



Information Article

The Development Model of Sports Diplomacy in Iraq

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ARTICLE INFO ABSTRACT

**Keywords:**

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This research aims to propose a model for the development of sports diplomacy in Iraq. The research method employed was qualitative, utilizing the grounded theory and the Glaser method. The study's statistical population consisted of experts in sports diplomacy in Iraq, including professionals in public diplomacountrycy and sports, high-ranking sport officials, professors of sports management, professors of international relations and political science, sports managers, and elite athletes. The sampling method used was purposeful sampling. A total of 67 concepts were categorized into four main categories: political-legal, economic, cultural-social, and communication. The political-legal category included subcategories of domestic policy with ten concepts and foreign policy with eight concepts. The economic category included subcategories of sports economy with six concepts and national economy with seven concepts. Based on the research results, it is recommended that special attention be given to the political-legal, economic, cultural-social, and communication dimensions for the development of sports diplomacy. Therefore, it is suggested that political and sports authorities work towards creating equal opportunities for men and women in sports to enhance sports diplomacy

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## INTRODACTION :

With the expansion of globalization and the transition from hardware power to an emphasis on soft power, various types of diplomacy have been proposed, including "sports diplomacy". However, this type of diplomacy is likely to be categorized under "public diplomacy", which aims to enhance medium and long-term relations between governments by influencing the general public abroad to achieve foreign policy goals (Khabiri & Fattahi Zadeh, 2019). Today, the application of soft power and its integration into the evolution of the global economic-political system is an undeniable necessity that can be examined in three dimensions: cultural, economic, and political. Sports is considered one of the secondary variables in the cultural sector. Furthermore, with the change in the nature of conflicts after the Cold War, traditional diplomacy, which focuses on resolving disputes over interests and power, could not resolve conflicts alone. Therefore, alternative methods, such as the second path diplomacy, which aims to address the root dimensions of conflict, have emerged with the support of official diplomacy and played a complementary role (Wong & Meng, 2023).

Just as sports have become an integral part of society, they have similarly become an instrument for diplomacy worldwide (Abdi et al., 2018; Kuo & Kuo, 2020). Due to its fluid nature and the process of democratization, politics has entered areas that were not involved before or were not considered to have political significance in the last century (Abdi et al., 2019). Sports are one of the most essential new realms of politics and policy-making. However, politics and professional sports have found different boundaries due to their increasing popularization, and leading to the creation of familiar territories for both. Diplomacy and diplomatic processes are commonalities that the internationalization of sports has inevitably brought into this field. The conflict has caused the development of the late and strategic concept of "sports diplomacy" (Khabiri & Fattahi Zadeh, 2019). Today, sports have become closely related to politics and have become the subject of international relations (Dubinsky, 2019; Kuruloglu, 2023). However, sports diplomacy is a well-known yet relatively overlooked field of theory and practice in diplomatic studies. In the modern diplomatic environment, sports diplomacy holds great potential, but this potential will not be realized until the necessary studies are conducted ( Murray & Pigman, 2014; Wainwright, 2021). Sports diplomacy serves as a remedy for governments to bridge differences and promote development, dialogue, and sustainability as a powerful diplomatic tool. Institutions involved in sports and diplomacy can foster





positive sports values such as mutual respect, order, patience, tolerance, and compassion amidst challenging and violent political relationships, thus plying a significant role in this environment (Dichter, 2021). Additionally, international relations and sports are becoming increasingly interconnected, with sports and sporting events being utilized for diplomatic and political purposes (Ganohariti & Dijkhoorn, 2020).

Some interpret the world as being a part of sports. Although this may seem exaggerated at first glance, it is possible that today, global society has an inseparable link with sports (Costa & Moriconi, 2024). International sports, with its significant mechanisms and institutions, such as the International Olympic Committee (211 members) and FIFA (206 members), has been able to surpass even the United Nations (193 members). The success of a country in these events is often associated with global prestige. The concept of sports diplomacy as one of the leading indicators of the development of soft power and public diplomacy has garnered the attention of many developed countries and emerging economies (BRICS). Furthermore, analysts believe that just as diplomats gather around the table to advance national interests, athletes similarly compete on the field to strengthen those interests (Baker et al., 2024).

Among the multitude of non-governmental, multinational, and intergovernmental organizations, sports and its global institutions, such as the International Olympic Committee, stand out as the most prominent standard value in today's societies. This has led to the realization of a truly global village with an ever-increasing speed, regardless of any ethnic or racial color (Shariati, 2019). Additionally, sport continues to play an essential role in enhancing the development of diplomatic and peacebuilding efforts through Sport for Development and Peace (Dixon et al., 2019; Postlethwaite et al., 2023). The ancient Olympic truce exercise and the rules of the modern football game show that sport can serve as a complementary instrument in resolving international disputes. Sports diplomacy, however, is an instrument that expresses political attitudes and has the potential to improve national image. Sports diplomacy lays the groundwork for a foundation for more public opinion orientation and foster a positive atmosphere between countries to assist in resolving disputes (Desaneugenio et al., 2017; Jankovic, 2017).

