

ORIGINAL ARTICLE**Designing and Compiling Strategies for Peace and Development through Sports**Sahar Tahmasbi¹, Tahereh Azmsha^{2*}, Maryam Karimi³

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EXTENDED A B S T R A C T**Introduction**

The transition from conflict to peace has increasingly attracted attention in recent decades, shifting focus from peacekeeping (ceasefire mediation) and peace maintenance (implementation of ceasefires) toward peace-building. Peace is a continuous process of improvement and development that can move societies beyond fragile ceasefires toward more stable and positive forms of peace. The establishment of the United Nations, as a successor to the failed League of Nations, marked a global effort to maintain peace and reaffirm undeniable constitutional support for all people, beginning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. To achieve global peace, the importance of successful peace-building—preventing the resort to violence—cannot be overstated. There are many ways in which peace-building projects can emerge within societies, yet the use of sport as a post-conflict intervention tool to prevent further violence is gaining ground. In this regard, organizing sports tournaments among regional countries in tense areas, under the banner and goal of peace for all nations, can serve as an effective strategy. Generally defined as structured and planned physical activity programs aimed at improving health or maintaining fitness, sport has been shown to offer numerous benefits for physical health and individual well-being, including lowering the risk of non-communicable diseases and providing recognized social benefits to communities at large. Given that societal progress, tranquility, and happiness are essential for achieving collective goals, sport—undoubtedly one of the fundamental elements of modern social life and a symbol of peace and coexistence—can serve as a cornerstone for lasting peace and sustainable development. This research aids all individuals facing deprivation by formulating strategic sports programs for development and peace and by examining the necessary corresponding strategies. In order to address current challenges and issues, the findings of this study can help improve the existing conditions and guide sports governing bodies (the Ministry of Sports and Youth, General Directorates of Sport, the National Olympic Committee, and Sports Federations) toward the goal of development and peace. Since the design and development of peace and development strategies through sport are planned based on scientific criteria, promising a bright future for sport, and considering the lack of an appropriate program for development and peace through sport along with an insufficient understanding and awareness of the real problems despite Iran possessing significant potential—and given that the pace and acceleration of change in today's world are extremely high, precluding reliance on sudden and hasty decision-making-long-term plans and visions can be formulated. This allows for a targeted and planned approach toward achieving the ultimate vision: reaching development and peace through sport.

Methodology

The present study employed a mixed-methods approach (qualitative–quantitative) in terms of data collection and was categorized as a strategic research project conducted in the field. The statistical population comprised all sports management professors, sports experts, managers, sports specialists, and athletes participating in international competitions. In the qualitative phase, using a purposeful sampling method, 30 experts were selected as the statistical sample. In the quantitative phase, since the total population size was unknown, Cochran's formula was used to determine a sample size of 384 individuals, selected through cluster sampling across five regions designated by the Deputy Minister of Sports. In the qualitative stage, a simple Delphi technique was applied to develop the research instrument. Following the Delphi phase, the final questionnaire was designed and compiled. The questionnaire included four dimensions: Weaknesses (17 items), Threats (15 items), Strengths (22 items), and Opportunities (19 items). All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale (from 1 = very low to 5 = very high). To assess the reliability of the questionnaires, a pilot study was conducted and the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated for each variable. All coefficients were above 0.70, confirming the reliability of the instruments. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods, including the calculation of frequency, percentage, and mean, as well as the Friedman test to rank the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. SPSS software was used for data processing, and a SWOT analysis approach was applied to interpret the research questions.

Findings

The findings from the Delphi stage, as determined by the panel members, indicated a consensus on 74 items listed as the final influential factors in promoting peace and development through sport. These 74 items included 23 strengths, 17 weaknesses, 19 opportunities, and 15 threats. According to the SWOT analysis, a total of 10 WO (weakness–opportunity) strategies were formulated for the strategic program of peace and development through sport, which are as follows:

1. Expanding sports infrastructure and capacity to promote the development of sport and secure opportunities for hosting events.
2. Striving to obtain international positions within global sports federations.
3. Ensuring participation of all sports organizations in planning and formulating effective strategies to overcome obstacles and implementation challenges in programs.
4. Providing specialized human resources within sports organizations to fulfill tasks related to sustainable peace development.
5. Securing financial resources and allocating appropriate research budgets for sustainable peace development programs through sport.
6. Pursuing cooperation with wealthier neighboring countries to jointly host international sports events.
7. Leveraging media capacities with a national perspective and expanding sports programs to promote peace strategies within society.
8. Attracting sponsorships from affluent organizations (such as oil and petrochemical companies) to finance initiatives aimed at peace development.
9. Organizing joint meetings among sports organizations to foster collaboration and dialogue regarding development and peace programs.
10. Encouraging innovation and creative strategies to utilize sport as a means of achieving sustainable development.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, the findings revealed that the strengths of peace and development through sport comprised 22 factors. Among them, the factor “sport as a tool for addressing humanitarian issues worldwide” had the highest level of importance with a mean rank of 14.16, while the factor “developing innovative new solutions and transferring achievements in peace and development through sport” had the lowest importance, with a mean rank of 6.88. Similarly, the findings indicated that the opportunities for peace and development through sport included 19 factors. The factor “breaking geographical boundaries through sport and fostering constructive interaction among countries” held the highest importance with a mean rank of 12.22, while the factor “using sports activities to nurture positive traits in youth and enhance social responsibility, interpersonal relations, peace, and healthy youth development” showed the lowest importance, with a mean rank of 2.65.

Overall, the results demonstrated that:

- The most significant strength of peace and development through sport is its capacity to address humanitarian issues globally.

- The most significant opportunity lies in sport's ability to break geographical boundaries and promote constructive international relationships.
- The most critical weakness is the lack of public education about the functional role of sport, and
- The main threat is the appointment of managers and staff based on personal connections rather than merit.

The study also showed that the weaknesses of peace and development through sport outweigh its strengths, while the opportunities outweigh the threats. This suggests that the overall status of peace and development through sport remains moderately sustainable and defensible. Therefore, sport, as a low-cost yet highly impactful instrument in humanitarian efforts, development, and peace-building, should be prioritized by governmental and non-governmental organizations alike, as well as by all segments of society. Through its political, social, economic, and cultural functions, and its profound effects on societies and constructive international relations, sport can indeed serve as a promising avenue toward global peace. Based on the weaknesses and threats identified, it is recommended that sports managers and policymakers at all levels take active steps to address and mitigate these issues. At the same time, according to the findings on strengths and opportunities, sports authorities—especially the Ministry of Sports and Youth—should reinforce the key strengths and capitalize on critical opportunities in promoting peace and development through sport. Given that weaknesses currently outweigh strengths, it is strongly advised that sports officials and stakeholders prioritize strengthening and institutionalizing the identified strengths while systematically addressing weaknesses—so that eventually, the balance shifts toward a context in which the strengths surpass weaknesses, leading to better conditions for peace and development through sport.

KEY WORDS

Sports, Peace, Development, Strategy, SWOT Analysis.

