

# Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of football industry in the Iranian Mazandaran Province

## Fortalezas, debilidades, oportunidades y amenazas de la industria del fútbol en la provincia iraní de Mazandarán

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**Abstract:** The objective of this study was to analyze the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of football industry in the Iranian Mazandaran Province. The sample of the present study consisted of 80 football experts (92.5% males and 7.5% females). The instrument used was a valid and reliable questionnaire consisting of four parts: 1- Strengths (17 questions), 2- Weaknesses (25 questions), 3- Opportunities (13 questions) and 4- Threats (19 questions). The statistical analysis was carried out with SPSS 24. The results showed that Mazandaran football industry had more weaknesses than strengths and more threats than opportunities. Considering these results, the authors propose a series of strategies to improve the football industry of this province using the SWOT approach.

**Keywords:** Strategic planning; football; SWOT analysis; sport management.

**Resumen:** El objetivo de este estudio fue analizar las fortalezas, debilidades, oportunidades y amenazas de la industria del fútbol en la provincia iraní de Mazandarán. La muestra del presente estudio estuvo formada por 80 expertos en fútbol (92,5% hombres y 7,5% mujeres). El instrumento utilizado fue un cuestionario válido y fiable que consta de cuatro partes: 1- Fortalezas (17 preguntas), 2- Debilidades (25 preguntas), 3- Oportunidades (13 preguntas) y 4- Amenazas (19 preguntas). El análisis estadístico se realizó con SPSS 24. Los resultados mostraron que la industria del fútbol de Mazandarán tenía más debilidades que fortalezas y más amenazas que oportunidades. Teniendo en cuenta estos resultados, los autores proponen una serie de estrategias para mejorar la industria del fútbol de esta provincia utilizando el enfoque FODA.

**Palabras clave:** Planificación estratégica; fútbol; análisis FODA; gestión deportiva.

### 1. Introduction

The strategic planning is a basic process in the realization of an organization's mission. An effective strategic planning process provides a framework to decide how to allocate organizational resources and challenges and take advantage of the opportunities that appear (De Andreis, 2019). A strategic plan contains goals, tools and actions that are useful for its accomplishment in a long-term perspective. Numerous studies showed a positive impact of strategic planning on organizational performance in developed countries (García et al., 2016; Jayawarna, 2019; Sánchez et al., 2017). Since the main task of a sport manager is planning, it is important to provide appropriate conditions for planning, which itself depends on the organization's attitude towards sports and its importance in the life of the community (Ilić, 2013).

Planning is a process implemented also by the sports organizations and it affects the environment in which they are functioning. In order to be effective and sustainable, sports organizations should plan their actions, analyze their compe-

ting environment, develop strategies to achieve goals and evaluate their progress and performance periodically (Avgerinou, Skoula, Papaioannou & Kriemadis, 2017).

Football is the world's most popular sport and most countries in the world consider it as a national sport (Fernández et al., 2019; Prieto, 2020; Radzimiński & Hajduczenia 2019; Sánchez et al., 2019). In consequence, it could be said that football is not only a sport. Although this may seem like a cliché, in the real world it is obvious that football is an industry. In Iran, football is the most common and popular sport and, in comparison to other sports, it has the highest number of players (Elahi & Ardakani, 2004). In general, the Iranian sports industry reveals a gap in human resources, lack of strategic policies, inconsistency between institutions, insufficient equipment and insufficient supervision over sports activities.

In Iran, football federations need to use strategic management methods more than other sports organizations. In consequence, the quality of goal setting, planning and implementation of football sports activities is of special importance. Therefore, the objective of this study was to analyze the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of football in the Iranian Mazandaran Province. We also tried to

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draw a strategic plan for the football industry of this province using the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) approach.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Participants

The sample of the present study consisted of 80 football experts (92.5% males and 7.5% females). The participants were heads (26.25%) and secretaries (26.25%) of the football associations of the Iranian Mazandaran province, as well as coaches (25%) and players (22.5%) of Mazandaran football teams. The most frequent age range of the participants was 40-49 years and the least frequent age range was 11-25 years. The most frequent work experience of the participants was 16-20 years (33.75%) and the least frequent work experience was 1-5 years (6.25%). The most frequent level of education of the participants was M. A. degree (37.5%) and the least frequent level of education was diploma degree (7.75%).

### 2.2. Instrument

The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire consisting of four parts: 1- Strengths (17 questions), 2- Weaknesses (25 questions), 3- Opportunities (13 questions) and 4- Threats (19 questions). This questionnaire was designed ad hoc for this study and its validity was confirmed by 10 sport university professors and experts. Also, the four parts of the questionnaire had the required validity according to Cronbach's alpha test.

**Table 2.** Significance of Friedman test in strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

Education	Weaknesses	Strengths	Opportunities	Threats
Chi-square	113.568	89.875	87.272	299.920
Degrees of freedom	24	16	12	18
Significance	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001

In Table 3 it is possible to observe the prioritization of items in each dimension of SWOT analysis: strengths, weak-

### 2.3. Statistical analysis

SWOT analysis was carried out using the following statistical tests: descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations), t-tests and Friedman test. All the analyses were done with SPSS 24. The level of statistical significance was set at  $P < 0.05$ .

## 3. Results

The results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov test showed that the sample had a normal distribution in all the variables except in the variable Threats. The results of this test are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Kolmogorov-Smirnov test statistics for normal data distribution.

Statistics	Z	P	Distribution
Strengths	0.955	0.335	Normal
Weaknesses	0.826	0.517	Normal
Opportunities	1.263	0.096	Normal
Threats	1.806	0.002	Non-normal

The strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats were classified using the Friedman ranking test. The results of Friedman test are presented in Table 2. The four variables were significant.

nesses, opportunities and threats.

