



Developing Sports Diplomacy Paradigm of Foreign Policy in Iran

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ABSTRACT

Sports diplomacy is regarded as one of the most important communicative components among nations in their international relations. Regarding the mentioned fact, the main objective of this study was to provide a paradigm of sport diplomacy in the foreign policy of Iran. This is a qualitative study with exploratory nature by applying the Strauss and Corbin grounded theory approach. The data collection tool was semi-structured interviews with 14 elites including sports experts and policymakers. Findings demonstrated 133 initial concepts in open coding, reduced into 27 categories, and categorized into six main themes to support the initial development of the model. The results showed that adopting appropriate strategies like managerial evolution, developing indigenous models, national brand-making through sports, educating and empowering human resources, legal and structural development of sports diplomacy, and cultural changes in Iranian professional sports could bring greater consequences that encourage governing bodies to alter attitudes toward the role of sports diplomacy, and to empowers foreign policy for strengthening mutual relations worldwide.

Introduction

In the international arena, the concept of diplomacy is used to influence the political systems of other states and the decision-making mechanisms of the countries. Public diplomacy which is the work of governments to influence the people and to create public opinion in their favor, has recently put forward its effectiveness (Shariati Feizabadi, 2019). A new type of diplomacy that is implemented in conjunction with public diplomacy in different way, is sports diplomacy with tremendous contribution to peace as an element of soft power. Sports diplomacy is one of the most civilized,

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peaceful and massive diplomatic instruments that many countries take advantages of, to encounter political issues and expand their international presence (Ozsari, Fisekcioglu, Cetin, & Temel, 2018). Globalization and the scheme of having a global territory resulted in developing the challenge of power and authority among nations, which forced governments to infiltrate and control others. They can't banish their structural duties and diplomatic responsibilities, accordingly altering their attitude to modern diplomacy is the only chance (Sajjadpour & Vhidi, 2011). Since hard power was the nature of international communications in the past, domination of other countries was based on military forces, army, consultation, coalition building, and international alliances. Extending foreign affairs and international relations was directly related to the government's authority, poverty, dignity, and grade, which encouraged all the nations to recruit all their assets in this respect (Sabbaghian, 2016). Thus, an international policy was the main asset and their key leading tool was their diplomacy (Esmaeili kelishomi & Derakhsheh, 2018).

The concept of diplomacy was first established in ancient Egypt, Greece, and China (Bjola & Kornprobst, 2018). Diplomacy is the most important component of foreign policy and has encountered lots of changes during these years. Coincident with the rise of media and the breakage of geographical boundaries, the concept and structure of diplomacy have been renovated (Bagheri, Shariati Feizabadi, & Nazarian, 2016). Eventually, the concept of general diplomacy was born in the Times Newspaper in 1851; when the global power of NGOs, human rights associations, universities, businesses, and religious unions was increasing day by day.

Nowadays, experts in international affairs strongly have faith in the influence of soft power as the only vantage point to convert attitudes and views (Murray & Pigman, 2014). Although the general policy is the government's soft power, the fast pace changing world affected the power of foreign ministers in different countries to be the solemn decision maker for the policies outside their boundaries. The extended spectrum of foreign policy needs non-governmental international actors to play their roles and this brings the contribution of scientific centers, private organizations, reflective noblemen, artists, and athletes (Pamment, 2019). Additionally, public opinion is the other important factor affecting countries' behavior in different international aspects that proves why governments cannot rely on their traditional diplomacy. These days, the patrons of general diplomacy are people, politicians, cultural elites, and individuals out of government who apply the power of advertisements in public media and advantage from the cultural influence of universities (Peymanfar, Elahi, Sajjadpour, & Hamidi, 2019).