Sports diplomacy is a recent phenomenon that aims to enhance dialogue, broaden perspectives, and foster cross-cultural understanding on a global scale. With sports becoming increasingly popular worldwide, there has been a growing focus on sports in international agreements. Additionally, many countries have utilized their national interests and





achieve their political and global objectives (Kobierecki, 2023; Peymanfar et al., 2019).

Matviyenko and Gryshuk (2024) explore the concept of sports diplomacy as an effective tool for enhancing national soft power and diplomatic reach, particularly for Ukraine. The research examines successful models from Saudi Arabia, Australia, and the European Union. Saudi Arabia's approach demonstrates the power of using sports for global influence through significant investments and hosting international events. Australia's model highlights a government-led strategy that supports sports diplomacy, knowledge sharing and community development. The European Union's use of sports diplomacy focuses on promoting peace and cooperation among member states. Adapting these models offers Ukraine a pathway to amplify its international voice and align sports initiatives with diplomatic goals (Matviyenko & Gryshuk, 2024).

In identifying and prioritizing the obstacles to the development of sports diplomacy in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Bakhshi Chenari et al. (2023) proposed that it is possible to utilize the potential of relevant ministries and even embassies located in countries where international sports organizations are based (such as Switzerland, the headquarters of FIFA) in the field of sports diplomacy to achieve global goals through bilateral cooperation between the Ministry of Sports and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Bakhshichenari et al., 2023). Taheri et al. (2023) demonstrated in their analysis of Iran's international sports diplomacy that the negative effects of diplomacy include cultural-diplomatic damage, strained relations, national unity, economic growth, and their associated sub-indices (Taheri et al., 2023).

Sports mega-events (SMEs), such as the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup, have become a key part of state strategies to achieve a multitude of foreign policy goals. The results show that while a variety of states, state actors, politicians, and non-state actors use the same means (SMEs) to achieve different foreign policy goals, their geopolitics, different histories, regime types, economic systems, and levels of development influence their rationale for doing so and the strategies they choose (Grix & Brannagan, 2024).

Sports diplomacy is regarded as one of the most important communicative components among nations in their international relations (Ghanbari et al., 2023). In the contemporary global landscape, nations strive to portray themselves as modern and open societies, employing various tools, such as art diplomacy, scientific diplomacy, and sports diplomacy, as a compelling facet of public engagement, especially over the





past two decades (Zare et al., 2024). Some of the strategies identified in sports diplomacy include: using popular social networks such as Instagram to share common content with Arabic-language sports pages, not having provocative interviews with athletes and coaches, preventing spectators from chanting racist slogans, facilitating the entry conditions of Arab spectators to international sports competitions. in Iran and the mutual support of the sports federations of Iran and the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf region to the sports representatives of the Middle East region in sports events at the global level (Abandansari & Kohan, 2023).

The Egyptian government relies on hosting and participating in sporting events as a form of public diplomacy (Taha, 2022). Hamidou (2022) stated that "Media" and "sports" serve as two tools of public diplomacy that help create a positive international image. This is achieved through organizing and participating in major sports events, constructing world-class sports facilities, and investing in media coverage of these events. These efforts work together to shape a national identity and foster a positive image on a national, regional, and international scale (Hamidou, 2022).

Ping Pong Diplomacy between China and the USA in 1971, the conduct of the Goodwill Games in the wake the Cold War to ease tense bilateral relations between the USA and the then Soviet Union (USSR) and Cricket Diplomacy between India and Pakistan as examples of the positive impact of sports. In reference to India and Pakistan, it has been the most favorite and popular game in both countries to the extent that Cricket has become a source of connection between the people of the two nations (Marwat et al., 2024). Kobierecki (2017) stated in a paper that many countries are increasingly using sports to enhance their international reputation. Governments can influence how outsiders perceive their country by hosting sporting event or achieving a high level of success in sports (Kobierecki, 2017).

Moreover, sports, regarded as a soft power asset, can promote states even beyond sporting events. Utilizing sports to shape a state's international image can involve showcasing sports-related assets in non-sporting contexts. Research conducted by Wong and Meng (2023) demonstrated that e-sports are used as a method to engage, inform, and create a positive image of China among both individuals and foreign nations (Wong & Meng, 2023).

