

## The Impact of Decentralization on the Development of Football Cities in Türkiye: An Analysis of the Role of Local Governments in Sports Diplomacy

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### **Abstract**

*This study explores the impact of decentralization on the development of football cities in Türkiye, with a primary focus on the city of Trabzon. Football in Türkiye is not merely a sport but also a unifying social instrument that plays a significant role in the cultural identity of society. With decentralization, local governments have greater autonomy in managing the development of sports infrastructure, supporting talent development, and increasing public participation. This policy has encouraged the construction of sports facilities that strengthen local football communities and enhance the city's appeal both nationally and internationally. Furthermore, local governments leverage sports diplomacy to bolster the city's reputation on the global stage through hosting international events and collaborating with overseas clubs. This study analyzes decentralization policies that support football development in Trabzon and their impact on the socio-economic aspects of the local community. The findings indicate that decentralization significantly influences the development of Trabzon as a football city as it grants local authorities the fiscal and administrative autonomy to mobilize resources for sport infrastructure and implement structural athletic programs.*

**Keywords:** Football City, Decentralization, Local Governments

**Abstrak**

*Studi ini mengkaji dampak desentralisasi terhadap pengembangan kota sepak bola di Türkiye, dengan fokus utama pada kota Trabzon. Sepak bola di Türkiye bukan sekadar olahraga, melainkan instrumen sosial yang memainkan peran penting dalam identitas budaya masyarakat. Dengan adanya desentralisasi, pemerintah daerah memiliki otonomi yang lebih besar dalam mengelola pembangunan infrastruktur olahraga, mendukung pengembangan bakat, dan meningkatkan partisipasi masyarakat. Kebijakan ini mendorong pembangunan fasilitas olahraga yang memperkuat komunitas sepak bola lokal serta meningkatkan daya tarik kota tersebut, baik di tingkat nasional maupun internasional. Selain itu, pemerintah daerah memanfaatkan diplomasi olahraga untuk memperkuat reputasi kota di kancah global melalui penyelenggaraan acara-acara internasional dan kerja sama dengan klub-klub luar negeri. Studi ini menganalisis kebijakan desentralisasi yang mendukung pengembangan sepak bola di Trabzon serta dampaknya terhadap aspek sosial-ekonomi masyarakat setempat. Temuan studi menunjukkan bahwa desentralisasi berpengaruh signifikan terhadap pengembangan Trabzon sebagai kota sepak bola, karena memberikan otonomi fiskal dan administratif kepada pemerintah daerah untuk memobilisasi sumber daya bagi infrastruktur olahraga serta melaksanakan program pembinaan atlet yang terstruktur.*

**Kata kunci:** Kota Sepak Bola, Desentralisasi, Pemerintah Daerah

**INTRODUCTION**

During the period of the Ottoman Empire, football was prohibited for Muslims and only permitted to be played by non-Muslims.<sup>1</sup> Today, football has become an inseparable part of Turkish society and has gone far beyond being merely a competitive sport. As one of the sports with the largest fan base in the world, football in Turkey plays a significant role as a unifying force among different social strata and reflects a deep cultural identity.

Football has also become an important social platform and, particularly in cities with strong clubs and football communities, it has had a considerable impact on social and economic development. In economic terms, the impact of football can be observed through ticket sales, sponsorships, and sports tourism within the economic cycle. For example, cities such as Barcelona and Manchester are not only known for their football clubs but also

strengthen their global image and stimulate the local economy and tourism sector through these clubs. Tourists visiting these cities contribute to the economy through spending on accommodation, food and beverages, and local products. This demonstrates that football can serve as a driving force in the economic transformation of a city and in shaping its identity.

As the role of football in society has continued to grow, local governments in Turkey have begun to recognize that football can be used as a strategic tool to enhance the competitiveness and identity of cities. Through decentralization, local governments have gained greater autonomy in allocating resources for the development of sports infrastructure. In this context, facilities such as stadiums, training centers, and football academies have been constructed. These efforts have not only supported the development of local talent but have also drawn national and international attention to

<sup>1</sup> M. Yüce, *Osmanlı Melekleri* (İstanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2014).

football development in various cities across Turkey. Furthermore, these policies have contributed to local economic growth, job creation, and the strengthening of social interaction among citizens.

