





The contribution of sports diplomacy to achieving sustainable development: The Algerian model

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to explore the contribution of sports diplomacy to achieving sustainable development in Algeria, utilizing sports as a tool of soft power on the international stage, and assessing its compatibility with the state's strategy for sustainable development. The descriptive-analytical method was employed through content analysis of the Ministry of Youth and Sports website and accredited media materials over the period from November 21, 2021, to March 24, 2024. The study concludes that the state relies on hosting sports events as a source of public diplomacy to achieve sustainable development in Algeria.

Keywords: Sports diplomacy, Sustainable development, Sports events.

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INTRODUCTION

Sport constitutes an integral part of the political landscape, with a longstanding and robust relationship between sports and politics, especially diplomacy, in its literal sense. However, sports diplomacy has only recently garnered significant attention as a distinct subset of public diplomacy, despite its practice dating back to the 9th century BCE. During the inaugural Olympic Games, an "*Olympic Truce*" was signed, suspending all hostile activities throughout the event to ensure the safety of spectators, athletes, and travellers, marking an early form of sports diplomacy (Deos, 2014).

The study of sports diplomacy has become a vast area of research in the 21st century. National sporting performances can enhance the local and international image of a country by fostering unity, national identity, and pride (e.g., Côte d'Ivoire's qualification for the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany). Sporting events also stimulate foreign investment and boost tourism (e.g., the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar). Additionally, it's essential to highlight the sports economy sector, with global sports revenue reaching \$501.43 billion in 2022 and projected to reach \$707.84 billion by 2026, constituting approximately 1% of the global GDP.

Sport provides countries with an opportunity to compete internationally, gain international standing through means other than military or economic power, and allows political actors wielding soft power to be seen as influential on the global stage (Ber, Yarchi, & Galily, 2017, p. 221).

Moreover, sports play a vital role in regional integration and international cooperation by strengthening diplomatic relations between countries. Algeria, one of Africa's five major powers alongside Egypt, Ethiopia, Nigeria, and South Africa, plays a significant role in shaping the continent's future due to its demographic, economic, and military size, as well as its historical role as a regional leader. However, changes in global power distribution will impact Africa's ability to showcase its strength and build formal and informal alliances at both continental and global levels (Cillier & others, 2015, p.1).

In this context, since its establishment in 2002, the African Union, as a successor to the Organization of African Unity, has sought to achieve greater unity and solidarity among African countries. It aims to be a people-centred institution by building partnerships between governments and all segments of society. This opens up the option of using sports as a diplomatic tool to enhance Africa's foreign policies and its policies within the continent.

Sport serves as a soft power tool because it can illuminate a state's culture and values, influencing how it is perceived globally and providing valuable opportunities for diplomatic action through international sporting events. Sports serve as a means of building relationships with foreign audiences by bridging communication gaps.

Recently (from 2019 to the present), the Algerian state has focused on developing a sustainable development strategy by reclaiming its previous status, impact, and influence through active and effective foreign policy on the international, regional, bilateral, and international stages. This includes considerable financial allocation towards developing infrastructure and sports facilities to host major sporting events for economic development, enhancing Algeria's positive image globally, and investing in sports and sporting events to promote international cooperation and achieve social development.

Based on this background, this research paper aims to analyse the tools used in sports diplomacy and assess their contribution to sustainable development in Algeria as a model.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Participants

An analysis was conducted on the website of the Ministry of Youth and Sports (<https://www.mjs.gov.dz/index.php/fr/actualites-4/sport>) as the responsible entity for sports activities. The analysis covered the period from November 21, 2021, to March 24, 2024. The media materials published during this period amounted to 54 media articles. The reason for choosing this period is that it witnessed significant activity in Algerian sports, hosting numerous international sporting events.

Measures

The researchers relied on content analysis as a tool to describe the content of the Ministry of Youth and Sports website, examining both the apparent and explicit content of newspapers and published media releases. This approach was tailored to meet the research requirements and objectives, categorizing the data into types of media content, types of sporting events, sources of sports diplomacy, their objectives, and outcomes, according to the sports diplomacy model.

RESULTS

The importance of utilizing sports diplomacy as a theoretical framework in the contribution of sports diplomacy to achieving sustainable development in Algeria.