Sports diplomacy, an essential tool in international relations, plays a vital role in enhancing interactions between countries. Sports can serve as a universal language, transcending political and cultural boundaries and





facilitating communication among governments, nations, and various communities. In countries facing political, social, and economic challenges, sports diplomacy offers an opportunity to improve international relations, enhance national image, and strengthen regional and international alliances. Iraq, a nation that has struggled for years with war, unrest, and political instability, aims to rebuild and elevate its international standing. Despite these challenges, sports can be a powerful tool for reshaping Iraq's image and improving its foreign relations. Currently, however, Iraq lacks a comprehensive and effective strategy in sports diplomacy. This research, by designing an appropriate model, can aid in formulating policies and programs that utilize sports to enhance international relations. Therefore, creating a comprehensive and practical model for the development of sports diplomacy in Iraq is essential. The present research, aimed at designing such a model, can assist Iraq's policymakers in leveraging sports as an effective tool to strengthen foreign relations and improve Iraq's socio-economic standing. Consequently, the central question of the research is, "What structures does the sports diplomacy development model in Iraq include"?

### Methodology

This research is interpretive, and exploratory-analytical in nature, with applied objectives. The research methodology used was qualitative, employing the grounded theory approach with Glaser's method. The study's statistical population consisted of experts in sports diplomacy in Iraq, including professionals in public diplomacy and sports, high-ranking sport officials, professors of sports management, professors of international relations and political science, sports managers, and elite athletes. The sampling method was purposive, with criteria based on experience and background in sports diplomacy, including individuals who have worked in the field or been involved in international sports affairs. The level of knowledge and expertise in diplomacy and politics also encompass university professors and researchers who teach and conduct research in foreign policy, international relations, and sports diplomacy.

The data collection tools included a literature review and semi-structured interviews, with theoretical saturation as the criterion for sample size. The interviews began in January 2023 and concluded in December 2023. A total of 18 interviews were conducted with sports diplomacy experts in Iraq. The researcher started the interview with the general question, "From your point of view, what actions are needed to develop sports diplomacy in Iraq?" The questions' continuation was designed based on the interviewee's answers. The average interview time with each person





was about 30 minutes to one hour, which was adjusted according to the interviewees' information, interests, and opportunities. The interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewees and written down immediately after the interview. Interpretive analysis using actual coding and theoretical coding was used to analyze the content of the interviews.

In the data-driven approach, there are two stages of coding: substantive coding and theoretical coding. Substantive coding is further divided into two phases: open coding and axial coding. In the first phase, open coding, each interview is examined line by line with careful attention, and a code is assigned to each situation. From the interviews, 67 open codes or concepts were extracted. In the second phase, axial coding, the concepts extracted from open coding are compared, and the researcher merges the codes that have greater semantic and conceptual similarity, classifying them into groups. As a result, four main categories were identified: political-legal, economic, cultural-social, and communications, along with their subcategories. Theoretical coding involves refining the categories. In the Glaser approach, theoretical coding begins when the core category emerges. At this stage, the researcher analytically considers the possible connections between the categories. Validity was assessed using four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba, 1994).

To achieve credibility, two key strategies can be employed. The first is triangulation, which involves utilizing various data sources, such as literature, interviews, and documents, to validate the results and enhance the acceptance of the findings. The second strategy is member checking, in which the findings are presented to participants for their review and confirmation that the results accurately reflect their experiences.

To achieve transferability, there are two key strategies: 1- Utilizing Thick description involve providing a detailed and comprehensive description of the environment, conditions, and research processes. This allows others to apply the findings to similar contexts effectively. 2- Comparing the results with similar studies in various fields helps determine whether the findings can be generalized to other cases. This approach enhances the overall reliability and applicability of the research findings.

To achieve confirmability, there are several key steps to follow: 1- Detailed documentation of the research process is essential. This includes fully documenting each research step, decision, and the reasons for selecting specific tools. This documentation enables others to review and confirm the process. 2-Peer review is crucial. Independent should be invited to review the data and tools used in the research. This helps ensure





that the findings align with the collected data and are not influenced by the researcher's assumptions or biases. 3- Maintaining an audit trail is also important. This trail tracks all changes and decisions made throughout the research process, providing transparency and accountability.

