

**Development of a Business Plan of Hellenic Mountaineering and Climbing
Federation for the Development of Paraclimbing for People with Disabilities.
Conduct SAF Analysis for Suitability, Acceptability and Feasibility of the Strategy**

C. Roumelioti, G. Yfantidou, C. Kouthouris, M. Baxevas

Department of Physical Education & Sport Science, Democritus University of Thrace

Correspondence with:

Roumelioti Christina

chiroum1@phyed.duth.gr

Democritus University of Thrace

Department of Physical Education & Sport Science

69100 Komotini

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Abstract

Paraclimbing, an adapted form of climbing designed for individuals with disabilities, is recognized for its numerous physical, mental, and social benefits. In Greece, the Hellenic Federation of Mountaineering and Climbing (EOOA) has set the development of the sport as a priority, aiming to enhance participation and ensure equal opportunities in sports. In this context, a business plan was developed with the goal of creating and implementing a strategy for the integration and promotion of paraclimbing. The Suitability, Acceptability, and Feasibility of this strategy were evaluated through a SAF analysis, while also exploring the potential for paraclimbing development within the EOOA and confirming its nature as an adapted form of climbing for individuals with disabilities. The research methodology was based on a qualitative approach, using semi-structured interviews with four EOOA officials, designed according to the SAF analysis criteria. Data collection was carried out through literature review and the aforementioned interviews, while data analysis was conducted using the method of thematic analysis. The study concluded that there is a clear potential and need for the development of paraclimbing within the EOOA as a suitable form of climbing for individuals with disabilities. The SAF analysis confirmed the alignment of paraclimbing with the vision of the EOOA, its acceptance by the climbing community, and the practical feasibility of implementation through the utilization of financial resources, specialized personnel, accessible facilities, and international collaborations. Therefore, the implementation of these practices by the EOOA and its partners can lead to the creation of a sustainable and successful framework for the development of paraclimbing in Greece, offering significant opportunities for individuals with disabilities to participate in a sport that promotes equal participation, acceptance of diversity, and the pursuit of high athletic performance.

Keywords: Paraclimbing, SAF analysis, suitability, acceptability, feasibility

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Introduction

The inclusion and equal participation of individuals with disabilities in sports is a fundamental value for a society that promotes inclusion and equal opportunities. Sport is not only a means of physical exercise and recreation, but also serves as a catalyst for social change, enhancing self-esteem, empowerment, and the social integration of individuals with disabilities (Montoya, Muñoz & Medina, 2024; Kamberidou, Bonias & Patsantaras, 2019). Furthermore, engagement in sports challenges existing stereotypes and promotes social acceptance by highlighting individuals' abilities beyond the limitations of disability (Aitchison et al., 2022).

Within this context, climbing is being a sport that demands mental resilience, physical strength, and strategic thinking that can provide a strong foundation for enhancing the confidence and autonomy of individuals with disabilities (Mazzoni et al., 2009; Vreuls et al., 2022). Paraclimbing, as a specialized form of climbing, is designed to meet the needs and capabilities of athletes with disabilities, offering them the opportunity to engage in a demanding yet highly empowering sport (Hubmann et al., 2024). The steadily increasing participation in international competitions and the upcoming inclusion of paraclimbing in the 2028 Paralympic Games highlight the sport's momentum and significance (Hubmann, 2024).

Strategy, as a method of aligning aspirations and capabilities to achieve goals and create value (Bryson & George, 2020), focuses on responding to and managing competition (Porter, 1989). It involves actions that redefine organizational direction (Bratton et al., 2021) and determine competitive positioning (Pickton & Wright, 1998). Strategic effectiveness is linked to long-term direction and organization (Johnson et al., 2020), as well as to strategies that relate to mission, vision, and organizational culture (Phillips & Klein, 2023). Strategic planning, a critical management tool (Vandersmissen et al., 2024), aims to improve performance (George et al., 2019) through a deliberate process involving analysis, goal setting, and addressing the competitive environment (Porter, 1989), requiring careful adaptation to specific contexts (Bryson & George, 2020).

