

An Analysis of Factors Influencing Sports Tourism Development in East Azerbaijan Province

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Abstract: Nowadays, the link between two huge industries of tourism and sports has led to a new type of tourism that has been very much favored and used by the people of the world, in a way that some countries, considering their capacities, potentials and suitable climatic conditions, have managed to secure a major part of their gross national income per capita through sports tourism. The objective of the present research was to study the factors of sports tourism development in East Azerbaijan Province. Research method is field-descriptive, using a researcher-made questionnaire with acceptable validity and reliability (95% CI for Cronbach's alpha). The statistical population and sample of this research include those involved in sports and tourism as well as active tourism centers of the province, totaling 190 subjects of whom 127 subjects were chosen as a purposeful random sample according to Morgan's table. In order to analyze the data after Bartlett and KMO tests were performed and in order to determine sample sufficiency and suitability of factor analysis, we used exploratory data analysis. The results showed that the following factors play a role in the development of sports tourism of East Azerbaijan Province, ordered according to importance:

1. Factors due to sports services with factor loading of 0.644.
2. Factors due to recreational facilities with factor loading of 0.617.
3. Factors due to natural resources with factor loading of 0.602.
4. Factors related to physical education with factor loading of 0.599.
5. Factors due to entertainment and recreational activities with factor loading of 0.595.
6. Factors related to cultural heritage and tourism with factor loading of 0.594.
7. Factors due to facilities and infrastructures with factor loading of 0.578.
8. Factors due to information and communication services with factor loading of 0.552.

The results of the present research are generally consistent with previous researches but are different in the order of factors, which is probably due to the properties and potentials of the region. Thus, considering sports tourism capacities of this province, we can take a giant step out of the single-product economy with the cooperation of the government, people and private sector using a systematic plan and by applying an educated and young workforce.

Key words: Sports tourism, East Azerbaijan Province, tourism, development factors, sports.

INTRODUCTION

Travel and tourism are of the issues that have recently been very much noted and gradually gain more importance (Pirouzian, 2001). Sport too is one of the necessities of contemporary life (Parks, 2003) and is regarded as the world's most significant social phenomenon (Sasi VK., 2005). On the other hand, a type of tourism that has been very much favored and used by people these days is sports tourism (Alamdard M., 2005). In the contemporary world, tourism is regarded as world's biggest industry and sports as a huge and significant industry and their incorporation, that is sports tourism, happens to be one of the most phenomenal modern service industries (Moeinfard MR., 2008). Currently, one of the concerns of marketers and organizers of sporting events is to increase the attendance of visitors and spectators in sporting events; thus, the reasons and factors that affect their presence is now being identified and planned and Iran, due to its profuse capacities, can much benefit from this process (Honarvar A., 2003). There are many factors influencing sports tourism development of a country. Factors such as natural resources, infrastructures (Chalip Land Harrison-Hill T., 2005 and Preuss, 2006), transportation (Costa, 2005), services, and related organizations play an important role in the development of sports tourism (Funk DC, 2007; Mason, 2008; Mohsin A., 2005). One of the strategies for

developing sports tourism is to identify and determine influential factors in the region. Hinch and Higham have identified basic resources for developing sports tourism:

Table 1: Basic resources for developing sports tourism.

Necessary Resources for Tourism Industry	Necessary Resources for Sports Industry
Natural resources: national parks, landscapes, lakes, mountains, rivers, seashores	Natural resources: national parks, outdoor facilities, deserts, geographical aspects (mountains, cliffs, spas, seas)
Facilities and infrastructures: transportation, accommodation, reception	Facilities and infrastructures: stadiums, sporting spaces, dining halls, reception
Recreational facilities: public restrooms, parking lots, signposts, refuges	Recreational facilities: public restrooms, parking areas, signposts, refuges
Tourist information services: visitor information services, internet information, brochures and tickets, tour agencies	Sports services: coaching and supervision, letting or selling of sporting equipment and clothing, warehousing and management, surveillance and security, practice facilities, prevention of injuries and medical facilities, scientific and research facilities
Tourism organizations: planning and development, strategic planning, destination image promotion, tourism marketing, visit schedules, tourism researches, relationship with other industries	Sports organizations: sports clubs, social and voluntary groups, management, development of facilities, budget, sponsorship, information services, marketing, commerce
Transportation services: roads, railroads, aerial transportation, sea transportation (domestic and international), motorboats, tourist routes, historical routes, bicycles and motorcycles, hot-air balloons	Transportation services: roads, railroads, aerial transportation, sea transportation (domestic and international)
Entertainments and activities: attractions, casinos, cinemas, zoos, shopping centers, night-time entertainments, night clubs	Entertainments and activities: sporting spaces and areas (ice-skating fields, recreation centers, stadiums, swimming pools, climbing walls, golf courses, seashores, sports museums, shopping centers, night-time entertainments

