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Fragmentation to Integration: Establishing a National Sports Organization in Iran Based on Professional System Models

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to design a model for establishing a Sports System Organization in Iran by identifying barriers, strategies, contexts, and consequences. Using a qualitative approach and grounded theory methodology, the research involved 17 participants, including sports science faculty members, managers and experts from the Ministry of Sports and Youth, and physical education graduates with relevant research and professional experience. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, continuing until theoretical saturation was achieved. The findings revealed a final model comprising five main categories related to causal conditions (e.g., the entry of non-specialists and the need to industrialize sports), five strategies (e.g., meritocracy, sports diplomacy, and leveraging successful international models), five intervening and limiting factors (e.g., lack of strategic planning, weak political influence in sports, and bureaucratic inefficiencies), and four contextual factors (e.g., cultural acceptance and economic constraints). These elements contribute to five positive outcomes for the sports sector, including the establishment of a systematic educational framework, infrastructure improvement, the prevention of non-specialist entry, enhanced community health, and increased international competitiveness. The results suggest that, given the existing causal conditions and the implementation of appropriate strategies, the groundwork for forming this organization can be established. The proposed model provides a pathway for creating an organized and efficient institution in Iran's sports industry, addressing both current challenges and future opportunities.

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Introduction

In the field of sports, graduates and specialists in sports sciences, after completing theoretical and practical training and obtaining academic degrees and coaching certificates, aim to enter the professional arena as coaches. However, the widespread entry of individuals without specialized academic education, merely through short-term training courses into the coaching field, has become a serious challenge. This situation not only limits job opportunities for genuine specialists but also negatively affects the quality of sports services (Lara-Bercial et al., 2022). The absence of a legal, specialized, and independent structure for monitoring and evaluating coaching activities represents a fundamental gap in the country's sports management.

Recent studies suggest that sustainable development in the sports sector necessitates a coherent, specialized, and accountable governance structure capable of improving service quality through institutional coordination, process standardization, and rigorous oversight (Sam et al., 2023; Tampubolon et al., 2024). In many countries, the presence of professional regulatory organizations in fields such as medicine and engineering has shown that precise regulation and effective oversight strengthen specialization, improve service quality, and reduce government intervention (Al-Jabouri, 2024; Thuriaux, 2022). In contrast, the current state of sports management in Iran faces multiple challenges due to the lack of a coherent structure. These challenges include overlapping responsibilities, mission redundancy, weak accountability, and the absence of professional oversight. The existing governing bodies in the sports sector have proven ineffective for several reasons. The absence of transparency in decision-making and managerial processes has fostered corruption and eroded public trust (Mohammadi et al., 2022). Furthermore, the absence of well-defined performance evaluation indicators has undermined effective supervision and continuous quality improvement, ultimately threatening public health and well-being (Ghorbani, et al., 2019).

Despite the presence of some institutions with scientific and research capacities, structural and managerial weaknesses have hindered the effective utilization of these potentials (Sattari-Fard et al., 2017). Furthermore, the intricate bureaucracy, non-specialized appointments, and ambiguous criteria for granting coaching licenses have facilitated the involvement of individuals without formal academic training in critical areas, consequently posing a threat to public health and societal well-being (Kingsbury, 2022). Statistical evidence also confirms these shortcomings; for example, a report by the Statistical Center of Iran (2022) indicates that in provinces that benefit from effective structural support and adequate infrastructure, sports participation is significantly higher. Provinces such as Semnan (66.1%), Alborz (57.6%), and Fars (56.9%) have recorded the highest levels of sports participation, while in provinces such as Kerman (38.8%), Lorestan (35.5%), and Sistan and Baluchestan (20.2%), this rate is worryingly lower. These data demonstrate that the existence of targeted and accountable management structures plays a decisive role in promoting sports participation and the quality of services.

In such circumstances, the necessity of establishing a sports governing organization as a centralized, specialized, and independent entity for organizing, supervising, and enhancing the quality of sports services is increasingly felt. These evidences highlight the need to establish a specialized, centralized, and independent organization in the field of sports; an entity similar to professional regulatory bodies in other sectors that have been able to improve service quality through regulation and supervision (Sattari-Fard et al., 2017). For example, the Iranian Medical Council, by establishing professional standards and effectively supervising the performance of physicians, has played a key role in enhancing the quality of healthcare services. This experience can serve as an appropriate model for the design and establishment of a Sports Regulatory Organization in Iran. In this regard, some efforts have been made in recent years. For instance, on September 22, 2016, a meeting was held at the Research Center of the Islamic Consultative Assembly (Majlis) with the participation of experts, critics, and representatives from relevant institutions. The meeting emphasized the necessity of establishing a Sports Regulatory Organization with objectives such as overseeing sports clubs, verifying the qualifications of coaches, promoting specialization, improving services, reducing governmental control, creating employment, ensuring healthy sports environments, and preventing the involvement of unqualified individuals in the sports sector (Sattari-Fard et al., 2017).

Although the necessity of establishing a specialized and independent institution, such as the Sports Professional Organization, is recognized as a solution to managing professional challenges in sports, a

profound knowledge and operational gap remains. Previous studies have generally highlighted the need for such an organization, yet no comprehensive research has addressed the precise design, structural components, and operational-explanatory model of this institution within the context of Iran's sports management system. The main question is whether the establishment of a sports governing organization can help solve the structural and operational problems of the country's sports system. If so, how can such an entity be designed and operationalized?

The importance of this question lies in the fact that answering it can transform the understanding of researchers, policymakers, and stakeholders in the sports field regarding the necessity of specialization, standardization, and supervision in sports. This article aims to fill the existing knowledge gap by analyzing the necessity of establishing a sports governing organization in Iran. It also examines similar experiences in other fields and provides a framework for designing this organization.

Ultimately, this study aims to offer evidence-based solutions to enhance the quality, efficiency, and transparency of the sports governance system in Iran by adopting a problem-oriented approach. The proposed framework for designing a professional sports regulatory body may serve as a conceptual basis for future comparative studies and foresight development in this field.