Important analytical tools include the Ansoff Matrix for growth strategies (Loredana, 2016), SWOT analysis for categorizing environmental factors (Namugenyi et al., 2019), the TOWS matrix for integrating internal and external factors into strategy development (Ravanavar & Charantimath, 2012; Johnson et al., 2020), PESTEL analysis for examining the macroenvironment (Johnson et al., 2020; Hassanzadeh et al., 2022; Groenewald et al., 2024), and Porter's Five Forces Model for industry competitiveness analysis (Grundy, 2006; Gerard & Bruijl, 2019; Pangarkar & Prabhudesai, 2024).

The evaluation of potential strategic options and the selection of the most appropriate direction are critical stages in strategic management, where the SAF criteria (Suitability–Acceptability–Feasibility) play a decisive role in analyzing new approaches to achieve organizational goals (Johnson et al., 2020; Scholes et al., 2002). Suitability assesses the alignment of a proposed strategy with external opportunities and threats, as well as internal strengths and weaknesses (Johnson G., 2008; Johnson et al., 2020; Johnson et al., 2008), ensuring compatibility with the environment, stakeholder expectations, and strategic objectives. Acceptability evaluates the satisfaction of affected stakeholders with the expected outcomes of the strategy, considering risk, return, and stakeholder reactions (Johnson et al., 2020; Johnson et al., 2008), with the analysis focusing on potential financial and operational impacts, as well as stakeholders' risk tolerance (Johnson G., 2008; Johnson et al., 2020). Feasibility examines the practical viability of implementing the strategy, assessing the availability and likelihood of acquiring necessary resources and capabilities (Johnson et al., 2020; Johnson et al., 2008), including financial, human, and material resources, organizational structure, and market access (Johnson et al., 2008).

The choice of strategic direction which involves the main options and methods for achieving them (Johnson et al., 2020) includes strategies such as diversification to reduce risk by expanding into new markets or products (Loredana, 2016; Johnson et al., 2020), market penetration to strengthen the position of existing products in current markets (Johnson et al., 2020; Loredana, 2016), development in new markets with increased risk (Loredana, 2016), and product development, which requires significant resources and carries the risk of failure (Johnson et al., 2020; Loredana, 2016). The final strategic choice depends on the combined assessment of the suitability, acceptability, and feasibility of each possible direction, taking into account the organization's unique circumstances.

Purpose

The present study aims to develop and implement a strategy for the promotion and integration of paraclimbing within the Hellenic Federation of Mountaineering and Climbing (EOOA). The objective is to foster social inclusion, improve the physical and mental health, and enhance the self-esteem of individuals with disabilities by providing equal opportunities in the field of climbing. This research seeks to lay the groundwork for a sustainable and strategically designed development of paraclimbing in Greece, contributing to the cultivation of a more inclusive sports culture.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of a specific phenomenon (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021; Moser & Korstjens, 2017; Verma et al., 2024), and focuses on a case study of the Hellenic Federation of Mountaineering and Climbing (EOOA) (Flyvbjerg, 2011; Yin, 2018). The case study, as a research methodology, allows for extensive exploration of an entity within its natural context, emphasizing developmental factors in relation to its environment (Flyvbjerg, 2011), and is particularly well-suited for investigating “how” and “why” questions (Guest et al., 2013; Yin, 2018). In this research, the case study is used to examine EOOA’s capacity to develop the sport of climbing for people with disabilities and to analyze in depth the aspects related to the implementation of a relevant business plan.

For the collection of primary data, semi-structured interviews were conducted (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021; Verma et al., 2024). This method allows for flexibility in exploring participants' responses while maintaining a guided framework (Guest et al., 2013). The interviews were structured around the SAF analysis criteria (Suitability, Acceptability, Feasibility) to evaluate the organization’s strategy. The research sample consisted of four EOOA executives selected based on their position and years of experience within the federation.

The interview data were analyzed using the thematic analysis method (Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021; Kulatunga et al., 2007), a flexible approach to identifying, analyzing, and presenting recurring patterns of meaning within the data. The interview process followed the recommended stages of thematization, design, execution, transcription, analysis, validation, and report writing (Chalikias et al., 2015). In parallel with the primary data collection, a thorough literature review was conducted to gather

secondary data concerning theoretical concepts and previous research related to the subject (Verma et al., 2024).