Beyond this, decentralization also provides local governments with opportunities to use football in the field of sports diplomacy. Through the organization of international events and collaborations with global clubs, cities in Turkey can promote local culture, enhance their international reputation, and develop diplomatic relations with other countries. In particular, sports diplomacy carried out through football has become a strategic instrument for strengthening Turkey's image and position on the global stage.

This research aims to examine in depth how decentralization supports the development of football cities in Turkey. The study focuses on the role of local governments in building a sports identity and increasing the competitiveness of cities. Through a case study of the city of Trabzon, local government policies and the social, economic, and diplomatic impacts of football will be analyzed.

In this context, the research is expected to provide a broader perspective on the contributions of decentralization to the development of local football and on Turkey's potential to support sports diplomacy at the international level. Furthermore, the findings of this study are anticipated to serve as a guide for policymakers in Turkey and other countries in using sports, particularly football, as a strategic tool for sustainable development.

## **The Concept of Decentralization and Sports Diplomacy**

### **Definition of Decentralization**

Decentralization is a process that involves the transfer of authority and responsibility from the central government to local governments or local authorities. This process aims to increase efficiency, responsiveness, and public participation in policymaking that is better suited to local needs. It grants greater autonomy to local governments in decision-making and ultimately enables the development of policies that are more appropriate to the local context and more sensitive to the problems faced by local communities.

Decentralization constitutes a system composed of public institutions and organizations operating outside the central administration, where public services are managed at the local level. Within this system, duties, powers, and responsibilities are exercised autonomously, and personnel and financial resources are organized independently from the center based on geographical criteria or the nature of the service. Decentralization, together with central administration, forms the executive branch, and countries can be defined as centralized or decentralized depending on the relative weight of central and local governance structures.<sup>2</sup> Decentralization not only grants greater authority to local governments but also provides opportunities for citizens to directly participate in decision-making processes that affect their daily lives. This process involves two key elements: delegation, which refers to the transfer of authority from the central government to the local level, and devolution, which refers to

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<sup>2</sup> M. Ökmen and B. Parlak, *Local Governments: Concepts, Approaches, Structures, and Legislation*

(Ankara: Orion Kitabevi, 2013), 20.

the transfer of authority from the central government to locally elected decision-makers.<sup>3</sup>

The main objective of decentralization is to increase efficiency, responsiveness, and public participation, as well as to balance regional development. By granting greater authority to local governments, decisions become more aligned with local conditions and more responsive to the needs of the community. Furthermore, decisions can be made more quickly and effectively compared to the lengthy procedures that must pass through central bureaucracy.<sup>4</sup> In addition, decentralization encourages the active participation of citizens in the policymaking process, which can strengthen the relationship between the government and the public and enhance accountability. It also has the potential to reduce inequalities between central and local administrations, as it provides previously underdeveloped regions with opportunities to manage resources more effectively and design fairer policies.<sup>5</sup> Decentralization enables the government to be closer to communities that require special attention. Overall, it serves as an important instrument for creating a more democratic, efficient, and locally responsive system of governance.

### Sports Diplomacy

Sports diplomacy refers to the use of sport as a tool to strengthen relations

between countries, improve a country's international image, and reinforce cooperation in cultural, economic, and social fields. As an activity that brings together different social and cultural groups, sport has the potential to create broader diplomatic opportunities. "Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. Sport can awaken hope where there was previously only despair. Sport speaks to people in a language they can understand."<sup>6</sup> In general, according to Nelson Mandela, sport has the power to change the world and can create a significant impact by inspiring people and uniting them with hope.

Sports diplomacy can be defined as a process in which state and non-state actors deliberately and strategically use athletes and sporting events to engage with foreign publics and organizations, to inform them, and to create a positive image. This process aims to shape the perceptions of target audiences in a manner that is more favorable to the sending actor.<sup>7</sup> Specifically, sports diplomacy includes activities such as the organization of international tournaments, athlete exchanges, and the construction of sports facilities that support international cooperation. The main objective of sports diplomacy is to create mutually beneficial relations between countries through sporting events; these events are often multilateral and involve various actors from different backgrounds. In this context, sport is not only

<sup>3</sup> Gustav Ranis and Frances Stewart, "Decentralization in Indonesia," *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies* 30, no. 3 (1994): 50,

