



Strategic Positioning of Sports Diplomacy Capacities for Sustainable Development

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to identify strategic positioning of sports diplomacy capacities for sustainable development. The statistical population included professional athletes and coaches; who had experience working at international sports levels. The sample was selected via availability methods (146 individuals). Data collection was conducted through a researcher-made questionnaire. Data analysis was performed using SWOT matrix. Five professors confirmed the validity of the questionnaire, and its reliability was determined by Cronbach's alpha value of 0.89, indicating the high reliability. The results revealed that the strategic position of sports diplomacy capacities for Iran's sustainable development is in the WT quadrant, indicating that the most appropriate strategies that can be applied are defensive ones. Accordingly, respective planners and decision-makers in sports, especially policy-makers, should consider appropriate strategies to improve Iran sports diplomacy capacities, leading to a more sustainable development.

Introduction

In today's world, all nations try to increase their power, wealth, status, and prestige, utilizing all available resources to achieve these goals (Khodaparast, 2023). In the past, due to the Hard Systems of governments focusing on more predominantly power-based systems to achieve their international objectives (Azadi, Rahimi, & Nazari, 2023), the primary tools to realize these goals and objectives were military forces, diplomacy, and forming alliances and coalitions (Selting, Lattimer, Hause, & Megan, 2019). However, changes in the identity of the international government system have significantly altered countries' tools to promote their international aims and interests. Alongside

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hard power, a new concept, termed soft power (Soft System), has emerged, rooted in countries' cultural and societal values, pursued by various forms of public diplomacies, carrying lots of different scopes including notable and significant areas of sport (Azadi et al., 2023).

Sport is closely connected to politics and has become a significant international issue (Khodaparast, 2023). As a source of soft power, the international functions of sports have transformed it into an instrument of foreign policy and public diplomacy (Taks, 2013). Countries utilize sports with international dimensions and mega sports events, like the Olympics, FIFA World Cup, and the Asian Games, to fulfill their extensive objectives of gaining power, wealth, and global prestige (Torchia, Calabro, Gabaldon, & Kanadli, 2018). These developments have revealed a new aspect of diplomacy, sports diplomacy, alongside other types of existing diplomacies. Indeed, sports, aside from their roles in entertainment, competition, health promotion, and boosting individual and group morale, can also significantly enhance diplomatic relations among countries and cause further economic and social developments (Yabalooie, Nazari, & Zargar 2022).

To emphasize the effect of sports on diplomacy, the cessation of military conflicts among the different states of Greece before the ancient Olympic Games to have a peaceful event can be mentioned as a clear example. Additionally, prominent examples of successful sports diplomacy, which have improved inter-country relations and are highly regarded by researchers, include the Ping-Pong diplomacy between China and the United States in 1971 and the Cricket diplomacy between Pakistan and India in 2011 (Qin & Liu, 2020). In Iran, wrestling and football matches between Iran and the USA, held during the 2012 to 2021 administrations, are among the many examples highlighting and remarking on the utilization of sports diplomacy and its impacts (Hozhabri, Ramezani Nejad, & Shaji, 2021).

The government's interest in utilizing sports as a form of diplomacy stems from various reasons, categorized into three main groups by different research: First of all, sports are a powerful cultural tool for developed nations, taking attention through media and national achievements (Talavera, Al-Ghamdi, & Koç, 2019). Secondly, sports can achieve non-sporting governmental objectives such as manifesting political power, fostering economic development, and revitalizing urban areas. In the third place, sports are a multidimensional phenomenon; not only is it useful as a public service, but also as a critical aspect of social and economic welfare, contributing to countries' sustainable development (Hoekman, Schulenkorf, & Peachey, 2019).

Sustainable development centers on humans, human societies, and their desired futures (Salimi & Khodaparast, 2021). Initially, it was focused on environmental concerns, but gradually, the scope of sustainable development has broadened over time to include cultural, economic, and political aspects (Salimi & Labbaf, 2023). Sustainable development involves integrating economic, social, and environmental goals to maximize the well-being of present humans without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs (Karimipour, 2022). This concept necessitates adequate investments in education, social health, and energy, ensuring no social debts are left for future generations. Beyond just environmental issues, sustainable development encompasses all life aspects, which can be categorized into economic, social, environmental, and political dimensions, necessitating significant policy changes at both national and international levels (Gehring, Kaplan, & Wong, 2022).

Development can be considered sustainable if and only if it is economically lasting, socially acceptable, ecologically correct and politically responsible and supported. Economic sustainability means that systems should be competitive and time- lasting while interacting with the economic environment (Salimi & Khodaparast, 2021). Any system which is not economically consistent, no longer can continue its existence; no matter how much it is accepted by society, compatible with ecological requirements or politically acceptable. It is also true about a system that is not socially accepted, no matter how profitable or environment- coordinated it is (Hozhabri et al., 2021).

It might be discarded or destroyed by the society which should support it (Müller et al., 2021). On the other hand, a system that is not ecologically correct, cannot sustain productivity over time, and

will become unsustainable (Talavera et al., 2019). Therefore, focusing on the area that can lead to the sustainable development of a country by considering all these dimensions, is of a great importance, and undoubtedly sport is one of the most important ones. Because planning in different sectors of this industry along with existing capacities can lead to a sustainable economic, political, social and ecological development which cause the societies' growth in world arena (Jiménez-García, Ruiz-Chico, Peña-Sánchez, & López-Sánchez, 2020).

All the aspects discussed in the realm of sustainable development are also pertinent to sports, one of the most influential and vital industries in the world, considering its vast capacities in various sectors such as international sports events, venues, facilities, athletes, coaches, fans, commercial contracts, and sponsors. Sustainable development in sports is intrinsically linked to significant economic, political, social, and environmental achievements for societies (Duan, Mastromartino, Zhang, & Liu, 2020). Sports diplomacy, as an essential and noteworthy segment of global sports, plays a profoundly influential role in this process, which can catalyze societal goals (Parra-Camacho, González-Serrano, Jiménez, & Jiménez-Jiménez 2023).

In Iran, to achieve sustainable development goals some measures have been taken to granted through sports; like signing a memorandum of understanding between the Environmental Protection Organization and the Ministry of Sports and Youth for the use of the logo of the Iranian cheetah on the football national team shirts , participation in the development of green sports indicators, as well as the use of sports to reduce psychological effects on children suffered through Bam earthquake (Dousti, Saboonchi, & Shariati Feizabadi, 2019); But despite all these measures, it can be said that the efforts made in this regard seem very limited for development at the global level and require much more planning and actions with better quality in comparison with projects and actions done in active sports organizations in other parts of the world. These decisions must be made by the country's officials. Considering the variables of the current study, various types of research have been conducted. Polvandeh & Rostami (2022) explored sports diplomacy's role in enhancing countries' international prestige, highlighting its effectiveness in their global and regional improvements (Polvandeh & Rostami, 2022). Mokhtari and Keshishyan Siraki (2021) investigated the effect of sports diplomacy on Iran-USA relations; considering Iran's economic, political, and cultural transitions, sports diplomacy could reinforce existing capacities in diplomatic ties or weaken them (Mokhtari & Keshishyan Siraki, 2021). McArdle (2023) examined the interplay between sports and politics, emphasizing that the growth of nations is intertwined with the role of sports in international relations. Peachey, Schulenkorf, and Hill (2020) identified sports diplomacy as a crucial factor for development and prosperity in various fields, including political, economic, social, and cultural domains. Dousti et al. (2019) regarded sports diplomacy as a vigorous support for countries, highlighting it as one of the paramount soft power tools.