Retaining all research documents, notes, and data analyses for external review is crucial for assessing confirmability. The reliability of the interviews was further validated through a process audit, which demonstrated an intra-subject agreement of 69%. This agreement was used to calculate the reliability of the interviews. To achieve this, a PhD student in sport management, familiar with the coding method of interviews, was asked to recode three interviews as a research collaborator. In each interview, codes that were deemed similar by both the researcher and the collaborator were labeled as "agreement," while dissimilar codes were labeled as "disagreement." The following formula was used to calculate the percentage of intra-subject agreement.

$$\text{A subject within the agreement of the percentage} \\ = \frac{\text{2. Number of agreements}}{\text{Total number of codes}} \cdot \%100$$

The results of these coding can be seen in Table 1

**Table 1. Reliability between two coders**

Reliability between two coders (percentage)	Number of disagreements	Number of agreements	Total number of codes	Interview number	Row
64%	10	9	28	4	1
73%	8	11	30	7	2
68%	12	13	38	18	3
69%	30	33	96	total	

According to Table 1, the reliability between two coders using the mentioned formula was 69%, which is higher than 60%. This confirms reliability of the coding.

## Results

The research on sports diplomacy was reviewed, and a semi-structured interview approach was employed to explore the research question. During the background review stage, 47 scientific research articles were utilized, with their details listed in the Appendix. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews were conducted with experts in sports diplomacy to identify the factors influencing its development. Table 2 presents the frequency and percentage of the demographic characteristics of the experts.





**Table 2. Frequency and frequency percentage of demographic characteristics of experts**

Attributes	Gender		Education			Major		Occupation		Age	
	M	F	Bachelor	Master	Ph.D	P.E	Non-P.E	Sports	Political	Min	Max
Frequency	13	5	1	1	16	12	6	12	6		
Frequency percentage	72.5	27.8	5.5	5.5	88.8	66.6	33.3	66.6	33.3	43	78

The findings included 67 items in sports diplomacy, categorized into four main categories: political-legal, economic, cultural-social, and communication. Table 3 displays the categories, concepts, and codes resulting from the data analysis in the selective coding, along with the source of the article and interview.

**Table 3. Categories, concepts, and codes resulting from data analysis in the selective coding**

Categories	Sub-categories	Number	Concept	Article/Paper	Interviews
Political and Legal	Domestic Policy	1	Reducing political stereotypes	R9, R12	P5
		2	Creating equal playing opportunities for men and women in sports	R3	P17
		3	Political acceptability of the government	R12, R20, R41	P16
		4	Training of Iraq's sports managers with the principles of international interactions and diplomacy	R17	P4
		5	Compilation of the cooperation document between the Ministry of Sports and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs	R12, R42	P15
		6	Developing strategic plans to promote public diplomacy through sports	R12	P18
		7	Employing politically capable managers	R3	P5, P15
		8	Having the public honesty of governments	R12, R40	P16
		9	Production of theoretical foundations in the field of soft power in scientific centers	R19	P18
		10	Reducing the monopoly role of governments	R19, R42	P18
	Foreign Policy	11	Providing international legitimacy	R12, R3, R14, R9,	P1
		12	Resolving political tension with other countries	R20, R32, R43	P15
		13	Branding and securing the identity of Iraq	R3, R12, R19, R21, R29, R32, R33, R34	P2
		14	International status/position	R3, R12, R15, R21, R34	P5





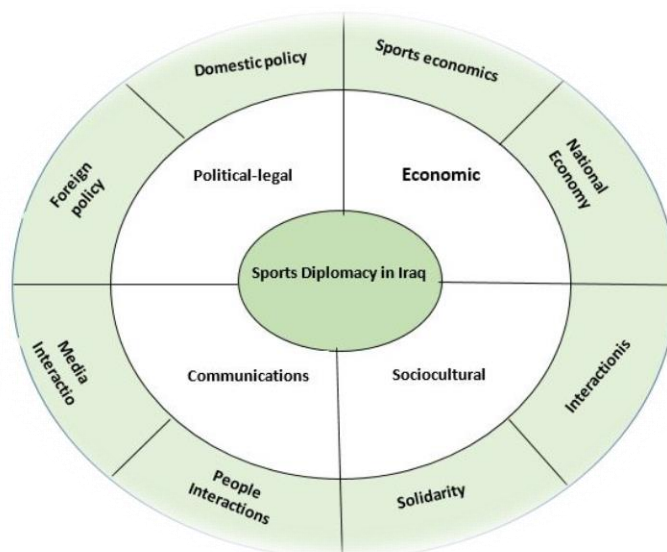
		15	Internationalization of national sports	R19	P16	
		16	peace and friendship	R11, R12, R15, R18, R23, R24, R31, R34	P2, P4	
		17	Increasing international communication	R12, R15, R18	P14	
		18	Globalization of sports	R19, R28	P18	
Economic	Sports Economics	19	Development of sports tourism	R2, R3, R12, R15, R19	P4, P5	
		20	Attracting foreign investors	R19, R20, R11	P14	
		21	Development of export of sports services and products	R12, R11, R15, R19, R27	P10	
		22	Strengthening the sports infrastructure and revitalizing the host city	R2, R12, R17, R20, R28, R45	P1, P5	
		23	Attention to the foreign labor market for professional athletes	R3, R44	P10	
		24	Encouraging sports investment	R12, R11, R16	P2, P6	
		National Economics	25	Income generation and economic prosperity	R2, R12, R17	P9
	26		Creating added value for Iraq	R3, R20, R9, R47	P4, P10	
	27		Contribute to economic stability	R2, R12	P14	
	28		Highlighting economic power	R2, R12, R20	P2	
	29		Improving the employment situation	R2, R12, R19	P5, P10	
	30		Improving economic output	R10, R20	P9	
			31	Acquire wealth	R12, R11	P13
	Sociocultural	Interactionism	32	Promotion of peaceful relations at the international level	R20, R11, R21, R37, R25, R26, R36	P3, P9
33			Establishing bilateral links	R10, R15, R14, R20, R21	P6, P10	
34			Attracting international sports elites	R2, R25	P8	
35			Transferring sports coaches	R2	P10	
36			Gain international credit, image, and prestige	R14, R17, R16, R20, R37	P1, P4	
37			The contact of cultures and the exchange of values and norms	R10, R15, R19, R20	P11	
38			Resolving cultural and linguistic differences between nations	R10, R21, R26	P6	
39			Removing negative mindsets and creating a positive image	R9, R10, R19, R20, R21, R22, R28, R35	P2, P8	
40			Compliance with human rights standards	R10	P13	
41			Introducing sports ambassadors to the world community	R9, R14, R20, R30	P3, P11	
42			Increasing national pride	R11, R17, R19, R16, R21	P16	
43			Promotion of political status	R10, R29	P6, P11	
44			Equal playing opportunities against all	R3, R38	P8	