The platform of general diplomacy can increase the intellectual power of every country and extend its supremacy worldwide under the supervision of governments, whereas non-governmental bodies stay alongside as the co-actors (Sajjadpour & Vhidi, 2011). In this respect, sport is regarded as one of the main potent aspects and the sports diplomatic literature abolished the boundaries and opened the doors to negotiation, where people can gather and share their views (Murray, 2013a). Although Rensmann and Markovits (2010) definition is a bit exaggerated in saying "world as a part of sports", it is obvious that nowadays worldwide societies are an inseparable piece of sport. International sports organizations like IOC with 211 members and FIFA with 206 members are working actively which seems to be more important for societies compared to the UN with 193 members (Postlethwaite & Grix, 2016).

Pointing to research made by Bergsgard (2007), sport is a socio-economic activity due to three reasons: firstly, it is a strong cultural instrument for the developed countries manifested by media and national achievements that attracts the attention of society; secondly, it can follow non-sportive objectives of governments including their political authority, economic improvement, and civilization; and lastly, sport is not only a public service but also a multi-dimensional fact, and a part of social welfare and wellbeing with economic consequences. Researchers believe that diplomats sit around a table to achieve their national profits, whereas athletes run around the track to accomplish the same objective (Murray, 2013b).

The popularity of world-class sport events can enable the initiation of multilateral diplomacy (Bakhshi Chenari, Godarzi, Sajjadi, & Jalali Farahani, 2021). In terms of foreign policy tools, sport also serves as an instrument to wield soft power. The impact of sport on diplomacy is obvious in the past centuries when the states of Greece stop the internal wars during the ancient Olympic Games. For many years, states have co-opted sport to amplify foreign policy and diplomatic messages. Oft-

cited examples are Hitler's staging of the 1936 Berlin Olympics (Krüger & Murray, 2010) and the 'ping-pong' inspired rapprochement between President Nixon and Chairman Mao in 1972 (Xu, 2008). The state has also employed sport to signal its displeasure with its counterparts, so sporting boycotts, such as those at the Moscow (1980) and Los Angeles (1984) Olympic Games, have become a feature of the sport diplomacy landscape (Beacom, 2012; Rofe, 2018). These 'traditional' sport diplomacy actions have tended to be 'sporadic, opportunistic and, arguably, somewhat clumsy' and the results have been difficult to determine (Murray, 2018).

According to Parrish (2022), we can define three features of sport diplomacy. The first and most familiar feature is 'traditional' sport diplomacy. At one level, 'modern' sport diplomacy could be considered merely a more regular and strategic version of its 'traditional' sibling. Take for example the systematic use of sports by China to re-brand via 'mega-event diplomacy', 'stadium building diplomacy', and the enormous investments made into domestic and overseas sports, notably football (Xue, Ding, Chang, & Wan, 2019). Consider also the use of soft power and cultural diplomacy in the context of the opening ceremonies of the Olympic Games (Arning, 2013). However, in another context, modern sport diplomacy feels different. It draws in a wider number of actors beyond the traditional diplomat and politician including amateur and professional sportspersons, sports clubs, governing bodies, and civil society actors. It refers to the 'conscious, strategic and regular' use of sport by the state to build long-term mutually beneficial partnerships with third countries and societies, particularly where relations have become estranged (Murray, 2018). Modern sport diplomacy extends the appeal of a nation's people and culture to third countries through the cultivation of people-to-people links with grassroots initiatives becoming increasingly prominent (Garamvolgyi, Bardocz-Bencsik, & Doczi, 2022). The third feature of sport diplomacy can be observed – 'sport-as-diplomacy'. Here, private sports bodies, as opposed to public bodies, harness the appeal of sport as a means of pursuing their interests in the international arena (Beacom, 2012). For example, through the allocation of major sporting events, sports bodies can leverage influence in national capitals and seek assurances, sometimes even enshrined in law, about the protection of key interests such as the preservation of autonomy and specificity of sport. The existence of the so-called 'Olympic Law' within national legal systems highlights the diplomatic power of the sports movement (James & Osborn, 2016). Similarly, the reference to the 'specific nature of sport' contained in Article 165 TFEU reflects a complex constellation of forces, but one significant factor was the diplomatic campaign led by the IOC (Garcia & Weatherill, 2012). 'Sport-as-diplomacy' offers the EU sporting partners already well-versed in the ways of international diplomacy and it also presents potentially fruitful avenues for the EU and the Member States to seek advances in their own interests, such as embedding a human-rights focus within the context of the staging of major sporting events (Parrish, 2022).