Results

The Hellenic Federation of Mountaineering and Climbing (EOOA), the official body responsible for promoting these sports in Greece, strives for the development and safety of its activities, as well as the protection of the natural environment (Johnson et al., 2020). The EOOA's mission focuses on promoting mountaineering and climbing at all levels, protecting mountainous regions, and representing the interests of athletes (Johnson et al., 2020). Its vision is to establish mountaineering and climbing as accessible and significant pillars of sports and recreation, fostering a dynamic community with shared values (Johnson et al., 2020). The Federation's core values include fair competition, excellence, respect for nature, collaboration, safety, lifelong learning, and equal opportunities (Johnson et al., 2020). Since its foundation in 1930, its purpose has been the development of these sports, the assurance of safety, and the protection of the environment (Johnson et al., 2020).

SWOT Analysis

The SWOT analysis of EOOA highlights key strengths, such as its official recognition and credibility, long-standing history and experience, extensive network of partners, emphasis on environmental awareness, educational programs, strong volunteer base, and the development of competitive activities (Namugenyi et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2020). However, it also identifies several weaknesses, including limited funding, insufficient advertising and communication, low recruitment of new athletes, underdeveloped infrastructure, limited human resources, and the underutilization of technological capabilities (Namugenyi et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2020). Despite these weaknesses, EOOA has several opportunities it can leverage, such as increased tourism interest in alternative activities, cooperation with international organizations, development of its digital presence and training, access to European funding, and the growing demand for outdoor activities (Namugenyi et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2020). At the same time, it faces threats including competition from other sports, inherent safety risks in its activities, economic instability, climate change, and the commercialization of sports (Namugenyi et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2020).

Table 1. SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
▪ Official recognition and prestige	▪ Limited funding
▪ Long-standing history and experience	▪ Limited advertising and communication
▪ Network of partners	▪ Inadequate outreach to young athletes
▪ Promotion of environmental awareness	▪ Underdeveloped infrastructure
▪ Educational programs	▪ Limited trained human resources
▪ Strong volunteer base	▪ Underutilized technological capabilities
▪ Development of competitive activities	
Opportunities	Threats
▪ Increased tourism interest in alternative activities	▪ Competition from other sports
▪ Collaboration with international organizations	▪ Safety risks
▪ Digital presence and online training	▪ Economic instability
▪ EU funding for environment and sport	▪ Climate change and environmental degradation
▪ Growing interest in outdoor activities	▪ Commercialization of sports

Suitability – Acceptability – Feasibility Evaluation

This study, utilizing the SAF framework (Suitability, Acceptability, Feasibility) by Johnson et al. (2008), explored the development strategy of paraclimbing within the Hellenic Federation of Mountaineering and Climbing (EOOA). The findings indicate that this strategy demonstrates significant elements of suitability, acceptability, and feasibility, making the promotion of paraclimbing not only achievable but also beneficial for the federation and the broader athletic community. The study emphasized the need for clarity in terminology, suggesting the term "para-anarrichisi" as the most commonly used translation of "paraclimbing" in Greece, while recognizing possible variations depending on the context (e.g., the Hellenic Sports Federation for Persons with Disabilities or the Hellenic Paralympic Committee).

In terms of suitability, the development of paraclimbing aligns with EOOA's mission to promote climbing as an inclusive activity (González-Serrano et al., 2020). The integration of paraclimbing already an internationally recognized sport and set to debut in the Los Angeles 2028 Paralympic Games (International Paralympic Committee) enhances the social role of the federation, fosters equality and inclusion, and contributes to the growth of the Paralympic movement in Greece. Additionally, it creates opportunities for international collaborations and the exchange of best practices (Farhangian et al., 2021).

Regarding acceptability, the study found that the shared value of challenge and overcoming limits inherent in climbing is likely to lead to a positive reception of paraclimbing by the existing climbing community (Haaskjold et al., 2024). Promoting inclusion and equal access enhances the sense of belonging and generates positive role models. Furthermore, associating the sport with socially sensitive issues may attract sponsors and institutional support, further strengthening the acceptance of the strategy (Verma et al., 2024).