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00074919412331336677>

<sup>4</sup> Lucy Gaster, "Quality Services in Local Government: A Bottom-Up Approach," *Journal of Management Development* 15, no. 2 (1996): 92.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>6</sup> Nelson Mandela, "Laureus World Sports Awards Speech," *Laureus*, 2000, accessed December 11, 2024, <https://www.globalgoals.org/news/sport-for-development-and-peace/>

<sup>7</sup> Stuart Murray and Geoffrey A. Pigman, "Mapping the Relationship between International Sport and Diplomacy," *Sport in Society* 17, no. 9 (2014): 1098–1118.

a tool for improving image but also a means of establishing dialogue between countries, strengthening social ties, and promoting values such as peace, solidarity, and tolerance. In other words, sports diplomacy creates opportunities to build more harmonious international relations by taking into account broader political, economic, and social interests.

### The Relationship Between Decentralization and Sports Diplomacy

Decentralization plays an important role in the development of sports diplomacy, especially in the context of cities in Turkey seeking to enhance their international profiles through sports. When more authority is granted to local governments through decentralization, these regions gain greater freedom to manage and develop their local sports potential. This may include the construction of sports facilities, the organization of international sporting events, and the establishment of relations with other countries or cities within the framework of sports diplomacy.

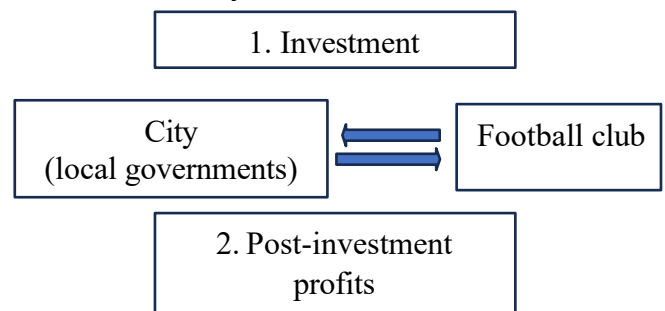
In a decentralized system, local governments have greater responsibility and capacity to design sports policies that are suited to the needs and resources of their own regions. For example, a city with a successful football club or a stadium that meets international standards can promote its local culture through sports, attract international tourists, and strengthen diplomatic relations with other countries. Organizing international sporting events such as a football championship or a basketball tournament can make the city more recognizable internationally, increase its

touristic appeal, and reinforce its relations with other countries.

Decentralization also enables local governments to respond more quickly and flexibly to the local needs of the public. Through an approach focused on local conditions, local administrations can organize sports programs that not only enhance public interest and participation in sports but also promote their region's potential at the global level. Through sports diplomacy, regions can establish international networks, attract investors, and contribute to broader economic and social development.

Football clubs can contribute to sustainable development in their host cities in economic, environmental, and social terms. If the benefits provided by football clubs are to be utilized for sustainable development, local governments in cities where there is high demand for football entertainment should invest in local football clubs.<sup>8</sup>

### The Investment–Return Relationship Between the City and the Football Club



Source: Roşca, V. (2010)

The figure illustrates a mutually beneficial relationship between a local government (city) and a football club through

<sup>8</sup> Emiliano Sparvero and Laurence Chalip, "Professional Teams as Leverageable Assets: Strategic

Creation of Community Value," *Sport Management Review* 10 (2007): 1–30.

investment and the resulting profits.<sup>9</sup> The local government makes an initial investment in the football club in the form of financing, infrastructure development, or other facility support. The club then uses this investment to improve its performance and generate revenue from matches, sponsorships, and related businesses.

As a result, the club contributes to the revitalization of the local economy through tourism and businesses around the stadium, improves the city's image nationally and internationally, and fosters a sports culture within the community. As a result, the club brings back positive effects to the city, such as the revitalization of the local economy through tourism and businesses around the stadium, the improvement of the city's image at the national and international levels, and the development of a sports culture in the community. Thus, a mutual cycle emerges in which the investment provides economic, social, and cultural benefits for the city.

### **The Development of Football Cities in Turkey and the Role of Local Governments Sports Policies of Local Governments in Turkey**

In Turkey, local governments, particularly within the framework of Law No. 5216 on Metropolitan Municipalities, play an important role in the public administration system and focus on meeting the needs of the local population.<sup>10</sup> While the central government handles general services such as education, health, and security, local governments are primarily responsible for

providing services and facilities tailored to the specific needs of their communities.

