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Presentation of a Sustainable Development Model for Iranian Sports Entrepreneurship

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Abstract

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This study introduces a sustainable development model for Iranian Sports Entrepreneurship based on Strauss and Corbin's Grounded Theory. The participants were experts in sport management, entrepreneurship, and the economy. Data saturation was achieved after 15 interviews using a theoretical sampling method. Analyzing previous data sets, open, axial, and selection coding methods were employed. A six-dimensional paradigm model was created, covering causes, central subjects, strategies, background, interference situation, and consequences. Validity was ensured through member compatibility, colleague feedback, and pilot interviews. To promote sustainable development in sports entrepreneurship, initiatives like enforcing Article 3's third clause ensuring universal exercise rights can boost interest in physical activities, stimulating demand for sports-related products and services, consequently facilitating job growth. Moreover, entrepreneurs must upgrade their knowledge and expertise to cater more effectively to society, possibly necessitating curriculum revisions. Transitioning towards privatization involves reallocating government-linked domains to private entities, downsizing the Sport and Youth Ministry, and encouraging public and private investments to improve sports infrastructure.

Keywords:

Sport Industry, Sport Entrepreneurship, Strategic Reflection, Sustainable Development

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Introduction

Entrepreneurship is recognized as a driving force for social and economic growth in today's world. It plays a vital role in the continuity, growth, and development of national economies. Therefore, there is an increasing need to create a supportive environment for entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs, including physical, spiritual, cultural, research, and scientific support (Razavi et al., 2015). In recent decades, the Entrepreneurship is widely recognized as a key driver of social and economic growth in today's world. It plays a crucial role in the continuity, growth, and development of national economies. Therefore, there is a growing need to establish a supportive environment for entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs, encompassing physical, spiritual, cultural, research, and scientific support (Razavi et al., 2015). In recent decades, the sports industry has emerged as an economic sector that produces goods and services related to sports, contributing significantly to the national economies of countries. It is considered one of the revenue-generating industries of the 21st century (Salimi et al., 2015). It's important to recognize that sports have significant effects in various areas. Today, sports promote individual health, provide opportunities for healthy and enjoyable leisure time, foster strong community relationships, and help prevent social fraud and moral deviations, especially among the younger generation (Seyed Javadin et al., 2014).

In the midst of global developments and evolving paradigms in various aspects of life, including sports, there is an increasing demand for fresh and innovative ideas. Recognizing and adjusting to environmental changes and seizing opportunities are fundamental aspects of entrepreneurship. Hence, entrepreneurship in sports plays a pivotal role in the prosperity of the sports industry (Hadavi et al., 2016). Additionally, sports entrepreneurship presents a multitude of possibilities and holds a worldwide significance (Reier-Forraddellas et al., 2021). As per Eurostat (2021), the sports sector is a burgeoning industry that hires educated youth. European nations like Iceland, Switzerland, Portugal, and Spain exhibit the highest employment rates in this sector among individuals with tertiary education (Eurostat, 2021).

Entrepreneurship is a key aspect in sustainable development, involving innovation to bring economic, social, and environmental benefits. Sports entrepreneurship, specifically, can enhance a nation's growth by fostering business, employment, and health while addressing social issues. This sector can also bolster sports programs, clubs, and facilities, contributing to community well-being and business sustainability. Despite its potential, the transient nature of sports businesses poses challenges for long-term development. The lack of institutionalization impacts individuals, organizations, and communities, a common issue faced by countries like Iran in sustaining sports enterprises. Another problem that entrepreneurs can offer a solution for is the unemployment problem. According to the report from the Statistics Center of Iran in 2015, there are over four and a half million unemployed people in the country, with a significant portion of them being university graduates. The employment of university graduates is a major issue in the country and in higher education. Therefore, entrepreneurship, as the economic engine, can help increase employment rates, productivity, and the productive capacity of students, while reducing the unemployment rate among university graduates (Goudarzi et al., 2017).