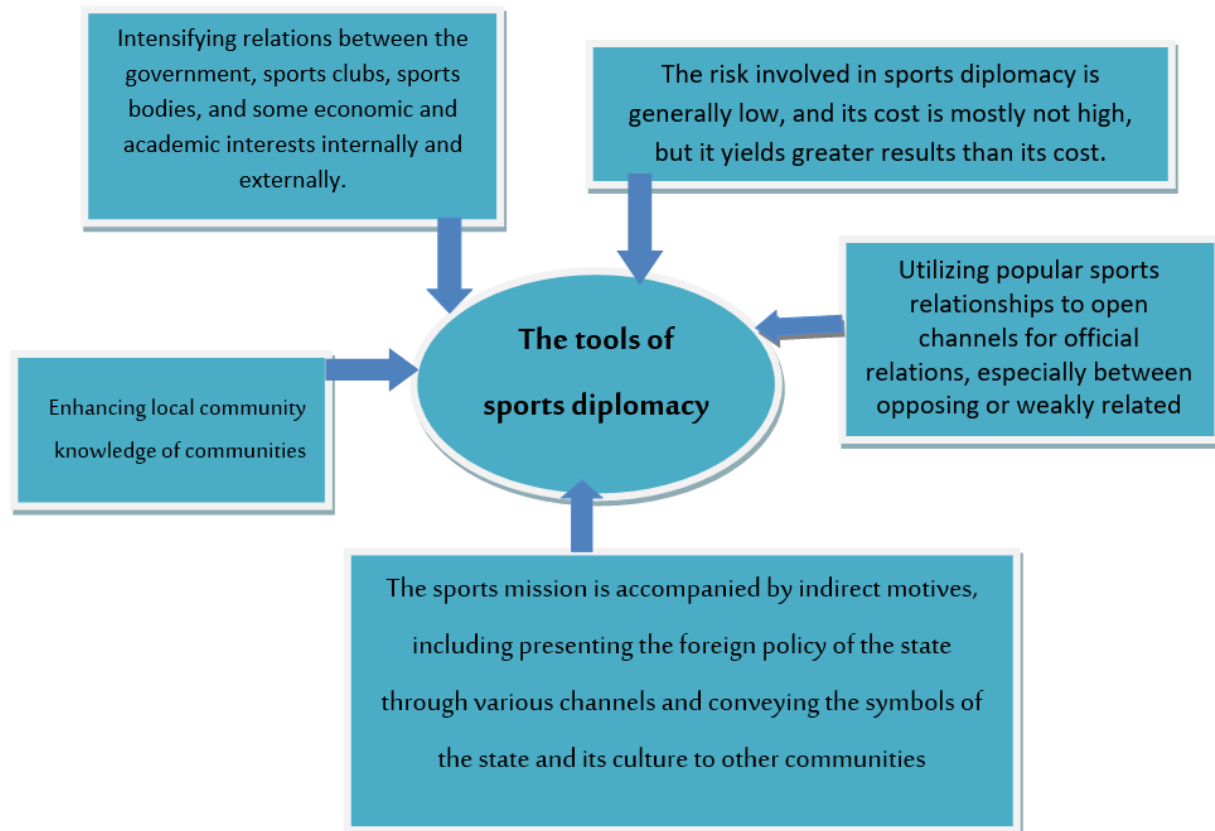


Figure 1. Sports diplomacy as a political tool in one of its dimensions.

Table 1. Most important tools used in sports diplomacy.

No	Tools used in sports diplomacy	Method of use
1	International organizations	Olympics or International Federation of Association Football (FIFA)
2	National brand	Each national feature or symbol has two dimensions: explicit (formal) and implicit (hidden)
3	Media (print, audiovisual, visual)	Employing these technical media during sports activities to convey a certain media image
4	Utilization of distinguished athletes	To play a direct diplomatic role

The role of sports diplomacy is evident from Table 1, as it works to invest in and utilize a number of tools, including:

1. International Organizations: Alongside regional or continental federations for various sports activities and events, there are international organizations such as the Olympics or the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) that are global institutions with a diplomatic sports character.
2. National Branding: According to Keith Dinnie (2008), each national feature or symbol has two dimensions: explicit (formal) and implicit (hidden). The explicit dimension includes a name, symbol, term, or design that refers to a country, entity, or state that makes it distinct from others and is associated with that entity in the minds of the recipient. As for the implicit dimension, the brand must capture the recipient's emotions positively and leave a long-lasting impact, and it must entail ethical or moral connotations.
3. Media (Print, Audiovisual, Visual): These technical media are employed during sports activities to convey a specific media image about the country, state, society, landmarks, or various symbols, in order to establish a positive image about the country or to undermine a negative image about the country or society.
4. Utilization of Distinguished Athletes: This involves utilizing distinguished athletes to play a direct diplomatic role, such as when President George Bush used basketball player Dennis Rodman for some diplomatic activities, or when athletes were appointed as ambassadors for UNICEF, or when mediating international disputes, as Muhammad Ali did in mediating with Iraq for the release of American hostages in the early 1990s (Maureen Callahan, 2015).

Table 2. Use of sports events as a source of sports diplomacy as reported on the official website of the Ministry of Youth and Sports and its accredited newspapers.

No	Events and Tournaments Organized 2021/2023	Year	Location
1	19th Mediterranean Games, Oran 2022	2022 25/06-06/07	Oran
2	4th Arab Cup U-17 Football Championship	2022 23/08-08/09	Mostaghanem/Sig
3	14th Africa U-17 Cup of Nations	Jan 2023	Algiers
4	15th Arab Sports Games	2023	Algiers
5	Ahaggar Rally	2021/12/ 31-24	Tamanrasset
6	African Championship of Vovinam Viet Vo Dao	2021/11/ 25-20	Algiers
7	African Judo Championship for Women and Men	2022/01/16-15	Algiers
8	16th African Sambo Championship	2022 /11/1	Oum El Bouaghi
9	World Vovinam Championship	2022	Algiers
10	Afro-Asian Karate Championship - Karte Do Kai	2022/11/19-15	Mostaghanem
11	World Cup Davis for Table Tennis / Africa Men's Third Competition	August 2022	Algiers
12	World Sabre Fencing Cup - Men and Women's Sabre	2022/11/13-10	Algiers
13	African Bodybuilding and Fitness Championship	2022/10/16-13	Constantine

The table clearly illustrates how hosting sports events serves as a source of sports diplomacy. The Ministry of Youth and Sports in Algeria has shown a remarkable commitment to organizing events like the Mediterranean Games in Oran, which witnessed great success and participation.

Throughout 2022, Algeria hosted various continental, Arab, and global sports events across different disciplines. This underscores Algeria's capacity to organize any sports event due to the size and quality of its sports infrastructure. Notably, Algeria hosted 40 international sports events in 2022 alone, setting a new record for the Algerian sports authorities less than a year after the resumption of sports activities following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Algeria's motorsports sector has made significant strides in a short time, becoming a prominent continental and global hub. This was evident in the successful hosting of several important competitions in 2022, which garnered respect and recognition from international bodies. Events like the Ahaggar Rally, the African Championship of Vovinam Viet Vo Dao, and the Sahara Challenge International Rally showcased Algeria's ability to combine sports with promotional tourism effectively.

In conclusion, the table highlights how hosting sports events contributes to sports diplomacy, as demonstrated by Algeria's exceptional organization of the Mediterranean Games in Oran and its successful hosting of numerous other international sports events.

In 2022, Algeria witnessed the emergence of several athletes in various combat sports that were excellently hosted by the country. This year saw an unprecedented record of continental and international championships and competitions held across the nation. It began with the African Judo Open Championships for men and women, hosted at the Multi-Sports Hall of the Olympic Complex "*Mohamed Boudhia*" in Algiers from January 15 to 16. The forty-third edition of the African Championships for seniors in individual and team categories also returned to Algeria after a 20-year absence.

Other combat sports also made their presence felt, such as Sambo, with Algeria hosting the sixteenth edition of the African Sambo Championship, which significantly contributed to the promotion of this sport. Additionally, there was a focus on Muay Thai through an international event dedicated to Mixed Martial Arts and Muay Thai, held at the Multi-Sports Hall in Ain M'lila on November 1.

