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**ROLE OF SPORTS TOURISM ATTRACTIONS IN DEVELOPING SPORTS
TOURISM**

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ABSTRACT

Identifying the existing sources is the first step in developing and managing sports tourism destinations. The aim of this research is prioritizing sports tourism attractions in developing sports tourism in the Northern provinces of Iran. For this purpose, 118 subjects (20 sports management specialists, 98 heads, deputies and experts from universities, departments of physical education, cultural heritage and municipalities of three provinces) were selected as the sample and responded to the made questionnaire. Face and content validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by experts, and Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.88 was calculated for reliability by a pilot study. To analyze the data, Kruskal-Wallis, Bowman and Withney, variance analysis and Tukey's test at a significance level of $\alpha = 0/05$ was used. Results showed that the attraction of the tournaments, watersports, hill-climbing and nature guides, mountain climbing and caving, hiking in the woods, warm-water therapy and therapeutic nature, hunting and fishing and winter sports, respectively have the most importance in the development of sport tourism in these provinces. With regard to these findings, it is suggested that authorities of responsible organizations pay more attention to athletic tournaments in order to attract more tourists and managers of sports in cooperation with the rest relevant sectors invest more on attractions, such as coastal sports and nature guides.

Keywords: Tourism, Sports Tourism, Sports Attraction

INTRODUCTION

Tourist is someone who for a while, at least for one night, not more than one year travels to a country other than his country of origin or ordinary residence and to work and make money in that country is not his goal (Gay, Chuck, 2004). Also, sports tourist is a temporary visitor who stays at the location of the event for at least 24 hours. His main purpose is participating in a sporting event; however there may also be second attractions (Nogova et al., 1996).

Nowadays, sports tourism, higher than industry, has become a social and economic phenomenon in the global scale. This industry, more than any other time, has opened its position as a multi-dimensional phenomenon in human societies and many countries, with considerable investments have realized it as an important resource to improve economic, social and political situation, increase employment, income and infrastructure development (Vandarzy, 2011) and also have understood its benefits and impacts.

International Society of Olympic and World Tourism Organization have reported that the tendency to sports has increased in recent years (Stuart and Bob, 2007). Studies show that sports tourism is the most important developed part of the tourism industry such that, with creating 5.4 trillion for the global

tourism industry and world tours, is considered as one element of a multi-billion business in the world (Chalyp, 2003). Various components have been considered for the development of sports tourism in the country, such as designing Iranian sports tourism marketing (Honarvar, 2010). Among these components, one important factor that could promote sports tourism is recognizing sports tourism potentials and capabilities (Zytonly, 2008). It is noted that sports tourism success is totally dependent on the capabilities of tourist destinations, which means they should somewhat compete with other destinations and be unique and distinct. Moeinfard has mentioned recognition of capabilities and capacities of sports tourism as an important factor in developing sports tourism and an important component of hosting international events (Moeinfard, 2009). For this reason, nowadays efforts of sports officials and planners are focused on specialization and localization of athletic fields. So a number of countries have made sports centers with a focus on one or more specific sport according to their talents and potentials. For example, Korea with martial sports including Taekwondo, Austria and Switzerland due to suitable climate and hosting winter sports such as skiing and hockey, and Japan with skiing tournaments

have attracted large numbers of sports tourists to their countries and thereby earn a great amount of income every year (Gibson, 2006). Also Turkey, with formulating 2023 strategy in 2007 and investing in strengths of sports tourism, Especially in the coastal city of Antalya in 2003, attracted 700 sports teams and in 2007, 1,200 sports teams from all over the world even Iran to hold preparatory camps And in 2007 earned an income equal to \$ 6 million through it (Aychez et al., 2010). According to studies done and proven, Iran is one of the top ten countries in the world in terms of tourist attractions and the world's fifth in terms of biodiversity and diversity of natural attractions (Ghiami rad & Moharamzadeh, 2008). Short and direct benefits of sports tourists in the host country are money, wealth and creating employment opportunities (Kazemi, 2008). In addition, long-term and indirect benefits are also conceivable, that is tourists' presence may be followed by the growth and development of industrial infrastructure and the economy (Chelip Kim, 2003). Studies indicate that beautiful landscapes, including national parks, wildlife, beaches, mountain centers and other attractions such as weather, four seasons and water treatment centers like hot springs can be a great opportunity for active sport tourist attraction and as a result, the

development of sports tourism for the country.