As for feasibility, the successful development of paraclimbing requires securing sufficient financial resources, developing specialized human capital such as coaches, judges, volunteers through targeted training programs (Kim et al., 2019), and creating accessible sports facilities. The study highlighted the need for a detailed budget, partnerships with international bodies and the Hellenic Paralympic Committee, and the strengthening of EOOA's organizational capacity to effectively promote paraclimbing in Greece (Lefebvre et al., 2023). The establishment of a dedicated committee for paraclimbing within EOOA is proposed as a key factor in implementing the necessary actions.

Table 2. SAF Evaluation

Suitability
▪ Alignment with the vision of the Hellenic Mountaineering and Climbing Federation ▪ Inclusiveness and equality ▪ Strengthening of the sports community ▪ Social responsibility ▪ Adaptation to international trends ▪ International collaborations
Acceptability
▪ Connects the climbing community through shared values ▪ Stakeholder participation in planning ▪ Cultivation of a respectful environment ▪ Formation of positive role models ▪ Institutional support enhances the Federation's prestige

▪ Attraction of sponsors and investors
Feasibility
▪ Accessibility of facilities ▪ Securing funding ▪ Specialized coach training ▪ Partnerships with relevant organizations ▪ Participation in international competitions ▪ Leveraging international experience

Discussion

This case study highlighted critical aspects regarding the potential and prerequisites for the development of paraclimbing in Greece by the Hellenic Federation of Mountaineering and Climbing (EOOA). The findings underscore significant advantages for EOOA, such as its institutional recognition and long-standing history (Johnson et al., 2020), combined with core values aligned with inclusion, such as environmental awareness and safety. However, the study also revealed existing challenges, particularly limited financial resources and infrastructure, which hinder the immediate development of paraclimbing (Shavandina & Kovalenko, 2021). Despite threats from competition with other sports and the impacts of climate change, significant opportunities are identified in the growing sector of alternative tourism and the potential of digital education (Trizotto et al., 2024).

A central finding of the study is the urgent need for the development and upgrading of climbing infrastructure on a national level, with particular emphasis on accessibility for persons with disabilities (Wigfield & Acai, 2024). The creation of new facilities designed from the outset with the needs of athletes with disabilities in mind, along with the adaptation of existing venues, is deemed essential for the meaningful growth of paraclimbing. Furthermore, the current geographic concentration of infrastructure in major urban centers highlights the need for regional expansion to ensure equal access to the sport for all (Hubmann et al., 2024). EOOA officials confirmed the current lack of adequate resources and facilities, emphasizing the challenge of geographic distribution and the necessity for targeted investments (Shavandina & Kovalenko, 2021).

The study also emphasized the critical importance of targeted awareness and sensitization efforts regarding paraclimbing at multiple levels (De Bock et al., 2023). Promoting the benefits and potential of the sport, combating prejudice, and attracting new athletes are key goals. In parallel, providing specialized training for coaches on the specific needs of athletes with disabilities and informing clubs about developing paraclimbing divisions is vital (Hubmann et al., 2024). Respondents' views converge on

the necessity of educating trainers, focusing both on specialized knowledge and on cultivating empathy, as well as networking with organizations that support individuals with disabilities (Lefebvre et al., 2023).

In terms of community development and increasing participation, the safety of athletes with disabilities is recognized as a primary concern, especially by their families. Addressing the general perception of climbing as a dangerous sport and offering reassurances about the safety of participants is essential. The presence of differing opinions within the climbing community highlights the need for ongoing information and awareness campaigns (De Bock et al., 2023).