Research Background

The Role of Public Policy in Shaping Coaching Systems

In recent years, the academic literature on sports policy has increasingly focused on examining the impact of public policies on the structure and quality of coaching systems in various countries. Studies conducted in countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia indicate that the effectiveness of coaching programs—particularly at the local and community levels—largely depends on how these programs are integrated into broader educational policy frameworks and the extent of institutional support provided to coaches (Hoye et al., 2022; Kraft & Blazar, 2018; Smith et al., 2021). These findings indicate that coaching is not merely an operational activity, but rather an integral part of a country's educational, cultural, and social systems, whose effective implementation requires structured support and purposeful policymaking (Ratten & Tajeddini, 2019). In this context, the research by Ives et al. (2023), focusing on the implementation of public policies in community-based sports coaching, emphasizes that supportive policies can have a significant impact on the psychological well-being, motivation, and job performance of coaches. Additionally, this study highlights the importance of continuous education programs and professional guidance for coaches, as these programs are directly related to improving educational quality and the outcomes of the coaching process (van Stam & Pulles, 2021). However, the existing literature in the field of sports policy, physical education, and physical activity has primarily focused on identifying policy actors and their structural roles, while paying less attention to the practical, experiential, and operational processes of policy implementation in real-world environments (Holdom, 2024). Particularly at the local levels, such as community-based coaching, effective policy execution requires a deep understanding of political skills, emotional management, and the performative aspects of this process. The study by Ives et al. (2023) highlights this gap and emphasizes that the psychological well-being and health of personnel in the sports field, which are directly affected by policy implementation, is one of the overlooked aspects in previous research. Many of the common analytical frameworks also lack the necessary theoretical depth to analyze the complexities of policy execution in real-world situations, and they have paid insufficient attention to the political, economic, organizational, interpersonal, and intrapersonal forces that influence this process.

The professionalization process of sports coaching is practically impossible without structural support and targeted policymaking. Findings from numerous studies indicate that public policies play a decisive role in shaping, developing, and enhancing the quality of coaching systems. For example, the research by Kraft and Blazar (2018) in the United States has shown that the success of coaching programs is directly related to their integration within formal educational structures and the level of organizational support.

Overall, the professionalization of coaching, particularly in the context of community-based sports, is directly influenced by policies that provide supportive and regulatory frameworks. The study by Woulfin and Spitzer (2024) also shows that supportive policy environments are a key factor in

enhancing the quality and sustainability of professional coaching. However, it should be noted that the structure of sports coaching in many countries is shaped by a cultural foundation where volunteerism plays a central role. In these countries, coaching is viewed more as a service-oriented activity based on personal commitment rather than a professional job with specific and sustainable standards. Accordingly, as Nash (2022) points out, professionalism in coaching is better understood not as a fixed and predetermined status, but rather as a dynamic ideology shaped by cultural and social contexts.

An examination of successful countries such as Australia, Canada, and South Africa shows that the development of coherent national structures in collaboration with academic and scientific institutions is key to advancing and improving the quality of coaching systems. In Australia, the National Coaching Accreditation Scheme (NCAS) has made professional advancement contingent upon completing hundreds of hours of academic training, practical internships, and the defense of a specialized thesis (Gowthorp et al., 2017). In Canada as well, the design of the professional coaching system, the National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP), has been carried out with the involvement of universities and sport psychology institutions. This program consists of five levels with numerous theoretical and practical assessments, and research has shown that this model has contributed to improving the quality of training and reducing sports-related injuries (Dolmatova et al., 2021). Even countries with limited resources, such as South Africa, have achieved significant progress in this field by establishing systematic infrastructure through the formation of a National Sports Organization (SASCOC) and setting entry requirements for the coaching profession restricted to graduates of sports science-related disciplines (Budevici-Puiu et al., 2020). Overall, the existing empirical and theoretical evidence suggests that the professionalization of sports coaching requires comprehensive policymaking, institutional support, and a transformative socio-cultural perspective on the role of coaches. Such policies not only define the structure of education and professional standards but also address the psychological, motivational, and social needs of the key actors in this field.

Professional Coaching Systems in Developed Countries: Strict Standards and Academic Requirements

In developed countries, sports coaching is recognized as a specialized profession that requires candidates to undergo multi-stage processes based on academic, practical, and ethical competencies. For instance, the Japan Sports Association (JSPO) in Japan mandates that coaches complete 400 hours of theoretical and practical training in subjects such as anatomy, physiology, and sports psychology, followed by participation in national qualification exams. According to a study by Hu and Chuchu (2023), 95% of coaches in Japan's professional leagues hold a master's or doctoral degree in sports sciences and are required to complete 50-hour refresher courses every three years (Hu & Chuchu, 2023).

In Scandinavian countries, such as Norway and Sweden, coaching systems are built on the principle of lifelong learning. The Norwegian Olympic and Paralympic Committee and Confederation of Sports (NIF) has established specific standards for each coaching level, from beginner to professional. Professional-level coaches are required to complete 800 hours of training, including internships at sports academies, participation in international seminars, and the submission of a scientific paper in their area of expertise (Dolmatova et al., 2024). Additionally, Research indicates that this structured approach has led to 78% of Norwegian athletes winning medals in international competitions, compared to only 34% in Iran (Rassouli et al., 2020). Even in developing countries like India, recent structural reforms have introduced stricter coaching regulations. In 2022, the Indian Association of Coaches (IAC), in collaboration with top universities, launched a two-year coaching certification program exclusively for graduates in physical education. The program includes 200 hours of practical training under the supervision of international coaches and requires the defense of a final project (Choudhury et al., 2023).

Iran's Coaching Landscape: A Decentralized System and Major Challenges

In Iran, the absence of a unified regulatory framework and the entry of unqualified individuals into coaching roles have created a structural issue. According to a study by Ghiabi et al. (2023), only 22% of active coaches in Iran's private clubs have completed more than 100 hours of formal training, while 45% lack any university degree related to sports. This problem is particularly critical in high-risk

disciplines, such as bodybuilding and martial arts, where 67% of reported sports injuries are attributed to mistakes made by unqualified coaches (Ghorbani-Nejad et al., 2024). Moreover, a comparative study by Dizani-Maktabi et al. (2022) highlights the complications arising from overlapping responsibilities among institutions in Iran, such as the Ministry of Sports, sports federations, and unofficial organizations, leading to conflicting licensing practices. For example, an individual can obtain a coaching license after completing a 30-hour course with the Football Federation, and simultaneously, coach in the Volleyball Federation without possessing sufficient expertise in either sport. In contrast, France enforces stricter regulations: As outlined by Scelles (2017), coaches are permitted to work in only one sport and are required to pass specialized exams administered by the Ministry of Sports every two years.