		countries			
Communications	Solidarity	45	Introducing capable sportspeople in the international arena	R3, R39	P1
		46	Cooperation, convergence, and synergism of all sports and non-sports-related devices	R17, R18, R19, R16	P3
		47	Correlation and integration of ethnicities	R3,R12, R17, R18, R19, R16, R22	P8, P16
		48	Resolving religious and cultural differences	R9, R12, R18	P11
		49	Compatibility and movement of sports with public opinion	R3	P18
		50	Creating social capital	R12, R19	P2, P3, P6
		51	Preservation of Indigenous and Sports Heritage	R3, R18	P12
		52	Learning the culture of public participation	R12	P16
		53	Transferring moral concepts	R12	P3
		54	Promotion of socialization	R12	P16
	55	Exchange of Indigenous cultures	R12, R18	P18	
	56	Psychological evacuation	R16	P16	
	Media interactions	57	Interaction of sports organizations and media	R12, R14	P1
		58	Professional advertising processing	R16	P6
		59	Strengthening the critical role of the media in reflecting national and global sports events	R17	P12
		60	Possession of global news networks	R10	P7, P8
		61	Influence in international treatises	R10, R18	P16
People interactions	62	Proper transmission of diplomatic messages	R10	P7	
	63	Hosting major sports competitions	R17, R18	P117	
	64	Emphasis on people's opinions and participation	R12	P1, P7	
	65	Communication management of topics daily	R19	P12, P13	
	66	Creating multiple communication channels	R12	P7	
		67	Bringing closer cultural and economic relations	R15	P1, P13

In coding, the theory is created through a pattern of association between categories. The researcher considers different categories, which can lead to various mental possibilities. The theoretical coding stage involves creating abstract models that combine categories and characteristics to develop a theory. Figure.1 displays the pattern resulting from the data analysis in the theoretical coding.



**Figure 1. Model of Sports Diplomacy in Iraq**

### Discussion and Conclusion

This research identified the structures of the sports diplomacy development model in Iraq by studying the background and conducting interviews with sports diplomacy experts. The result of the background check and coding of the interviews included 67 items related to Iraqi sports diplomacy, which were categorized into four main categories: political-legal, economic, cultural-social, and communication. The main political-legal category consists of two sub-categories: domestic policy and foreign policy. Generally, under the category of domestic policy, the following factors were mentioned: Reducing political stereotypes, creating equal opportunities for men and women in sports, ensuring political acceptance of the government, training Iraq's sports managers in international interactions; and diplomacy, drafting a cooperation document between the Ministry of Sports and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, formulating strategic plans to promote public diplomacy through sports, employing politically capable managers, promoting government transparency, producing theoretical foundations in soft power at scientific centers, reducing the exclusive role of governments.