Sports tourism resources such as natural environments, sports facilities, transportation, infrastructures and information services must be taken into consideration in a coordinated fashion in the long-term development of a region in order for sports tourism to prosper. East Azerbaijan Province has many capacities in terms of natural tourist attractions and due to the climate of the region, has many capacities regarding winter sports and on the other hand, annually, witnesses various national and international events such as cycling tours, soccer premier league and first division, and so on. Thus, the objective of the present research was to study the factors influencing sports tourism development of East Azerbaijan Province.

Research Methodology:

This research is field-descriptive, performed using a researcher-made questionnaire devised by Nobakht (2008) with acceptable validity and reliability (95%CI for Cronbach’s alpha). The statistical population and sample of this research include those associated with sports and tourism and active tourism centers of the province, totaling 190 subjects of whom 127 subjects were chosen as a purposeful random sample according to Morgan’s table and they all filled out the questionnaires. In order to analyze the data after Bartlett and KMO tests were performed and in order to determine sample sufficiency and suitability of factor analysis, we used exploratory data analysis.

Findings:

The results of Bartlett and KMO tests showed that the samples were sufficient for the current research and that questions were appropriate. The results of factor loading of each question were summarized in Table 2 and were named using research literature.

- F1: Factors due to natural resources.
- F2: Factors due to facilities and infrastructures.
- F3: Factors due to recreational facilities.
- F4: Factors due to information and communication services.
- F5: Factors due to sports services.
- F6: Factors related to physical education.
- F7: Factors related to cultural heritage and tourism.
- F8: Factors due to entertainment and recreational activities.

Table 2: Factor loadings of questions related to factors influencing sports tourism development of the province

Factors	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	F8
Hydrotherapy rivers and springs	74.3							
Geographical conditions (weather and natural landscapes)	66.5							
Mountains of the province	59.6							
Landscapes	57.4							
Being conterminous with neighboring countries	53							
National Parks	50.4							
Hotels and accommodation centers (service, price, quality)		68.7						
Railroad transportation		68.2						
Land transportation		61.3						
Stadiums		57.2						
Arial transportation		46.2						
Museums and exhibitions related to sport stars and champions		45.3						
Hygiene services			69					
Parking lots and shelters			65.3					
Recreational infrastructures			65.2					
Promotional posters and brochures				70.6				
Travel agencies				58.7				
How travelers are received in customs, airports, and events				56				
Informative services of broadcasting networks				54.5				
Internet registration and electronic services				50.7				
Weblogs and websites				48.9				
Tourist routes (signposts and route info)				47.4				
Road relief and rescue				47				
The role of educated sports tourism trainers					76.9			
Scientific congresses and sports exhibitions					76.4			
Practical research proceedings in the area of sports tourism					62.8			
Hydrotherapy, massage and mud therapy					55			
Holding sport tournaments (national and provincial)					48.3			
Marketing for sports tourism of the province						77.4		
Facilities for travelers during sports events						72.1		
The role of international tournaments in development						69.3		
The effect of the quality of holding sports and tourist events						69.2		
The role of voluntary sports groups						68.9		
Holding league matches in the province						64.1		
Holding tours, coaching courses, and sporting-scientific events						55.7		
The role of sports clubs in attracting tourists						55.5		
Sports stars						54.1		
The effect of seasonal variety and sports consistent with each season						52.9		
Security and convenience of sports tourists during events						52.8		
Coordination of sports and tourism organizations						50.7		
Holding local games festivals						36.1		
Private sector investments							71.5	
Customs facilities during holidays							70.8	
Using an educated and young workforce							67	
Discount, awards, and promotional gifts							58.3	
Holding local festivals (customs, traditions and food culture of the province)							40.7	
People's interest in mountaineering and ecotourism								72.5
Recreation centers, sightseeing, and sports night clubs								69.7
Recreational sports like skiing, fishing, and hunting								58.9
Local music and handicrafts								48.5
Local culture and historical monuments								37.2

And considering the results of this factor analysis, these factors were ranked according to their significance in developing sports tourism of East Azerbaijan Province.