Given the significant role of sports diplomacy in the sustainable development of societies, and considering the Islamic Republic of Iran's current economic and political challenges due to US sanctions, while most countries avoid financial transactions with Iran, not being part of the USA's punitive system, which hampers competition for national benefits and domestic welfare—the necessity of employing sports diplomacy on an international scale to surmount these challenges in Iran is significantly apparent. This research's importance stems from the need to counter widespread anti-Iranian propaganda, which represents Iran as an insecure country and causes Iranophobia on the one hand. It eases international tensions through sports diplomacy, improves Iran's economic conditions, and promotes sustainable development and social welfare. This study aims to uncover the potential capacities of sports diplomacy in fostering sustainable development in Iran.

Methodology

The present research is applied in terms of purpose and operationally descriptive-analytical one. In this research, after studying lots of review literatures from various sources such as articles, books and reliable news sites in order to identify Iran's sports diplomacy capacities in the direction of

sustainable development; scientific interviews with experts in the field of research were conducted. After determining the effective factors on capacities of sports diplomacy in line with the country's sustainable development, the SWOT method was used to detect the strengths and weaknesses as well as opportunities and threats. Analyzing SWOT matrix will show the country's strategic position in terms of sports diplomacy and can provide the best strategies. The statistical population in the first part of the research includes all experts who are scientifically or practically active in the field of sports diplomacy such as expert professors in the fields of sports management, international relations, sciences politics, sociology, economics and management, as well as senior managers, deputies and experts in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and important sports organizations of the country, including the Ministry of Sports and Youth, National Sports Federations, National Olympic Committee, etc. In the second part of the research, there were also professional athletes and coaches who have been participated in international sports forums as the statistical population. The statistical sample of the research in the first part of the research was chosen based on non-probability sampling method (purposive and snowball technique), so that the most appropriate and relevant people were selected for the desired research area. In the second part of the research, the statistical sample was full sampling. Thus, for the first part of the research, the sample included 28 people, and in the second part of the research, it included 146 ones. The information obtained from samples became the basis of statistical analysis. The method of data collection was followed in two general formats: in the first part, the required data regarding the influencing factors on the capacities of sports diplomacy in line with sustainable development of the country, gathered from various sources such as articles, books, websites, scientific and reliable news and interviews with experts, and in the second part of the research, data was collected through the distribution of a researcher-made questionnaire based on the list of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. In the first part of the research, in order to check the validity, the findings of the research were presented to the participants, also the proposed model was studied and the comments were applied. The retest method was also used to check the reliability of the research. To do so, 5 interviews were selected among all the conducted interviews, each of which was retested twice in 15 days of a time interval. These interviews were coded by the researcher; the similar codes were titled as agreement codes, and dissimilarities were titled as non-agreement ones. Finally, with the help of the following formula, the amount of accuracy and reliability of the research was evaluated. The obtained results are stated in table (1).

$$\text{Intra-subject agreement percentage} = \frac{\text{Number of agreements} \times 2}{\text{Total number of codes}} \times 100$$

Table 1. Reliability Calculated by Retest Method

Title of the Interview	Number of Codes	Number of Agreements	Number of non-Agreements	Reliability (Percentage)
2th	26	11	4	84%
6th	34	16	2	94%
11th	28	12	4	85%
15th	41	18	5	87%
Total	129	57	15	88%

According to the table above, the reliability obtained in the retest method using the mentioned formula is 88%, which is higher than 60%; therefore, the reliability of coding is confirmed. The validity of the questionnaire used in the second part of the research was also confirmed by presenting it to several professors and applying their opinions. Its reliability was determined using the Cronbach's alpha method, a value of 0.89, which indicates its high reliability. In the first part of the research, pending Grounded Theory methodology, the emergent approach was used; in which data is obtained by passing through three main steps of coding including open coding (freely coding the text of the interviews with the aim of finding the central category), selective coding (coding

focused on the central category), and finally theoretical coding (connecting the central category to other selected ones).

In the second part of the research, after data collection from the questionnaire, to make its items meaningful, the Sample T-test was used. Friedman's rank test was also taken into account, to determine the priority of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats after all. Then, in order to identify the strategic position of Iran regarding the capacities of sports diplomacy, SWOT analysis (internal factor evaluation matrix (IFE)), and (external factor evaluation matrix (EFE)) as well as internal -external matrix (IE) was used.

Results

Demographic information related to the statistical sample of the research is presented in Table (2).

Table 2. Research Sample Demographic Information

Main Index	Sub-Index	Frequency		Percentage		Main Index	Sub-Index	Frequency		Percentage	
		Qualitative	Quantity	Qualitative	Quantity			Qualitative	Quantity		
Age	30>	2	51	7.14	34.93	Ed*	B.A and less	2	92	7.14	63.01
	31-40	7	54	25	36.98		M.A	4	40	14.28	27.39
	41-50	10	27	35.71	18.49		Ph.D.	22	14	78.57	9.58
	51<	9	14	32.14	9.58		<10 Year	2	75	7.14	51.36
Gender	Male	24	103	85.71	70.54	W-E*	11-20 Year	5	45	17.85	30.82
	Female	4	43	14.28	29.45		21-30 Year	21	26	75	17.80
	Total	28	146	100	100		Total	28	146	100	100

*Ed stands for Education

*W-E stands for Work Experience

The open coding stage started at the same time as the end of the first interview. All the conducted interviews were written down and then examined word by word. Then, in the selective coding stage, the data obtained from open coding was classified based on thematic and conceptual similarity, then a comprehensive and abstract concept was assigned to each class. At this stage, one of the obtained categories (based on its frequency and conceptuality); was selected as the main category and placed in the center of the process. In the next step other categories were related to it. In present research, "Capacities of Iran's sports diplomacy in the direction of sustainable development" was determined as the main category.

After performing all the steps related to open and selective coding, a total number of 362 primary codes were extracted from the first analysis of 28 interviews. Passing through the codes and examining their similarities and classifications, 109 more abstract concepts were obtained by the end of next step. These concepts were divided into 4 main categories based on thematic division including: 1- political factors, 2- economic factors, 3- cultural-social factors and 4- health and environmental factors. Thus, 45 concepts were considered as "political factors", 20 concepts as "economic factors", 31 concepts as "cultural-social factors" and finally 13 concepts as "health and environmental factors". In each category, concepts were divided into strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats based on the framework of the SWOT method. Table (3) shows the findings of the open and selective coding stage regarding "political factors" affecting the capacities of Iran's sports diplomacy in the direction of sustainable development.

Table 3. Concepts and Categories Resulting from Open and Selective Coding Regarding "Political Factors" Affecting Iran's Sports Diplomacy for Sustainable Development

