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Designing a sports venue productivity model based on urban branding in Iraq

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Abstract

This research addresses the challenges faced by Iraq's sports facilities due to political instability, security issues, and economic dependence on oil. It aims to explore solutions for optimizing sports venues to support urban branding. A qualitative approach was used, gathering data from 21 experts, including sports facility managers, officials, coaches, athletes, and citizens. Interviews were conducted, and the data analyzed using MaxQD E software. The findings highlight various factors influencing the effectiveness of sports facilities, such as branding, tourism development, cultural revival, technology, social responsibility, economic value, and service quality. The research concludes that improving sports venues can enhance social and economic development, ultimately contributing to urban branding in Iraq

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Introduction

The increasing demand for sports facilities, driven by rapid environmental changes and population growth, underscores their critical role in hosting sports activities, competitions, and enhancing urban identity. Proper planning, construction, and management of these venues are essential to avoid wasting resources and ensure they meet global standards. Efficient sports facilities contribute to social cohesion, economic development, and urban branding, positioning cities as attractive destinations for tourism and investment (Hussein, 2021).

Urban branding through sports venues enhances a city's image, fostering social interactions, improving citizens' quality of life, and supporting sustainable urban development. Effective management, including cost-efficient construction, maintenance, and utilization of facilities, is vital, particularly in developing nations like Iraq, where political and economic challenges prevail.

Research highlights key factors influencing the efficiency of sports venues: accessibility, user satisfaction, ethical human resource management, systematic planning, regular maintenance, strong leadership, continuous evaluation, and financial profitability. Addressing these factors can enhance the performance of sports facilities, aligning them with urban branding goals and contributing to economic and social progress (Nazzal, 2014).

Sports venues hold significant potential for urban branding, fostering development, and enhancing cities' identities. Studies highlight the role of urban branding in revitalizing and attracting investments by creating unique city identities (Amini & Ansari, 2000)(Al-Dabbagh & Muhammad, 2022). Sports facilities, as integral urban landmarks, enhance physical activity and reduce sedentary behavior (Zhang et al., 2022), while promoting equitable spatial distribution of resources (Chen et al., 2021) .(Muhammad & Juber Nazzal, 2025)

In Iraq, political instability, dependency on oil, and insufficient infrastructure have hindered optimal use of sports venues, limiting their economic, cultural, and social impacts. Urban branding through sports facilities can address these challenges by boosting tourism, investment, and social cohesion. However, issues like poor planning, weak management, and outdated practices remain obstacles (Muhammad & sabar, 2024).

This research proposes a model for improving sports venue performance in Iraq, focusing on their role in sustainable urban development and branding. By optimizing these venues, Iraq can enhance city status, attract investments, and improve citizens' quality of life. This model serves as a

foundation for addressing similar challenges in other developing regions, emphasizing the importance of urban branding in achieving sustainable growth.

Method

This research employed a qualitative and exploratory approach with a practical purpose, aiming to expand understanding of sports venue productivity based on urban branding in Iraq. The study used Glaser's (1992) grounded theory methodology, involving 21 purposefully sampled participants, including sports venue managers, Baghdad Municipality officials, sports experts, coaches, athletes, and citizens. Participants were selected based on their direct experience and ability to contribute effectively to the study through semi-structured interviews.

Data collection involved recording and analyzing interviews using MaxQDA software (version 20). Coding and theorization were conducted iteratively, adhering to Glaser's method. Validity and reliability were ensured through criteria such as transferability, trustworthiness, and verifiability. Feedback from sports management professors and participants validated the interview content and coding methods. Reliability was confirmed using an inter-coder agreement method, achieving a 79% agreement rate, exceeding the acceptable threshold of 60%.

This process yielded a robust dataset for analyzing the relationship between sports venue management and urban branding, supported by detailed coding results summarized in Table 1.

$$\text{Reliability percentage} = 100 \frac{\text{Number of agreements} \times 2}{\text{Total number of codes}}$$

Table 1. The results of the reliability of two coders

Interview number	Total number of codes	Number of agreements	Number of disagreements	Reliability percentage
1	15	6	3	80
6	13	5	2	76,92
12	17	7	4	82,35
the whole	45	18	9	79,75

For verification, several professors of sports management and experts in the related field who were outside the research process, reviewed all the stages of the research and their opinions were applied. In order to consider ethical principles in the current research; First, the goals and necessity of the research were explained to the research participants before starting the interviews. Then the participants participated in the research with their personal consent and initial familiarity with the topic under study.

The findings

Table 2 shows the demographic information of the interviewees.