Conclusion:

The results of the present research are generally consistent with the researches of Chalip and Hill (2005), Tabias (2007), Mason and Duquette (2008), Williams (2008), Honarvar (2004), Nobakht (2008), Moeinfard (2008) but are different in the sequence of factors. It appears that most of the mentioned factors are considered significant in any region, yet the order of their significance and priority differs with regards to properties and potentials of each region. In order to present applicable results based on research findings, general applicable strategies for developing sports tourism and the final results are provided and sports and tourism organizations can make use of the following plans based on their priorities in order to develop sports tourism.

A and B -Sports and tourism organizations:

1. Marketing for sports tourism of the province.
2. Developing sports clubs and stadiums.
3. Holding sports matches consistent with each season.
4. Educating sports tourism teachers.
5. Holding sports tournaments (national and provincial).
6. Coordination of physical education and tourism organizations.
7. Holding league matches.
8. Providing security and convenience for sports tourists during events.
9. Holding scientific congresses, sports exhibitions, and museums and exhibitions related to sport stars and champions.
10. Improving the quality of holding sports and tourism events.
11. Providing facilities for travelers during sports events.
12. Holding tours, coaching courses, and sporting-scientific events.
13. Scientific and research proceedings regarding tourism and sports.
14. Holding international tournaments.
15. Using sports stars.
16. Using voluntary sports groups.
17. Holding local games festivals.
18. Using an expert workforce.
19. Attracting private sector investors.
20. Offering customs facilities during holidays.
21. Holding local festivals regarding customs, traditions and food culture of the province.
22. Offering discount, awards, and promotional gifts.

C -Following through other institutions and joint cooperation of sports and tourism organizations:

1. Developing road transportation, aerial transportation and railroads.
2. Installing signposts and providing route info.
3. Creating recreational-sporting infrastructures through municipality.
4. Improving information systems such as websites, weblogs, etc.
5. Developing recreational sports such as equestrianism, skiing, and so on with the cooperation of the private sector.
6. Using local music during events with the cooperation of cultural organizations.
7. Creating integrated and strategic plans, using professional managers, developing tourism culture and taking into consideration the private sector.

Generally, in order to execute any kind of plan, we need to consider financial resources, workforce, structures, and related regulations. From the structural viewpoint, in this research, physical education and tourism institutions must consider an appropriate budget in coordination and correlation with other institutions. On the other hand, the decision-making centers deciding provincial programs and priorities must set relative regulations. Normally, beside these three items, adopting a proficient workforce makes implementing the programs feasible. It must be noted that to create such a development, we must use private sector, the government and people to make a proper move in developing sports tourism of the region.

Factor Loadings

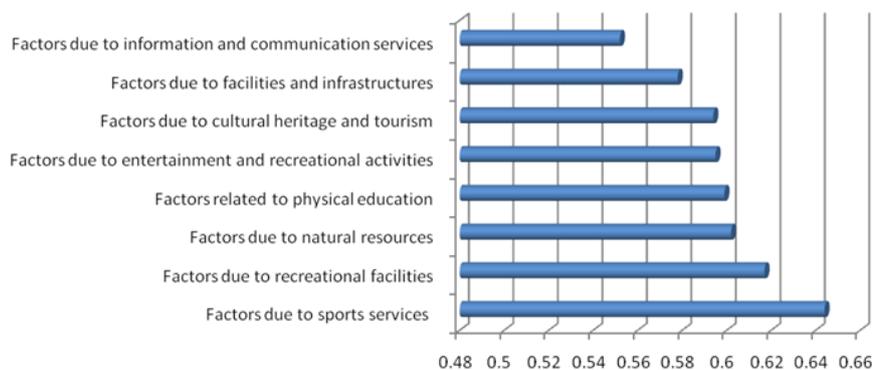


Fig 1: Factors ordered according to their significance in developing sports tourism of the province.

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