Successful Global Models: Lessons for Iran

An examination of Australia's National Coaching Accreditation Scheme (NCAS) highlights how integrating academic standards with practical requirements can lead to long-term success. In Australia, coaches seeking a Level 3 (Professional) license must complete at least 500 hours of university-level education, undergo 200 hours of supervised training under international coaches, and defend a thesis in the field of coaching (Gowthorp et al., 2017). This structured approach has contributed to Australia's impressive performance, securing 7th place in the medal rankings at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics despite its relatively small population.

In Canada, the Coaching Association of Canada (CAC), in collaboration with 15 leading universities, has developed the National Coaching Certification Program (NCCP). This program features five certification levels, each requiring written exams, practical evaluations, and psychological interviews. Research by Dolmatova et al. (2021) found that 90% of Canadian coaches believe this system has significantly improved the quality of training and reduced sports-related injuries. Even South Africa, despite its limited resources, has successfully reformed its coaching system through the establishment of the South African Sports Confederation and Olympic Committee (SASCOC). Entry into the coaching profession is now restricted to graduates of sports science programs. Following the implementation of this policy in 2018, the country witnessed a 25% increase in its international medal count (Budevici-Puiul et al., 2020).

Research Methodology

The present study employed a qualitative research approach, aligned with the nature of the topic and the data collection process. The research was conducted using the grounded theory methodology, based on the model proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1990). A total of 17 participants were selected through a purposive sampling method, complemented by snowball sampling, to ensure access to individuals with rich and relevant insights. Participants included university faculty members in sports management and physical education, outstanding students and distinguished graduates with notable academic or voluntary experience in the field, and managers and experts from the Ministry of Sports and Youth. The selected students were among the top in their academic programs and had valuable practical experience gained through work in various sports federations. Respondents were chosen based on their expertise, managerial position, and direct relevance to the research topic. The managerial participants represented executive and policy-level managers within the Ministry of Sports and Youth who were actively involved in strategic planning, organizational decision-making, or the implementation of sports development programs. Access to participants was achieved through formal correspondence with the Ministry and universities, as well as through professional and academic networks that facilitated additional referrals via the snowball sampling process. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes, and data collection continued until theoretical saturation was reached. The main questions used to guide the semi-structured interviews are listed in Appendix A.

Data analysis was conducted using the grounded theory coding procedure of Strauss and Corbin, supported by MAXQDA version 10 software. The analysis involved three main stages: In the open coding phase, interview transcripts were reviewed line-by-line, and initial codes were assigned to meaningful units of data. These codes were imported into MAXQDA and constantly compared across interviews to refine and consolidate them. During the axial coding phase, codes were organized into higher-order categories by identifying their interrelationships. Using Strauss and Corbin's paradigm

model, data were structured around causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences. MAXQDA's visualization tools, such as the code matrix and relationship browsers, were employed to aid in recognizing these linkages. In the selective coding phase, a core category was identified and systematically related to the main categories, culminating in the development of a conceptual model that integrates the findings. Throughout the process, the constant comparative method was applied to ensure the consistency and depth of emerging categories. Analytical memos were also recorded in MAXQDA to document decisions and track the evolution of the theoretical framework.

To ensure the reliability of the coding process, the intra-coder agreement method was applied. A PhD student in sports management was invited to collaborate as a research assistant in the coding phase. Three interviews were selected for this purpose, and the results from both coders were compared and documented in a table. The intra-coder reliability was calculated using the following formula:

$$\text{Intra-coder Agreement (\%)} = \frac{2 * \text{number of agreements}}{\text{total number of codes}} * 100$$

Table 1. Data Reliability

Interview	Total Number of Codes	Number of Agreements	Number of Disagreements	Intra-Coder Reliability
Interview 1	10	4	6	0.80
Interview 2	16	6	10	0.75
Interview 3	14	5	9	0.71
Total	40	15	25	0.75

The overall intra-coder reliability was calculated at 0.75, indicating an acceptable level of consistency in the coding process.

Seventeen participants took part in the study, comprising 9 men (52.9%) and 8 women (47.1%). The sample included university faculty members (52.9%), students and graduates in physical education (23.5%), and managers from the Ministry of Sports and Youth (23.5%). Details regarding participants' educational level, gender distribution, and professional roles are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Demographic Information

Field of Activity	PhD	Master's	Total	Male	Female	Total
University Faculty Members	9	--	9	4	5	9
Students and Graduates	2	2	4	2	2	4
Ministry of Sports and Youth Managers	2	2	4	3	1	4
Total	13	4	17	9	8	17

Results

In order to analyze the findings, after coding all the interview texts, a total of 922 initial codes were generated as conceptual labels. A large number of these codes were similar to each other and repetitive in the conducted interviews. As a result, in the coding stage, 118 independent initial codes were identified. Of these, 32 codes were related to causal factors, 21 codes to contextual factors, 24 codes to intervening factors, 24 codes to strategies, and 27 codes to the outcomes of establishing a sports system organization in Iran. The following section provides a detailed explanation of each of these concepts and extracted codes.

Identification of Causal Factors in the Establishment of a Sports System Organization in Iran

Causal conditions include a set of factors that lead to the emergence and the need for the development of the central phenomenon. In this regard, among the extracted codes, 32 codes were considered as factors that drive forces and, sometimes, compel movement toward the development and establishment of a sports system organization in Iran. These codes are presented in detail in Table 3. As shown in the aforementioned table, the relevant codes are categorized into five concepts: the organization of unregulated coaching courses, the need for an integrated information and monitoring system, the

involvement of non-sporting and non-expert individuals, the high popularity and financial tolerance in sports, and the necessity of transforming sports in the country into an industry.