Among these Northern provinces, three of them (Gilan, Mazandaran, Golestan) have natural, pristine, coastal and mountain areas to attract sports tourists. They can be considered by athletes and tourists, be regarded as a destination for leisure and in particular time periods, attract large numbers of tourists (Zytonly, 2008). Sports with natural source such as swimming, sailing, surfing, scuba diving, skiing, horseback riding, rock climbing, mountaineering, caving and traditional and indigenous sports, vibrates the body and meanwhile make people to be in natural areas. Due to psychological need of modern man to play sports that can be done in natural areas, with a careful plan, whilst exploiting the potential of different regions and considering different situations, we can take steps in economic development and job creation and create suitable environments for tourists (Adabi Fyroozjah, 2007).

Unfortunately in Iran, tourism and sports tourism has received little study and its importance is not fully known and understood. But in industrialized countries as well as in many developing countries, during designing and developing programs and policies, special attention is paid to tourism as an effective tool in the

continuing of development. This necessitates research on all aspects of tourism, including sports tourism. Other reasons to conduct research in the field of sports tourism are: 1. the world's rapid growing of sport tourism in different dimensions, 2. Young people and sports enthusiasts in the country, 3. the role of sports tourism in permanent and seasonal employment. Hence the researcher aims to identify the most important common attractions in the development of sport tourism in Northern provinces of Iran (Mazandaran, Golestan, Gilan). Hopefully, the results of this study will help planners and event organizers and local sporting events. Also these results can be used in tourism industry and tourism agencies which are responsible for planning and management of tourism activities.

METHODOLOGY

This is a practical study which is performed in a survey form (descriptive analytic). The researcher has identified the most important common sport tourism attractions in the development of sport tourism in Northern Iranian provinces (Mazandaran, Golestan, Gilan). Statistical population of the study was 118 (20 faculty members from the three provinces which are called exercise management expert, 18 people, including the President and Vice President, working in the physical education departments, cultural

heritage organization, three municipalities of provinces and 80 physical education expert which were employed at the centers mentioned) Therefore, due to restrictions in the choice of subjects and due to the limited number of experts of the study, the entire population was selected based on availability. (N = n)

In the present study, due to the lack of questionnaire adapted to the subject, researchers first identified many of the factors contributing to the development of sports tourism in the north by reviewing supplies, books and articles related to this research and classified them in 8 groups: 1. Beach sports, 2. winter sports, 3. hiking and caving, 4. natural hot water treatment, 5. attractions related to hunting and fishing, 6. attractions of hill-climbing and hiking, 7. Attraction of circulation in the forest, 8. competitions and sporting events. Then a questionnaire of 38 questions on a Likert scale of five values was set and after its validity was confirmed by experts (experts in tourism management and planning and management in sport), the final questionnaire with 35 questions was developed and prepared for research.

During the guide study, 30 questionnaires were completed by the study participants (27 experienced men in sports tourism and also 3 managers of Cultural Heritage and

Tourism organization) to assess the reliability of the designed questionnaire. After analyzing them, its Reliability was confirmed by reducing it to 31 questions and $92/0 = \alpha$ was calculated. The questionnaire contained two parts, personal information and the main part, the questionnaire. To analyze the data, descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, and mean, standard deviation) to assess demographic characteristics and also determination of the significance of each attraction were used. To test normality of the data distribution, Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, and to investigate the research questions, the non-parametric tests (Kruskal-Wallis, U, ANOVA and Tukey's test) was used at a significance level of $P \leq 0/05$

RESULTS

The results showed that 75% of participants in the study were men and most of them were between 49-40. 69/5% of participants had a bachelor's degree and diploma and between three groups, experts had the most participants with the highest number of 72 percent. Most participants in this study were from Gilan province and had work experience for less than 5 years. The Department of Physical Education, with 26.3%, had the largest participants in the study.