An examination of the literature provided on the subject indicates that previous studies are divided into two different groups (Shariati Feizabadi, 2019):

The first group of research shows that sport is non-aligned with policy. These researchers believe that there is no dependency between sport and political interactions, and sports diplomacy is only limited to sport among different countries. This idea is the same as Olympism and validates the Olympic philosophy of the IOC. According to Qing and Richeri (2010) "London Times" and "New York Times" put emphasis on the political advantages of electing Beijing as the host city for 2008 Olympic Games and not the eligibility. After 2000 Sydney Olympic Games, Rowe (2019) reported Australians as the most "sportive nation" worldwide. Shariati Feizabadi and Godarzi (2015), described that sport is out of the diplomatic borders in Iran and politicians believe in the recreational role of sports more than anything else.

On the other hand, the second group of research provides information that sport is in the service of policy. These researchers aim to sport as a tool for politicians to reach their political objectives. Satterfield (2013), noted that we can use sport diplomacy to build a global network to empower women and girls. Grix and Houlihan (2014), pointed to the case of so-called BRICS countries (a group of large, emerging states seeking to collectively raise their status). They have all hosted a major sporting event: Brazil had double-host status (2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympics), as does Russia with the 2014 Winter Olympics and the upcoming 2018 World Cup; India hosted a disastrous Commonwealth Games in 2010; China hosted the 2008 Summer Olympics and will host 2022 winter

games, and South Africa had the 2010 World Cup. All were hosted with the purpose of putting the respective countries on the map, in particular those countries with a questionable past. Shariati Feizabadi (2019), also confirmed that other small countries with a limited population around the Persian Gulf are hosting sports events with the same objective, including Qatar (FIFA World cup 2022) and Bahrain (Formula One). Lula Da Silva the president of Brazil wrote a letter to Sepp Blatter as FIFA president and requested for hosting of the World cup games in his country, putting emphasis on the importance of this event and Football in Brazil as a power for removing any discrimination, injustice, and bringing solidarity among men and women (Castro, 2013). During the last ten years, Brazil also hosted many international sport events that intellectually improved its power and influence in the world including 2013 FIFA Confederation Cup, 2014 FIFA World Cup, 2016 Summer Olympic Games, 2016 Paralympic Games, 2019 Universiade, and 2021 Summer Deaflympics. According to Yousefi Kupai, Yazdani, and Omidi (2019) USA neglected Latin American countries and due to the Monroe Doctrine in the USA, they complained IOC for not accepting US states for the bidding of the Olympic Games. Cha (2013), focused on the role that Olympics and the Asian Games have played in promoting diplomatic breakthroughs between countries and the use of sports diplomacy to foster the end of the Cold War in Asia, studying the breakthroughs between Korea, China, and Russia. He also noticed that some countries are using sports as their “national emblem” to affect their society. Pointing to Guttman (2002), hosting the Olympics is ‘the Twin Suns of Prestige and Profit’.

Peymanfar et al. (2019), also developed a model to explain the nature of sports diplomacy in Iran. He conducted his qualitative research to collect data and defined a paradigm. He concluded that the knowledge of sports diplomacy has major implications for the development of political sociology, foreign policy, and the development of sports in the country with different dimensions. Therefore, long-term planning in this field can provide a better future for sports, politics, international relations, peace, and the development of countries.