**Table 3.** Prioritization of items of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

Strengths	Mean	Standard deviation	T-test	Rank
Employing interested individuals and players	3.500	0.977	11.48	1
Holding workshops and special courses of human resources	3.379	1.005	11.09	2
Decentralization and delegation of authority for holding football events in the cities	3.379	0.005	10.88	3
Discovering talent and introducing elite to famous teams	3.224	1.155	10.17	4
Presence of experienced volunteers with high education	2.672	1.129	6.90	17
Presence of experienced and specialist personnel in the field of coaching and refereeing	2.931	0.915	8.21	13

Strengths	Mean	Standard deviation	T-test	Rank
<b>Weaknesses</b>				
Insufficient fund for sports facilities maintenance	3.827	1.352	13.35	1
Lack of budget and deprecate funds from other government and non-governmental organizations	3.534	1.366	16.00	2
Attention only to gaining rank by groups	3.431	1.156	15.55	3
Not sufficient budget and financial resources for the development and improvement of football	3.431	1.027	15.39	4
Absence of coherent bidding system	2.810	0.963	10.72	24
Families do not trust some clubs	2.741	0.889	10.32	25
<b>Opportunities</b>				
Mazandaran's good rank among other provinces	3.500	0.903	8.93	1
Having tourism and tourism attractions in the country	3.310	10.046	8.28	2
Having countless sports talents in the province	3.310	0.842	8.23	3
Sports culture and its attraction in the province	3.206	0.950	3.206	4
Presence of some prominent physical education professors in the province	2.689	1.012	5.81	12
Possibility of enjoying natural resources and a suitable environment for outdoor activities	2.655	0.849	5.51	13
<b>Threats</b>				
No cost and decreasing of financial budget	3.931	1.023	14.01	1
High renting for gyms	3.889	1.020	13.39	2
Vacillation of budget and allotment	3.793	0.913	13.04	3
Lack of diligent and organized efforts to achieve national seats	3.706	0.955	12.75	4
Utilize football facilities for non-sporting activities	2.275	0.932	5.46	18
Disagreement between sports managers	2.310	0.842	5.21	19

The internal factors evaluation matrix was used to evaluate the internal factors. In this matrix, the identified strengths and weaknesses are classified and are scored by special coefficients and rankings to determine whether the Mazandaran football has strengths or weaknesses in terms of internal factors. The sum of the internal matrix scores showed that there were more weaknesses than strengths. The external factors evaluation matrix was used to evaluate the external factors. The results of the external matrix showed that the Mazandaran football has more threats than opportunities.

According to these results, Mazandaran football should use the following strategies:

- To develop a strategic plan and to establish a system of continuous monitoring and evaluation of programs and activities of football.
- To create a reward system to attract professional football players.
- To host football events and competitions with presence of talented athletes.
- To activate the marketing department and to attract financial resources.
- To benefit from the experience and knowledge of professors, experts and experienced staff.

- To benefit from natural resources, suitable environment and free sports facilities.
- To use international football champions of Mazandaran province to attract attention.
- To identify and to nurture sports talents.
- To increase the number of football stadiums.

#### 4. Discussion

In this section we discuss the results of the present study and the main planned strategies of the SWOT matrix.

Regarding the strategy of developing a strategic plan and establishing a system of continuous monitoring and evaluation of programs and activities of football, this strategy is consistent with the research conducted by Ghofrani (2008), Khosravi Zadeh (2008) and Asefi et al. (2014). The competition space in today's world is very hard and narrow. The essential condition to remain in this environment is the provision of new and superior services and products. Meanwhile, research and development play a significant role. Therefore, it is necessary to design a system for research and development of soccer, and establish close communication and interaction with sports centers and football clubs (Asefi et al., 2014). Considering the current weaknesses and mentioned opportunities,

it seems necessary to adopt an appropriate strategy to utilize the opportunities through overcoming those weaknesses.

The strategy of creating a reward system to attract professional football players is consistent with the studies by Khosravi Zadeh (2009), Nasirzadeh (2002), Ghofrani et al. (2009), Javadipor & Samienia (2014) and Sadegian (2015). This strategy is established by combining the weakness of failure in appreciating football players with the threat of the lack of the required motivation of these players. Creating a reward system is a very important factor to avoid lack of motivation in sports (Ghofrani et al., 2009). Therefore, applying this strategy will increase the motivation of football players and coaches.

The strategy of hosting football events and competitions is in line with the studies by Khosravi Zadeh (2009), Ghofrani et al. (2009), Javadipour (2013), Sadeghian et al. (2014) and Mehdizadeh et al. (2013), but not consistent with the study by Nasirzadeh (2011). For the success of this strategy it is important the cooperation with academic experts and media. If the number of football players increases, the competition in this sport will increase too, which will result in enhancing the quality level of the players.

The strategy of activating the marketing and attracting financial resources is consistent with the research of Ghofrani et al. (2009), Khosravi Zadeh (2009) and Asefi et al. (2014). For example, in Japan the private sector is one of the most important sectors responsible for directing and developing sports programs in exchange of tax exemptions, providing more facilities and enabling more people to benefit from sports (Ghofrani et al., 2009). Other example is Sweden, where the private sector receives special privileges to promote sport (Khosravi Zadeh, 2009). These examples could be applied also in Mazandaran Province.

## 5. Conclusion

This study detected the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of football industry in the Iranian Mazandaran Province. The results showed that Mazandaran football industry had more weaknesses than strengths and more threats than opportunities. Considering these results, the authors propose a series of strategies to improve the football industry of this province using the SWOT approach.

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