Results of the most common sports attractions promoting the development of sports tourism indicated that from the perspective of research subjects, attractions of sporting events ($26/25=\mu$), Water and beach sports ($\mu=15/97$), Hill-climbing and hiking ($\mu =14/07$), Climbing and caving ($\mu =12/59$), Circulation in the forest ($\mu 12/14$) and natural hot water treatment ($\mu =10/88$),, hunting and fishing ($\mu =10/04$) and winter sports ($\mu =7/16$), respectively, have the highest importance in the development of sport tourism in provinces studied.

Data in Table (1) shows that the features of Tournament and watersports, by means of 24/55 and 15/22, respectively, are the most common feature and winter sports and fishing and hunting capabilities with the average of 7/72 and 10/16 are the least important common features in the development of sports tourism from the perspective of those who have responded to questions.

Data in Table (2) shows that the capability of Tournament and watersports, by means of 25/26 and 15/97, respectively, are the most common features and winter sports and fishing and hunting capabilities with the average of 7/16 and 10/04 are the least important common features in the development of sports tourism in these provinces.

Table 1: Sports tourism potential variables

maximum	minimum	standard deviation	mean	Sample size	statistics variable
35	8	5/76	24/55	118	Tournament
20	4	3/78	15/22	118	Water Sports
15	3	3/21	7/72	118	Winter Sports
20	7	3/68	12/88	118	Climbing and caving
15	6	2/28	10/96	118	Hot water and natural therapy
15	3	3/13	10/16	118	Fishing and hunting
20	5	3/26	13/94	118	Hill climbing and hiking
15	5	2/30	12/12	118	Circulation in the forest

Table 2: prioritization of the most common sport features of three Northern Provinces

Significant level	degrees of freedom	X2	Average rank	variable	group
0/019	7	13091	25/26	Competitions	Guilan Golestan Mazandaran
			15/97	Aqua	
			7/16	Winter Sports	
			12/59	Climbing and Caving	
			10/88	Health spa and nature	
			10/04	Fishing and hunting	
			14/07	Hill climbing and hiking	
			12/14	Circulation in the forest	

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In general, sports tourism is a multi-dimensional phenomenon and success in it requires identification of powerful tourism destinations and exploiting advantage of these capabilities and attractions. Cultural, natural and sports attractions are known as the three important elements and engines of sustainable development of tourism, and analysis and evaluation of capabilities and

natural attractions of an area is considered the first major step in management and development of sports tourism destinations. Sports tourism enables the optimize use of natural sports attractions to attract Sports tourists.

To this end, paying attention and investing in attractions that from the experts view are more important in attracting tourists, is

essential. In this study, capabilities and sports tourism attractions of three provinces of Mazandaran, Gilan and Golestan is discussed and prioritized according to the perspective of the subjects of each of these attractions. Given that except sporting events and tournaments, other attractions mentioned in the research are components of natural attractions, it should be noted that there are numerous ones in these provinces. Therefore they are considered one of the strengths of the Northern provinces and their importance is uncovered. The importance of natural sports attractions in the development of sports tourism is approved in Gibson (2005), literary Firoozjah (2007) and Zytonly (2008) research. But different order or priority of these elements can be seen between studies. These differences are probably due to differences in potentials of the areas where there have been studies or cultural differences.

In this research, attractions related to sporting events and Tournaments was the first priority. This calls for more attention to the significant high-level Tournaments, camps and sport in these provinces which is one of the areas to attract tourists. Also the importance of famous teams and events as one of the most important attractions and capabilities of sports tourism development has been approved in Zytonly (2008), Stuart

and Bob (2007), Solberg and Prussia (2007) research.