Category	Row	Concepts
Strengths	1	Iran's relationship with neighboring Islamic countries
	2	Iran's international credibility and prestige among Islamic countries and the Middle East
	3	Attending international organizations with an emphasis on the Silk Road and the Shanghai Summit and the Eco Organization
	4	Increasing importance of military issues and more tension and conflict in the region
	5	The breadth and diversity of Iran's geography
	6	Expanding interactions between nations and peaceful coexistence
	7	Acceptable level of the country's sports among Asian and Islamic countries
	8	The role of the Islamic Republic of Iran in regional and international policies
	9	Sport is a tool to acquire political values
	10	Iran's remarkable foreign policy in dealing with other countries
	11	Reducing stereotypes, political tensions and ideological conflicts
	12	Non-dependence on world powers
	13	Improving the political position of the country and feeling more patriotism
	14	Success in sports events as the progress of the system and government
	Weaknesses	15
16		Lack of correct and scientific planning in line with the development of sports diplomacy
17		The difference between the country's parties and organizations in policies
18		The inability to obtain quotas for major sports events as a tool in sports diplomacy
19		Diversity among Muslim countries in terms of religion (Sunni and Shia)
20		Not having a stable place or seat in international sports institutions
21		The involvement of politicians in the country's sports
22		The existence of different political approaches between some governing institutions and the government
23		Weakness of sports managers in familiarizing with international ceremonies and protocols
24		Lack of specialized view on the management of sports organizations
25		Lack of active presence of female sports managers in international sports organizations
26		Lack of a guardian organization regarding sports diplomacy
27		Lack of management stability at the highest level of the country's sports
28		Weakness of financial and human resources in the field of sports diplomacy of the country
29		The lack of awareness of the heads of government (Members of Parliament, senior managers and students) about the benefits and capacities of sports diplomacy
Opportunities		30
	31	Weakness and lack of attention in the interaction and cooperation between the diplomatic system and the country's sports system
	32	The role of international sports events in turning the country into a hub of world trade and sports
	33	The proximity of governments and the expansion of political connections
	34	The inviolability of sports
	35	The progress of democracy
	36	Sports as a suitable platform to meet the political leaders of countries
	37	Increasing global attention to the issue of sports as a tool of diplomacy
Threats	38	Expansion of sports sisterhood with other areas and industries
	39	Existence of strict rules regarding the issuance of visas, customs and the length of stay of athletes
	40	Lack of necessary coordination between world sports organizations
	41	The soft war of some western countries and the spread of negative propaganda against Iran
	42	The growth of Arab countries compared to Iran in order to hold sports events
	43	Lack of specialized and skilled personnel in the field of sports diplomacy
	44	The existence of regional conflicts between Iran and some countries in the region
	45	Promoting Islamophobia, Shiaphobia and Iranophobia

According to table (3), 15 concepts were identified as "strengths", 16 concepts as "weaknesses", 7 concepts as "opportunities" and 7 concepts as "threats" among "political factors" affecting sports

diplomacy of Iran in line with sustainable development. Table (4) also shows the findings of open and selective coding regarding "economic factors" affecting Iran's sports diplomacy in line with sustainable development.

Table 4. Concepts and Categories Resulting from Open and Selective Coding Regarding "Economic Factors" Affecting Iran's Sports Diplomacy for Sustainable Development

Category	Row	Concepts
Strengths	1	Revenues from sports tourism sectors
	2	Greater presence of domestic and foreign investors during sports events in the country
	3	The role of sports in introducing and promoting the brand of other active industries in the country
	4	Sport is an opportunity to deal with economic sanctions
Weaknesses	5	Lack of ability in international branding
	6	Lack of development of sports tourism infrastructure
	7	Lack of investment in professional teams and athletes
	8	Lack of economic stability and rampant inflation
	9	Existence of financial corruption in sports clubs and organizations
	10	Lack of development of privatization
	11	Not using sports diplomacy to circumvent or cancel economic sanctions
Opportunities	12	Creating foreign exchange income for the country through sports
	13	Creating and expanding suitable opportunities for entrepreneurs
	14	Development of sports and non-sports facilities and equipment in the country
	15	Creating employment and generating more income
	16	Use of economic resources of international sports organizations
	17	Stable economic relations in sports
	18	Early profitability of sports compared to many other industries
Threats	19	Lack of allocation of sufficient funds and resources regarding the growth of global sports
	20	Reluctance of foreign investors to enter the country

According to table (4), 4 concepts were identified as "strengths", 7 concepts as "weaknesses", 7 concepts as "opportunities" and at last 2 concepts as "threats" among the "economic factors" affecting Iran's sports diplomacy in line with sustainable development. Table number (5) also shows the findings of open and selective coding regarding "social-cultural factors" affecting Iran's sports diplomacy in the direction of sustainable development.

Table 5. Concepts and Categories Resulting from Open and Selective Coding Regarding "Social-Cultural Factors" Affecting Iran's Sports Diplomacy for Sustainable Development

Category	Row	Concepts
Strengths	1	Iran has a rich culture and thousands of years of history
	2	The spread of magazines, media and sports analysts in the country
	3	The existence of cultural commonality among different countries
	4	The existence of cultural diversity in Iran
	5	Belonging to people's love and friendship towards Iran
	6	Strengthening Iranian identity, national solidarity and synergy of ethnicities through sports
	7	Cultural interactions in the form of cultural and sports festivals
	8	The desire of the country's youth to do sports
	9	Better communication between different races and nations in sports events
	10	General prejudice and zeal of Iranian people
Weaknesses	11	Lack of specific planning for cultural exchange with different countries
	12	Weak unity among the different ethnic groups of the country
	13	Fewer desires of officials to communicate more with international sports institutions
	14	Magnification of the country's weaknesses by international media
	15	Defeat against developed countries
	16	Not having the desired plan and program in the field of cultural development of the country

Category	Row	Concepts
	17	Insular operation of various sports bodies
	18	Lack of attention to the country's social capital
	19	Not using the capacity of non-governmental organizations in the field of sports
	20	People's lack of awareness of the importance of sports diplomacy
Opportunities	21	Civilization, cultural background and rooted Iranian identity in the world
	22	Sports, a tool for dialogue and convergence in multicultural societies
	23	Attracting foreign fans for domestic leagues in order to increase influence on the public mind
	24	The presence of young people interested in sports in the country and the world
Threats	25	The heterogeneity of some values of the sports world with the country's cultural environment
	26	Emphasis on the use of religious symbols and values in some sports events of the country
	27	Failure to revive the ancient and mythological cultures of Iran
	28	The existence of different cultural differences of sports managers and the existence of emotional and hasty encounters
	29	Modernization and neglect of traditional sports
	30	Some sports restrictions for women
	31	The growth of immigration and declaration of asylum among athletes

According to table (5), 10 concepts were identified as "strengths", 10 concepts as "weaknesses", 4 concepts as "opportunities" and 7 concepts as "threats" among "social-cultural factors". They were classified as influential factors on Iran's sports diplomacy in the direction of sustainable development. Table (6) also shows the findings of open and selective coding regarding "health and environmental factors" affecting Iran's sports diplomacy in line with sustainable development.

Table 6. Concepts and Categories Resulting from Open and Selective Coding Regarding "Health and Environmental Factors" Affecting Iran's Sports Diplomacy for Sustainable Development

Category	Row	Concepts
Strengths	1	The presence of Iran's diverse ecosystem
	2	Coordinating and holding various meetings of the officials of the countries during the holding of international sports events in order to promote health and comply with environmental points
	3	Good reception of health and medical tourists from Iran
Weaknesses	4	Weakness in planning and implementing global guidelines in the field of environment
	5	Decreased community health due to poorer nutrition, mobility and dynamics
	6	Lack of documented studies and research related to health and environment
	7	Lack of familiarity with the potential of different regions of Iran regarding holding sports events
	8	Lack of standard of places, facilities and sports equipment in the country
Opportunities	9	Designing sports facilities and spaces based on optimal energy consumption and sustainable architecture
	10	Many human and natural facilities in the field of sports activities
Threats	11	The spread of various diseases in recent years
	12	Climate change and the growth of arid and semi-arid regions of the country
	13	air pollution crisis and the threat to the health of athletes and spectators

According to table (6), 3 concepts were identified as "strengths", 5 concepts as "weaknesses", 2 concepts as "opportunities" and 3 concepts as "threats" among "health and environmental factors".

The final process of coding is theoretical coding, which is actually the main stage of theory development; This stage is based on the results of the previous two stages, i.e., open coding and selective coding. These two stages are considered as preliminary and foundational stages for theorizing. The preliminary categories and relationships between them are available as the basic structures for production of theory. Figure (1) shows the final model of the research.