Sport can serve as a tool for reducing political stereotypes in society. Through sporting events, different countries can experience various cultures and perspectives, helping to diminish prejudices and biases. According to Kobierecki (2023), international sporting events have the potential to create direct interaction between nations and provide a platform for informal political dialogue. In Iraq, reducing political stereotypes through sports can contribute to stabilizing political and social conditions (Kobierecki, 2023). One of the most crucial factors in







developing sports diplomacy is ensuring equal opportunities for both men and women. This fosters gender equality but also promotes social justice in the realm of sports. Additionally, the active participation of women in sports, both domestically and internationally, can improve Iraq's image, aligning with the findings of Javadipour and Rasekh (2019). In Iraq, implanting such policies could enhance the social and political status of women and strengthen Iraq's soft power (Javadipour & Rasekh, 2019). Postlethwaite et al. (2023) argue that participation in sports diplomacy can enhance the legitimacy and acceptance of governments (Postlethwaite et al., 2023). By utilizing sports as a tool of diplomacy, governments can present themselves as supporters of social, cultural, and sporting development. For Iraq, which faces both internal and external challenges, using sports to project a positive image can strengthen international relations and build global trust. Training sports managers who are familiar with the principles of diplomacy and international relations is essential for the development of sports diplomacy. Sports managers with diplomatic skills can play a crucial role in fostering international relations and strengthening ties between countries through sports. This aligns with the research of Ambarwati & Hartati (2022). In Iraq, especially during the period of reconstruction and efforts to enhance foreign relations, this is of significant importance.

A key step in advancing sports diplomacy in any country is to draft joint documents and agreements between the Ministry of Sports and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. These documents can facilitate coordination between the two entities in various areas, including participation in international sporting events and leveraging sports as a tool to strengthen international relations. In Iraq, selecting managers with experience and skills in diplomacy could positively influence the progress of Iraq's sports diplomacy programs. Honesty in international relations and diplomatic interactions is a crucial element in building global trust. In sports diplomacy, the honesty of governments can enhance public trust and strengthen international cooperation (Murray & Pigman, 2014). For Iraq, which has experienced political and military crises in the past, honesty in international interactions can improve Iraq's reputation and attract foreign support. Furthermore, reducing the sole reliance on governments in sports diplomacy involves increasing the involvement of private and non-governmental sectors in this area. Using sports as a tool of diplomacy can be more effective through collaboration between the government and private and non-governmental entities, as suggested by Abdi et al. (2019).





Such collaboration has the potential to improve Iraq's sports diplomacy and expand its influence internationally.

Under the category of foreign policy, the following factors were mentioned: providing international legitimacy, resolving political tension with other countries, branding and securing the identity of a nation, global prestige, internationalizing national sports, peace and friendship, increasing international communication, and globalization of sports. Moreover, Abedi and Dousti (2024) stated in their research that nowadays, social interactions play a vital role in countries' politics (Abedi & Dousti, 2024). Sports, however, is one of the peaceful instruments for international affairs that countries may use to strengthen relationships around the world and historically use sports and its appeal to advance political agendas. Sports diplomacy helps promote the strengths and cultural values of each country, making the independent personality of a country visible. This allows every country to showcase its famous and traditional sports, enjoying economic, cultural, and social benefits, winning in international sports competitions demonstration the power and productivity of a country, helping to secure its identity and role in the world. Additionally, organizing events, developing sports infrastructure, and providing professional training enhance the overall display of Iraq's culture and identity. For example, countries like Brazil are renowned for soccer and Italy for cycling. In general, sports diplomacy can serves as an effective medium to attract global attention, improve a country's image, and strengthen national identity. These points are in line with Dubinsky (2019) and Kobierecki (2017) (Dubinsky, 2019; Kobierecki, 2017).

The main economic category includes two sub-categories: the sports economy and the national economy. Under the sports economy category, the following factors were mentioned: the development of sports tourism, attracting of foreign investors, exporting sports services and products, strengthening sports infrastructure, revitalizing the host city, focusing on the international job market for professional athletes, and encouraging sports investment. Sports can have a significant impact on tourism development, both directly and indirectly. When people travel to an area to participate in various sports, they require accommodations, restaurants, stores, and other services, which directly contribute to the development of the region's travel and tourism sector (Fatahimilasi et al., 2022).

Sports diplomacy can help attract foreign investors, providing countries with numerous opportunities. Hosting international sports events, competitions, tournaments, and mega sports events offers an excellent chance to draw in foreign investment. Additionally, investors may





collaborate to support sports teams, equipment, and infrastructure, as noted by Ganohariti and Dijxhoorn (2020) and Dubinsky (2019). Furthermore, hosting sports events also enhances the quality of sports infrastructure, improves stadiums, provides financial resources for stadium construction and maintenance, offers suitable spaces for athlete education and training, and increases the appeal of destination cities and regions. This is consistent with the findings of Onel et al. (2018) and Wainwright (2021).