The results of a study revealed that individuals' entrepreneurial mindset and the institutions they are part of can influence sustainable sports entrepreneurship, leading to economic, social, and institutional development in the sports community (Mondalizadeh et al., 2016). Gosens et al. (2018) highlighted the lack of educational entrepreneurship as a key obstacle to progress. Bjärsholm (2017) explored social and sports entrepreneurship, finding that organizations required a new approach for change. Another study examined the role of entrepreneurs in nonprofit sport organizations, with positive results suggesting the need for innovative policies to drive change among employees (Winand & Anagnostopoulos, 2017).

In contrast to traditional entrepreneurship that focuses mainly on economic development, sustainable entrepreneurship aims to balance economic, social, and environmental goals. The concept has gained significance in recent years, with sustainable entrepreneurship striving for sustainable and successful innovations, integrating social and environmental goals alongside economic principles (Belz & Binder, 2017). The link between individuals and opportunities is emphasized, with key capabilities and identifying opportunities being crucial for implementing sustainable development strategies (Biberhofer et al., 2018).

Sustainable entrepreneurship involves taking risks, encouraging innovation, and addressing ethical concerns to create value for the community and address economic, environmental, and social issues (Greco & Jang, 2017).

Schrepel (2020) studied factors impacting the economic prosperity of American sports and highlighted issues related to the globalization of sports affecting sports entrepreneurship. Da Silva & Da Silva (2019) focused on sustainable entrepreneurship in sports, underlining the importance of sustainability in major sports events and proposing the implementation of the "Green Goals" program by organizing committees. Mondalizadeh et al. (2016) developed a sustainable entrepreneurship model in sports and noted that individuals' entrepreneurial attitude, institutions, and the institutional environment can shape sustainable sports entrepreneurship and its outcomes in economic, social, and institutional aspects.

Examining the business environment in Iran reveals challenges like sanctions, tariffs, banking issues, delayed WTO membership, and economic stagnation creating an unfavorable setting. In such conditions, creativity and innovation are crucial for problem-solving. In sports, creativity, innovation, and change are vital. Traditional norms are insufficient for addressing sports issues, requiring creative ideas and entrepreneurship. Moreover, entrepreneurship proves effective when innovation across products, processes, markets, and business models generates positive results, significantly enhancing the business environment. Youth employment is crucial not just economically but also socially, with unemployment's negative effects underscoring the importance of fostering a culture of production and entrepreneurship among young individuals. Empowering individuals in entrepreneurship can turn employment into sustainable entrepreneurship, aligning with sustainable development goals. Promoting sustainable development through entrepreneurial endeavors is paramount (Schrepel, 2020; Da Silva & Da Silva, 2019; Mondalizadeh et al., 2016). Businesses in sustainable development must prioritize environmental and social considerations alongside economic goals. Entrepreneurs should focus on innovative, sustainable products and services. Since job creation starts with entrepreneurship and the growth of sustainable entrepreneurship directly impacts the national economy, in addition to benefiting a significant number of physical education graduates, it becomes imperative to establish a comprehensive model for the sustainable advancement of sports entrepreneurship.

Research Methods

The current study utilized a qualitative approach, employing the Strauss and Corbin Grounded Theory method to analyze the perspectives of interviewees on sustainable development in sports entrepreneurship. The research focused on understanding the components essential for this development. The methodology was geared towards developing plans and programs, using qualitative measures to explore research variables. Data from interviews and documents aided in comprehending social phenomena, with the researcher integrating experiences, knowledge, thoughts, and attitudes of involved individuals to formulate a theory. The study targeted experts in sports management, economics, and entrepreneurship, interviewing 15 such individuals until theoretical saturation was achieved. Sampling was conducted theoretically, seeking samples that supported the evolving theory until saturation was met. Deep exploratory interviews, open-ended questions, and Grounded Theory aspects were utilized to examine causal factors, environmental influences, and strategies for sustainable sports entrepreneurship. Coding and analysis occurred concurrently with interviews, emphasizing centrality among identified themes and words. An iterative process between initial texts and final categories ensured stability and common understanding among researchers. Encoding was carried out openly, axially, and selectively, enhancing and integrating categories to outline the research theory. Strategies such as credibility, transferability, reliability, and validity were employed for audit purposes, with rigorous measures implemented to validate research findings and ensure consistency in coding processes.

