mechanisms, structured social programmes and sustainability strategies, including environmental initiatives aligned with SDG 13, « Climate Action », and broader commitments to institutional integrity under SDG 16. UEFA's engagement with the SDGs also reflects its scale and transnational role. Given the organisation's economic power and visibility, SDG commitments are often articulated through official strategies and programmes. Yet, the credibility of these initiatives depends heavily on governance mechanisms that ensure accountability, monitoring and alignment between stated objectives and actual practices. As a result, SDG engagement at the UEFA level is more visible and formal, but also more exposed to criticism if governance structures fail to effectively constrain power or address democratic distance.

To slightly compare the two organisation, we can see that the SDG engagement from both organisations takes different forms depending on governance structure and organisational level. SvFF's approach is more implicit and practice-oriented, closely tied to democratic governance and member priorities. UEFA's approach is more strategic and formalised, reflecting its regulatory authority, economic power and international visibility.

Conclusion

To conclude, the analysis and comparison of SvFF and UEFA respective governance really show that governance practices are not uniform, but shaped by organisational level, power and institutional context.

SvFF's governance is characterised by democratic proximity and member-based accountability, which facilitates legitimacy and the integration of social priorities. UEFA, by contrast, relies more heavily on regulatory authority, formal accountability mechanisms and economic redistribution, reflecting the challenges of governing football at a continental and highly commercialised level.

Rather than indicating a difference in governance quality, this contrast highlights how governance logics evolve as organisations gain power and operate across broader and more complex systems. From this perspective, good governance and socially responsible outcomes are closely linked to how decision-making authority and accountability are structured within football organisations.

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