After studying the literature on this subject, it can be concluded that sports diplomacy is not only a case of a governmental issue for your own people and countries; but also something to affect the view of societies and people worldwide. Collecting the literature on sports diplomacy brings the necessary theoretical pieces of evidence, at the same time as terminating the importance of sports diplomacy will lead to the weakness of political assets in foreign relations, and inactivating this potent value of a country can harm national interests. Therefore, while explaining the place of sports in the development of today's international interactions, the present study aims to design a qualitative model for sport diplomacy in the context of foreign policy to come into the best practice for national interests and support further efficiency of sports diplomacy in the main vision of Iran's foreign policy for the future researches.

Methodology

The present study is explorative research due to its objectives, whereas, it is among fundamental studies regarding the results. More than 50 articles, books, notes, and news from the years 2006 to 2021 were studied to gather the necessary information. In order to collect data in this qualitative research, deep semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 selective elites in the year 2021. 12 face to face interviews were conducted plus 2 interviews on phone, each of them lasting for 60 to 75 minutes. Theoretical saturation was the main criterion to justify the sample size. In order to collect beneficial data during the interviews, subjects were objectively chosen and requested to participate in this survey including university professors, international relations experts, foreign affairs officials, and diplomats. Subjects were asked to share their knowledge and experiences in the field of sport diplomacy. Some expository questions were also asked based on the role of sports diplomacy and its components leading to successful international diplomatic behavior in the world. This research was based on Strauss and Corbin's version of Grounded Theory (GT). Grounded theory is a qualitative method that enables you to study a particular phenomenon or process and discover new theories that are based on the collection and analysis of real-world data. The key terms in the coding instrument are code, concept, category, and theme (Figure 1). In this sequence, code is the first item that emerges. Codes are the labels given to the data extracts depending on what the data extract indicates. Concepts are interpretive words that group the codes sharing the similar ideas (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Categories are higher in level and more abstract than the concept they represent. Comparison and contrast among the concepts generate categories. Categories are the basic guide through which themes, the final step in the coding sequence, are created. Themes are the highest level of abstraction. Codes, concepts, categories, and themes can be created as concise phrases or gerunds.



Figure 1. Sequence of the key terms inside the coding instrument

First of all, the research group started the GT by open coding. Although the different procedures of coding do not occur in a strict sequence, open coding is usually the first approach to the data. Core elements of open coding are posing sensitizing questions and constantly comparing data and codes. Open coding is the part of data analysis that focuses on the conceptualization and categorization of phenomena through an intensive analysis of the data. Secondly, axial coding was used as a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories. As people act and interact with other people, they possess different strategies to handle their interpretations of the situations in which they are involved. Their acting as well as the pursuit of their strategies have consequences. The third step was based on selective coding. The goal of selective coding is to integrate the different categories that have been developed, elaborated, and mutually related during axial coding into one cohesive theory to generate the Themes. To reach this goal, the results from axial coding are further elaborated, integrated, and validated. A further central rule of grounded theory methodology is to interrupt the coding process, again and again, to write down memos. In general, memos are very special types of written notes as they keep track of the analytical process and the directions for the analyst. Thus, they not only describe the phenomena they are about; but move on a meta-level by being analytical and conceptual and help the researcher to step back from the material to see it from an analytical distance (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Supplementary to written memos, diagrams also help the researcher to find relations between concepts and develop the grounded theory from the data. Strauss and Corbin (1998), define diagrams as visual devices that depict the relationships among concepts. Thus, diagrams are needed to link concepts graphically, which is especially helpful for instance to illustrate the relations between the different elements of the coding paradigm.