Table 2, information of people participating in the research

experts	side	gender and	Separation of people
group1	Manager of sports facilities	man sir3	woman 1
group2	Senior municipal official in Baghdad city	man sir3	woman 1
group3	Experts in the field of sports facilities	man sir2	woman 1
group4	Sports coaches	man sir2	woman2
group5	Professional athletes	man sir2	woman 1
group6		man sir2	woman 1

Table 3 shows the dimensions related to the productivity of sports venues based on urban branding in Iraq

Table 3. Productivity of sports venues based on urban branding in Iraq

concept	The main theme	Sub-theme	open source
		Creating a sports brand	Sports brand association, awareness of the sports brand, perceived quality of the sports brand, loyalty to the sports brand, creating a

<p>Urban branding</p>	<p>Incorporeal</p>	<p>Development of sports tourism</p> <p>Revival of sports culture</p> <p>Communication and networking</p>	<p>special identity for the city, generating income</p> <p>Increasing advertising capabilities, strengthening urban infrastructures and facilities</p> <p>Improving the cultural status of the city through</p> <p>Sports tourism</p> <p>Increasing public private participation, use of sports diplomacy, education and awareness in the field of use</p> <p>Sports facilities, active lifestyle, sports model in families, encouraging healthy competition, attention to public sports, coordination and cooperation between local, regional and national government to promote projects</p> <p>Urban development and facilitating the branding process of private sector participation, creating international interactions to attract foreign investors and attracting projects</p> <p>A macro development of involving people in branding processes through public consultation programs, workshops and collaborative activities, informing</p>
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			<p>and educating citizens about the goals and benefits of urban branding through local campaigns, .events and social media</p> <p>Use of local and national media Use of social platforms to communicate with local and international audiences</p> <p>Managing the image of the city in the minds of the audience and publishing positive news and stories related to the city</p> <p>Creating cooperation networks with artists and prominent cultural figures to promote the city's identity and strengthen cultural connections</p> <p>Creating a digital and interactive urban experience, providing virtual tours, urban guide applications and augmented reality (AR) and virtual .reality (VR) systems</p>
			<p>Use social platforms to communicate</p> <p>With local and international audiences, managing the image of the city in the minds of the audience and publishing positive news and stories related to the city</p> <p>Prominent cultural figures to promote the city's identity and strengthen cultural connections to</p>

			create a digital and interactive urban experience	
		Al Avari	<p>The use of new technologies in construction and urban planning, such as advanced technologies in the construction of smart buildings, environmentally friendly materials and the design of digital urban .spaces</p> <p>Smart transportation systems include self-driving vehicles, shared bicycles, online taxis, and traffic management applications</p> <p>Data management and information analysis of digital marketing and online advertising, the use of information and communication technologies, including the creation of strong high-speed Internet infrastructure</p> <p>Advanced telecommunication networks and digital services such as electronic payments and online services</p>	
			Using artificial intelligence (AI) for more efficient management of urban resources and services	
			Environmental	<p>Protecting the environment</p> <p>Reducing the consumption of</p>

		social responsibility	<p>Social</p> <p>economic</p>	<p>natural resources</p> <p>The importance of waste recycling</p> <p>Use of renewable energy</p> <p>Commitment to improve social welfare</p> <p>Active participation in social and cultural events</p> <p>Fair treatment of employees</p> <p>Help to solve social problems</p> <p>Protection of local culture</p> <p>Avoid local language distortion</p> <p>Trying to make more profit</p> <p>Achieving long-term success</p> <p>Job creation for local people</p>
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<p>Productivity of sports facilities</p>		<p>Creating economic value</p>	<p>Creation of modern infrastructure such as public transport roads, airports Diversifying industries and creating economic opportunities Improving the quality of life through improving public services, health education, security and green spaces</p>
		<p>Marketing campaigns</p>	<p>Attracting leading companies and creative entrepreneurs for market research and target market identification Creating a distinctive visual identity, designing a simple and recognizable logo and slogan, telling stories from the rich historical past, innovations, or even geographical .location</p>
	<p>physical</p>	<p>Design and architecture</p>	<p>Construction of special and unique buildings that become urban symbols and create a distinct visual .identity for the city Creating pleasant and attractive environments using public arts, creative lighting and modern urban design</p>
		<p>Sustainable infrastructure</p>	<p>Balanced distribution of urban infrastructures and services in different parts of the greenarchitecture city</p>

