



[www.aassjournal.com](http://www.aassjournal.com)  
ISSN (Online): 2322 – 4479

**Original Article**

Received: 31/07/2013  
Accepted: 11/10/2013

# Identifying sports cultural opportunity – Case Study of Mazandaran Province

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## ABSTRACT

Sport is an important tool to draw the national attention. Sport is a big assembly to make identity. Also, sport is a cause for identity and unity. The purpose of this study is to identify the cultural opportunity of sport in the province of Mazandaran in Iran. The research method was mixed. Sequential exploratory mixed method of the first method is qualitative and quantitative methods. The study included all the Mazandaran managers, coaches, experts, judges and athletes at the national level. The results show that directors, judges and experts believe that people's happiness and euphoria in winning the sports events is the most sport important cultural opportunity in Mazandaran (All kinds of sport were included). A lot of money is spent on TV programs and movies to fill the people's free time.

**Key Words:** cultural opportunity, sport, athletes, coaches.

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## INTRODUCTION

Sport has a range of benefits at both the community and individual level. At the community level, sport brings people together, breaks down barriers and unites those who may have nothing else in common. Sport has a unique ability to transcend race, religion, gender and creed. Sport refers to a playful self-development, self-actualization, and competitive use of physical and mental skills. The history of sports activities is as long as the history of humans (1). It is well-documented that sports activities have long been part of human's cultural activity (2). Culture and sport are powerful tools for building community cohesion. Activities like football, music, local history and filmmaking offer natural opportunities for people to come together and participate in community life. They break down barriers between diverse groups and can help create a sense of local pride and belonging (3).

The emergence of sport as a significant policy area, although often as part of a wider cultural block, has also been paralleled by attempts to reform its delivery in line with attempts by governments to modernize the state and ensure that policy-making is more effective and efficient (4).

Murphy and White (1995) reported that sports and physical activities play a significant role in spiritual and transcendental experiences (5).

Watson et al., (2005) and Czech et al., (2004) showed that existential psychology may be used to investigate the sources of individual morality in sports (7,6). For some athletes, existential and phenomenological concepts include aspects of spirituality such as religiosity and the philosophy of life (8).

The meaning of culture in every society is in proportion to their meanings of life. Edward Tyler says, "Culture is a complex set of issues including knowing, beliefs, arts, morals, laws, customs and any other

capabilities achieved by man as a member of society (9). Many researchers believe that sport is, in fact, the social manifestation of cultural aspect of plays and games. The main problem, in the cultural aspect, is to study the sports behaviors and the definition of its role in the whole cultural frame, and this is not as easy as it looks. Many researchers have shown that culture and sport are closely related to each other and can influence on each other too (17-10). Richard Croatia says that the Hebrews has, at least, a dozen words in their language to describe dance and play, but some game species are related to idolatry, which the ancient Hebrews considered them immoral (18). When the athlete have a sense of responsibility to others, enjoy prayers and follow a clear goal in their lives, they can take a positive attitude toward sports competitions (8).

Donnelly (1993) concluded in his research that the members of both groups (body builders and endurance runners) manifest their personal and behavioral traits with sports norms (19). Physical damage were caused by excessive physical exercise among endurance runners, unhealthy behaviors, nutrition and weight control strategies among female university athletes and amateur sports (19).

The interdependence of sport and culture was previously discussed in sport's relation to culture with the emphasis on values, sport's function for the socio-cultural system and its relation to change and evolution. The system of sport, as an integrated part of the socio-cultural system, seems to depend on the industrialized, technological or protestant religious system. Yet, it cross-culturally appears that these systems, as intermediate variables, are just special cases of a more general system. This is determined for sport by the achievement value, a value of collectivity and supposedly power orientation. On the basis of these cultural value orientations, one may explain the

uneven distribution of sport as such and of team sports versus individual sports in certain socio-cultural systems. Sport's function for a socio-cultural system can mainly be seen for pattern maintenance and integration, in modern policy dominated societies as well as for goal attainment. In primitive cultures it is universal and thus functions for adaptation as well (20).

Despite the large number of studies on culture and sport (27-21), the cultural opportunity between athletes has received little attention (28-21).

The objective of this study is to identify of sport cultural opportunity in the province of Mazandaran. Considering the impact of cultural opportunity in sport, this study will create some criteria to inform the directors.