Miranda and Andoza (2005) in reviewing the Sports Tourism in Spain found that among natural attractions in the country, watersports with 36.84 and hill climbing and walking exercise with 31.85 percent is more important in attracting tourists. They also noted that element of natural attractions with 78.3 percent is one of the most important factors in attracting sports tourists to Spain. Mazandaran, Gilan and Golestan are full of capabilities and natural attractions, water sports, beach and mountains, and more. In this research, these attractions were the next priority in the perspective of sample members. Reasons of coastal sports and climbing and hiking importance in comparison with other attractions are: 1. the extent of this attraction in north of the country, with nearly a thousand kilometers of coastal border. Caspian Lake, the largest lake in the world, is the summer resort for many people who are interested in traveling in Iran. The coastal strip in this area, between Northern slopes of the Alborz and South shore of Caspian, is a collection of the most beautiful natural landscapes in Iran. Ideal combination of beach, mountain and forest in this region has caused the formation of the major tourist hub of Iran in this region. 2. Wider variety of exercises that can be

performed on these attractions. Activities such as swimming, diving, sailing, water skiing, surfing, beach sports and Canoe which is done on the shores of lakes and rivers. And also activities such as walking, slow running, cycling, horse riding, golf and leisure that can be performed on the slopes and hills. 3- Low influence of seasonality on these attractions. Research done on hill climbing, hiking and climbing, insinuate that mountains and foothills are very suitable for recreation and entertainment. This blessing should not be neglected and with a proper planning and investment, we can have economic gain from these advantages (Rahmani, 2011, Mitchell et al. 2012, Holding, 2007, Harioky et al, 2012.). Another appeal was climbing, which was the fourth in the perspective of members. In this context it should be noted that different countries in the world, receive tourist hikers and majority of them have higher altitudes in their region (Moghimi, 2011; Gill, 2012). Tibet with a population of 2.5 million, as a high plateau, is home to a large number of tourists who are interested in mountain climbing and hiking (World Health Organization, 2001). It was shown in investigations that another appeal, the forest, is important in attracting tourists (Andrews & Miranda, (2005) - Deb, 2000 AbdolSalam, 2000). Their results are not much consistent with this research because

in our research forest didn't get much point from the sample and became the fifth priority. But we cannot ignore the role of forests in the north in attracting tourists and more attention should be given to this God-given potential in a way that we make great efforts to protect it. Many researchers have been done in the area of hot water and natural treatment and it is considered one of the attractions for tourists. But in this research, it didn't get a high score and it can be said that it has relatively little consistency with previous researches (Zahra Kazemi, 2007, Holding, 2007). Mineral water is one of the interesting phenomena of tourism and medical attention. The country's mineral resources can be an important source of income, especially in terms of attracting tourists. Mineral hot springs emerge from the ground in areas in which the morphology, tectonic, magmatic and meteoric is provided. Many researches has been done in the context of hunting and fishing capabilities in which they are considered one of the attractions for tourists, but in the present study, they had a lower rank in the sample perspective. Today, hunting tours are one of the most thriving areas to exploit from ecotourism resources of each country. Unfortunately, Iran has never made optimal utilization of these areas. The fact is that the hunting tourism in Iran has stopped. Almost none of the travel

agencies in recent years have held even a single hunting tour. The absence of a specific context for investment in hunting tourism, Lack of planning in organization in charge of Tourism and Environmental Protection and unreasonably expensive cost of hunting licenses announced by the Environmental Protection Agency, are major factors in not attracting tourists who are interested in hunting. In terms of attractions for winter sports, the present study results contradict Kvsasy. In his research (2005) attraction for winter sports was the first priority but it was different with the results of our investigation. The reasons are: 1- Climate change and reduction of snow in some years that reduces Skiing and winter sports season in the north, while in Europe and North circuit, snowing is longer and more, and As a result winter sports attractions in these regions are more. 2- Lack of identifying resources and facilities for winter sports tourism in the North. 3- Low and non-standard ski resorts with appropriate facilities and 4- difficulty of access to the ski slopes during the winter.

Investigations showed that the capabilities and attractions of three provinces of Mazandaran, Gilan and Golestan are suitable for sport tourism development because they have a great variety to develop sports fields. Also, capabilities and attractions of these provinces due to

extension are less influenced by the seasonality phenomenon and they can provide different tourism activities in all seasons.

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