In this context, the sports sector plays a significant role in social development, with local governments acting as a bridge that connects the population with available resources. Sports are recognized as an important element for social inclusion, and local administrations carry significant responsibility in promoting and delivering sports services. Accordingly, strategic plans implemented by metropolitan municipalities include various objectives. These objectives encompass organizing national and international sports events, constructing sports facilities, creating recreational areas, expanding sports activities throughout the city, transforming the city into a "sports city," and fostering a healthy society and youth development. Additionally, strategic plans include initiatives such as providing sports education for individuals with disabilities, increasing public participation in sports activities, and constructing bicycle lanes and walking paths.

### **Improving Sports Infrastructure**

Local governments in Turkey place special emphasis on the construction and renovation of sports facilities, stadiums, football fields, and other supporting infrastructure to create an environment that fosters the development of local clubs and athletes. This aligns with the provisions of Article 7(m) of Law No. 5216 on Metropolitan Municipalities, which states that municipalities are responsible for the

<sup>9</sup> Vlad Roşca, "Sustainable Development of a City by Using a Football Club," *Theoretical and Empirical Researches in Urban Management* 5, no. 7 (16) (August 2010): 61–68, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/24872601>

<sup>10</sup> Erol Mumcu, Burcu Aligül, Ömer Karakullukçu, and Yasin Paktaş, "Examination of the Quality of Metropolitan Municipal Sports and Recreational Services," *Uluslararası Toplum Araştırmaları Dergisi* 17, no. 36 (2021): 2841–2858.

construction, management, or operation of social facilities, parks, libraries, museums, and sports facilities.

Additionally, municipalities are tasked with supporting amateur sports clubs, providing equipment, and organizing sports competitions. They can also award athletes, coaches, and students who achieve success in national and international competitions through decisions made by the municipal council. For example, many cities in Turkey now have stadiums built to international standards that can host high-level matches while also serving as centers for community events.

### **Youth and Local Talent Development Program**

Local governments initiate training programs to help young people discover and develop their football potential. Football academy programs are typically organized in schools or local sports centers, aiming to increase participation in the sport among children from diverse backgrounds.

Articles 15 and 24 of Law No. 5216 on Metropolitan Municipalities include provisions for the establishment of education, culture, youth, and sports commissions, as well as the allocation of budgets for sports-related expenditures, granting metropolitan municipalities greater responsibility in sports management. It is noted that out of the 30 metropolitan municipalities in Turkey, 19 have established dedicated sports directorates, while in the others, sports management is conducted through different directorates.

### **Support for Local Football Clubs**

One of the main policies of local governments is to provide financial and administrative support to local football clubs.

This support can take the form of direct funding for club operations or even tax incentives. Some cities facilitate collaboration between local governments and sponsors to promote programs that benefit local football fans.

Article 7 of Law No. 5216 on Metropolitan Municipalities outlines the powers and responsibilities of metropolitan and district municipalities. Specifically, Article 7(m) states: "To construct, commission, operate, or have operated social facilities serving the integrity of the metropolitan area, regional parks, zoos, animal shelters, libraries, museums, sports, recreation, entertainment, and similar facilities; to provide financial assistance, equipment, and necessary support to amateur sports clubs when needed; to organize sports competitions among amateur teams; and to award athletes, technical directors, coaches, and students who achieve outstanding success or rankings in domestic and international competitions, based on the decision of the municipal council."

### **A Case Study of a Football City in Turkey Trabzon: A Football City with a Strong Identity**

Located in the Black Sea Region, Trabzon is known as a city with a strong football culture and is home to the legendary Trabzonspor club. This club is one of Turkey's most successful football teams, and the local government of Trabzon contributes to the development of football through targeted policies. These supports include:

#### **Sports Facilities and Stadium Development**

The local government of Trabzon is committed to improving the city's sports quality and supporting the development of football by enhancing stadiums and sports facilities. One of the most significant steps in developing sports infrastructure in Trabzon

was the opening of the Şenol Güneş Sports Complex in Akyazı, Ortahisar, which serves as the new home of the Trabzonspor football team. The complex was inaugurated with a grand ceremony attended by prominent figures such as the President of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, his spouse Emine Erdoğan, the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim Hamad Al-Thani, as well as key members of the football community, including Turkish football director Fatih Terim and former presidents, coaches, and administrators of Trabzonspor.<sup>11</sup>

The complex built in Akyazı is equipped with modern facilities that offer greater spectator capacity, meet international standards, and provide a more comfortable and safe viewing experience. The opening of the Şenol Güneş Sports Complex marks a new milestone for Trabzon, serving not just as a venue for football matches but as a sports center that can host various sporting events and tournaments. With its larger capacity and enhanced amenities, the stadium is expected to contribute to the development of football and other sports in Trabzon, as well as attract more tourists and sports enthusiasts from both within Turkey and abroad.