The main social-cultural category includes two sub-categories: interactionism and solidarity. Under the interactionism category, the following factors were mentioned: promoting peaceful relations at the international level, establishing bilateral ties, attracting international sports elites, transferring sports coaches, gaining international credit, image, and reputation, the contact of cultures and the exchange of values and norms, solving cultural and linguistic differences between nations, erasing negative mindsets and creating a positive image, observing human rights standards, introducing sports ambassadors to the world community, increasing national pride, promoting political status, equal playing opportunities in front of all countries, and introducing capable sports people in the international arena. Accordingly, Bakhshi Chenari et al. (2023) stated that sports diplomacy establishes cultural and behavioral connections between countries and may assist in creating peace and tranquility in the world (Bakhshi Chenari et al., 2023). Moreover, sports will likely be exercised as an aspect of international diplomacy and reduce disputes. Some events are used for countries to reconsider their commitments to peace and security. Hamidou (2022) pointed out that sports become an arena for peace-building through sports diplomacy (Hamidou, 2022).

In light of previous studies, the concept of sports diplomacy development in Iraq can be linked to the findings of these researches through the perspective of subordinates (staff and personnel in sports institutions), as they form the fundamental base upon which any developmental or diplomatic strategy in the sports field is built.

The study by Layikh & Shakir (2018) highlighted the importance of decision-making and its relation to personality types and constructive perception among the heads of youth and sports forums. This reflects the leadership and administrative role that contributes to supporting and implementing sports policies on the ground. From the perspective of sports diplomacy, the ability of sports leaders to make rational decisions based on constructive perception enhances Iraq's international image and demonstrates administrative efficiency in the sports domain.





Meanwhile, the study by Abdullah, Mohammed & Ismael (2024) addressed positive and negative thinking among students practicing and not practicing sports activities, emphasizing the importance of creating a sports work environment based on positive thinking and psychological support. Positive thinking is a crucial element in developing sports diplomacy, as it helps form sports personnel with a constructive outlook for international cooperation and cultural exchange through sports.

The study by Shahada & Mahmoud (2024) focused on building and codifying the human engineering scale for physical education teachers, directly relating to the qualification of subordinates (teachers and coaches) according to scientific and methodological foundations. Developing the professional skills of these individuals improves institutional performance and consequently positively impacts sports diplomacy as an aspect of organizational and administrative advancement for the country in the sports field.

Under the solidarity category, the following factors were mentioned: cooperation, convergence, and synergy among all sports and non-sports-related institutions; correlation and convergence of ethnicities; resolving religious and cultural differences; aligning sports with public opinion; creating social capital; preserving native and sports heritage; fostering a culture of public participation; transferring moral concepts; promoting socialization; exchanging native cultures; and providing psychological relief. Additionally, Baker et al. (2024) demonstrated that public diplomacy, under the framework of sports policy-making, works towards sharing norms among nations. This can facilitate cooperation, strengthen intercultural understanding, and eliminate feelings of alienation or separation between individuals and governments. These findings are consistent with those of Shariati (2019).

Under the category of public interactions, the following factors were mentioned: proper transmission of diplomatic messages, hosting major sports competitions, emphasis on polling and participation of people, daily communication management of issues, creation of multiple communication channels, and bringing cultural and economic relations closer together. In his study, Schneider (2018) stated that sports are excellent facilitators for people and governments to build relationships, creating friendship and loyalty among individuals from different nations (Schneider, 2018). However, Sharing and mutual understanding of concepts between host and guest countries in international sports events can strengthen national identity. Therefore, individual interactions play a critical role. Furthermore, the government should emphasize the public's opinion and participation.







Based on background search and analysis of interviews with experts, officials should focus on four dimensions-political-legal, economic, cultural-social, and communication for the development of sports diplomacy. Future researchers should explore the opportunities and challenges of sports diplomacy to help sports managers effectively utilize this important tool.

### **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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## Appendix

### Research Data

Code	Author/Year	Paper/Article
R1	Abedi and Dousti (2024)	Cultural Strategies of Public Diplomacy and Soft Power in Sports tourism of the Islamic Republic of Iran.
R2	Bakhshi Chenari (2023)	Identifying obstacles to the development of sports diplomacy in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran
R3	Mohammad Hassan et al. (2023)	Presenting the model of developing diplomacy through sports
R4	Fatahi Milasi et al. (2022)	Economic and sports consequences of the development of sports diplomacy in the Islamic Republic of Iran
R5	Taheri et al. (2022)	Pathology of Iran's international sports diplomacy
R6	Ebrahimi et al. (2022)	The Sports Diplomacy Model of the Islamic Republic of Iran
R7	Honarmand et al. (2022)	Identifying and prioritizing the prerequisites for the