Table 3. Codes and Concepts Related to Causal Factors

General Category	Concepts	Codes	Frequency of Repetition
Causal factors	The holding of unstructured coaching courses	1- Holding multiple coaching courses without scientific backing	17
		2- Occurrence of unfortunate sports incidents in recent years due to the lack of scientific-sport knowledge	10
		3- Significant increase in the number of sports coaches across various disciplines	17
		4- The high-risk nature of the coaching profession due to the presence of various injuries in sports	12
		5- The entry of pseudo-coaches into the coaching community	17
	The necessity of establishing a unified information and monitoring system	6- Integration of operations	12
		7- The necessity of establishing a specialized talent development committee in all sports disciplines	12
		8- Increasing work efficiency	9
		9- Lack of an appropriate monitoring system	17
		10- The importance of having an integrated system	17
		11- The importance of proper supervision highlighted by increasing economic costs	12
		12- The necessity of distinguishing between coaches and athletes	10
		13- Lack of an appropriate system for evaluating coach performance	17
		14- The necessity of having a talent identification system for younger age groups	10
	The entry of non-sporting and unqualified individuals	15- Lack of meritocracy in the management sector of sports	12
		16- Removal of self-promoting and non-expert individuals from the sports community	17
		17- Significant increase in appointments based on personal connections and family ties	13
		18- Entry of individuals unrelated to sports	17
		19- Entry of non-expert individuals into supervisory roles	17
	The popularity and high financial tolerance in sports	20- The necessity of making sports all-encompassing for all segments of society (including underprivileged areas and low-income individuals)	10
		21- The sensitivity of the sports community	12
		22- The presence of significant capital makes the establishment of a suitable system mandatory	9
		23- The public visibility of sports (both domestically and internationally)	13
	The Necessity of Transforming Sports into an Industry	24- The number of sports disciplines	14
		25- The high level of administrative bureaucracy	12
		26- The importance of competing with leading sports countries	14
		27- The increasing competitive environment among coaches	15
		28- The decline in championship titles in recent competitions, such as the Olympics and Asian Games	11
		29- The rapid advancement of global sports	17
		30- The necessity of drafting unified laws and regulations for all sports-related affairs	10
		31- The necessity of changing the current policies of the Ministry of Sports	17
		32- The increase in champion development and a specialized perspective	13

Identifying the Contextual Factors in the Formation of a Sports System Organization in Iran

Contextual conditions encompass a set of specific categories and variables that influence the central phenomenon and its associated strategies. As shown in Table 4, a total of 21 codes have been identified for contextual factors. These codes are categorized into four concepts: the presence of suitable scientific and practical foundations in the country's sports sector, support from the national sports community, the existence of leading organizations and countries as models, and the enhancement of public awareness regarding sports.

Table 4. Codes and Concepts Related to the Contextual Factors

General Category	Concepts	Codes	Frequency of Repetition
Contextual	Support of the country's sports community	1- The active and dynamic nature of the country's sports community	11
		2- Support from sports enthusiasts and athletes for the establishment of such an organization	14
		3- The existence of hierarchical directives and demands	10
		4- The desire of the sports community to transform sports into an industry	12
		5- The presence of some government support (albeit very limited)	6
	The presence of organizations and leading countries to serve as role models	6- The possibility of utilizing the experiences and established programs of leading countries	17
		7- The existence of practical experiences from the Medical and Engineering System Organizations in the country	17
		8- The presence of leading countries in implementing a Sports System Organization	17
		9- The opportunity to leverage sports journalists and existing sports networks nationwide	14
	The increase in public awareness of sports	10- Increasing public awareness among citizens and athletes	12
		11- Changing public perception of physical education and sports management	14
		12- Repeated emphasis by the country's leadership and presidency on the development of scientific sports	8
		13- Growing concern and engagement within the sports community	12
		14- Gaining widespread public approval for sports	17
	The favorable academic and practical foundations in the country's sports sector	15- The presence of NGOs and organizations in sports	13
		16- A strong academic foundation provided by universities	16
		17- The active and effective role of sports associations at the university level	15
		18- The increasing number of graduates in the field of physical education	17
		19- The presence of competent managers in various sports sectors	11
		20- The availability of relevant scientific and field research	15
		21- A favorable financial and commercial environment in sports	17

Identifying the Intervening Factors in the Formation of a Sports System Organization in Iran

Intervening factors are a set of general conditions that influence the formation of a sports system organization in Iran and act as obstacles to its establishment. Among the extracted codes, 24 have been identified as intervening factors. As shown in Table 5, these codes are categorized into five key concepts: lack of awareness regarding the sports system organization, resistance from certain physicians and health brokers, absence of strategic planning, weakness of political power in sports, and the presence of non-expert individuals in the country's sports sector.

Identifying Strategies for the Formation of a Sports System Organization in Iran

Strategies consist of a set of approaches developed in response to the central phenomenon under study, influenced by contextual factors and intervening conditions. In this section, as shown in Table 6, a total of 24 codes have been identified for the strategies. These codes are categorized into five key concepts: developing a scientific and achievable structure, leveraging leading organizations and countries, establishing sports diplomacy, promoting meritocracy, and implementing networking and publicity initiatives.

Table 5. Codes and Concepts Related to the Intervening Factors

General Category	Concepts	Codes	Frequency of Repetition
Intervening	Lack of awareness regarding the sports system organization	1- Lack of understanding among some officials regarding the importance of establishing a sports system organization	11
		2- Insufficient awareness campaigns within society and among athletes about the roles and objectives of the sports system organization	17
		3- Insufficient awareness among students and graduates of physical education programs regarding the approval of the sports system organization in the country	16
		4- Lack of awareness regarding the significance of establishing a sports system organization among the general public	17
		5- Insufficient understanding among some professional and amateur athletes about the importance of the sports system organization	17
	Resistance from certain doctors and health intermediaries	6- The presence of behind-the-scenes stakeholders who profit from organizing various sports courses	15
		7- Strong resistance from certain officials in medical fields	10
		8- Lack of cooperation from some officials during the implementation of core tasks (referring to the clearing of the field)	7
		9- Existence of corruption or favoritism	17
		10- The presence of health intermediaries who profit from the lack of widespread sports participation and public health issues	13
		11- The existence of obstructions outside the media and public view	8
	Absence of strategic planning	12- Insufficient advertising regarding the necessity of establishing a sports system organization in the country	17
		13- Lack of development of the provisions and failure to document the implementation process of the sports system organization in the country	9
		14- Lack of strong unity among graduates of sports-related programs	12
		15- Absence of strategic planning	12
	Weak political power in sports	16- Lack of a strong and specialized sports committee within the national parliament	11
		17- Failure to localize certain sports strategies and solutions.	10
		18- Inadequate and persistent follow-up by the Ministry of Sport regarding the approval of the sports system organization in the country	15
		19- Weak political power of the Ministry of Sports and Youth	14
		20- Economic and psychological pressures within the parliament and government	11
	Presence of non-expert individuals in the sports sector of the country	21- Opposition from pseudo-coaches and pseudo-champions to the establishment of the sports system organization in the country	15
		22- Negative stances from non-sport officials and those unaware of the importance of the sports system organization in the country	17
		23- The presence of familial relationships in most sports positions, which complicates the creation of such a system	17
		24- The influence of some uninformed military personnel on the sports sector	6