A notable exception in 2022 was the hosting of two important events related to Vovinam Viet Vo Dao. Algeria hosted the fourth edition of the African Vovinam Viet Vo Dao Championship and the World Vovinam Championship. Algeria deservedly won both tournaments, showcasing its prowess in yet another new combat sport. The Afro-Asian Karate Championship, held in Mostaghanem from November 15 to 19, was another significant event, further solidifying Algeria's position in the sports arena.

Moreover, Algeria hosted two major events in 2022: the World Fencing Championships in sabre, for both men and women, held from November 10 to 13 at the "*Harcha Hassan*" Hall with the participation of 300 athletes, including 165 female athletes, representing more than 40 countries from five continents. Another noteworthy event was the Davis Cup, which returned to Algeria after 19 years, held in August last year and dedicated to the competitions of the third African group.

Bodybuilding also gained prominence this year, with Algeria hosting three continental competitions, starting with the African Bodybuilding and Fitness Championship, followed by the African Power lifting Championship,

and finally the African Bodybuilding Championship, held in Constantine from October 13 to 16, with the participation of 180 athletes representing 12 countries.

The success of Algeria in organizing these competitions adds to its previous successes in hosting various sporting events, as well as those it will host in the coming years.

One of the most prominent football events hosted by Algeria in 2022 was the organization of the Arab Cup for Under-17 football, which took place from August 23 to September 8 in the provinces of Mostaghanem and Mascara. The tournament witnessed the deserved and prestigious victory of the national team, clinching the title for the first time.

Following the resounding success of this tournament, Algeria hosted the African Nations Championship for local football players at the beginning of January, with the participation of 18 African teams. The competition took place in stadiums with international standards, representing a new challenge that could further enhance Algeria's chances of hosting the African football spectacle, the Africa Cup of Nations (AFCON).

By successfully organizing numerous continental, Arab, and international sporting events across various disciplines during the years 2021, 2022, and 2023, as documented by the Ministry of Youth and Sports and accredited national sports newspapers, Algeria has become a distinguished destination recognized by international sports authorities and participating delegations for hosting global sporting competitions. This has not only bolstered Algeria's position on the international sports map but also reflects the special attention given to sports and athletes by the President of the Republic, Mr. Abdelmadjid Tebboune, through the provision of high-quality infrastructure and effective organization.

Table 3. Results of sports diplomacy targeted through media coverage of the Ministry of Youth and Sports website and accredited newspapers.

Results of sports diplomacy		Repetition of media materials	%
Explicit Results	Communication between countries	32	59.25
	Mutual understanding	29	53.7
	Building trust	41	75.92
Implicit Results	Boosting the sports industry	17	31.48
	Socio-economic development	24	44.44
	Development of sports tourism	35	64.81
Total		178	

Table 3 illustrates the results of sports diplomacy targeted through media coverage on the Ministry of Youth and Sports website, categorized into explicit and implicit results.

Regarding explicit results, the category of "*Building Trust*" ranked first with a percentage of 75.92%. Most of the media materials published emphasized Algeria's ability to host sports events and overcome challenging circumstances, providing all necessary facilities for their success. The Ministry of Youth and Sports website revealed the major axes of the youth and sports sector's strategy, focusing on upgrading the youth and sports system to achieve excellence and positive results nationally and internationally. Additionally, significant progress was made in receiving sports facilities, with 67 sports and youth facilities being handed over during the past year (2023).

In second place came "*Inter-Diplomatic Communication*" with a percentage of 59.25%, reflected through hosting and participating in major sports events. Sports delegations participating in international events act as sporting ambassadors for their country, promoting cultural heritage, values, customs, and traditions of the organizing country. Furthermore, it presents a golden opportunity to enhance tourism and contribute to Algeria's national economy.

"*Mutual Understanding*" ranked third with a percentage of 53.7%. Media coverage on the Ministry of Youth and Sports website showed that sports diplomacy aimed to strengthen international relations and document ties. Several projects related to bilateral international cooperation in sports between Algeria and many countries were studied, along with agreements with the United Nations Development Program for the period from 2024 to 2026, focusing on youth empowerment in Algeria. Partnerships and cooperation agreements with Tunisia were also highlighted, enhancing sports diplomacy in its explicit results.