The validity and reliability of this research were evaluated with the contribution of interviewees and a Ph.D. student of International Affairs as the assessor. He was asked to help the research group in the coding process for the first four interviews to find the percentage of accordance between the codes and intercoder reliability (ICR). The below equation shows how to find this percentage:

$$ICR \text{ Percentage} = \frac{2 \times \text{agreements}}{\text{Total number of Codes}} \times 100\%$$

The coding process between research group and evaluation group is demonstrated in Table 1:

Table 1. Researcher and Assessor's Coding Comparison

Interviewee	No. of Codes	Agreements	Disagreements	ICR
I	41	16	9	78%
II	29	13	3	90%
III	15	6	3	80%
IV	37	16	5	86%
Total	122	51	20	83%

According to the above table, 122 codes were defined from four interviews, in which 51 comments agrees and 20 disagreements were identified between the research group and the evaluation group. This shows a good percentage of reliability that is above 60%.

After the coding process and classification, primary drafts were given to the interviewees to check the accuracy of the collected notes by the research group aroused from their opinions; and their agreement proves the validity of this research.

Results

The following table indicates the demographic features of the study sample. 14 selective male and female elites including university professors, international relations experts, foreign affairs officials, and diplomats were invited to the interviews to take part in this research.

Table 2. Demographic Data of Study Sample

	Age			Sex		Education	
	- 40	40 - 50	+ 50	Female	Male	Master	Ph. D.
Frequency	3	4	7	4	10	1	13
Percent	21.42	28.58	50	28.5	71.5	7	93

Interviews were analyzed based on Strauss and Corbin's Grounded Theory and according to the coding process, findings exposed 133 concepts in open coding, reduced into 27 categories by axial coding, and categorized into six main themes after selective coding to support the final development of the model (Table 3). Five codes as casual conditions, three codes as grounded conditions, six codes as intervening conditions, two codes as the main phenomenon, six codes as strategies, and five codes as the consequences of developing a sports diplomacy model of foreign policy in I.R. Iran.

Table 3. Sport Diplomacy Coding Outcomes

Theme (Selective Coding)	Category (Axial Coding)	Concept (Open Coding)
1 Casual Conditions	1. Unique Nature of Sport	5 concepts
	2. Sport Extensiveness	4 concepts
	3. International Sport Organizations	4 concepts
	4. Good Station of Professional Sport in Iran	6 concepts
	5. Superior Potential of Sport	3 concepts
2 Grounded Conditions	1. Developing the Legal Environment	4 concepts
	2. Structural Development	3 concepts
	3. Removing Cultural & Political Obstacles	4 concepts
3 Intervening Conditions	1. Political Tensions	5 concepts
	2. Uncontrollable Factors	5 concepts
	3. Human Resources Deficiency	4 concepts
	4. Cultural Differences	5 concepts
	5. By-Laws & Rules Imperfection	4 concepts
	6. Economic Conditions	4 concepts
4 Main Phenomenon	1. Developing National Diplomacy through Sport	5 concepts
	2. Developing Sports Diplomacy	3 concepts
5 Strategies	1. Managerial Evolution in Iran's Sport Diplomacy	7 concepts
	2. Developing Indigenous Models of Sport Diplomacy	4 concepts
	3. National Brand-Makings through Sports	6 concepts
	4. Educating and Empowering Human Resources	8 concepts
	5. Developing Structure & Legal Environment of Sports Diplomacy	7 concepts
	6. Cultural Changes in Iran's Professional Sports	5 concepts

6 Consequences	1. Developing the National Brand of Iran in the World	6 concepts
	2. Developing the Sport Tourism	5 concepts
	3. Human Resources & Financial Development	6 concepts
	4. Improving the National Identity	6 concepts
	5. Extending Infra-National Peace & Friendship	5 concepts

Key strategies in promoting sport diplomacy in the foreign policy of Iran grounded from 37 concepts in the open coding process (Table 4). These strategies in empowering and promoting sport diplomacy in the foreign policy of Iran are defined in six main categories:

1. Managerial evolution in Iran's sports diplomacy, grounded from seven concepts. This evolution is based on both human resources and structure.
2. Developing indigenous and national models of sports diplomacy, grounded in four concepts. The main idea of this strategy is to have national models, which are more practical and support the unique culture, economy, policy, and social issues of each country.
3. National brand-making through sports, grounded in six concepts. This strategy is focused on increasing a country's fame in the world.
4. Educating and empowering human resources, grounded in eight concepts. Updating managerial knowledge, recruiting educated people, and organizing courses are the key elements that could be supported by specialists of the foreign ministry and sports authorities.
5. Developing structure and legal environment of sports diplomacy, grounded from seven concepts. This strategy is mainly related to the social, economic, and political conditions of other countries, which affect our decisions and the recognition of the National Sports Federation in Iran.
6. Cultural Changes in Iran's Professional Sports, grounded from five concepts. Ethical codes, social behavior, and the role of sports ambassadors are the main aspects of this strategy.

Table 4. Strategies and concepts of sports diplomacy in the foreign policy of I.R. Iran

Strategies	Concepts
1 Managerial Evolution in Iran's Sport Diplomacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recruiting eligible and expert managers of sport diplomacy • Identifying strengths and weaknesses of the managerial structure in Iran • Having short-term and long-term planning for developing sport diplomacy • Designing specified road-maps and meticulous programming • Increasing the budget for international sport organizations from the government • Implementing systematic knowledge management in sport diplomacy • Empowering top managers that make critical decisions
2 Developing Indigenous Models of Sport Diplomacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Having geographical knowledge of the national environment • Attracting the attention of national research groups to grasp synergetic ideas in sport diplomacy • Negotiating with national sport ambassadors • Organizing sport diplomacy gatherings with the presence of both sport experts and diplomats from the foreign ministry
3 National Brand-Makings through Sports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using Iranian national symbols in international sport events • Achieving managerial positions and seats in international sport organizations • Contributing with famous Iranian athletes to improve international relations • Increasing the presence of Iranian athletes in international gathering • Hosting mega sport events

<p>4 Educating and Empowering Human Resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • expanding Iranian origin-based sports like Polo and Zurkhaneh • Updating managerial knowledge of staff in National Sport Federations • recruiting educated people in the field of Physical Education and Sport Sciences in the NOC of Iran • organizing international sport courses • recruiting experts of foreign ministry to organize educational courses for sports managers • organizing bilateral conferences between sport authorities and international relation's experts of foreign ministry • advantaging the potentials of universities in Iran, organizing international diplomatic gatherings among Asian countries • extending the collaboration of scientific society with executive staff of Sports Federations
<p>5 Developing Structure & Legal Environment of Sports Diplomacy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paying attention to political, economic & social environment of other countries • Improving international investments in sports by modifying the rules • Developing National Sports Federation's activities by amending supportive regulations • Evolving organizational structure of National Sports Federations • Supporting the independency of National Sports Federation as non-governmental organizations • Increasing the number of NGOs and non-profitable organizations to support the activities of National Sports Federation's • Recognizing National Sports Federation's as the highest authority
<p>6 Cultural Changes in Iran's Professional Sports</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing ethics in international sport arena • Branding the ethical codes of Iranian athletes & their behaviors • Showing the culture of fair play from Iranian athletes to the world • Familiarizing the Iranian athletes to other cultures • Introducing famous Iranian athletes as cultural sport ambassadors

According to the collected data noted in Table 3, the below model of sport diplomacy in the context of Iran's foreign policy was developed. Model fit indices were also confirmed.