To assess credibility, the researcher reanalyzed a interview a month later and compared results with Scott's coefficient, which was 80%. Transferability entails assessing the ability to transfer inferences from one platform to another. To gauge transferability, the final data analysis report, resulting categories, and interview text were shared with four individuals for feedback, used in coding and model development. Dependability involves ensuring consistent findings if another person coded the data, which was confirmed in this study. Additionally, two test interviews were conducted to enhance research tool accuracy. Validity,

or confirmability, verifies if findings are genuinely derived from the data. To establish confirmability, three experts meticulously reviewed codes, findings, and the model; all steps were thoroughly documented.

Interview Questions

1. What is your definition of sustainable development?
2. In your opinion, to what extent can sustainable development in the field of sports be effective in promoting entrepreneurship?
3. In your opinion, which aspects of Iranian sports have the potential to foster sustainable entrepreneurship?
4. In your opinion, what is the main challenge facing entrepreneurship in Iranian sports?
5. To what extent do the existing mechanisms in Iran's sports education system cultivate entrepreneurial individuals?
6. How receptive is the management structure of Iranian sports to individuals with an entrepreneurial spirit, in your opinion?
7. How interested are entrepreneurs in investing in Iran's business environment?
8. To what extent does entrepreneurship in Iranian sports attract both domestic and foreign investors?
9. How much does the sports environment in Iran allow for a return on investment?
10. What are the obstacles to the acceptance of entrepreneurs in the field of sports?
11. How can entrepreneurship contribute to the prosperity of the sports industry in the country?
12. In your opinion, what are the practical implications of promoting sustainable entrepreneurship in sports?
13. To what extent does social trust in the country's sports structure influence entrepreneurship in sports?
14. What strategies can be implemented to facilitate entrepreneurship in sports?
15. What are the key factors contributing to the sustainable development of sports entrepreneurship in Iran?
16. What are the underlying causes of sustainable development in sports entrepreneurship in Iran?
17. What strategies can be adopted to optimize the sustainable development policies for entrepreneurship in the sports sector?
18. Which factors do you consider important in influencing and intervening in the process of implementing sustainable entrepreneurship in sports?
19. In your opinion, what are the outcomes of implementing sustainable development in sports entrepreneurship?
20. If you feel that there are any gaps in the above topic after completing the interview questions, please share your opinion.

Findings

Demographic characteristics and frequency distribution of experts of this study are shown in Table 1.

Table 1- Demographic characteristics and frequency distribution of the study samples

Expertise	Frequency	Frequency percentage	Work experience	Education
Sports management	8	53.3	18	Ph.D.

Expertise	Frequency	Frequency percentage	Work experience	Education
Economics	3	20	18	Ph.D.
Entrepreneurship activists	4	26.7	19	M.A and Ph.D.

Free encoding

According to the results of Table 2, using the interview method in the form of the above model, the information obtained from the views and opinions of the experts was summarized as the research given meanings. The practical concepts were collected from these interviews under the title of "Open Codes", part of which is given as the sample.

Table 2- A sample of extracted concepts and conceptual codes in free encoding

Derived concepts	Conceptual codes
One of the factors needed to realize the sustainable development of entrepreneurship is the proper management of resources. In this regard, we need the appropriate distribution of limited resources to unlimited needs.	Resource management Maintaining resources for the future Creating sustainable resources Responsibility to future generations
In order to implement sustainable development of entrepreneurship, the educational system should have a high capacity to provide the necessary knowledge in this field and, in addition, create entrepreneurs in the community.	Education system Sharing knowledge Knowledge application Creating trust in science Raising creativity and innovation in physical education graduates Preparation of applied thesis in the field of entrepreneurship Increasing the workshops and scientific fields in this regard
To accomplish this, we need to take the structure of the state toward a private structure, because we need structural flexibility to realize sustainable development of entrepreneurship.	Existence of non-flexible structures Top rules
Creating a proper setting for attracting investors and ideas in the field of sport can improve the state of entrepreneurship in the country.	Creating trust Creating legal and juridical infrastructure Create demand for sports Raise the sense of sports of the public Move to a private economy Using scientific financing methods
One of the strategies to apply appropriate policies for the development of sport entrepreneurship can be the need of assessment in the sports community.	Identify the audience's need Separating the needs of the audience Improving social understanding of sport
The existence of transparency in sport leads to investment in this field, and as a result, sustainable development of entrepreneurship will be achieved.	Create a competitive setting Creating financial transparency in the field of sport Transparency of sports rules Transparency of player and coach contracts
Identifying the benefits of sports for the public and authorities is important for attracting and developing entrepreneurship in the field of sport.	Reducing social crimes Increase the health and vitality of the people Control the emotions Good for free time of families Reduce mortality by non-contagious diseases
If sustainable development of entrepreneurship takes place in terms of strategic thinking, it will lead to better conditions for sport in the country.	More employment Increasing the quality of products and services Increase the share of sports in GDP Export of products