Finally, securing sustainable funding sources for the development of paraclimbing remains a significant challenge. Exploring European funding programs, forming partnerships with municipalities, regional governments, and disability organizations, and establishing a dedicated funding committee within EOOA are proposed as potential strategies (Shavandina & Kovalenko, 2021; Verma et al., 2024). The need for systematic research and utilization of existing funding schemes, combined with strengthened collaboration among sports stakeholders, is identified as key to the financial support of paraclimbing (Lefebvre et al., 2023). The integration of paraclimbing into the Paralympic Games presents an untapped opportunity that could boost visibility and attract resources (Trizotto et al., 2024). Effective governance and transparency in EOOA's administration will play a crucial role in promoting innovative practices and successfully implementing the business plan for paraclimbing (Lefebvre et al., 2023; Kriemadis & Theakou, 2007).

Suggestions for Future Research

Future academic research on the development of paraclimbing within the Hellenic Federation of Mountaineering and Climbing (EOOA) could focus on analyzing and comparing successful international organizational and administrative models, with the aim of creating a tailored framework for integrating the sport into the federation's existing structure, while also assessing needs in terms of personnel, resources, and infrastructure. Additionally, the development of methodologies for evaluating the effectiveness of paraclimbing programs after their implementation is crucial. Further research should also explore and analyze potential funding sources and strategies for their effective mobilization.

Practical Contribution of the Research

This study, utilizing the SAF model, provides the Hellenic Federation of Mountaineering and Climbing (EOOA) with a structured framework for strategic decision-

making regarding the development of paraclimbing, aligning the federation with international trends. The practical contribution of the research focuses on the need for the development of accessible infrastructure at the national level, the implementation of targeted awareness and sensitization actions, the specialization of coaching personnel, ensuring the safety and accessibility of athletes, securing sustainable funding sources through partnerships, and the active utilization of international expertise for the successful establishment of paraclimbing in Greece.

Conclusion

The SJT literature has been primarily focused on examining status quo biases within group dynamics. While research in sport management has made use of the construct to explain certain phenomena, the literature has not fully expanded into expounding pressing issues within the field. Nevertheless, research on status quo maintenance has contributed a great deal in the understanding of the functional norms in fans. However, the assembly of both sport management and psychological concepts has been limited. The present review offers a conduit between the two fields regarding one of the most critical matters in sport and the overarching society today (i.e., doping by athletes). We suggest a number of variables to consider in the processes of athlete doping, such as the level of team identification, social identity threat, gender, and race. If future investigations consider these factors, we may be able to shed light upon how fans are affected by PED usage. As such, many questions about fan behavior on the whole, such as how fans go about supporting athletes following PED scandals, could be better understood. Such answers to these inquiries may provide useful applications for the field of sport management and psychology as well as corporations and teams alike.

From an applied sport perspective, the examination of doping and system justification in fans could inform managers and practitioners in how to effectively manage PED scandals in athletes. This would also allow corporations, teams, as well as the comprehensive professional sports leagues to weigh the costs and benefits of signing a player with a record of doping. While usage of PEDs may ostracize some players, those athletes who continue to perform at elite levels may be able to shroud prior transgressions. Considering psychological contributions, research on system justification in fans would extend the theory itself and allow for increased applicability in an even more unique setting. In addition, future research could differentiate the unique contextual factors, such as personal participation by the fan, rivalry between teams, or even the

history of the team itself, involved within the sports, which may further parse out features of SJT that may be distinct in sports fans. This could potentially even incite further investigation into the linkages of other psychological theories to the realm of sports.

Overall, doping in sports, while prevalent among athletes, has not been recognized as a norm across the various sport domains. As the drug policies within each sport shift toward strict anti-doping, athletes will need to adapt to prevailing conditions as a means to simultaneously appease their teams, fan bases, the media, and others. As doping becomes more sophisticated, we may see fans disregard the advantages in doping, as in sports like American football. As this progresses, the individual sport systems may spur unique settings for rationalizing such PED usage. As we have seen throughout history, fans seek out enjoyment through sports and in some cases, utter physical dominance brings out the most gratification. While sports like baseball tout that the proverbial “steroid era” during the late 1990s and early 2000s may have salvaged the entire sport itself, doping will be continued to be frowned upon by society as a whole. However, as doping usage becomes more frequent, fans of such domains will work to justify the overarching system to not only vindicate their fanship and identity as sports fans, but also avert change that upsets the legitimacy of the entire system itself.

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