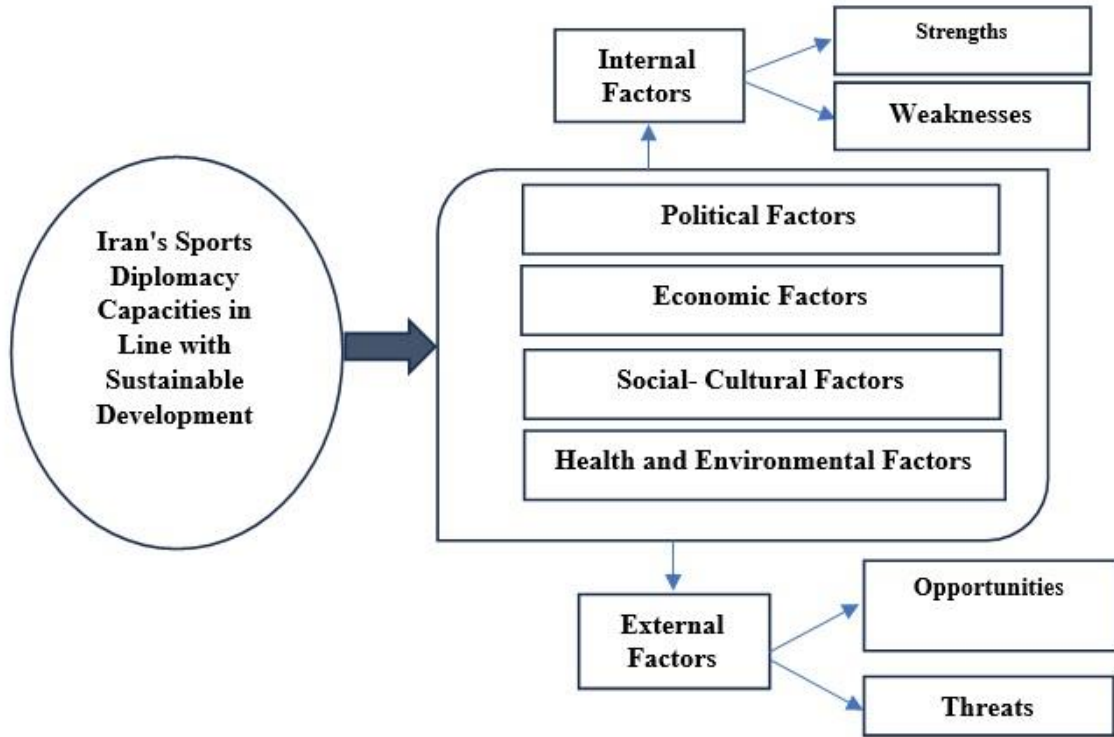


Figure 1. The Model of Iran's Sports Diplomacy Capacities in Line with Sustainable Development

The results of the Sample T-test regarding the items related to strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats are presented in table (7).

Table 7. The Results of the T-test

Category	Indices	Mean	Mean Difference	T	Sig	Category	Indices	Mean	Mean Difference	T	Sig
Political	S1	3.96	0.96	6.364	0.001	Economic	S16	3.10	0.10	7.145	0.001
	S2	3.65	0.65	7.918	0.001		S17	3.74	0.74	6.533	0.001
	S3	3.88	0.88	4.775	0.001		S18	3.44	0.44	3.287	0.001
	S4	3.46	0.46	4.885	0.001		S19	3.35	0.35	3.707	0.001
	S5	3.52	0.52	7.991	0.001		W17	3.69	0.69	4.004	0.001
	S6	3.78	0.78	5.971	0.001		W18	3.94	0.94	7.145	0.001
	S7	3.61	0.61	5.962	0.001		W19	3.62	0.62	6.664	0.001
	S8	3.60	0.60	8.981	0.001		W20	3.44	0.44	6.596	0.001
	S9	3.65	0.65	4.528	0.001		W21	3.55	0.55	9.985	0.001
	S10	3.88	0.88	1.078	0.001		W22	3.78	0.91	8.663	0.001
	S11	3.46	0.46	5.574	0.001		W23	3.91	0.91	10.481	0.001
	S12	3.52	0.52	5.598	0.001		O8	3.24	0.24	4.639	0.001
	S13	3.78	0.78	4.689	0.001		O9	3.62	0.62	6.768	0.001
	S14	3.68	0.68	4.470	0.001		O10	3.31	0.31	2.174	0.001
	S15	3.18	0.18	3.229	0.001	O11	3.37	0.37	10.127	0.001	
	W1	3.56	0.56	8.240	0.001	O12	3.67	0.67	8.663	0.001	
	W2	3.41	0.41	9.465	0.001	O13	3.69	0.69	10.481	0.001	
	W3	3.44	0.44	5.221	0.001	O14	3.14	0.14	4.214	0.001	
	W4	3.36	0.36	7.086	0.001	T8	3.62	0.62	2.768	0.001	
	W5	3.95	0.95	6.993	0.001	T9	3.70	0.70	1.174	0.001	
	W6	3.75	0.75	5.696	0.001	Social- Cultural	S20	3.81	0.81	7.251	0.001
	W7	3.52	0.52	3.479	0.001		S21	3.40	0.40	6.661	0.001
	W8	3.41	0.41	8.521	0.001		S22	3.03	0.03	3.779	0.001
	W10	3.81	0.81	4.449	0.001		S24	3.77	0.77	4.094	0.001
	W11	3.17	0.17	6.723	0.001		S25	3.64	0.64	7.442	0.001
	W12	3.55	0.55	7.174	0.001		S26	3.28	0.28	6.463	0.001
	W13	3.36	0.36	10.127	0.001		S27	3.09	0.09	6.529	0.001
	W14	3.52	0.52	8.663	0.001		S28	3.11	0.11	9.571	0.001
	W15	3.28	0.28	10.771	0.001		S29	3.83	0.83	8.554	0.001
	W16	3.27	0.27	4.821	0.001		W24	3.49	0.49	7.660	0.001
	O1	3.49	0.49	6.768	0.001		W25	3.07	0.07	6.071	0.001
	O2	3.47	0.47	8.369	0.001		W26	3.09	0.09	3.854	0.001
	O3	3.77	0.77	5.721	0.001		W27	3.52	0.52	4.547	0.001
O4	3.46	0.46	4.691	0.001	W28		3.07	0.07	6.617	0.001	
O5	3.26	0.26	7.562	0.001	W29		3.65	0.65	2.917	0.001	
O6	3.61	0.61	5.446	0.001	W30		3.36	0.36	3.730	0.001	
O7	3.95	0.95	5.963	0.001	W31		3.71	0.71	5.081	0.001	
T1	3.82	0.82	4.524	0.001	W32		3.89	0.89	7.145	0.001	
T2	3.72	0.72	4.751	0.001	W33		3.51	0.51	6.550	0.001	
T3	3.33	0.33	5.521	0.001	O15	3.22	0.22	6.789	0.001		
T4	3.61	0.61	3.662	0.001	O16	3.32	0.32	9.624	0.001		
T5	3.15	0.16	5.425	0.001	O17	3.79	0.79	8.426	0.001		
T6	3.03	0.03	8.784	0.001	O18	3.46	0.46	7.551	0.001		
T7	3.77	0.77	9.236	0.001	T10	3.21	0.21	6.749	0.001		
Health and Environment	S30	3.44	0.44	4.741	0.001	T11	3.80	0.80	3.681	0.001	
	S31	3.73	0.73	2.258	0.001	T12	3.16	0.16	3.337	0.001	
	S32	3.19	0.19	8.963	0.001	T13	3.82	0.82	4.091	0.001	
	W34	3.11	0.11	5.247	0.001	T14	3.90	0.90	7.841	0.001	
	W35	3.20	0.20	6.259	0.001	T15	3.09	0.09	6.662	0.001	
	W36	3.41	0.41	7.559	0.001	T16	3.43	0.43	6.642	0.001	
	W37	3.19	0.19	6.412	0.001						
	W38	3.36	0.36	6.658	0.001						
	O19	3.82	0.82	9.851	0.001						
	O20	3.77	0.77	8.336	0.001						
	T17	3.92	0.92	6.337	0.001						
	T18	3.40	0.40	4.158	0.001						
T19	3.77	0.77	4.526	0.001							