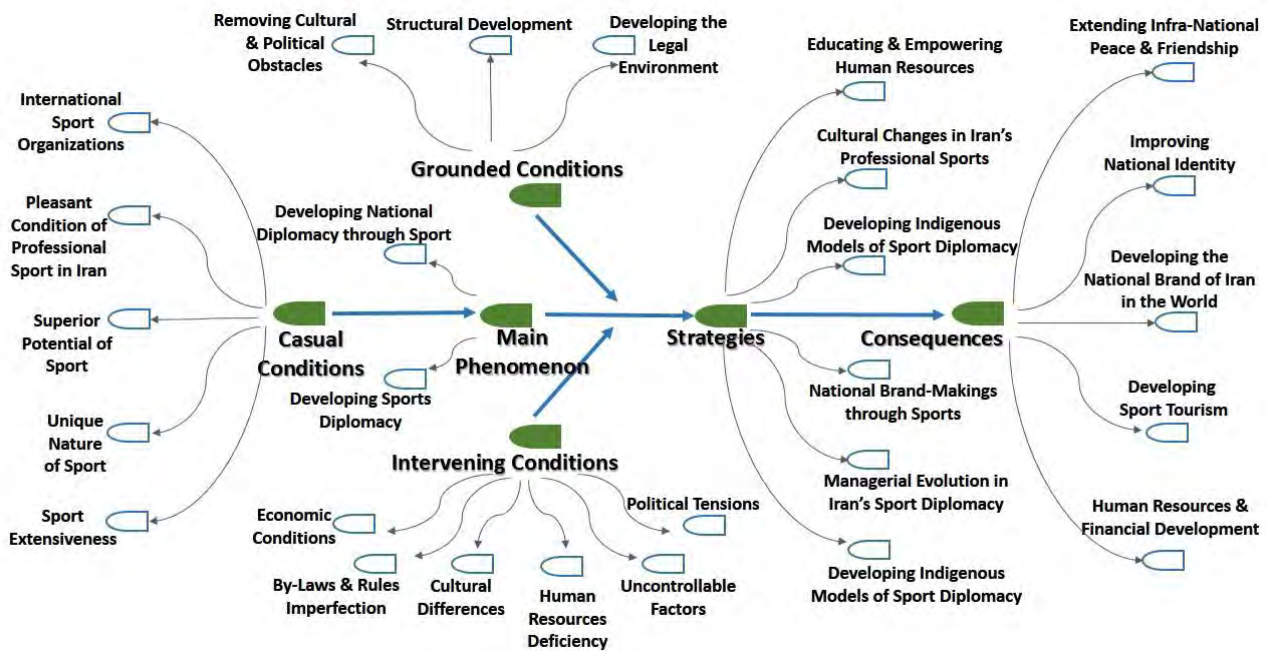


Figure 2. Sport Diplomacy Paradigm in the context of Foreign Policy of I.R. Iran

Discussion and Conclusion

The final model of research states that sports diplomacy is a familiar but relatively under explored area of theory and practice in diplomatic studies. Considering the diversity and dynamism of the modern diplomatic environment, sport diplomacy does have potential. For governments, their diplomats, and respective publics, sport and sporting events can transform layers and networks into positive diplomatic relationships and, more importantly, offer an alternate channel for entrenched relations. At the present time, there are many explanations to show how countries are using sports in their general diplomacy to facilitate international relations (Shariati Feizabadi, 2015). Studying “what, why, and how” sports diplomacy affects the triumph of countries can help politicians to consider the importance of sports in their diplomacy and this is vital for our current society. The concept of sports diplomacy under the structure of soft power and general diplomacy is much important for developing countries and economically growing nations.

The above-mentioned points are good enough to put emphasis on the necessity of this research, aiming to develop a paradigm that shows some key strategies for empowering and promoting sports diplomacy in the foreign policy of Iran.

According to Dixon, Anderson, Baker, Baker, and Esherick (2019), through a review of different foreign policy objectives that are common in multilateral diplomacy, the effectiveness of sports as a platform for diplomacy is proven. The most common strategic objectives are (a) providing an unofficial reason and location for international leaders to meet and begin a dialogue; (b) providing insights into the host country and educating others about it; (c) bridging cultural and linguistic differences among nations and seeking common ground through sports; (d) creating a platform for new trade agreements or legislation; (e) creating awareness for the international relationship through sports ambassadors; (f) creating a legacy for the host country, improving its image in the world; and (g) using sport to provide legitimacy for a new nation.