Table 6. Codes and Concepts Related to Strategic Actions

General Category	Concepts	Codes	Frequency of Repetition
Strategies	Developing a scientific and achievable structure	1- Step-by-step planning	17
		2- Development of a scientific and proper structure for the sports system	17
		3- Adopting a logical and executable approach based on the current political conditions in Iran	12
		4- Avoiding exaggeration or idealistic perspectives in formulating the structure of the sports system organization	10
		5- Fully documenting the provisions and areas related to the sports system organization	13
	Leveraging organizations and leading countries	6- Assigning certain employees of the Ministry of Sports or sports management students to advanced countries in terms of execution and management	11
		7- Utilizing the legal expertise of lawyers or even other foreign sports law specialists	8
		8- Drawing on the experiences and practices of military engineering organizations, medical systems, or similar entities	17
	Establishing sports diplomacy	9- Holding confidential meetings with members of the medical system and even health intermediaries, and reaching agreements with them	17
		10- Attempting to organize a special meeting with the leadership to obtain a direct directive for cooperation in establishing the sports system organization	4
		11- Organizing a special meeting with the Presidential Cabinet and other members of parliament to gather votes of confidence	10
		12- Establishing connections with other ministries and organizations	11
		13- Expanding communication channels and creating strong international diplomacy	15
	Meritocracy	14- Utilizing specialists in management and sports management	12
		15- Issuing a call for the submission of ideas and necessary regulations for the establishment of the sports system organization	7
		16- Avoiding the appointment or selection of individuals involved in other tasks or holding governmental positions for the main task force	8
		17- Eliminating friendly or relational formalities entirely and fostering a professional outlook within the committee members	15
		18- Establishing a specialized and focused task force	17
		19- Engaging concerned and devoted individuals from the national sports community	13
	Networking and advertising	20- Uniting the entire sports community and forming a cohesive sports system group on social media platforms to foster broad connections.	12
		21- Organizing consecutive workshops at universities, particularly at physical education faculties, focusing on the importance of establishing a sports system organization in the country.	17
		22- Utilizing the potential of social media networks.	17
		23- Organizing roundtable discussions on the sports system organization on television networks.	12
		24- Conducting widespread advertising and public awareness campaigns regarding the benefits of the sports system organization.	17

Identifying the Outcomes of Forming a Sports System Organization in Iran

In this study, outcomes represent the results and key categories emerging from the implementation of strategies for establishing a sports system organization in Iran. As shown in Table 7, a total of 27 codes have been identified as the outcomes of forming a sports system organization in Iran. These outcomes are categorized into five key concepts: establishing a systematic education and evaluation system, preventing the entry of non-experts, improving sports infrastructure, creating career pathways in sports and coaching, and fostering elite athlete development and health promotion.

Table 7. Codes and Concepts Related to the Consequences

General Category	Concepts	Codes	Frequency of Repetition
Consequences	Establishing a structured educational and evaluation system	1- Creation of a comprehensive coaching information system for the entire country	17
		2- Enabling easy and accurate evaluation of coaches and referees nationwide	17
		3- Existence of a structured educational system	12
		4- Improvement of the athlete information system nationwide	14
		5- Enhancement of communication systems between the Ministry of Sports and other organizations	10
		6- Advancement of the national educational system	17
	Preventing the entry of non-specialized individuals	7- Preventing the organization of coaching courses or seminars that are irrelevant and unscientific	17
		8- Enhancing the technical and practical knowledge of coaches	17
		9- Organizing systematic and principled coaching courses	17
		10- Improving the academic knowledge of coaches	17
		11- Raising the scientific and technical level of coaches nationwide	15
		12- Preventing the entry of unqualified and non-expert individuals into the field of sports education and coaching	17
		13- Improving the level of referees nationwide	13
	Creating career paths in sports and coaching	14- Fair allocation of sports facilities nationwide	11
		15- Meritocracy in the management of federations and committees	15
		16- Facilitating effective communication with international arenas	10
		17- Leadership succession planning	9
		18- Improvement of infrastructure for venues and equipment	15
		19- Providing insurance for coaches and creating a career-oriented perspective toward sports nationwide	17
		20- Improving public health across the country	14
		21- Creating career paths for all coaches and referees in the country	15
		22- Retirement of coaches and receiving monthly stipends	17
		23- Reducing national healthcare costs	9
		24- Increasing the career longevity of athletes due to a strong foundational structure	11
	Champion development and enhancing health	25- Elevating the level of competitive sports	13
		26- Improving the level of mass sports	13
		27- Conducting systematic and foundational talent identification and planning	14

Figure 1 illustrates the paradigm model developed through axial coding based on Strauss and Corbin's (1990) grounded theory approach. This model helps conceptualize the multifaceted influences on Iran's sports system and provides a structured framework for understanding how contextual and intervening conditions shape strategic decisions and eventual outcomes. By visually organizing the dimensions of analysis, Figure 1 contributes to the theoretical clarity of the research findings.

