

THE CULTURAL STRATEGIES FOR SPORT ENTREPRENEURSHIP DEVELOPMENT IN IRAN

Azam Ebrahimi, Morteza Doosti, Mohammad Hossein Razavi and Masoomeh Kalateh Seifari

University of Mazandaran, Iran

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Abstract

Encouraging entrepreneurship is crucial to create jobs and improve competitiveness and economic growth. Furthermore, the potential of sport to create jobs and improve the health of people has been proven. The promotion of sport entrepreneurship requires different contexts including special cultural texture. The purpose of this study was to identify the appropriate sport entrepreneurship culture and to discover the most important strategies to develop entrepreneurship in sport as a new area in Iran. 20 sport entrepreneurship experts, top entrepreneurs and successful sport business owners were selected as the interviewees through purposeful sampling. Findings that were obtained using qualitative content analysis showed that sport has to be considered as a necessity of modern life and also as a science in Iranian society. In addition, sport entrepreneurship should be recognized as a tool for reducing unemployment by officials and policymakers. Finally, 9 strategies were suggested to improve sport entrepreneurship culture in Iran. They are basically focused on raising awareness of the importance of sport and sport entrepreneurship.

Key Words: entrepreneurship, strategy, sport entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship culture.

Introduction

Entrepreneurship is considered as an engine for economic growth because it can cause economic development, productivity, job creation and social well-being (Ahmad Pour et al., 2004). There are a multitude of explanations for entrepreneurship phenomenon. These could be personal (Hisrich et al., 2005), cultural (Co, 2003), economic (Smith & Cronje, 2005), or psychological (Mahadea, 1994) in nature (Mothilal, 2012). Developed countries have utilized almost the same strategies in order to develop entrepreneurship. The entrepreneurship development strategy in Canada that is suggested as a successful model for other countries by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) is as follows (Ahmad Pour et al, 2004):

Cultural reforms for valuing entrepreneurship in the society

Structural reforms and legal modification to facilitate entrepreneurship process, financial, technical, information and managerial support in order to mobilize resources for entrepreneurs. In this model, people's motivations are targeted through public media, education system and specific plans such as giving prize to top entrepreneurs. Along with the focus of education system on entrepreneurship, various programs are run outside this system. Additionally, research and knowledge distribution is regarded as a key factor in the mentioned model.

Sport-based entrepreneurship has emerged in recent years as a promising conceptual joint venture between entrepreneurship and sport management research (Hemme et al., 2016). Generally understood as "the mindset of people or organizations actively engaged in the pursuit of new opportunities in the sports-context"

(Ratten, 2012), sport entrepreneurship combines considerations for the economic, socio-political, and entrepreneurial facets of the sport industry (Hemme et al., 2016).

Both sport and entrepreneurship stimulate economic growth and have similar characteristics such as innovation, risk taking and opportunity-seeking. Sport can improve health in society and increase national productivity. In addition, there are many job opportunities in sport events (Mond Alizadeh & Honari, 2010).

In general, sport has different direct and indirect economic impacts. Direct economic impacts include sport goods and services, exports and imports, sport facilities, advertising, stock exchange, employment, tourist attraction and sponsorship. Indirect economic impacts of sport include improving the level of health in a society, reducing the treatment costs, reducing crime, reducing staff absenteeism and then improving their performance and efficiency and at last economic growth (Rostam Zadeh et al, 2014).

There are a lot of job opportunities in sport. Sport entrepreneurs can be athletes or non-athletes. Ratten (2015) believes that Greg Norman, David Beckham and Serena Williams are sport entrepreneurs because they have been risk taking by involving themselves in innovative business deals that have been commercially successful.

People who involved in sport indoorization are one example of non-athletes who can be called as sport entrepreneurs. Since the late 1980s, Outdoor lifestyle sports, such as surfing, skating, rowing, alpine skiing, biathlon, cross-country skiing, snowboarding, mountain climbing and even ski

jumping and parachute jumping, which used to be exclusively practiced in a natural environment of mountains, oceans, lakes, rivers and the air, are now being offered by entrepreneurs in safe, predictable and controlled indoor centers. Table tennis, 'futsal' or indoor soccer and swimming are the first examples of indoorization (Salome, 2012).