Axial encoding

In Table 3, after conducting the open encoding, the central encoding process was used to identify the existence of the same cases and the difference in the listing of derived cases from the interviews. Then, by integrating some of the concepts and codes of the previous stage, the main codes were selected.

Table 3- A sample of categories identified in the axial encoding

Components	Categories
Responsibility for future generations Trustee for future sources No impact on the environment Provide sustainability criteria by sports managers	Institutionalizing the culture of sustainable development
Create a divergent view Create a systematic view Creating strategic beliefs in managers Provide long-term plans by managers	Create strategic thinking in managers
Result-oriented individuals Not having a strategic belief and entrepreneurial spirit Risk tolerance Trying to increase individual skills	Individuals' personality characteristics
Increase in wealth Increasing people's welfare	Economic Development
Creating legal and juridical infrastructure for investors Provide legal support in the field of sports intellectual property and services Identify sports dealers and deal with them Creating punishment and penalty mechanisms for sports managers	Creating legal and juridical infrastructure
Establish a systematic structure between the Ministry of Science and the Ministry of Labor and Social Welfare Relations between industry and university Create a job code for all physical education activities Establishing institutions to attract ideas Considering knowledge-based institutions Stimulating demand and, as a result, purchase more sport goods	Increasing youth employment
Entrepreneurial culture in the country, Entrepreneurial thinking, Attitude formation, Perception of entrepreneurship, Culture of result orientation, Creative thinking, Understanding of change, Importance of entrepreneur, Importance of entrepreneurship, Lack of motivation in entrepreneur	Correct definition and institutionalization of entrepreneurial culture
Demand for sports, Raising awareness of the benefits of sports, Institutionalizing sports culture, Creating motivation, People's attention to health, Attractiveness of sports, Sports per capita, Lifestyle change, Inter-organizational synergy, Reduction of treatment costs, Prevention of non-communicable diseases, Content creation, Personalization of needs, Identification of needs	Demand for sports
Creating entrepreneurship in various sports sectors, Entrepreneurship in providing sports services and training, Entrepreneurship in public sports, Entrepreneurship in competitive sports, Entrepreneurship in educational sports, Software and hardware exports, Playing a role in the international sports system, Innovative businesses, The use of opportunities	Dimensions of sports entrepreneurship
The current state of microeconomics, Financial transparency, Government credits, Profitability, Sports investment risk, Financing methods, Competitive advantage, Job security, Attracting investors, Increasing the gross national product, Marketing, Market making	Macroeconomic conditions
Knowledge production, Knowledge sharing, Knowledge application	Innovation and knowledge development
Establishing a platform for entrepreneurship education, Training to change the attitude of managers, Skill development for entrepreneurship, The relationship	Training and acquiring entrepreneurial skills

Components	Categories
between industry and university, A platform for innovation in sports entrepreneurship, Sports research and development (R & D), The need for sports entrepreneurship headlines, The inappropriateness of jobs and employees in the field of physical education, Pay attention to technology and innovation parks, Knowledge-based institutions	
Qualified approach in sports, Competitiveness in the private sector	Privatization of sports
Hardware infrastructures, Software infrastructures, Human infrastructures, Virtual entrepreneurship platform in sports, Facilitating conditions for the presence of entrepreneurs, Infrastructure for sports	Sports entrepreneurship infrastructure
Social trust, Hope and self-belief, Cooperation, Public participation, Consumer satisfaction, Efficiency effectiveness and productivity, Activation of social media, Social growth with sports, Reduction of social offenses	Social capital

Selective encoding

At the final stage of encoding, the main codes of the previous stage were merged into each other in terms of integrity and generalizability, comprehensiveness and applicability of each concept semantically, and content relationship, and then selectively extracted to complete the three-part encoding process. At the end of this stage, a comprehensive model is depicted as follows.