			<p>Paying attention to the climate, geographic conditions and the use of local materials for</p>
		Urban geography	<p>sustainable public transportation</p> <p>Using the historical heritage of the city as a tool for branding and strengthening the unique identity of the city</p> <p>Continuous training of employees and improvement of their skills, motivation through rewards, incentives, creation of work environment</p>
	Sports facilities deposit	War Al-Dhee management	<p>Continuous training of employees and improvement of their skills</p> <p>Motivating through rewards, incentives and creating a work environment</p> <p>Positive to increase efficiency</p> <p>Division of work and specialization</p> <p>Optimizing the costs of the organization to increase profitability and reduce the wastage of resources</p> <p>Allocation of financial resources to sectors with profitable projects to increase investment returns</p> <p>Managing the organization's cash flow to avoid problems</p>

		<p>Optimal use of resources</p> <p>Quality of service</p> <p>User satisfaction</p>	<p>Finance and maintain economic stability</p> <p>Alignment of international standards such as Six Sigma with Kaizen to improve quality and productivity, invest in innovation for competitive advantage and increase</p> <p>Efficiency of knowledge management</p> <p>Improve time management through fine-tuning and scheduling</p> <p>Priorities</p> <p>Human resources (coaches and staff)</p> <p>Physical facilities such as sports facilities, locker rooms, gymnasiums and other auxiliary spaces are essential resources for supply</p> <p>The needs of users of technology resources such as customer management systems (CRM)</p> <p>Online reservation software, mobile applications to track exercises and smart equipment for virtual exercises by providing detailed information</p> <p>Educational and informational resources, such as information on health, nutrition, proper sports, as</p>
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			<p>well as training through clients with training programs for users</p> <p>Easy access to responsiveness</p> <p>Cleanliness and hygiene of the environment</p> <p>Expertise of trainers and personnel</p> <p>Variety and breadth of services</p> <p>Accurate control and evaluation of the quality of services provided in sports facilities</p> <p>meeting the expectations of the audience and athletes from sports facilities</p> <p>User satisfaction</p> <p>Appropriate prices and tariffs for security and safety</p> <p>Professional and friendly behavior of staff</p>
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In Figure 1, the final model of the research is shown.

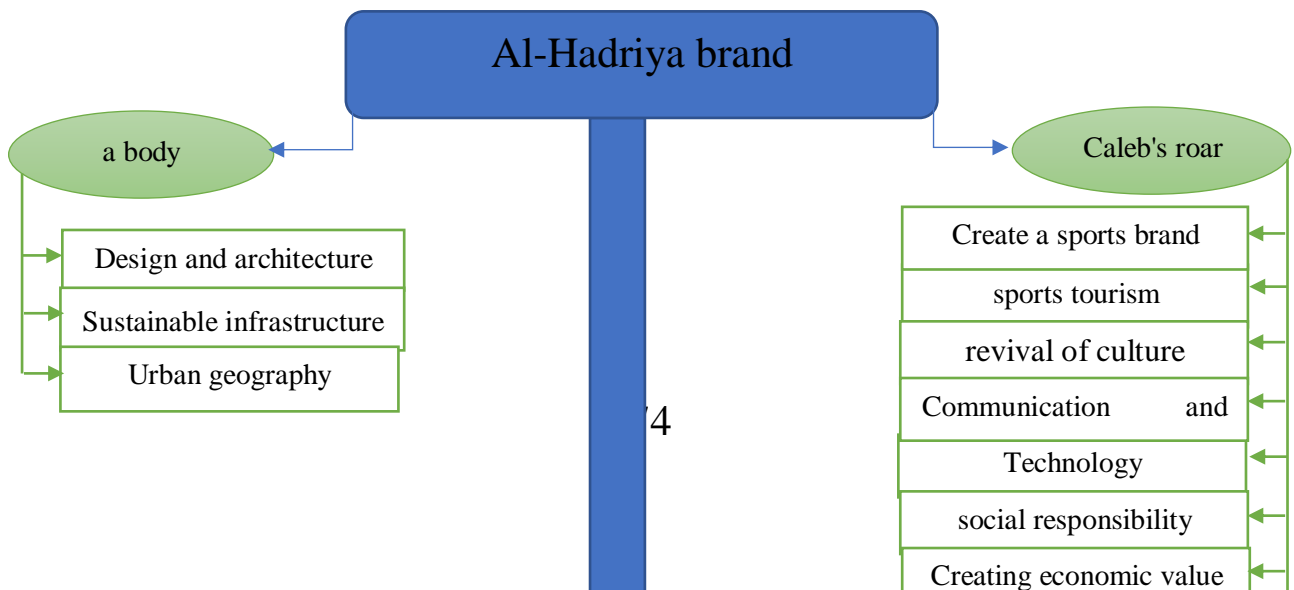


Figure 1, Final research model

Result and Discussion

Sports facilities play a significant role beyond just providing a platform for sports, contributing to social, economic, and cultural development. In countries like Iraq, with challenges such as political instability and economic dependence on oil, improving sports facility productivity is seen as a solution for development. This research focuses on creating a model for efficiently utilizing sports venues based on urban branding in Iraq, which can strengthen urban identity, attract investment, and promote sports tourism.