One of the necessary actions for entrepreneurship development in a country in general and also in sport in particular is providing an appropriate context. One of the most important aspects of appropriate context is providing entrepreneurship culture in the society. Cultural context as the base of other entrepreneurship contexts requires deep changes in people, insights, beliefs, rights, custom and traditions and behaviors (Seyed Noorani & Vafaei Yeganeh, 2010). According to Farahani et al. (2014), it is necessary to know culture, emotions and values of a society in order to succeed in a business. Ratten (2012) confirmed the importance of entrepreneurship culture to support and flourish sport opportunities.

There is a dearth of research examining sport sciences and entrepreneurship and according to Ratten (2012), few studies have empirically developed and tested a sport entrepreneurship construct and little conceptual or empirical research has been devoted to understanding the conditions that produce sports' entrepreneurship (Pixoto Naia, 2013). According to Byers (2012), research on entrepreneurship in sport is quite far behind the mainstream literature, so there is considerable scope to develop further understanding.

He added only a few articles have addressed this issue and primarily through case studies. Study on Red Bulls and Brooks Sports are two examples of these researches.

Research on sport entrepreneurship in Iran has an extremely wide range but it is not surprising because both sport management and entrepreneurship are multifaceted and interdisciplinary. Furthermore, both are new academic subjects.

Despite the great potential of entrepreneurship in Iranian sport and a widespread area for doing different activities, it has not been studied seriously. Financial turnover in some sports in Iran is so huge that providing a good context and attracting all interested people can lead to an enormous entrepreneurship area (Farahani et al. 2014).

Iran is facing unemployment crisis and entrepreneurship in sport may reduce its rate. According to the researches, sport entrepreneurship in Iran is not in a good condition and also the good conditions for achieving it have not been investigated. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to investigate the entrepreneurship culture in sport as a major context and identify some strategies to improve it.

Entrepreneurship and culture

Sport entrepreneurship development is influenced by various factors such as cultural, social, economic factors and public support. Some cultures are better for entrepreneurship in comparison with other cultures. Lifestyles and education system have a vital role in creating a good culture. Some authorities believe that the most important practice to develop entrepreneurship is the promotion of entrepreneurship culture.

This concept must be considered in policies, promotional-educational programs and in all social levels and classes. Culture-building can be fulfilled by the collaboration among the government, private sector, civil society and media. Therefore, first of all the entrepreneurship culture should be promoted and stabilized in the society and also management styles and public policies must be entrepreneurial, next, individual characteristics of people can be helpful and improve entrepreneurship and innovation in that society (Alvani et al. 2011).

Akhter & Sumi(2015) confirmed that cultural factors can influence both positively and negatively entrepreneurial activities in a society. Such factors include beliefs, values, attitudes, and habits, forms of behavior and lifestyles of people.

According to Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) report 2016/2017, Iran took 59th place among 65 countries in terms of social and cultural norms. The entrepreneurial framework conditions (EFCs) assessed by GEM are: financing, government policies, taxes and bureaucracy, government programs, school-level entrepreneurship education and training, post-school entrepreneurship education and training, R&D transfer, access to commercial and professional infrastructure, internal market dynamics, internal market burdens, access to physical and services infrastructure, and social and cultural norms. Obviously, culture is one of the central concepts in entrepreneurship development.

Generally, a series of public policies must be considered in order to achieve an entrepreneurial society. Policies that are effective on people's culture, values and beliefs are one of the so-called policies for the promotion of the entrepreneurship (Riyahi et al., 2016).

Some argue that the major part of entrepreneurship culture in modern societies is affected by institutionalization of scientific culture. In other words, entrepreneurship culture is fulfilled in an environment that its dominant norms support values and beliefs which are based on science and work. Entrepreneurship happens through a social need discovery. Finding this need is impossible without recognition of economic, social and cultural context in the country. According to some research, the biggest barrier for entrepreneurs is related to cultural issues and governments can change cultural values (Gol Avar, 2011).

It is believed that an entrepreneurial sport industry is one of the major contributors to national economies and their growth (Ball, 2005).

Yadollahi Farsi et al. (2010) following the study of sport entrepreneurship in Iran based on three categories (behavioral, structural and environmental) confirmed the necessity of the attempt of media in order to promote entrepreneurship culture. Besides, Mond Alizadeh et al (2016) approved of the significance sport entrepreneurship culture in a society.