			Importance Factor (weight)	Rank	Score	
Strengths	Political	S1	Iran's relationship with neighboring Islamic countries	0.025	4	0.1
		S2	Iran's international credibility and prestige among Islamic countries and the Middle East	0.024	4	0.096
		S3	Attending international organizations with an emphasis on the Silk Road and the Shanghai Summit and the Eco Organization	0.021	4	0.084
		S4	Increasing importance of military issues and more tension and conflict in the region	0.004	3	0.012
		S5	The breadth and diversity of Iran's geography	0.007	3	0.021
		S6	Expanding interactions between nations and peaceful coexistence	0.016	3	0.048
		S7	Acceptable level of the country's sports among Asian and Islamic countries	0.027	4	0.108
		S8	The role of the Islamic Republic of Iran in regional and international policies	0.019	3	0.057
		S9	Sport is a tool to acquire political values	0.007	3	0.021
		S10	Iran's remarkable foreign policy in dealing with other countries	0.025	3	0.075
		S11	Reducing stereotypes, political tensions and ideological conflicts	0.022	3	0.066
		S12	Non-dependence on world powers	0.019	3	0.057
		S13	Improving the political position of the country and feeling more patriotism	0.021	4	0.084
		S14	Success in sports events as the progress of the system and government	0.02	3	0.06
	S15	Iran's new interactions with the world and influential countries in international diplomacy	0.023	4	0.092	
	Economic	S16	Revenues from sports tourism sectors	0.028	3	0.084
		S17	Greater presence of domestic and foreign investors during sports events in the country	0.022	4	0.088
		S18	The role of sports in introducing and promoting the brand of other active industries in the country	0.019	4	0.076
		S19	Sport is an opportunity to deal with economic sanctions	0.007	3	0.021
	Sociocultural	S20	Iran has a rich culture and thousands of years of history	0.015	3	0.045
		S21	The spread of magazines, media and sports analysts in the country	0.02	4	0.08
		S22	The existence of cultural commonality among different countries	0.021	4	0.084
		S23	The existence of cultural diversity in Iran	0.019	4	0.076
		S24	Belonging to people's love and friendship towards Iran	0.021	4	0.084
		S25	Strengthening Iranian identity, national solidarity and synergy of ethnicities through sports	0.017	4	0.068
		S26	Cultural interactions in the form of cultural and sports festivals	0.007	3	0.021
		S27	The desire of the country's youth to do sports	0.014	4	0.056
		S28	Better communication between different races and nations in sports events	0.02	4	0.08
		S29	General prejudice and zeal of Iranian people	0.028	4	0.112
	Health and Environment	S30	The presence of Iran's diverse ecosystem	0.028	4	0.112
		S31	Coordinating and holding various meetings of the officials of the countries during the holding of international sports events in order to promote health and comply with environmental points	0.03	4	0.12

	S32	Good reception of health and medical tourists from Iran	0.022	4	0.088
Political	W1	Lack of correct and scientific planning in line with the development of sports diplomacy	0.009	1	0.009
	W2	The difference between the country's parties and organizations in policies	0.028	2	0.056
	W3	The inability to obtain quotas for major sports events as a tool in sports diplomacy	0.014	1	0.014
	W4	Diversity among Muslim countries in terms of religion (Sunni and Shia)	0.006	1	0.006
	W5	Not having a stable place or seat in international sports institutions	0.029	1	0.029
	W6	The involvement of politicians in the country's sports	0.013	1	0.013
	W7	The existence of different political approaches between some governing institutions and the government	0.011	1	0.011
	W8	Weakness of sports managers in familiarizing with international ceremonies and protocols	0.016	1	0.016
	W9	Lack of specialized view on the management of sports organizations	0.011	1	0.011
	W10	Lack of active presence of female sports managers in international sports organizations	0.01	1	0.01
	W11	Lack of a guardian organization regarding sports diplomacy	0.014	1	0.014
	W12	Lack of management stability at the highest level of the country's sports	0.003	1	0.003
	W13	Weakness of financial and human resources in the field of sports diplomacy of the country	0.019	1	0.019
	W14	The lack of awareness of the heads of government (Members of Parliament, senior managers and students) about the benefits and capacities of sports diplomacy	0.012	1	0.012
	W15	The lack of sports policies in the country's public policies	0.004	1	0.004
	Economic	W16	Weakness and lack of attention in the interaction and cooperation between the diplomatic system and the country's sports system	0.004	1
W17		Lack of ability in international branding	0.012	2	0.024
W18		Lack of development of sports tourism infrastructure	0.008	1	0.008
W19		Lack of investment in professional teams and athletes	0.006	1	0.006
W20		Lack of economic stability and rampant inflation	0.015	2	0.03
W21		Existence of financial corruption in sports clubs and organizations	0.003	2	0.006
W22		Lack of development of privatization	0.003	1	0.003
W23		Not using sports diplomacy to circumvent or cancel economic sanctions	0.001	1	0.001
Sociocultural	W24	Lack of specific planning for cultural exchange with different countries	0.009	1	0.009
	W25	Weak unity among the different ethnic groups of the country	0.007	1	0.007
	W26	Fewer desires of officials to communicate more with international sports institutions	0.004	1	0.004
	W27	Magnification of the country's weaknesses by international media	0.01	2	0.02
	W28	Defeat against developed countries	0.019	1	0.019
	W29	Not having the desired plan and program in the	0.012	2	0.024

		field of cultural development of the country			
Health and Environment	W30	Insular operation of various sports bodies	0.018	2	0.036
	W31	Lack of attention to the country's social capital	0.003	2	0.006
	W32	Not using the capacity of non-governmental organizations in the field of sports	0.006	2	0.012
	W33	People's lack of awareness of the importance of sports diplomacy	0.008	1	0.008
	W34	Weakness in planning and implementing global guidelines in the field of environment	0.011	2	0.022
	W35	Decreased community health due to poorer nutrition, mobility and dynamics	0.006	2	0.012
	W36	Lack of documented studies and research related to health and environment	0.01	1	0.01
	W37	Lack of familiarity with the potential of different regions of Iran regarding holding sports events	0.011	1	0.011
	W38	Lack of standard of places, facilities and sports equipment in the country	0.003	1	0.003
	The sum of coefficients of internal factors			$\Sigma=1$	

The results of table (7) show that all the questionnaire items have two necessary conditions, i.e., a positive mean difference compared to the average level (average level=3), and a significant difference ($P \leq 0.05$) compared to the same level. Therefore, in these items, the null hypothesis ($\mu = 3$: H_0) is rejected and it can be stated that the mean of the sample is significantly greater than the average level, (average level=3) meaning that ($H_A: \mu > 3$). The results related to the ranking of four factors of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats related to sports diplomacy capacities for sustainable development in Iran are also presented in Table (8) as below.