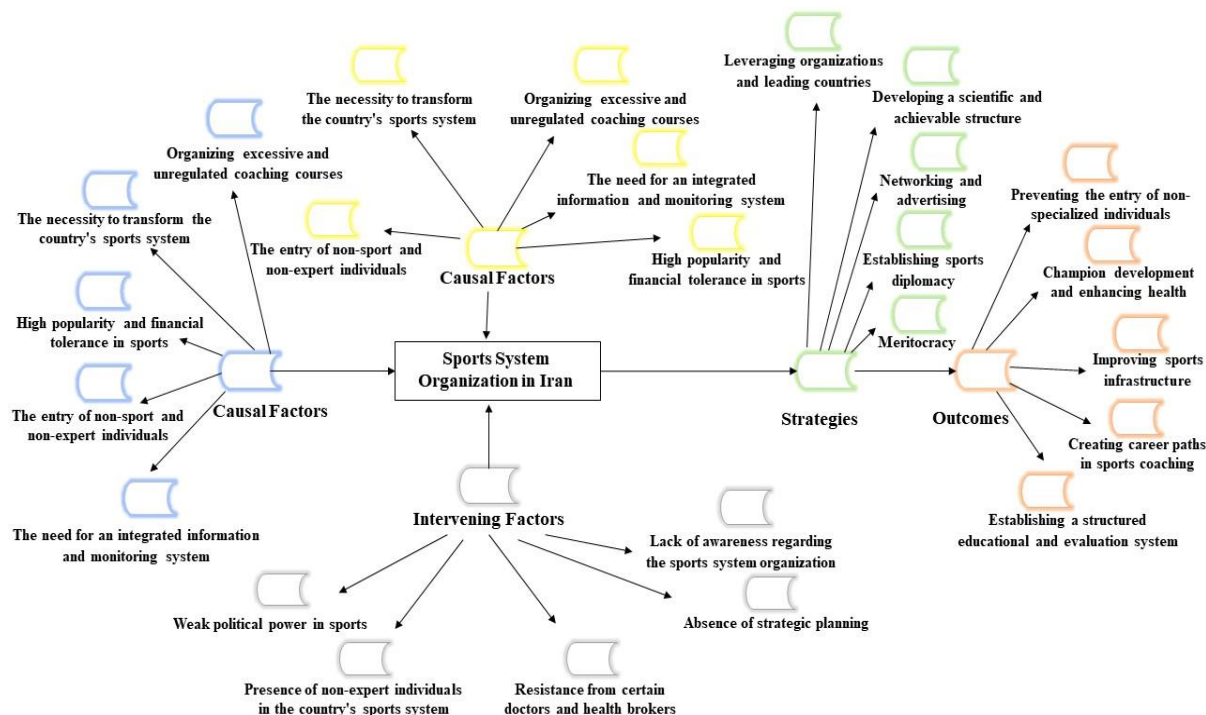


Fig. 1 .The Final Conceptual Model for the Formation of the Sports System Organization in Iran

Discussion

The formation of a sports system organization in Iran can serve as a fundamental response to the managerial and structural gaps in the country's sports sector. The lack of coordination among relevant institutions, the absence of a well-defined organizational framework, and the unclear position of sports within macro-level policies have remained persistent challenges over the past three decades. The establishment of a centralized and specialized institution for monitoring and coordinating sports activities is a fundamental step towards organizing this sector and enhancing the role of sports in macro-level policymaking (Dousti et al., 2013; Životić & Veselinović, 2016). This study was conducted with the aim of analyzing the necessity of establishing such an organization and providing practical strategies for its realization. The findings indicate that the formation of a specialized and authoritative body can play a significant role in the sustainable development of the sports sector. Utilizing qualitative coding, the study presents a data-driven and context-specific model that offers high levels of applicability and compatibility with existing institutional structures.

The findings highlight the urgent need for a specialized body to manage and organize the country's sports affairs. Such an organization could serve as a national authority and play a key role in the sustainable development of the sports sector. In the qualitative analysis using content analysis, 118 initial codes were identified: 32 related to causal factors, 21 to contextual factors, 24 to intervening factors, 24 to strategies, and 27 to the outcomes of establishing a sports system organization in Iran.

As observed in the resulting model, causal conditions such as the excessive organization of training courses, the presence of unqualified individuals, high financial turnover, the popularity of sports, and the need for industrialization clearly highlight the necessity of establishing a Sports Regulatory Organization in Iran. One of the key components of this organization is the creation of an integrated information and monitoring system, since the current institutions face challenges such as the lack of coordination, weak information exchange, and ineffective oversight, which have reduced the efficiency of the sports sector (Radinmanesh et al., 2021; Veselinović et al., 2022). With the growing demand for transparency, the need for an organization with the capacity for regulation, oversight, and performance evaluation is increasingly felt. Such an organization can take significant steps toward enhancing efficiency and promoting the sustainable development of sports (Tripes & Voracek, 2012).

The findings of the present study align with the results of Bavaresco (2024), Brenner (2024), Ghiabi et al. (2023), and Sajjadi et al. (2018). These studies emphasize that improving the efficiency

and performance of sports organizations requires the implementation of effective monitoring systems and adherence to management principles such as reducing bureaucracy, eliminating overlapping tasks, balancing power, strengthening the private sector, clearly defining responsibilities, and fostering coordination and transparent communication between institutions. Although previous studies have emphasized the importance of effective monitoring and management, they often lack an integrative framework that systematically connects structural reforms with organizational pathways. The present model advances this area by offering a comprehensive roadmap that identifies key factors and proposes practical steps for institutionalization, effectively addressing issues such as overlapping responsibilities and weak inter-institutional coordination. This integrative approach marks a substantial contribution to improving the efficiency and sustainability of sports governance in Iran.

One of the primary causes of inefficiency is the appointment of unqualified individuals to managerial positions, which often leads to poor decision-making and weakened organizational outcomes (Horvath, 2008). To address this issue, it is essential to establish transparent regulatory frameworks that uphold professional standards and preserve organizational integrity (Mariscal, 2012). The lack of formal qualifications among managers can lead to corruption and misconduct. Managers without sufficient knowledge and experience are unable to develop and implement effective strategies to combat corruption, which threatens the integrity of sports and diminishes public trust (Lastra et al., 2018). The results of research by Ghorbani et al. (2019), Tošić (2023), Wilson and Kiely (2023) also support this view. They emphasize the key role of expert managers in promoting organizational coordination, optimal resource allocation, attracting financial support, and ensuring the sustainability of sports organizations. The present study, emphasizing these findings, offers a practical and coherent framework to enhance oversight and managerial expertise, capable of addressing existing gaps and improving strategies to combat corruption and inefficiency within Iran's sports structure. Moreover, this research elucidates the mechanisms through which professional management contributes to resource optimization, financial support acquisition, and sustainable organizational growth, providing a more precise and advanced understanding beyond previous studies.

Contextual conditions are introduced as factors that create an appropriate environment for various phenomena and influence behaviors and actions. In the context of contextual analysis, contextual conditions are related to concepts such as support from the country's sports community, the presence of leading organizations and countries for benchmarking, increasing public awareness of sports, and the provision of appropriate scientific and practical foundations in the country's sports sector. These conditions play a crucial role in the growth and development of sports and contribute to the advancement of sports goals.

One of the key components in this regard is the support from the country's sports community. For the realization of a sports system, support from athletes, the sports community, and the government is essential. Additionally, governing bodies play a significant role in establishing management frameworks and developing sports, which influence both local and international strategies. The efficiency of these bodies can contribute to the success of sports organizations in steering toward national and global goals (Jacopin, 2010). Integrating scientific research with sports practice to identify talents and develop strategies tailored to the circumstances (Cahill & MacNamara, 2024). Additionally, promoting public awareness can increase participation and social support for sports (Lindsey & Adams, 2013).