#### MATERIALS AND METHODS

Considering the main goal of research and posed issues, the research methods will be the combined method. The mixed method is of kind of sequential exploratory method that, first, is the qualitative and, then, the quantitative method. In this process, the researcher is seeking to survey about an indefinite situation. For this purpose, first he collects qualitative data deals. This stage leads him to describe countless aspects of phenomena. Using this initial identification, the possibility of formulating hypothesis on the occurrence of the phenomenon is provided. After that, for the next step, the researcher can test the assumptions through collecting quantitative data. So, in this type of mixed research designs, qualitative data is more important. Moreover, the sequence of collecting the data originally starts with qualitative data and then quantitative data. Finally, based on the research findings from the qualitative data, the researcher aims at collecting the qualitative data for extending the possible findings.

**The Qualitative Stage.** Using semi-structured interviews and of comprehensive kind of interviews with a number of coaches,

referees, executives, professionals and athletes (All kinds sports were included), identifying the factors related to the research was begun and, the whole 21 variables related to sports cultural opportunity in were identified in Mazandaran. In this method, a number of special samples are not pre-determined. Second qualitative method is used by the time the model is not performed, while sampling continues. Therefore, purposeful and snowball sampling methods are used in the first stage of research. The number of samples reached 32 by the time the model reaches saturation.

**The Quantitative Stage.** The purpose of this stage was to weigh and rank variables identified in the qualitative stage. In qualitative stage, a total of 21 sports cultural variables were identified in Mazandaran. One of the best methods for weighing and ranking the variables is the AHP (Analytical Hierarchy Process) method.

By using the Delphi group, the number of variables was reduced to 7 variables. The Delphi method is a structured communication technique, originally developed as a systematic, interactive forecasting method which relies on a panel of experts. The group consists of thirty-two people who were interviewed.

After reducing the number of variables identified from the qualitative (interview), the weight of AHP method was used to rank the variables.

AHP is a multi-objective or multi-criteria measurement which helps address the complicated decision problems. It does so by structuring the problem, identifying decision-making factors, measuring the importance of the factors, and synthesizing all the decision-making factors (29). AHP reflects a simple fact that the nature of decision-making requires a series of logical considerations of different factors involved in a certain decision-making situations. Many times, decision-making factors are

difficult to quantify or prioritize as they are intangible, subjective, and non-quantifiable. One of the advantages of AHP is that the method can convert intangible factors into numerical values, and systematically evaluate the weights of selected factors in pairs through a series of comparisons (29). Therefore, the cornerstone of AHP is the logic of pair-wise comparison. The pair-wise comparisons allow the production of the relative importance value, which is called weight.

The Sampling way: Totally, this research will happen in two steps, and sampling is appointed in each step.

First step of research uses qualitative ways that gathered 32 interviews. As shown in Table1, the number and variety of interviews are based on the separated place, work and social situation.

Second step of research: in this step, we will use AHP method. About 90 questionnaires of AHP were completed.

Table 1: The number and variety of interviews based on separated place, work and social situation

Place, work and social situation	Number of human
coaches	4
Manager	14
Expert	10
referee	2
Athlete	2
total	32

Table 2: the number of completed questionnaires of AHP

Group	Number
referee	7
coaches	19
Athlete	25
Manager	17
Expert	22
Total	90

Although it is desirable to consider many factors during a decision-making process, it is important to keep the number of factors limited for pair-wise comparisons. There is no specific rule regarding the number of factors. However, it is recommended that the number of factors should not exceed 10 variables (30).

In order to conduct an AHP analysis, a questionnaire which asks a series of pair-wise comparison of factors was created. Survey respondents were asked to provide answers based on their own preferences by comparing two given factors. There was a

question of which of the two factors has a greater weight in the choice and how much greater. AHP, then, transforms each preference to a numerical value which can be compared and evaluated. The relative importance is given a value on a scale of 1–9.

## RESULTS

AHP results revealed that respondents considered people's happiness and euphoria in winning the sports events, as the most important consideration (see Table 3).