#### **Development of Local Talents**

The Liberation Project is a highly significant initiative that addresses the management of sports talent in Trabzon in a structured and sustainable manner. One of the main challenges faced by amateur clubs is that larger clubs, having greater resources, often transfer players who have been painstakingly developed.<sup>12</sup> In this context,

the project aims to establish a management system that benefits amateur clubs, seeks to increase the value of local athletes, and simultaneously protects the rights of both the athletes and their clubs.

One of the strategic steps taken by the Liberation Project is the establishment of the Sports Performance Measurement and Talent Center. This center will manage athletes' data and ensure that each athlete receives the proper development suited to their potential. With the support of professional coaches, the project aims to implement a solid plan and take the right steps to prepare local athletes for entry into the professional football world.<sup>13</sup>

The project also provides benefits for clubs facing financial challenges, as a more organized system allows these clubs to receive the support needed for their development. This initiative aligns fully with Trabzon's local government's goal of creating sustainable opportunities for local talent across various fields, including sports. By combining efforts to enhance education, skills, and sports quality, the project seeks to maximize the potential of local athletes, enabling them to compete at higher levels both in the global labor market and in professional sports.

#### **The Impact of Decentralization on the Development of Football Cities in Turkey**

##### **Impact on Society**

##### **Increasing Community Participation in Soccer**

<sup>11</sup> BeIN Sports, "Historic Moments in Trabzon! Akyazı Şenol Güneş Stadium Opened," December 19, 2016, accessed December 5, 2024, <https://beinsports.com.tr/haber/trabzonsporun-yeni-stadi-akyazi-senol-gunes-stadi-acildi>

<sup>12</sup> <sup>12</sup>TrabzonX, "Look at Me: The Spirit of Yavuz Selim Is Gone," August 4, 2023, accessed December 5, 2024, <https://www.trabzonx.com/me-n-bak-yavuz-selim-ruhu-yok-oldu/6106/>

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

One of the greatest impacts of decentralization is the increased participation of the local population in football events. Previously, highly centralized policies limited the community's direct involvement in organizing and supporting sports activities. However, thanks to policy changes that allow more space for local initiatives, we are now witnessing an extraordinary rise in community participation.

For example, after the group matches at EURO 2024, the Turkish National Team not only advanced to the Round of 16 but also achieved remarkable success in terms of spectator attendance. During the group matches, Turkey attracted over 130,000 fans to the stadiums to support their team, surpassing even the host nation, Germany, in audience numbers.<sup>14</sup> This situation not only demonstrates the growing enthusiasm and participation in supporting the national team but also highlights the significant role of football in fostering social cohesion and national identity. This success reflects the strong bond between the community and football, while also showcasing the substantial contribution of local fans in creating an exciting match-day atmosphere.

### Strengthening Local Identity

A football team is considered not only a representative of sport but also a symbol of a city's cultural and social identity. For

example, Trabzonspor in Trabzon, which has a significant impact on the social life of the community, is much more than just a football club. These clubs serve as centers of civic pride and strengthen social cohesion within a diverse society.