Therefore, the establishment of a National Sports Organization in Iran, with the aim of improving management and coordination among sports institutions, can strengthen a sports-oriented culture and contribute to transparency and accountability. A review of multiple studies, including the research of Mpambe (2024), Çabucak (2023), Abdullah (2023), Karstensen (2024), and Askarian et al. (2021) shows that collaboration and coordination among relevant institutions play a key role in the development of sports and its institutionalization within public culture. Specifically, Çabucak (2023) emphasizes that sports management, when accompanied by careful planning, organization, and monitoring, can lead to the optimal utilization of resources and the achievement of developmental goals. Studies by Karstensen (2024) and Abdullah (2023) indicate that awareness of the importance of sports contributes to improved quality of life, but a busy lifestyle and unequal access limit participation. In marginalized communities, sports play a key role in health, social interaction, and empowerment, and infrastructure development can enhance participation and strengthen a sports

culture within society (Askarian et al., 2021; Çabucak, 2023; Karstensen et al., 2024; Mpambe, 2024; Razali Abdullah, 2023). In this regard, the proposed model of this study distinctively emphasizes the importance of infrastructure development and special attention to marginalized communities as a means to promote health, social engagement, and empowerment. It practically offers strategies for fostering a sports culture across various levels of society.

Intervening factors such as governmental structures, macro-level policymaking, and managerial contradictions hinder the establishment of a sports governance system in Iran. Key challenges include the lack of strategic planning, limited awareness, resistance from certain groups, weak political influence, and unprofessional management. Strategic planning, by utilizing expert knowledge, can pave the way for more effective sports management in the country (de Almeida Villanueva & Catapan, 2021). The establishment of a sports system organization in Iran can facilitate the coordination of activities and prevent misalignments by implementing long-term, systematic policies. This, in turn, would enhance the quality of sports and ensure the provision of the necessary infrastructure. The findings of research by Richards (2022) and Willem and Scheerder (2017) underscore the importance of strategic policymaking and the role of governments in supporting sports. However, the added value of the present study lies in its development of a mechanism that not only focuses on macro-level policymaking but also emphasizes specialized institution-building and the consolidation of oversight structures—an area that has been rarely examined systematically in previous research.

A key obstacle to establishing an effective sports governance system in Iran is the limited political power of the sports sector, which restricts support for reform, reduces funding, and results in weak managerial performance. The involvement of non-professionals in leadership positions further undermines policy implementation and institutional credibility (Mendes & Codato, 2015). This finding is consistent with earlier studies by Hita et al. (2024), Ouyang et al. (2022), and Lindsey (2017), emphasizing the lack of strategic planning and qualified personnel as structural impediments to sports development. However, the present study moves beyond these descriptive insights by analytically linking institutional and political weaknesses to systemic inefficiency in sports policy implementation. While previous research has called for broader investment in education and capacity building (Mendes & Codato, 2015), this study highlights the critical role of political leverage and expert-driven leadership in ensuring policy coherence and sustainable reform. In this way, the research not only confirms earlier concerns but also expands the understanding of governance failures by proposing a context-sensitive framework for reform that aligns with Iran's institutional realities (Hita et al., 2024; Lindsey, 2017; Mendes & Codato, 2015; Ouyang et al., 2022).

Strategies for establishing a sports governance organization include structural improvement, standard enhancement, strengthened oversight, learning from global experiences, meritocracy, sports diplomacy, and networking. The involvement of experts and the development of a balanced scorecard play key roles in improving performance and aligning organizational goals with societal needs (Souza & Vasconcelos, 2021). Sports diplomacy also plays a vital role in achieving political, cultural, and economic goals through international cooperation (Abbaspour et al., 2024; Dousti et al., 2013). The creation of a Sports Diplomacy Policy Council has been suggested to guide these efforts (Abbaspour et al. 2024). Studies highlight that economic and technological factors significantly affect strategic implementation in sports organizations (Shahraki & Esmaeili, 2022). A lack of sports diplomacy and weak international engagement are key obstacles, making comprehensive regulation and expert-driven management essential (Bakhshi Chenari et al., 2023; Siffredi & Vilches, 2022). What distinguishes the present study, however, is its integrative approach in linking these strategic dimensions such as structural alignment, political leverage, and talent-driven leadership into a coherent governance framework tailored to Iran's institutional context. While prior research has addressed each of these aspects in isolation, this study synthesizes them to propose a roadmap for sustainable transformation.

With the establishment of a sports system, outcomes such as the systematization of education and evaluation, prevention of the entry of non-specialized individuals, creation of sustainable career pathways, development of elite sports, and improvement of public health are anticipated. The most significant outcome is the formation of a system aimed at enhancing the quality of human resources and the performance of coaches and athletes, leading to increased transparency and efficiency across various sectors of sports (Bunkova & Balkovaya, 2024).

The creation of sustainable career pathways, when roles align with individuals' values and interests, leads to increased job satisfaction, attraction of specialists, youth motivation, and sustainable growth of the sports industry (Valcour, 2015). The Sports System Organization, by promoting both grassroots and elite sports, contributes to improved public health, a reduction in chronic diseases, and an enhanced quality of life (Woods et al., 2022). Government investment in public health through sports plays an effective role in reducing healthcare costs and increasing public welfare (Ghafouri et al., 2023; Razali Abdullah, 2023). The development of elite sports also requires effective strategies and intra-organizational coordination to ensure the sustainability of this sector. Moreover, increased public spending with a focus on sustainable development and regional equity, along with market financial development and the strategy of "empowering the nation through sports," can enhance public health and economic sustainability (Wang et al., 2022). However, the absence of a talent identification system, unequal distribution of resources, and weak inter-organizational cooperation are key barriers to the development of elite sports in Iran and other countries (Gowthorp et al., 2017).

While previous studies have addressed the impacts of sports on public health, human development, and social equity in a fragmented manner, the present study adopts an integrative approach to demonstrate how a structured sports system can holistically connect these domains within a sustainable and coordinated framework. By emphasizing institutional mechanisms, such as sustainable career pathways, intra-organizational coordination, and regionally sensitive policymaking, this research advances the discourse beyond descriptive analysis. It offers a pragmatic, context-sensitive governance model applicable not only to Iran but also to countries with similar institutional structures. In doing so, the study not only reaffirms prior findings but also provides a more comprehensive understanding of the systemic potential of sports in promoting sustainable development and social justice.