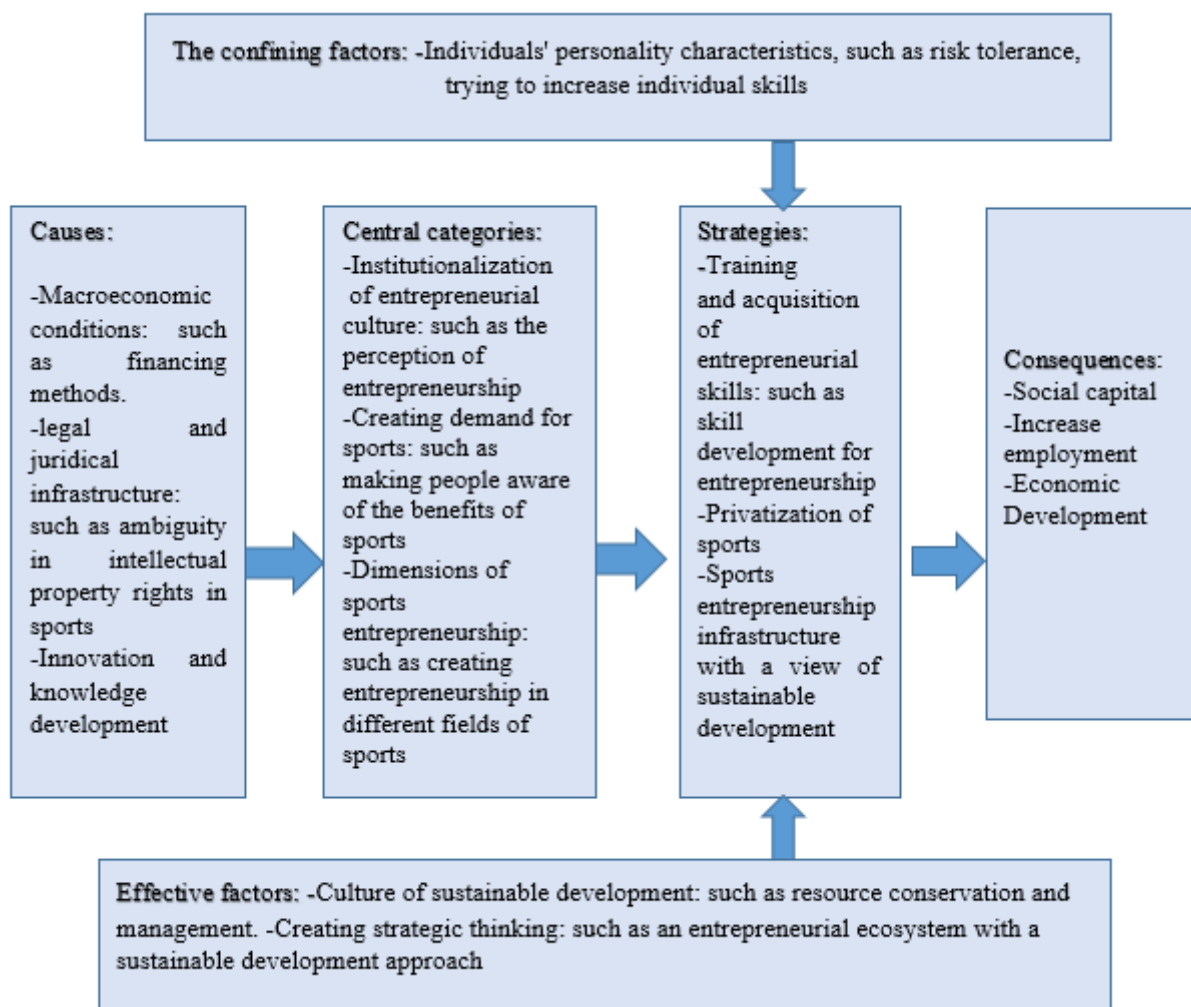


Figure 1. A Paradigm model of sustainable development of Iranian sports entrepreneurship