In Turkey, fandom is often passed down through families, and many people identify with their hometown football team from childhood. Research shows that love for a football team typically originates from the family, with children tending to follow the example of their parents and other relatives in supporting a particular club. In most cases, a person's support for their city's team stems not just from personal opinion or preference but from values transmitted by the family. A study conducted between September 30 and October 1, 2017, involving 2,670 participants from 30 provinces of Turkey, revealed that many people, especially those living in small towns and rural areas, support football teams influenced by family and local traditions.<sup>15</sup>

Support for football and fanaticism toward local teams have a significant impact on people's social lives. Indirectly, these football clubs strengthen relationships among community members and become symbols of local pride and identity, which are integral to daily life. This can be seen in how fans celebrate their team's victories or mourn its defeats with their families, friends, and neighbors. In other words, being a football

<sup>14</sup> Habertürk, "Turkey Leaves Its Mark on the Group Matches at EURO 2024! Turkish Fans Surpassed Germany," December 5, 2024, accessed December 5, 2024, <https://www.haberturk.com/euro-2024-te-grup-maclarina-turkiye-damgasi-turk-taraflar-almanya-yi-solladi-3698629-spor>

<sup>15</sup> KONDA, *Barometer: Football and Fandom*, October 2017, accessed February 26, 2026, <https://konda.com.tr/uploads/tr1710-barometre80-futbol-ve-tarafarlik-295cace1fcd97179c0f57662ee25ca0a4c9a7b1558b9caa7879597c43c13c55e.pdf>

fan in Turkey is often not just a hobby but also part of a deeper social connection.

### Impact on the Local Economy

#### Job Creation

Major football clubs have a significant impact on both direct and indirect employment. This effect can be observed across various sectors involved in football club activities, ranging from stadium management to marketing and youth development.

The management of football stadiums and infrastructure generates a variety of employment opportunities, both directly and indirectly, in stadium operations, food and beverage services, marketing, and youth development. Direct jobs include stadium managers, technical staff, chefs, servers, marketing specialists, and academy coaches, while indirect jobs involve stadium equipment suppliers, food material providers, advertising agencies, and training companies. This ecosystem demonstrates how the football industry contributes to the economy by creating employment across multiple related sectors.

#### Growth in the Tourism Sector

Cities that host major football clubs attract visitors from outside the city and abroad to watch matches, creating a positive impact on the tourism sector. Large events, such as international matches or football tournaments, can boost tourism and provide economic benefits to sectors dependent on tourists, including accommodation, transportation, restaurants, and other services.

In 2014, the number of foreign tourists visiting Turkey for sports purposes reached 550,000. According to a report prepared by the Association of Turkish Travel Agencies (TÜRSAB), tourists coming to Turkey for sports purposes spent more than 900 million USD, contributing 1.5% to the country's total tourism activity. The report also notes that the largest portion of this spending came from sports tourism, particularly football and golf.<sup>16</sup>

| Year | Total Number of Tourists | Number of Tourists Visiting for Sports Activities | Share of Sports Tourists in Total (%) |
|------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 2003 | 16,302,053               | 156,499                                           | 0.96                                  |
| 2008 | 30,979,979               | 319,093                                           | 1.03                                  |
| 2012 | 36,776,645               | 551,649                                           | 1.5                                   |
| 2014 | 36,837,900               | 552,568                                           | 1.4                                   |

**Table 1.** Number of Visitors Coming to Turkey for Sporting Purposes

Source: TÜRSAB, 2014

This table shows the number of tourists visiting Turkey for sports activities and their contribution to the total number of tourists between 2003 and 2014. In 2003, 156,499 tourists visited Turkey for sports purposes, accounting for 0.96% of all tourists. In the following years, this number increased significantly, reaching 552,568 tourists in 2014, contributing 1.4% to the total tourist population.

These data support the important role of sports events, particularly football, in increasing the number of foreign visitors to Turkey. In 2014, over 550,000 tourists visited Turkey for sports purposes,

<sup>16</sup> TÜRSAB, *Sports Tourism Sector Report*, 2014, accessed December 5, 2024,

[https://www.tursab.org.tr/apps/OldFiles//dosya/12195/tursab-spor-turizmi-raporu\\_12195\\_5670173.pdf](https://www.tursab.org.tr/apps/OldFiles//dosya/12195/tursab-spor-turizmi-raporu_12195_5670173.pdf)

demonstrating the significant pull of sports events such as international football tournaments. Moreover, these figures are consistent with TÜRSAB reports, showing that sports tourists contribute economically through expenditures in sectors such as hospitality, transportation, and restaurants. Therefore, major sports events held in stadiums not only attract thousands of visitors from around the world but also enhance the contribution of sports tourism to Turkey's local and national economy.

### Sponsorship and Marketing Revenue

The revenues that football clubs generate from sponsorships and television rights have a significant impact not only on the clubs' operations but also on the local economy and neighboring communities. A concrete example of this can be seen in the income earned by Turkish football clubs, which plays an important role in stimulating the local economy and contributes to the community's welfare through various channels.