Conclusion

Based on the conducted analyses, this study effectively identified and examined the existing gap in the scientific literature regarding the necessity of establishing a national sports regulatory organization in Iran. The findings indicate that the absence of such an organization has created a significant structural and functional void in the integrated management of the country's sports sector, leading to various challenges at the policy-making, implementation, and oversight levels. Through a systematic analysis of causal, contextual, intervening, strategic, and outcome-related factors, this research has comprehensively explained the need for such an organization and, drawing on both domestic and comparative evidence, proposed an analytical model for understanding its necessity.

The establishment of a Sports System Organization in Iran is a pivotal step toward professionalizing the sports sector by ensuring that only individuals with the necessary scientific, professional, and ethical qualifications enter the field. This organization will enhance service quality, foster employment, and create a structured regulatory framework to oversee professional conduct and industry standards. Additionally, it will prevent the infiltration of unqualified individuals, optimize government resources by reducing unnecessary intervention, and align Iran's sports governance with international best practices. By fostering a more ethical, efficient, and competitive sports environment, this initiative will strengthen the nation's sports ecosystem, enhance public health, and elevate Iran's standing in the global sports industry.

Although this article is based on an examination of the specific conditions in Iran, its findings can also be useful for other countries facing similar challenges in the realm of sports governance. The proposed conceptual model and the analyses provided can serve as a model, especially for countries on the path to developing professional and grassroots sports. Iran's experience in dealing with structural complexities and striving for integrated sports management can also be presented regionally and internationally as a localized experience with a systemic approach.

1. Theoretical Implications

The current research, through a qualitative analysis of experts' views, has provided a comprehensive conceptual framework for understanding the dimensions and necessity of establishing a sports governance organization. This framework employs a five-category classification of causal, contextual, intervening, strategic, and outcome codes, taking a systematic approach to the topic that can also be

utilized in future studies. Therefore, this research contributes to filling a theoretical gap in the realm of sports governance structure in Iran and emphasizes the importance of examining intermediary and regulatory institutions.

2. Managerial and Policy Implications

The findings strongly indicate that establishing a Sports Regulatory Organization as an independent regulatory body can play a pivotal role in redefining national sports policies. Expert insights emphasize the urgent need to clearly delineate institutional responsibilities, eliminate redundancies, and implement accountable and transparent policy-making mechanisms. Accordingly, the study provides a concrete model for designing data-driven policies and performance evaluation frameworks, offering actionable guidance for public and national sports institutions.

Content analysis further reveals that many inefficiencies originate from non-specialized, unstructured, and ethically weak leadership across various levels of sports organizations. The results highlight the necessity of transitioning from politically-driven management to meritocratic, professional, and ethically accountable leadership. Consequently, the study proposes a structured framework for reviewing the processes of manager selection, training, and evaluation, ensuring that professionalism, specialized experience, and resource management skills are prioritized.

Another practical recommendation of this study is the development of operational guidelines and performance evaluation indicators for sports organizations in the country. The proposed conceptual model can serve as a basis for designing a Balanced Scorecard (BSC) to systematically assess the performance of managers, coaches, and sports institutions. This approach not only enhances transparency in performance but also fosters improved managerial accountability and increases the legitimacy of decisions in the public perception.

One important observation in the interview analysis was the variation in respondents' perspectives on concepts such as centralization, professionalization, and institutional independence within the sports system, which was not systematically examined. It is recommended that future research conduct a comparative analysis among different stakeholder groups (policymakers, federation officials, academics, athletes, and students) to better understand the existing plurality of views and how these differences impact the design and implementation of sports structures. This approach can contribute to enhancing the efficiency, acceptance, and legitimacy of the National Sports Organization.

Strengthening multi-level and participatory governance emerges as a central strategy of the proposed model. Establishing a Sports Regulatory Organization would facilitate systematic engagement with the private sector, professional associations, universities, and civil society organizations. This approach promises to enhance institutional capacity, diversify financial resources, and foster participatory, accountable governance in the national sports sector.

Ultimately, although the framework of this study is designed based on the specific context of sports in Iran, the proposed model due to its emphasis on concepts such as transparency, merit-based leadership, and independent institution-building can serve as a localized framework for countries facing similar challenges in sports governance.

3. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

The present study, despite its valuable contributions, faces certain limitations that may affect its findings and interpretations. One of the most significant limitations is the temporal and spatial scope of the research, which may confine the results to the current conditions of Iran and specific aspects thereof. Additionally, due to the use of content analysis methodology, some of the participants' views and experiences may not fully encompass all dimensions of the research topic.

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that future research focus on assessing the feasibility of designing the operational structure of the proposed organization, clarifying the legal and regulatory requirements for its formal establishment, and conducting comparative studies with similar structures in other countries. Additionally, exploring the perspectives of various stakeholders, such as coaches, athletes, federation managers, and private sector actors, regarding the formation of such an organization, could further enrich the discourse. Future studies may also adopt quantitative or mixed-method approaches to enhance the generalizability of results and test the proposed conceptual model.

One of the essential requirements for establishing a sports governance organization is to formulate specific laws and regulations regarding the duties, powers, and executive structure of this organization. It is suggested that a legal framework be designed in collaboration with legal experts and sports managers, ensuring it is practically implementable and prevents institutional conflicts.

It is recommended that an interdisciplinary approach be considered in the design of the National Sports Organization. This approach should incorporate knowledge and expertise from fields such as public health, sports sociology, and social policy-making. Such an approach can lead to the development of a comprehensive and effective model that holistically addresses the social, health-oriented, and structural dimensions of sports, thereby providing sustainable and impactful solutions.

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Appendix A. Semi-Structured Interview Guide

No. Interview Question

- 1 How would you describe the current structure and challenges of the sports system in Iran?
- 2 In your opinion, what are the key factors that have led to fragmentation or inefficiency in the sports sector?
- 3 What contextual or environmental factors (e.g., cultural, political, or economic) influence the organization of sports in Iran?
- 4 What major barriers prevent the formation of a professional and integrated national sports organization?
- 5 What strategies or actions could help improve the efficiency, coordination, and professionalism of Iran's sports system?
- 6 How can successful international models or best practices be adapted to Iran's sports context?
- 7 What positive outcomes or impacts could result from establishing a national sports system organization?
- 8 What practical recommendations would you suggest for policymakers to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of this organization?