Table 8. The Results of Friedman's Ranking Test in the SWOT Analysis of Sports Diplomacy Capacities for Sustainable Development in Iran

The Capacities of Sports Diplomacy for Sustainable Development in Iran	SWOT Analysis		Mean of Ranks	Chi-square Distribution	Significance Level
		Mean			
	Strengths	3.46	2.04	18.936	0.001
	Weaknesses	3.69	2.42		
	Opportunities	3.80	2.65		
	Threats	3.92	2.89		

According to the data in table (8), it can be seen that based on the significance level obtained, the four factors of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of sports diplomacy capacities for sustainable development in Iran do not have the same ranks. In this test, it was found that considering the internal factors, the weak points (weaknesses) are in a higher rank than the strong points (strengths). Also, considering the external factors, it can be seen that the threats of the country's sports diplomacy capacities are in a higher rank than Iran's opportunities.

In order to determine the strategic position of sports diplomacy capacities for sustainable development in Iran, the evaluation matrix of internal factors (Table 9) and the evaluation matrix of external factors (Table 10) were formed. In these matrices, rank 4 or 3 is assigned to opportunities and strengths and rank 2 or 1 is assigned to threats and weaknesses determined by the statistical sample group of the research. The explanations of the ranks are presented as follow: rank 4: an excellent opportunity or great strength; rank 3: ordinary opportunity or strength; rank 2: ordinary threat or weakness; and rank 1: serious threat or critical weakness). Also, a weighting coefficient between zero (unimportant) and one (very important) is assigned to each factor, that its sum must be

equal to 1(sum= 1). Thereby to determine the final score of each factor, its importance coefficient (weighting coefficient) must be multiplied by its rank.

Table 9. Evaluation Matrix of Internal Factors for Sports Diplomacy Capacities of Iran for Sustainable Development

As observed, the total scores of this matrix are less than 2.5 (total score = 2.36), indicating that the internal capacities of Iran's sports diplomacy for sustainable development are weak. Table (10) shows information about external factors as well.

Table 10. Evaluation Matrix of External Factors for Sports Diplomacy Capacities of Iran for Sustainable Development

	Index	Code	Internal Factors	Importance Factor (weight)	Rank	Score
Opportunities	Political	O1	The role of international sports events in turning the country into a hub of world trade and sports	0.027	4	0.108
		O2	The proximity of governments and the expansion of political connections	0.024	4	0.096
		O3	The inviolability of sports	0.017	4	0.068
		O4	The progress of democracy	0.012	4	0.048
		O5	Sports as a suitable platform to meet the political leaders of countries	0.024	4	0.096
		O6	Increasing global attention to the issue of sports as a tool of diplomacy	0.039	4	0.156
		O7	Expansion of sports sisterhood with other areas and industries	0.057	4	0.228
	Economic	O8	Creating foreign exchange income for the country through sports	0.057	3	0.171
		O9	Creating and expanding suitable opportunities for entrepreneurs	0.029	3	0.087
		O10	Development of sports and non-sports facilities and equipment in the country	0.057	4	0.228
		O11	Creating employment and generating more income	0.029	4	0.116
		O12	Use of economic resources of international sports organizations	0.051	4	0.204
		O13	Stable economic relations in sports	0.021	4	0.084
		O14	Early profitability of sports compared to many other industries	0.02	4	0.08
	Sociocultural	O15	Civilization, cultural background and rooted Iranian identity in the world	0.007	4	0.028
		O16	Sports, a tool for dialogue and convergence in multicultural societies	0.026	3	0.078
		O17	Attracting foreign fans for domestic leagues in order to increase influence on the public mind	0.041	4	0.164
		O18	The presence of young people interested in sports in the country and the world	0.024	3	0.072
	Health and Environment	O19	Designing sports facilities and spaces based on optimal energy consumption and sustainable architecture	0.051	3	0.153
		O20	Many human and natural facilities in the field of sports activities	0.039	3	0.117
Threats	Political	T1	Existence of strict rules regarding the issuance of visas, customs and the length of stay of athletes	0.013	1	0.013
		T2	Lack of necessary coordination between world sports organizations	0.011	2	0.022
		T3	The soft war of some western countries and the spread of negative propaganda against Iran	0.014	1	0.014
		T4	The growth of Arab countries compared to Iran in order to hold sports events	0.021	2	0.042
		T5	Lack of specialized and skilled personnel in the field of sports diplomacy	0.014	2	0.028
		T6	The existence of regional conflicts between Iran and some countries in the region	0.011	1	0.011

Economic	T7	Promoting Islamophobia, Shiaphobia and Iranophobia	0.027	1	0.027
	T8	Lack of allocation of sufficient funds and resources regarding the growth of global sports	0.027	1	0.027
	T9	Reluctance of foreign investors to enter the country	0.013	2	0.026
Sociocultural	T10	The heterogeneity of some values of the sports world with the country's cultural environment	0.01	2	0.02
	T11	Emphasis on the use of religious symbols and values in some sports events of the country	0.011	2	0.022
	T12	Failure to revive the ancient and mythological cultures of Iran	0.014	2	0.028
	T13	The existence of different cultural differences of sports managers and the existence of emotional and hasty encounters	0.01	1	0.01
	T14	Modernization and neglect of traditional sports	0.06	2	0.12
	T15	Some sports restrictions for women	0.041	2	0.082
Health and Environment	T16	The growth of immigration and declaration of asylum among athletes	0.027	2	0.054
	T17	The spread of various diseases in recent years	0.017	2	0.034
	T18	Climate change and the growth of arid and semi-arid regions of the country	0.002	1	0.002
	T19	air pollution crisis and the threat to the health of athletes and spectators	0.012	1	0.012
The sum of coefficients of external factors			$\Sigma=1$		$\Sigma=2.34$

Similarly, the total scores of this matrix are less than 2.5 (total score = 2.34), which indicates weaknesses in the external capacities of Iran's sports diplomacy for sustainable development. Based on Tables (9) and (10), the weighted average scores of the internal and external factors matrices are presented in Table (11).

Table 11. Weighted Average Scores of Internal and External Factors Matrices

Agents	Weighted Average Score
Internal	2.36
Foreign	2.34

Clarified strategies for identifying the capacities of sports diplomacy in line with sustainable development in Iran can be placed in one of the four quadrants of the SWOT matrix, determined as SO, ST, WO, or WT strategies. This matrix comprises a two-dimensional coordinate table in which each quadrant represents one particular strategy. Each strategy is described briefly as follows:

- Offensive Strategy (SO): Strategies that maximize the use of environmental opportunities by reinforcing existing strengths.
- Conservative Strategy (WO): Strategies that utilize potential advantages hidden in environmental opportunities to compensate for weaknesses.
- Competitive Strategy (ST): Strategies that use existing strengths to avoid probable threats.
- Defensive Strategy (WT): Strategies to minimize losses caused by weaknesses and threats.

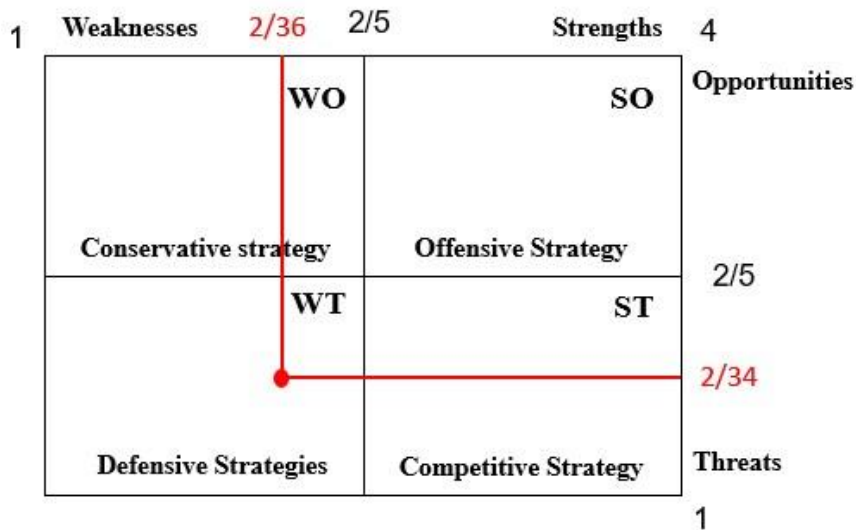


Figure 2. Strategic Positioning of Sports Diplomacy Capacities for Sustainable Development in Iran