In Figure 1, based on interviews and encoding processes, causative factors leading to consequences are analyzed with five content components that impact the main phenomenon. This model includes seven underlying factors and eight confining factors, shaping strategies. The subsequent part of the strategic model outlines how these strategies translate into outcomes.

Following the interviews and analysis, 395 open codes, 143 axial codes, and eventually 15 selective codes were identified. The references for selected codes are as follows:

- Establishing legal and juridical infrastructure: 37
- Strategic thinking: 36
- Training and developing entrepreneurial skills: 32
- Aspects of sports entrepreneurship: 27
- Macroeconomic conditions: 22
- Sports demand: 21
- Embedding sustainable development culture: 21
- Sports privatization: 18
- Defining and institutionalizing entrepreneurial culture: 16
- Social capital: 14
- Personal traits of individuals: 14
- Sports entrepreneurship infrastructure: 9
- Economic growth: 9
- Promoting innovation and knowledge development: 7
- Enhancing youth employment: 6.

Discussion

Today, sports is a domain that mobilizes the masses and carries significant global importance. Sports entrepreneurship provides a platform to advocate for environmentally friendly practices and instill values that support sustainable development in society (Reier-Forraddellas et al., 2021). The natural environment plays a pivotal role in sports, and the values acquired through sports can be translated into daily life, aligning with sustainability principles (King & Church, 2017). This research aims to create a sustainable development framework for Iranian sports entrepreneurship. The model, grounded in theory, delineates the specifics of sustainable development tailored to Iranian entrepreneurship. Grounded theory served as the methodology for this study. Following the research, five pivotal factors emerged in the model, elucidating the causal relationships and their impacts. The conclusions and model proposed stem from the researcher's analysis. The causal conditions outlined in the model encompass the institutionalization of a sustainable development culture, bolstering the nation's economy, implementing suitable policies for the sports business environment, establishing a robust legal framework for the sports sector, and ensuring an equitable resource distribution with sustainability in mind. A notable challenge influencing these conditions is economic instability, where insufficient funds and unequal capital distribution impede the growth of small sports and recreational entities (Karlis, 2006).

The primary focus of the model encompasses the significance of fostering a participatory culture, cultivating strategic thinking among managers, supporting innovative projects, utilizing technology rooted in applied and knowledge-based practices, implementing eco-friendly land management approaches, and addressing community realities and needs. Furthermore, creating favorable political conditions for investment, generating interest in sports, and similar initiatives can aid in the sustainable growth of Iranian sports entrepreneurship through strategic thinking. The strategies essential for sustainable entrepreneurship are a topic of discussion. Experts suggest that achieving sustainable entrepreneurship involves special paradigms, termed as strategies in this context. These strategies represent unique dynamics stemming from the central phenomenon or category. Enforcing Article 3 of the Constitution - which underscores the promotion of free, accessible, and public sports - along with stimulating demand for sports goods and services, establishing legal and juridical frameworks, fostering investor-investee trust, restructuring government organizations, and forming expert entrepreneurial teams are key strategies that foster sustainable development in entrepreneurship. Factors influencing these strategies include moving towards privatization, attracting financial resources, increasing sports-related investments, fostering productive political

relationships with other nations, technological advancements, and clear regulatory guidelines. However, there are constraining factors impeding strategy implementation, such as an uncompetitive environment, high risks within the sports sector, social constraints, lack of governmental backing for entrepreneurs, presence of sports intermediaries, individual traits and social class, and the omission of entrepreneurship in academic curricula. Implementing strategies derived from the grounded theory model holds substantial implications in economic and social domains. For example, adopting a diversified perspective on sports could lead to increased industry funding, fostering enhanced business growth. Elevated employment rates would also ensue, creating sustainable job opportunities. On a macroeconomic scale, effectively implementing planned strategies positively impacts public health and well-being, curbing non-communicable diseases, reducing social misconduct, instilling strategic thinking, fostering a dynamic and competitive environment, and ultimately facilitating entrepreneurial proliferation.