Saboonchi, Shariati Feizabadi, and Bahmani (2022), also concluded that political development is one of the main themes related to the concepts of sport and security. Governance and management are both important in this respect and strengthening national political values is much more important in the success of countries political development.

It can be thought that the rationalist way to have a word in sports diplomacy, with the logic of following public diplomacy strategy and empowering sports managers who are well trained in sports

management and have adequate qualification required by the age. Furthermore, it can be given various training to the athletes, trainers, and sportsman representing his countries for effective sports diplomacy within the scope of sports diplomacy and to make them sports ambassadors (Ozsari et al., 2018).

According to Grix (2013), the main objective of the UK for hosting the 2012 London Olympic Games was to develop the tourism industry, increase the number of national stakeholders involved in sports, improve exports, bring self-esteem to politicians, empower patriotism and pride of UK national identity, and lastly show a different level of hosting sports event. Moreover, the other positive example is Germany's FIFA World Cup in 2006. It was one of the most successful sports mega-events in terms of changing a state's national image abroad. Germany's image had been colored by its Nazi past and the idea that Germany wants to dominate Europe. Among the striking aspects of that World Cup was that they struggled to find infrastructure to invest in because theirs was already in such good shape. Germany spent the funds and resources on public diplomacy efforts. The foreign office put an awful lot of money into creating positive public diplomacy outcomes. They hired people who spoke lots of different languages and ran all sorts of efforts to send out a positive message and change the minds of how citizens of other countries saw Germany. That is public diplomacy. Murray (2012), put emphasis on the countries that experience economic growth through sports. In another research by Murray (2013b), he points to the international advantage of the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games as soft power and national attraction for Australia.

Regarding different studies and the results of this research, it is widely believed that the concepts of sports and diplomacy are filled with various projects and sport as a diplomatic activity is a soft and rational force that encourage nations to carry out their sports diplomacy activities through international sporting organizations, national brands, media and technology, sports ambassadors and lobbying. Thus, the main objective of countries is to manifest their superiority in the sports, which spreads their culture and improve their economics.

Although the research group had encountered some limitations in this study related to the confidentiality of political jobs of interviewees, the most important advantage of this paradigm is the native context useful for Iranian politicians and diplomats to develop the best possible diplomacy through sports among the foreign policy of the country. Clearly, there is a disconnection between the reality of sport in Iran and its representation and utility as a diplomatic tool. The neglect of sport as a diplomatic tool, and an obsession with winning and impressing an international audience that does not really care is disappointing for a country that touts sport in religious terms.

Eventually, it could be noted that geographical, cultural, social, political and economic condition of Iran have made its foreign policy a critical point and well-designed sports diplomacy could facilitate its international relations resulting to further achievements for the country. Further researchers are encouraged to use this paradigm in mixed studies and examine this qualitative model with structural equation modeling to supported the accuracy of this model.

This paradigm also indicates that consequences of using these strategies are supporting the development of Iranian sport diplomacy in the context of our foreign policy, including:

1. Developing the national brand of Iran in the world
2. Developing the sport tourism of Iran
3. Improvement of human resources & financial development
4. Improving Iranian's national identity in the world
5. Extending infra-national peace and friendship

According to the obtained results, it is suggested to sports strategists and managers to have closer contribution with diplomats and policy makers of International Affairs. Sharing knowledge in this respect and giving meticulous information about the power and nature of sport, will probably support their decisions in Iran's public diplomacy. The prominent role of NOC and National Sport Federations are undeniable, and governments should give more authority to these organizations in making political decisions. Sports managers and experts should also be aware of their vital responsibility and make precise studies in the field of global policies and the responsibility of sports diplomacy in developing countries.

Lastly, it is recommended to other research groups to make further studies on the effective factors of sports diplomacy on internal policies of Iran, which may support our diplomacy in the foreign policy. It is also suggested to study the sport diplomacy models and paradigms of successful countries like UK and USA to make practical comparison with this paradigm.

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