This positioning indicates a WT situation, meaning that strategies relevant to this quadrant aim to reduce the country's vulnerabilities and weaknesses, thus minimizing external threats and constraints. This approach will enable the best use of sports diplomacy capacities for sustainable development. The related strategies for developing sports diplomacy capacities for sustainable development are outlined below:

- W1, W44, W44: To implement an applicable plan for developing sports diplomacy capacities adjusted to the political, economic, cultural, and social conditions and capabilities.
- W2, W18, W37, W39, T2, T13: To Raise awareness about the critical role of sports diplomacy in sustainable development among government leaders and planners, including parliament representatives, senior managers, and other officials, and to expand collaboration and coordination among different organizations of the country with integrated policies, in such a way that all the sectors involved in this process act in a committed and responsible manner based on their duties.
- W3, W22, W23, W36, W46, W47, T3, T4, T21, T22: Given the significant role of hosting mega sports events in developing sports diplomacy, appropriate measures must be taken into granted, equipping and improving the country's sports and non-sports infrastructure, alongside creating appropriate cultural, social, and political conditions could be some of these measures to facilitate hosting opportunities and to enhance the national brand of the country in world zone.
- W5, W9, W13, W32: To strive for a stable and permanent position in international sports organizations by setting necessary standards and conditions, augmenting the familiarity of Iran's sports managers and officials with international protocols and principles, and finally, amplifying human resources in sports diplomacy.
- W6, W17, T2, T5: Select a specific organization for sports diplomacy and enact clear laws and regulations to minimize political interferences in the country's sports affairs.
- W11, T5, T17, T18, T19, T20: To increase the extensive presence of women in management roles in the country's sports sectors and international sports organizations.
- W12, W19, T2: To create a specialized approach to sports management organizations and to achieve management stability at the top levels of the country's sports.
- W20, W43, T1, T11: To strengthen sports policies within the country's public policies and also implement them.

- W25, W26, T10: To plan for better economic stability in the country, controlling inflation, and allocating sufficient budget to brawn actions related to sports diplomacy.
- W27, W28, T9, T10: Further privatization of the country's professional sports clubs and enacting laws and regulations to prevent financial corruption.
- W31, W33, W36, T7, T8, T12, T14: To manage counterattacks against the soft war of many Western countries causing Iranophobia through representing various cultural, social, and religious faces of Iran in an accurate way.

These strategies are essential for mitigating the identified weaknesses and addressing external threats through well-planned sports diplomacy initiatives, facilitating sustainable development in Iran.

Discussion and Conclusion

According to the findings of the research, it was determined that the sports diplomacy capacities of Iran are divided into four general categories of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and all these four general categories include political factors, economic, cultural-social and health and environmental factors. Each of these factors contains more detailed concepts; which will be investigated and discussed as follow. Among the political factors which is considered as one of the country's strengths, one of the most important issues is more and more officials' attention to sports and the higher level of the national and global performance of sport arena in Iran in recent years. This is dealt with one of the appropriate tools for political communication. In fact, the presence of the country's athletes and sports teams in various international sports events, including the Olympics, the World Cup, the Asian Games, causes lots of success in various sport fields leading to raise the name of Iran more and more; and also, can provide suitable conditions for the country's sports managers and officials to communicate with the managers and officials of other countries in sports and non-sports organizations all around the world. This can lead to the development of the country's sports diplomacy by strengthening the political, economic and cultural dimensions, finally bringing about the sustainable development of the country as much as possible.

Iran's lack of dependence on world powers can also be considered as one of the strengths of sports diplomacy capacities in the field of political factors, because this issue has strengthened the communication of sports managers and officials with other countries and less restrictions in international interactions. These relationships can provide a platform for strengthening their political connections by holding various sports events and competitions at the regional level; helping the country's growth as much as possible.

Iran has the opportunity to be neighbors with various countries and expands its interactions with them in recent years due to its geographical size (Salimi & Khodaparst, 2021). These interactions considered as a strong point among all the political factors related to the capacities of sports diplomacy. Holding formal and informal sports competitions, transferring of athletes and coaches, making various sports camps in order to prepare athletes and sports teams, makes it possible to establish more communication with sports officials and even non-sports officials of those countries. As mentioned, before it causes the strengthening of the Iran's sports diplomacy and its sustainable development as well.

Another classification which is considered as the strength of the country in terms of sports diplomacy is economic factors. Despite the problems and sanctions that have taken place in recent years, still economic factors play very important roles. As an example, sports and sport brands can play a significant role in introducing and promoting the brand of other active industries in the country. Lots of other achievements can be gained if sport is used correctly in different economic sectors, resulting in the development of the country finally.

As sport is a global issue and includes a wide variety of audiences with different educational levels, different economic status, races, etc., could be a unique opportunity to introduce other industries

productions. If the country's officials can meet the necessary conditions to host global and regional sports events, this opportunity is provided by a large group of the country's brands and manufacturers. In fact, in the short and limited time of holding sports events, sport industry can act as an umbrella for other brands and industries to introduce and promote them. Expansion of different industries, leads to the sustainable development of the country. Considering the sanctions that have been imposed on Iran by some countries in recent years, and are still standing, sports can be taken into account as a suitable tool to deal with them (Hozhabri et al., 2021). By taking appropriate measures, holding events and developing communication with officials and managers of other countries in sports and non-sports sectors, more suitable economic conditions for Iran can be provided.

If the authorities of the country can provide the necessary conditions for hosting international and regional sports events, it will provide a very favorable atmosphere of foreign investors to invest in Iran leading to a significant foreign exchange to be made for the country. The other benefit would be encouragement of domestic investors to invest in the field of sports and non-sports infrastructure as much as possible; while preventing foreign exchange leaving the country. It leads to the expansion of sustainable development in the country. Currently, the tourism industry is considered as one of the most important and prosperous industries, so most countries are trying to develop this industry using various plans and investments. This industry includes various sectors such as religious tourism, historical, cultural and artistic tourism, medical and health tourism, sports tourism, etc. As sports tourism is the combination of two very important and money-maker industries, tourism and sports, it can turn to a cross-sectoral scope and can play a very important role in the sustainable economic, social and cultural development of a country with the arrival of a large population.

In the cultural-social sector, Iran has many strong points that, if properly planned and evaluated, can play an important role in the development of the country's sports diplomacy and its sustainable development. One of the most important of these strengths is that Iran has a rich culture and a civilization of several thousands of years, which, if correctly introduced, can eliminate many negative views of this country and attract a significant number of people to visit and invest in. Also, Iran is made up of very diverse ethnicities and cultures, causing a lot of attractions for this country that can be very influential in the field of tourism. Among many countries, including Iran, there are many cultural commonalities which provide the basis for strengthening their relations and diplomacies in various sectors, like sports; because sports are considered as one part of the culture of any society. The existence of cultural commonality can lead to the development of sports diplomacy and the expansion of their common cultures.

In the field of health and environment, Iran has also many strong points. By taking appropriate measures to maintain and enhance them, strengthening the sports diplomacy of the country can happen, because lots of sports fields depend on the environment and many events or races are held in natural areas (Salimi & Khodaparst, 2021). Even the construction and establishment of sports facilities are very influential for the environment, since neglecting these factors can endanger the sustainable development of a country, especially in the field of health and environment.