To validate and analyze the study results, a comparison with other relevant studies is conducted. [Mondalizadeh et al. \(2016\)](#) found that sustainable entrepreneurship leads to reduced healthcare costs, prevention of social issues, improved financial turnover, job creation, and increased interest in starting sports businesses. They emphasized the role of government support and a shift in the perception of entrepreneurship. These findings align with some of the implications of this research, such as increased employment, reduced social crimes, business prosperity, and improved health and vitality of the population. Another study identified the most important factors influencing sports entrepreneurship, including the development of a comprehensive plan, the presence of a Ministry of Sports and Youth, a dedicated sports television channel, favorable bank facilities for new sports projects, and the involvement of sports experts in the ministry ([Razavi et al., 2015](#)). [Mirsafian \(2016\)](#) highlighted that the leadership style of managers significantly impacts employee entrepreneurship in sports organizations. Factors such as meritocracy and delegating authority to creative and innovative employees were identified as essential components of management for promoting entrepreneurship, which aligns with the implications of this research.

[Greco and Jang \(2017\)](#) stressed the significance of startups, profitable companies, and the nonprofit sector in entrepreneurship, innovation, and sustainable community advantage. This is closely tied to the concept of privatization, the central focus of this paper. The model proposed in this study, along with [Goudarzi et al.'s \(2017\)](#) findings, illustrate that changes in laws, regulations, social factors, and financing practices are common aspects of entrepreneurship. [Ghorbani and Vahdani \(2016\)](#) examined the competence patterns of entrepreneurs in Iranian sport, aligning with the individual skills, learning willingness, risk-taking, and personality traits required for model implementation. [Fereydooni and Jalali Farahani \(2017\)](#) affirmed that strategic thinking is vital for individuals in sport organizations to generate value, accomplish objectives, and adapt to environmental changes, supporting the strategic thinking concept in managers discussed here. Nevertheless, a key limitation in this process is the absence of entrepreneurship subjects in academic curricula. [Biberhofer et al. \(2018\)](#) highlighted the necessity for sustainable entrepreneurship courses in higher education institutions to deepen students' understanding of global values and perspectives and enhance their skills. Education plays a critical role in realizing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and nurturing an entrepreneurial sustainable mindset. [Strachan \(2020\)](#) underscores the importance of education rich in sustainable values for a sustainable future.

To achieve sustainable development in sports entrepreneurship in Iran, several strategies can be implemented. One approach is establishing a legal infrastructure, including intellectual property rights, to support entrepreneurs. This move can attract investors to the country. Another strategy involves creating demand for sports goods and services by promoting a sports culture among the population through collaborations and facility provisions. The enforcement of Article 3 of the Constitution, ensuring free physical education for all, can help boost the demand for sports goods and services. To create a conducive legal environment for entrepreneurs, steps such as preventing rent and exclusivity in sports, establishing a sports trade union, and implementing transparent licensing processes and import supervision are recommended. Setting up an information repository, fostering financial transparency in sports businesses with support from the Ministry of Sports and Youth, and streamlining executive and administrative processes for sports enterprises are crucial. Collaborating with the environmental protection organization to develop environmental laws for sports goods production, services, venues, and events, and communicating these laws

for compliance across all organizations are vital steps. Introducing environmental protection initiatives from primary school levels can further embed the culture of sustainable development.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is essential to address the importance of fostering efficient and entrepreneurial human resources in the sports community and labor market through education and training. The development of sports equipment and organizations should match the requirements of both the sports community and learners, while higher education should aim to impart not only professional knowledge but also other essential skills for entrepreneurial achievement. Limitations of this study include challenges in reaching interviewees due to job commitments, work obligations, and geographic distance. The research provides a theoretical foundation for further exploration and recommends conducting quantitative studies based on the proposed model to examine different facets of sustainable sports entrepreneurship. The results of this study could also offer valuable insights for future research approaches.

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Conflicts of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

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