		development of sports diplomacy
R8	Mousavi Gargori et al. (2022)	Designing a model of factors influencing the promotion of Iran's sports diplomacy
R9	Bakhshi Chenari (2021)	Identifying and prioritizing factors affecting the development of sports diplomacy in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran
R10	Hassanpour Qaeidi and Dousti (2021)	The position of sports diplomacy in Iran's foreign policy after the Islamic Revolution of 1977
R11	Ghaemmaqami et al. (2021)	Exploring the influential factors in the development of Iranian chess with an international approach
R12	Tahzibi (2021)	Examining the role and influence of sports diplomacy in international relations
R13	Mokhtari et al. (2020)	The role of second track diplomacy in Iran-US relations: a case study of sports diplomacy (1998-2019)
R14	Sabzi et al. (2020)	Designing a model of the concepts of the impact of sports diplomacy on the development of relations between Iran and the United States
R15	governments Asgarabadi et al. (2020)	Identifying effective strategies for Iran's public diplomacy through sports and its consequences
R16	Mousavi Gregari (2019)	Providing a framework for analyzing the role of sports diplomacy in promoting international interactions
R17	Shariati Faizabadi (2019)	A comparative study of sports diplomacy in the development of foreign relations between Iran and selected countries
R18	Javadipour and Rasekh (2019)	The role of sports and the development of sports diplomacy in advancing cultural-social policies and foreign relations of the Islamic Republic of Iran
R19	Bakhshi Chenari et al. (2019)	The role of sports diplomacy in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran
R20	Salehi Amiri (2019)	The necessity of policy-making and strategic planning in the country's sports diplomacy
R21	Dousti et al. (2019)	Thematic analysis of sports diplomacy in the development of international relations
R22	Peymanfar et al. (2019)	Evaluating sports diplomacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran using the TOPSIS model
R23	Khabiri & Fattahi Zadeh (2019)	Sports diplomacy: requirement and limitation of a strategic political concept
R24	Sabaghian (2014)	Sports diplomacy
R25	Postlethwaite et al., (2023)	An integrated review of sports diplomacy
R26	Kobierecki (2023)	Sports at the World Expo Analysis of sports diplomacy in non-sporting events, place branding, and public diplomacy
R27	Kuruloglu (2023)	Sports diplomacy and propaganda in Turkish foreign policy in the early republican period
R28	Wong & Meng-Lewis (2023)	Sports Diplomacy - Building China's Soft Power in the Digital Age
R29	Ambarwati & Hartati (2022)	South Korea's Diplomacy Utilizing the 2018 Winter Olympics to Build Harmonious Relations with North Korea
R30	Kuo & Kuo (2020)	Sports diplomacy and survival: Republic of China table tennis coaches in Latin America during the Cold War





R31	English & Murray (2022)	North Korea and the Peace Games: Media Representations of Sport and Politics at the 2018 Winter Olympics
R32	Wainwright (2021)	Athletics, Exhibitions, and Exchanges: American Sports Diplomacy in Iran, 1959-1955.
R33	Dichter (2021)	The Diplomatic Turn: The new relationship between sport and politics
R34	Abdi et al., (2019)	Identifying the sources of sports diplomacy as a tool of soft power
R35	Dubinsky (2019)	From soft power to sports diplomacy: a theoretical and conceptual discussion
R36	Castro (2018)	FIFA World Cup 2018: Achievements and Limits of Russia's Soft Power Recruiting Through Soccer and Sport.
R37	Abdi et al., (2018)	Transforming Sports diplomacy into diplomatic results: introducing the sports diplomacy model
R38	de-San-Eugenio et al., (2017)	Peace, Sports Diplomacy and Corporate Social Responsibility: A Case Study of the 2013 Barcelona Football Club Peace Tour
R39	Kobierecki (2017)	Norwegian sports diplomacy
R40	(Jankovic, 2017)	Enhancing International Dispute Resolution: The Role of Sports Diplomacy
R41	Schneider (2018)	Sports as a positive facilitator of international relations
R42	Murray and Pigman (2014)	Drawing the relationship between international sports and diplomacy
R43	Cha (2013)	Winning Is Not Enough: Sport and Politics in East Asia and Beyond
R44	Kamaluddin Abdul Rahman and colleagues (2023)	The role of sports in strengthening Egypt's national security to fight extremism and terrorism
R45	Al-Zahra and Saad Mohammad (2022)	People's sports diplomacy strategies for the Egyptian government in the light of perspective
R46	Kamal Hamido (2022)	Media and sports are tools for creating and marketing national personality
R47	Mahmoud Mohammad (2020)	Elite evaluation of the new role of sports media in promoting sports diplomacy and international competitive identity