One of the most important weaknesses of the country in the field of political factors related to diplomacy capacity in line with sustainable development of the country is disagreements between parties and politicians in sports diplomacies. These opposed opinions in policymaking impede the development and growth of the country in regional and global levels. Also not allowing some sports events to be held in the country or preventing athletes for attending or presence in them is a place of concern; showing another political weakness in Iran. Its negative results can be seen in all sectors, including cultural, economic, political and also social sector. Another disadvantage in the field of political diplomacy of the country is the interferences of the country's officials in all sports fields and sports decisions which in many cases can have irreparable and negative outcomes for the country's sports arena and its brand. It is necessary to pass some laws and regulations for not

interfering of officials in the sports. Also familiarizing managers and sports officials with the international formalities and protocols which are highly important in strengthening sports diplomacy and sustainable development of the country. Another disadvantage in the field of political factors is the absence or low presence of women in the field of sports management that hurts the position of the country and hurts the women society who are half of Iran's population as well. This fade presence of Iranian women in sports management and totally sport affairs brings about negative image in global levels; for example, can undermine many women's rights for taking part in international sport races. Another disadvantage in the economic field of sports diplomacy in the country is financial corruptions that happen in many sports clubs and organizations. According to the news many athletes and coaches are not well- respected in terms of their financial rights; or there is no transparency in their financial contracts. So, sports clubs and athletes in the country have lots of problems to face with financially. Not developing of privatization of professional clubs in Iran is another disadvantage in economic classification of factors related to sport diplomacy capacity of country which can weaken all these professional clubs performances and undermine the national brand of the country in the world. Sports diplomacy at the global level will also face problems leading to limit global interactions with international sports organizations and global sponsors.

There are many issues affecting the sports diplomacy capacities of the country related to cultural and social weaknesses. The lack of good plans and programming in the field of Iran's culture developing at the national and international levels is one of them, which leads to restrictions in decision makings especially in sport fields; finally, not allocating any fund to them. Part of this issue is due to neglecting or insufficient attention to the country's social capital, especially the youth. Another issue is the insular functioning of the various organs of the country in the field of sports diplomacy, which hampers homogeneous plans and programs in this regard. This is in a situation where other countries are trying to discourage the youth about the country's future by exaggerating the country's internal weaknesses and instilling hopelessness among them. Weaknesses related to the field of health and environment in the discussion of sports diplomacy also include various cases, which according to the findings of the current research include weakness in planning and not implementing global guidelines and instructions related to the environment either.

In recent years, we have witnessed the unfavorable state of the country's ecology, which itself can affect many decisions in sports fields like sport events hosting; bringing about negative consequences in contradiction with spirit of sports. In our country, Iran, a significant part of sports facilities, and equipment do not meet the requirements of international standards. So, sports places and facilities do not have the necessary conditions for sports events hosting, or they are in conflict with the laws related to environmental protections. All these weaknesses will put the country's officials in a real challenge for announcing Iran's candidacy for hosting competitions, holding sports camps and other cases.

In relation to the country's opportunities regarding the political factors affecting sports diplomacy, various issues are raised, one of the most important of which is the expansion of global attention to sports as a tool for sports diplomacy. In this regard, the country's sports officials can provide the necessary conditions for achieving success by planning and taking appropriate measures regarding the development of the country's sports in various sectors. These sectors include two important steps; first, getting ready for sports events hosting; and secondly building up-to-date sports facilities in accordance with international standards. Iran's officials must put it into actions as a unique opportunity for all the athletes and sports teams to enjoy their matches and competitions helping the sustainable development of the country in the political, economic, cultural, social and environmental fields at last.

Another issue that can be considered as an opportunity in the political field of sports diplomacy is the connection of sports as an influential industry with other industries. This benefit can lead to the

formation and expansion of communication between the country's sports managers and officials with the other countries' officials. One of the most important sports opportunities is holding and hosting of international sports events, which, due to the wide range of sports fields, the number of athletes and coaches, the presence of numerous strong sponsors and officials from other industries, is a unique opportunity to strengthen the sports diplomacy of the country. Another economic opportunity of the country in the field of sports diplomacy is the early returns of sports industry compared to many other industries, hosting sports events can be mentioned as an example of. If successfully done, will act as a catalyst for the country's improvements in various sectors, including sports diplomacy. A part of these consequences takes place in the field of employment and creating money maker jobs, which leads to the sustainable economic development of the country. Also, successful sports diplomacy can provide conditions to use the resources of international sports organizations as much as possible in different ways, such as the construction and development of sports facilities and equipment, etc. through the entry of currency into the country and expansion of countries' relations for more presence of entrepreneurs in the communities. The opportunities related to the social-cultural field in the field of sports diplomacy also include various concepts. For example, attracting foreign fans for domestic leagues, which creates positive effects on the public, introduces the country in its true face and finally abolishes the slanders against the country in the best way.

Also, the population interested in sports at the national and international levels is highly significant and this huge human capacity provides a unique opportunity in the sports industry; since sport is the common language of all people with cultural, racial, religious, etc. differentiations. Among the health and environmental opportunities, it can be pointed out that the authorities paying more attention to the design of sports facilities in accordance with the culture of Iran, will make the country more known in the world and will provide an opportunity for stronger and broader sports diplomacy.

In the case of political threats, the improvements and developments of Iran's neighboring countries, including the Persian Gulf countries, in sport fields, is the most critical one. Although it can be considered as an opportunity in some aspects too; but the threatening view is more a place of concern. These countries' attempts to have hosting of sports events, to provide attractive and spacious places for sports camps and to hire professional athletes and coaches put Iran's position in danger. This issue should be an alarm for the authorities of the country. The officials should try to implement the conditions and measures with appropriate planning; finally provide the country's sustainable development in various aspects as much as possible.

One of the most important threats related to the economic field that was identified in the findings of this research is the reluctance of foreign investors to enter their capital in the country. By making more and more interactions with other countries, the obstacles of this issue will reduce; resulting the receipt of their huge funds and the country's sustainable development. Among the cultural-social threats identified in the research, the incompatibility of some values of the world of sports with the cultural environment of Iran is a very important issue that has weakened the capacities of the country's sports diplomacy and affected the country's performance in other sectors as well. Part of which is due to the emphasis on the use of religious symbols of the country in some sports events, which is in opposition with the international sports organizations' instructions. The country's sports restrictions for women in various fields, such as their non-appearance in stadiums as spectators, or the non-appearance of men in women's sports events, non-telecasting of women's competitions, etc., are also among the issues that affect the country's global image in cultural-social factors. All these can affect the sports diplomacy relations.

Threats related to the health and environmental field of sports diplomacy also include concepts; including the spread and contagion of various diseases in recent years. This issue is highly important because sports events and the holding of various competitions and tournaments can be a suitable environment for an epidemic. This issue has been a serious concern of sports and non-sports

officials of all countries, if properly planned, could provide the basis of the development of sports diplomacy. Other issues are air pollution, droughts and threats to the health of people participating in sports events including athletes and spectators. This is an important issue in weakening sports diplomacy, so requires fundamental measurements and scientific planning to be solved. Therefore, in using the capacities of sports diplomacy for the sustainable development of the country, it is necessary to examine and study all the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in different political, economic, cultural-social, health and environmental aspects. This vital topic can hopefully be done with an exact programming, containing details and evaluable actions. The outcome will be strengthening the strengths, using the opportunities appropriately, reducing the weaknesses and ultimately turning the threats into opportunities as much as possible in order to witness Iran's improvements in various sectors and to make its sustainable development possible.

Ethical Considerations

Compliance with ethical guidelines: Ethical points have been observed.

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Authors' contribution: All authors have contributed to the design and implementation of this study.

Conflict of interest: there is no conflict of interest.

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