Methods

This research was a qualitative study using content analysis. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. 10 top sport entrepreneurs and 10 experts in this area participated in the present research. They were selected using purposeful sampling because informants who had practical and scientific experiences were needed.

Qualitative content analysis is one of numerous research methods used to analyze text data that provide better understanding of the phenomenon under study. In the present study, interviews were coded and the special codes and categories were drawn and then, appropriate strategies were proposed based on them. Additionally, the proposed strategies were confirmed by the experts of the sample.

Results

Demography of people who participated in semi-structured interviews is shown in table 1.

Table 1. Demography of interviewees.

Demography	
Age under 30 years old: 1 between 31 to 40: 17 over 41: 1	Gender 3 women 17 men
Work experience under 10 years: 5 people between 11 to 20: 13 people over 21: 1 person	Education B.A: 3 people M.A: 5 people PhD: 12 people

Findings imply that there are 2 aspects for the improvement of sport entrepreneurship culture in Iran. First, people have to realize the importance of sport in their lives. Second, the society has to figure out the importance of entrepreneurship in sport. The most important items after coding are as follows: lack of awareness about sport benefits, lack of attention to specialized people in sport and sport as a science, lack of attention to sport economics and lack of awareness for new sport area such as sport psychology, sport marketing.

According to the most important categories mentioned above, 9 key strategies drawn from the interviews are as follows:

1. Focus on awareness of physical and mental benefits of sport through different media
2. Focus on awareness of learning and doing sport properly and using sport equipment appropriately
3. Raising awareness of considering sport as a necessity of life and as a multifaceted and interdisciplinary science
4. The glorification of successful businesspeople in sport
5. Introducing of top entrepreneurs in cities, provinces and country through different media
6. Setting up sport fairs and introduction of modern sport equipment and services
7. Introduction of state-of-the-art sport technologies through media
8. Introduction of top gyms and enterprises in different cities, provinces and country and giving special prizes to them
9. Giving national prize for sport innovations and inventions

Conclusion

Providing a good cultural context for sport entrepreneurship in Iran has 2 aspects: 1.Highlighting the importance of sport as a necessity, 2.Highlighting the importance of sport entrepreneurship as a possible solution for unemployment in the society. Interviewees stressed the lack of knowledge about positive effects of sport among Iranian people. In fact, they believed that the exercise preventive role against different diseases has not recognized yet in Iran. In other words, according to experts, Iranian society does not consider sport and physical activity as a necessity for life and they do not participate in physical activities as much as necessary. Foroughi Pouret al. (2007) suggested that mass sport has considerable potential for employment and entrepreneurship because this area aims at happiness and health for all people and prevention of different physical and mental problems.

Mond Alizadeh et al. (2016) confirmed people, s attitudes toward sport and sport entrepreneurship in the success of sport businesses. These authors also highlighted the significance of entrepreneurship culture. As can be inferred from the results, the significance of sport in either health or economics has not yet figured out among the majority of Iranians. Media can have a major contribution to the promotion of sport. Therefore, it is suggested that media try to produce special educational programs about sport in order to inform about the real nature of sport and the health benefits of physical activity and encourage people to take part in different activities. Other action strategies for the promotion of sport entrepreneurship can be the introduction of top sport entrepreneurs through media and their glorification, holding various seminars, publishing scientific papers and giving speech in order to alter the attitude and beliefs of managers and policymakers to the sport. In addition, the role of sport entrepreneurs in industrial and economic

growth and job creation should become a public belief. In other words, in the modern world based on data and science that we live, growth and development is just possible through innovation and creativity. In conclusion, one of the most important prerequisite for the sport entrepreneurship development in Iran is cultural

reforms focusing on changing attitudes toward exercise and physical activity. In an appropriate cultural context, entrepreneurs can exploit the various opportunities in sport area and cause different positive consequences at the macro-micro levels. Future studies might prioritize these strategies based on practicability.

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Correspondence to:

Azam Ebrahimi

PhD student in Sport Management,

University of Mazandaran, Iran

Faculty of physical education and sport sciences

E-mail: ebrahimi2226@yahoo.com