Key strategies for enhancing sports venue productivity include developing a sports brand, improving service quality, and fostering loyalty. Non-physical branding, like using symbols, slogans, and creating a sense of belonging, helps attract and retain users. Raising brand awareness through events and media is essential for building a strong identity.

Sports tourism is a critical aspect, as it generates income and boosts infrastructure development. The collaboration between the public and private sectors is vital for creating the necessary infrastructure and hosting sports events. This partnership leads to economic growth, as sports tourism brings in revenues and enhances the city's international status. Modern facilities, improved public transport, and strategic event management are necessary to support this growth and attract international events.

In summary, leveraging sports venues as part of urban branding can significantly contribute to

sustainable urban development, attracting investment, and enhancing the cultural and economic status of cities like Baghdad

Communication and networking play a crucial role in the development and branding of sports venues, fostering cooperation among government bodies, the private sector, and local communities. Effective partnerships can improve infrastructure, attract investment, and enhance services. Public-private sector collaboration drives innovation and resource sharing, while international interactions elevate a city's global sports reputation. Public awareness campaigns, media use, and local cultural events further strengthen the city's sports brand.

Technology also plays a vital role, improving infrastructure, access, and service quality. Smart technologies like AI, digital platforms, and eco-friendly construction enhance operational efficiency, user experience, and sustainability. These technologies attract audiences, optimize transportation, and support data-driven decision-making.

Social responsibility, particularly in environmental sustainability, is central to sports venue management. Green construction, renewable energy, and waste reduction efforts align with environmental goals. Social programs promoting sports accessibility for diverse groups, including youth, women, and vulnerable populations, strengthen community ties and support public health.

This integrated approach to technology, communication, and social responsibility helps build a strong, globally recognized sports brand, supporting both urban development and community welfare.

Sports activities have a significant impact on the local and global economy by creating new jobs and stimulating tourism. Sporting events help grow the economy by increasing revenues from ticket sales and support services, which attracts investment and creates jobs. Sustainable infrastructure and modern technology contribute to reducing costs and improving efficiency.

Marketing campaigns, distinctive visual identity, and storytelling are key tools in promoting the sports brand and attracting audiences. The design of sports facilities must also be creative, enhance social interaction, and improve the user experience. The sustainability of infrastructure and the selection of appropriate geographical locations play a role in facilitating access to sports facilities.

Managing productivity in sports facilities through employee training, allocating financial resources, and reducing costs is essential to improving efficiency and increasing returns. By

following these strategies, sustainable development in the sports sector can be achieved and the quality of life in the community can be improved.

Productivity management in sports facilities requires attention to multiple elements such as employee training and motivation, cost optimization, and knowledge management. These elements contribute to improving efficiency and service quality, which contributes to improving organizational performance and user experience. Optimal use of human and financial resources, in addition to the sustainability of facilities and modern technologies, helps to enhance productivity. Providing easy-to-access services such as online registration and improving interaction with users enhances the quality of service. Also, facilities' interest in sports, health, and hygiene are key factors in attracting users and maintaining their health. Finally, achieving user satisfaction by meeting their expectations and offering fair prices helps build trust and loyalty to sports facilities.

.Security and safety in sports facilities are crucial for user satisfaction. Proper monitoring, staff training, and clear security measures ensure a safe environment, enhancing the user experience. Employees should possess strong communication skills, professionalism, and problem-solving abilities to foster customer satisfaction. Creating a culture focused on customer care and professional behavior improves service quality.

This research highlights the link between sports venues and urban identity. Well-designed, sustainable sports facilities contribute to urban branding, enhance tourism, and promote economic growth. Efficient management of resources, including human, financial, and physical, is essential for increasing productivity and reducing costs. Additionally, new technologies improve management and user experience.

Conclusions

Sports venues should align with broader urban development goals, such as branding, economic strengthening, and cultural promotion. This strategy leads to sustainable outcomes, not just increased income. The research provides a guide for leveraging sports venues in the sustainable development of Iraqi cities, promoting a healthy and dynamic sports community. Continuous improvement will enhance sports venues' role in urban development and improve quality of life in communities.

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