In Turkey, the system regulating the distribution of revenue from television broadcasting rights and known as the "Pool System" which is allocates income proportionally among clubs competing in the Süper Lig.<sup>17</sup> A large portion of these revenues is directed to major clubs such as Beşiktaş, Galatasaray, Fenerbahçe, and Trabzonspor. These clubs play a key role in revitalizing the local economy. Existing data show that, particularly during the 2017–2018 season, these major clubs earned substantial income from sponsorship deals.

| Team        | Total Revenue (million USD)     |
|-------------|---------------------------------|
| Galatasaray | 14.5 million USD + bonuses/year |
| Fenerbahçe  | 12 million USD + barter/year    |
| Beşiktaş    | 17.5 million USD/year           |
| Trabzonspor | 7.9 million USD/year            |
| Bursaspor   | 1.5 million USD/year            |

Table 2. 2017-2018 Super League Champions' Sponsorship Revenues  
(Prepared on an annual basis for jersey and stadium revenues)

Source: [www.anasponsor.com](http://www.anasponsor.com)

The revenues earned by these major clubs have a broad impact on the economies of the regions in which they operate. For example, Galatasaray, Fenerbahçe, Beşiktaş, and Trabzonspor not only support their club activities but also generate significant income from sponsorships, which encourage investment in sports infrastructure and facilities and create employment in construction, hospitality, and tourism sectors. The stadiums and training facilities built or improved with these revenues attract thousands of fans, who directly benefit local economic sectors by spending on tickets, accommodation, and other consumption.

In addition to broadcasting rights and sponsorship revenues, contributions from sponsors such as Spor Toto provide financial support to football clubs, playing a crucial role in financing various club activities. Spor Toto supports clubs in the Süper Lig, 1. Lig, and TFF 2. Lig, strengthening Turkey's football ecosystem and ensuring that lower-league clubs are not left behind in terms of funding and development.<sup>18</sup> This support

<sup>17</sup> Anasponsor, "2017–2018 Süper Lig – Infographic of the Jersey Revenues of the 5 Big Clubs," August 7, 2017, accessed February 26, 2026,

<https://blog.anasponsor.com/2017-2018-super-lig-5-buyuklerin-forma-gelirleri-infografigi/>

<sup>18</sup> Demir, A Comparative Analysis of the Football Sector in the Economies of Turkey and Spain

enhances the sustainability of clubs while also contributing to the overall development of Turkish football.

Moreover, the revenues generated from sponsorships and broadcasting rights have a direct impact on local income through player salaries, staff expenses, and taxes on club operations. A portion of the income earned by these clubs is used for the construction of facilities and infrastructure improvements, which ultimately increases local tax revenues. The presence of both large and small football clubs positively affects local hospitality, tourism, and service sectors, thereby contributing to the local economy.

### **Impact on the city's image**

One of the greatest impacts of decentralization in the context of football is the enhancement of the international image of cities in Turkey. Cities that host major football events, such as league tournaments or international matches, attract more attention from diverse audiences worldwide. This not only increases the popularity of football but also significantly shapes the global perception of the city.

For example, Trabzon has hosted numerous important national and international football matches at the Şenol Güneş Stadium, home of the Trabzonspor club, including UEFA matches. A notable moment occurred during the 2024/2025 season when Trabzonspor participated in the UEFA Europa League qualifying rounds. In one of these matches, Trabzonspor defeated Slovakia's Ružomberok (SVK) 1-0 at the Şenol Güneş Stadium, drawing wider attention to the city.

Rich in history, culture, and natural beauty, hosting prestigious football events in Trabzon has played a significant role in promoting the city on the global stage. Such major matches not only attract thousands of visitors from outside the city and abroad but also generate substantial media coverage.

This rise in the city's image has a positive impact across various aspects of urban life. In tourism, Trabzon is experiencing an increase in visitors not only coming to watch football matches but also to explore natural attractions such as Uzungöl and the Sümela Monastery, as well as to experience the city's culture and cuisine. Additionally, the local economy benefits from the growing number of tourists, with increased revenues in the service, transportation, and hospitality sectors.