Concerning implicit results of sports diplomacy targeted through coverage on the Ministry of Youth and Sports website, the category of "*Development of Sports Tourism*" ranked first with a percentage of 64.81%. This underscores the recent focus on enhancing sports tourism quality due to its high economic revenues and its role in cultural and social continuity. Thus, it serves as a part of alternative tourism, contributing not only to economic development but also to effective management of human, financial, and natural resources and directing the service of the host country politically, socially, and culturally. Given Algeria's unique atmosphere and historical sites linked to sports, the intertwining of sports events with historical places strengthens sports diplomacy and directly contributes to sustainable development in the country.

Therefore, it is essential to emphasize its adoption in Algeria, which has witnessed the development of its tourism and sports sectors since independence until today, thanks to the policies implemented by the state. Both sectors have been developed through infrastructure construction and the formulation of development programs. Although Algeria is a young country that gained its independence sixty-six years ago, it possesses significant tourist assets, especially diverse natural resources. These resources allow for the establishment of sports tourism, entering the global tourism market, and competing in it. Proper utilization of these resources and the adoption of clear strategies, especially in natural sports, which are considered a strength for Algeria with its natural potential and current infrastructure (international stadiums, specialized halls, Olympic pools, new hotels, roads, and transportation), has enabled the hosting of continental competitions that have impressed the world, such as the Mediterranean Games (Oran 2022) and the African Cup of Nations (CHAN). Therefore, the necessity to upgrade and develop tourism potential has become one of the fundamental requirements for the development and advancement of communities economically, socially, environmentally, and even culturally, to achieve sustainable development originating from sports diplomacy.

In second place came the category of social, economic, and community development, with a percentage of 44.44%. This is achieved through investment in sports events to convey local culture, achieve mutual understanding, and present a positive image of the country to foreign audiences, reflecting social benefits by helping develop public places and services in the country. Sports events serve as a source of diplomatic resources to create and facilitate recreational facilities and services for citizens and visitors. Additionally, they contribute to enhancing citizens' sense of belonging to their homeland, as sports diplomacy increases opportunities for sports and cultural exchange between the hosting society and visitors, and as an output of positive sports diplomacy, it works to raise awareness among various segments of society. Economically, it manifests in strategic plans to increase the allocation of resources to develop specific tourist areas related to local, continental, or international sports events with favourable natural and climatic conditions. Moreover,

the contribution of supervisory authorities and various sectors in incentivizing local and foreign private sectors to invest in tourism and sports in these areas is insufficient.

In third place came the category of developing the sports industry, with a percentage of 31.48%. It is represented by the interest in sports facilities and infrastructure, and the development of sports event management processes in line with global standards in security, technology, safety, and health.

CONCLUSIONS

The Algerian state has shown great interest in sports, evident in hosting numerous regional, continental, and international sporting events and promoting sports culture in the country. Based on this, Algeria has hosted more than 40 regional, continental, and international sports events according to (Africa News, 2022). The suitable sports facilities have accelerated the pace of development for hosting such significant regional events involving 26 countries, all while fully respecting international laws. These events represent significant challenges for Algeria in terms of regional and international image, as well as economic, social, and media development. The study reached the following points:

1. Sports contribute to enhancing diplomatic relations between countries through the exchange of cultures and values, serving as a universal language understood by all, a focus highlighted by the Algerian state in adopting sporting events as a common peaceful activity.
2. Algeria hosts numerous global and regional sports events, creating conducive atmospheres for enhancing understanding, communication, and diplomatic relations between itself and other countries worldwide.
3. Sporting events in Algeria play a significant role in changing Algeria's image globally, directly contributing to the development of mutual relations and economic, commercial, and tourism cooperation.
4. Sports diplomacy in Algeria serves as a driving force for foreign investment and economic development, transforming financial influence into integrated political and media influence due to the soft power of sports.
5. Sports contribute to strengthening relations between neighbouring peoples in Africa directly by enhancing relationship components. They also contribute to alleviating tension in regional relations among these countries.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The three authors collected, analysed, and processed the data for this study. The first author was responsible for proposing the study's parameters and general frameworks. Also data analysis. The other authors collected the study data and analysed the study data.

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DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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