



Sport and the Development of Cultural Values: An Analysis of Its Implications

Fatemeh Balanian

PhD in Sport Management, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran.

Habib Honari*

Professor, Department of Sport Management, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran.

Sara Keshkar

Professor, Department of Sport Management, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran.

Gholamreza Shabani Bahar

Professor, Department of Sport Management, Allameh Tabataba'i University, Tehran, Iran.

Abstract

Beyond their physical function, sport and physical education play vital roles in social cohesion, cultural value promotion, and identity-building. This qualitative grounded theory study, based on Charmaz's approach, explored cultural outcomes of sport in Iran through interviews with 20 sport management and sociology experts. Analysis identified four key categories: cultural identity and social interaction; awareness and virtue-based orientation; managerial strategies and governance; and sustainable health. Findings show sport can strengthen national identity, enhance social capital, reduce cultural conflicts, and promote intergenerational ties. The study calls for culturally oriented, human-centered policies and educational programs to integrate ethical and cultural transmission into sport, addressing gaps in Iran's current infrastructure-focused policies.

Introduction

Sport and physical education hold significant social, cultural, and identity-forming potential beyond their physical roles. In Iran, sports policy has focused mainly on infrastructure and elite performance, overlooking cultural functions. This study, using Charmaz's grounded theory and insights from 20 sport management and sociology experts, explores how sport can promote cultural values, strengthen national identity, foster social virtues, and support sustainable well-being in a diverse society.

Methods and Materials

This qualitative study applied Charmaz's constructivist grounded theory to examine cultural value outcomes of physical education and sport in Iran. Twenty experienced academics in sport management, sociology, and cultural studies were purposefully selected via snowball sampling. Data from semi-structured interviews were analyzed through the three coding stages of Strauss and Corbin (1990) using MAXQDA 2020, with validity ensured through member checking, triangulation, peer debriefing, and inter-coder reliability ($\kappa = 0.72$).

* Corresponding Author: habibhonari@gmail.com

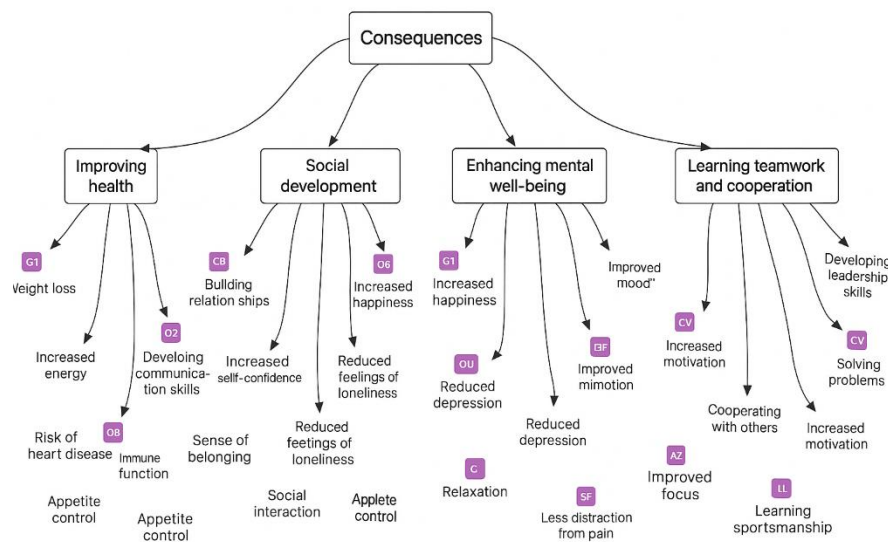
How to Cite: Balanian, F., Honari, H., Keshkar, S. & Shabani Bahar, G. (2026). Sport and the development of cultural values: An analysis of its implications. *Journal of Sustainable Development in Sport Management*, 7(16), 48-67.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the results in several parts. The findings obtained from the research were analyzed using MAXQDA 2020 software. The statistical description of the participants and their demographic characteristics is as follows: Open, axial, and selective coding were used to identify the outcomes influencing the development of cultural values in Iran through physical education and sport. The results are presented in and Figure 1. The axial codes representing the outcomes of developing cultural values through physical education and sport include the following: Cultural identity and social interactions

1. Awareness-raising and virtue-oriented behavior
2. Managerial strategies and sports governance
3. Sustainable health and psychological balance

Figure 1. Selective code of outcomes and corresponding axial codes



Note. This model illustrates the positive consequences of physical activity across four domains: Improving health, social development, Enhancing mental well-being, and learning teamwork and cooperation.
Source: Research findings

In the proposed model, “Outcomes” encompass individual, social, educational, cultural, and political effects of developing cultural values through physical education and sport. Sport emerges as a strategic tool for promoting public culture, strengthening cohesion, and supporting cultural-political discourse. Outcomes range from fostering virtues, identity, and life skills to advancing sports diplomacy, global relations, and national cultural values. Realizing these benefits requires strategic policymaking, human-centered programs, and embedding a cultural approach in sport management for lasting impact.

Conclusion

Physical education and sport go beyond physical activity, serving as strategic tools for promoting health, reinforcing national identity, fostering social cohesion, and enabling cultural exchange. In Iran, they can preserve indigenous traditions, resist cultural homogenization, and project cultural values globally, with athletes acting as cultural ambassadors. This study shows that sport fosters virtues such as respect, discipline, and cooperation while enhancing cultural identity, unity, and tolerance. An integrated cultural sport management model is proposed, aligning elite, public, and educational sports with cultural objectives, using measurable impact indicators and a multi-level governance framework. It recommends awareness programs for athletes and coaches and

initiatives to revive traditional sports. Collaboration among cultural, educational, and sports institutions—nationally and internationally—is essential to preserve and transmit Iran’s cultural values, strengthening both social cohesion and individual well-being.

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to extend their heartfelt appreciation to their esteemed supervisor, Dr. Habib Honari, whose insightful guidance, academic rigor, and unwavering support were instrumental throughout every stage of this research. Their valuable advice, constructive feedback, and profound knowledge greatly enriched the depth and quality of this study. It is with deep respect and sincere gratitude that we acknowledge their vital role in the successful completion of this work.

Keywords: cultural identity, cultural policy-making, educational role of sport, social cohesion, cultural management in sport