A stronger international image also opens doors for foreign investment. Large international companies may be more willing to invest in cities with a strong global profile, seeing them as attractive locations for growth. This can create new job opportunities, stimulate economic growth, and generate additional employment for local residents.

### **The impact of international cooperation**

The international cooperation strengthened by decentralization has had a significant impact on the development of football cities in Turkey across sports, economic, and cultural domains. In the football world, collaborations with international clubs and federations allow local clubs to access the latest coaches, players, and training techniques. The direct result of this is the improvement in the

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(master's thesis, Niğde Ömer Halisdemir University, Graduate School of Social Sciences, 2019).

quality of local teams and the creation of opportunities for young Turkish players to compete on the international stage.

For example, during the 2022–2023 season, 19-year-old Ahmetcan Kaplan was transferred from Trabzonspor to Ajax for €9.5 million, becoming a symbol of the global integration of Turkish football.<sup>19</sup> Similar successes were achieved by Rıdvan Yılmaz, who joined Rangers, and Emirhan İlkan, who plays for Torino. These transfers not only reflect the increased competitiveness of Turkish players but also strengthen bilateral relations between Turkey and other countries.

Furthermore, international cooperation is transforming football cities in Turkey into centers of sports diplomacy through the organization of tournaments and friendly matches. These cities become meeting points for athletes, coaches, and business professionals from different countries, creating opportunities for collaboration in trade, investment, and cultural exchange. The presence of foreign players in Turkish clubs fosters a dynamic environment for cultural exchange, while the transfer of young Turkish players to European leagues enriches cultural experiences in the destination countries and generates a reciprocal influence on Turkey's football culture.

This international cooperation also offers significant opportunities in education and research. Educational institutions and universities in Turkey's football cities can leverage these global connections to develop

academic programs in sports management, event management, and sports economics. As these cities frequently host international events, diverse global communities come together, share experiences, and establish long-term relationships that benefit all parties.

This cooperation is also manifested through "Sister City" programs. For example, Trabzon has established relationships with ten international cities, including Sochi in Russia, Batumi in Georgia, and Dortmund in Germany.<sup>20</sup> Through these partnerships, Trabzon actively promotes its local culture, history, and economic potential on the global stage. However, these collaborations have not yet been fully focused on football development, as most of the partnerships primarily target diplomacy in cultural, economic, and educational fields.

## **CONCLUSION**

This article demonstrates the significant impact of decentralization on the development of football cities in Turkey. The increased role of local governments through decentralization enables more effective management of local resources, including the development of sports infrastructure, training programs, and sports diplomacy.

The case study of the city of Trabzon shows that investments in football can increase community participation, strengthen local identity, support economic growth, and enhance the city's international image. This success highlights the strategic role of decentralization in building strong

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<sup>19</sup> Yeni Şafak, "12 Turkish Footballers Transferred to Europe at Age 21," *Yeni Şafak*, August 21, 2022, 13:24, accessed December 12, 2024, <https://www.yenisafak.com/foto->

[galeri/spor/turkiyeden-avrupaya-transfer-olan-genc-futbolcularin-listesi-2068082/3](https://www.yenisafak.com/foto-galeri/spor/turkiyeden-avrupaya-transfer-olan-genc-futbolcularin-listesi-2068082/3)

<sup>20</sup> Trabzon Municipality, "Sister Cities," accessed December 25, 2024,

<https://www.trabzon.bel.tr/Web/Icerik/kardes-sehirler>

football cities and underscores the use of sports as a tool for both cultural and economic diplomacy.

## RECOMMENDATION

The Trabzon local government should leverage media and technology effectively to promote Trabzon as an “International Football City.” Digital campaigns and online product sales targeting the international market could serve as key steps in introducing both the city and the Trabzonspor club to a global audience. Matches broadcast on international television networks can further showcase the club and the city to a wide worldwide viewership.

To increase community engagement, football training programs for children and annual sports festivals can be organized, fostering strong connections between local government, clubs, and the community. For sustainability, eco-friendly stadium management and green awareness campaigns during football events can serve as important strategic initiatives.

Additionally, Trabzon can establish “sister city” relationships with other cities that have strong football traditions, facilitating the sharing of best practices and attracting foreign investment to support sports infrastructure projects. Through these measures, football will not only remain a leading sport but also become a major driving force that enhances cultural diplomacy, economic development, and social cohesion within the Trabzon community.

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