Table 3: variables and descriptions

variables	Weight of variables	rating
people's happiness and euphoria in winning the sports events	0/208	1
Presence of Mazandarani athletes in National team	0/176	2
participating of athletes with Islamic Coverage in competitions	0/146	3
athletes as modeling in society	0/142	4
developing sport for all between women and men	0/127	5
Globalization of culture	0/12	6
Increasing the tolerance between Mazandarani athletes	0/081	7

## DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

The results of the research showed that directors, judges and experts believe that people's happiness and euphoria in winning the sports events is the most important cultural opportunity in Mazandaran. A lot of money is spent on TV programs and movies to fill the people's free time. Sport is one of the best choices to fill the time with the difference that it causes the physical happiness for man. In addition, the athlete's or team's success is the success of their own people and makes them happy.

Exercise is the cause of euphoria and solidarity. Athletes are representatives of governments and their people. When they win, this victory is a symbol of the victory of the people and their governments. In the 1900 Olympics, United States' athletes in America were better than their European counterparts. This demonstrates the superiority of the human resources of the America's next top (31).

Koch (2007) in a study entitled " Sport and politics during the Cold War: reflections on agency and identity by Canadian Olympians, 1970s to 1980s ", investigated the influence of politics in shaping social identity of athletes in Canada in the 1970s and 1980s. The research examined the experiences of Canadian Olympic athletes

during the decades of 1970 and 1980. The main issue in this research was about the ideology of the Olympics and Canadian political aims for sport during the 1970's and 1980s, causing a unique social and national identity for the sportsmen. The outcome of the research showed that there are shared points between the ideology of the Olympics and political aims in a way that caused the Canadian athletes experience a period of life that resulted in an identity that uniquely shaped the sports community of the Canada during the 1970s and 1980s. The results also showed that, in response to the social and political atmosphere of the 1970s and 1980s, Canadian athletes had higher levels of interest and enthusiasm in athletic competition. In Canada, the 1970s was a period of division. As a state and a state ideology, anti-British nationalism, the increasing dominance threatened the division of the country and the dominance of the US on culture and economy of the Canada resulted in national identity crisis in Canada. As a result, the Canadian government tried to stop the threat of state-oriented vision. Cultural and social significance of sport made it a lovely issue for political exploitation. In an effort to eliminate the state-oriented attitude in Canada, politicians focused on sports as

means for unity and to create a collective identity. Politicians were hoping that success in competition influence on local disputes, legal administration and improvement of self-esteem and national honor. The results show that Canada's National Olympic Committee in the 1970s and 1980s obviously followed the political aims of the Canada government. The results also

indicated that the Government of Canada wanted its Olympic athletes to be inspiring, cultural representatives and a role model for their nation. In contrast, the International Olympic Committee urged the athletes to represent themselves as international institutions. IOC wanted the athletes to show the spirit of the Olympics and world peace (32).

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## مقاله اصیل

تاریخ دریافت: ۱۳۹۲/۰۵/۰۹

تاریخ پذیرش: ۱۳۹۲/۰۷/۱۹

## تازه‌های علوم کاربردی ورزش

دوره اول، شماره سوم

صص ۹-۱۶، پاییز ۱۳۹۲

# شناسایی فرصت‌های فرهنگی ورزش - مطالعه موردی استان مازندران

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## چکیده

ورزش یک ابزار مهم برای جلب ملی است. ورزش اجتماع بزرگ برای به دست آوردن هویت است و همچنین ورزش باعث هویت و وحدت می‌شود. هدف از این پژوهش شناسایی فرصت‌های فرهنگی ورزش استان مازندران بود. روش تحقیق آمیخته از نوع اکتشافی متوالی که ابتدا روش کیفی و سپس روش کمی است. جامعه مطالعه شامل تمام مدیران، مربیان، کارشناسان، داوران و ورزشکاران مازندرانی بود که در سطح ملی فعالیت داشتند. نتایج تحقیق نشان داد که شادابی و سرخوشی مردم در کسب پیروزی از نظر مدیران، داوران و کارشناسان به عنوان مهمترین فرصت فرهنگی ورزش استان مازندران می‌باشد (همه ورزش‌ها را شامل می‌شوند). هزینه‌های زیادی صرف ساخت برنامه‌های تلویزیونی و سینمایی می‌شود تا اوقات فراغت افراد جامعه به شکلی مطلوب پر شود.

**واژگان کلیدی:** فرهنگ، فرصت، ورزش، ورزشکاران، مربیان.

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