

Identification of the most important common natural attractions in the development of sport tourism of Iran's northern provinces (Mazandaran, Guilan, Golestan)

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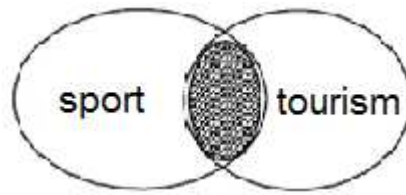
ABSTRACT

Tourism is one of the greatest industries in the world. Sport tourism as a part of tourism has been made through a combination of sport and tourism. It is growing rapidly and changing into a great, independent industry. One of factors impresses the development of a country's sport tourism is natural resources. Nowadays regarding human's mental needs to going to nature and also considering sports done in natural areas, the economical progress, job-making, and making appropriate natural areas for tourists can be provided through a detailed planning and enjoying the potentials of the natural areas. Thus, this study aims to indentify the most important common natural attractions in the development of sports tourism of Iran's Northern provinces (Mazandaran, Golestan and Guilan). 118 subjects participated in this study and answered a designed questionnaire in sport tourism. Face and content validities of the questionnaire was approved by the specialists and its reliability determined by a pilot study was 0.92 ($\alpha=0.92$). The findings showed that the attractions relevant to forest, beach sports, hot water and nature therapy, hill climbing and nature-rambling, hunting, climbing and caving, and winter sports respectively have the most importance in the development of sport tourism in the studied provinces. Regarding the results, the northern jungles, Khazar Lake (as the world's largest lake), coastal line between Alborz's northern ranges and Khazar's southern beaches has created a collection of the most beautiful natural landscapes. It seems, therefore, to take these potentials into account.

Key words: Tourism, Sport Tourism, Common Sport Attractions

INTRODUCTION

Sport is one of activities tourists do during touring, and also tourism and travel are accompanied with doing the variety of sports. Tourist is one who travels, for at least one night and no more than a year, to a country except his own country or his present residence, as well as his purpose isn't working or earning money at destination country (14). A sport tourist, on the other hand, is a temporary visitor who stays at the tournament place for at least 24 hours and his purpose is taking part in that sport event. Yet the secondary attractions may be existed (28). In past, sport and tourism were considered as two separate scopes. However, today the relation between these scopes has been taken into consideration. Ferankli believes that sport and tourism have common goals, making mutual understanding bridges among different cultures, life ways and customs, increasing friendship and peace among nations, arousing and encouraging people for doing amusing and enjoyable activities in order to release the pressures of the routine life (16). Tourism and sport either professionally or in amateur require many travels to different world areas. For the continuous of the economical development, job-making and income-making, sport and tourism must move side by side. Hink and Higum have illustrated properly in the following *Figure* interaction between tourism and sport (19).



Sport tourism is one of the growing scopes of tourism as the sport competitions and events attract a large number of tourists- national and foreign. According to studies, sport tourism is one of the parts of tourism industry which is growing continuously over world (9, 18 , 24). In this case, sport tourism has an important role as the number of destinations which consider sport tourism as one of their marketing goals is added (10, 13 , 20). Sports with a natural origin such as swimming, sailing, surfing, diving, skiing, horse riding, rock climbing, climbing, caving, and traditional and indigenous sports require both the needed physical activities and also attending at nature. Nowadays regarding human's mental needs to going to nature and considering sports done in natural areas, the economical progress, job-making, and making appropriate natural areas for tourists can be provided through a detailed planning and enjoying the potentials of the natural areas and considering different conditions (1). The existence of beautiful natural scenes such as national parks, wild life, sea beaches, mountainous areas and the other attractions including climates, being four- seasons, existence of water- therapy regions like hot-water fountains can create an appropriate opportunity for any country in order to attract active sport tourists and subsequently, to develop sport tourism. Therefore, Iran's three Northern provinces (Mazandaran, Guilan and Golestan) respectively with an area of 104377,140423 and 23756 km² and regarding their special geographical situation and natural attractions such as national parks, wild life, sea beaches, mountainous areas and the other attractions including climates and water-therapy centers can affect strongly the development of sport tourism. Of short-term and direct advantages of the presence of sport tourists in host country are money, wealth and job- making opportunities (22). Long-term and indirect advantages, moreover, are the development of host countries' economical and industrial infrastructures (2,23). Given what is mentioned above, today sport tourism is a rich source of benefit and income. And every country which can provide the needed infrastructural facilities certainly enjoys a plenty of its benefits. Statistics show that most countries have desirable conditions in sport tourism their own economy is provided through sport tourism (17). However, Iran, unfortunately, hasn't been successful in attracting tourist, in general, and sport tourist, in particular while it enjoys the desirable geographical, historical, cultural conditions, the plentiful natural capabilities considered as one of the richest world countries in this case, the favorite climate rather than all of region countries and most of world countries. That is the reason that Iran has a slight share of tourism industry as Iran' tourism share of national gross product is only 0.1% (15).

How to organize and guide the global activities is a serious problem of sport tourism. The coming progress of this industry in Iran depends on the organizational structures of companies, the ability of facing the global competition, the immediate responsibility of demands, and the ability of increasing profitability. Certainly one way Iran can enhance its status in global competition is making a massive planning over country (27). Unfortunately, in Iran tourism industry in general and sport tourism in particular haven't been studied accurately and its importance hasn't been taken into consideration. The industrial countries and most of the developing countries, however, pay a special attention to tourism industry and consider this industry as an effective tool in the development process when making massive planning and policies. This shows, therefore, the study significance of all of tourism aspects including sport tourism. Of the other reasons of the study significance are 1.the rapid growing of sport tourism in different aspects worldwide 2.existence of young people and followers of sport and sport tourism in the country 3.The role of sport tourism in creating permanent and seasonal jobs. Thus, the researcher aims to recognize the most important common natural potentials in the development of sport tourism of Iran's Northern provinces (Mazandaran, Guilan, Golestan). It is hoped that the findings of the present study help the planners and organizers of national sport competitions and events. The results, also, can be used in tourism industry and tourism agencies which plan and manage the tourism activities. It, on the other hand, can cause a close cooperation among organizations relevant to sport tourism such as Physical Education Organization, Iran Touring and Tourism Organization, municipalities and exarch, National Olympic Committee, and sports federations in developing sport tourism. The results of this study, moreover, can lead to establish a primary framework and strategy of a better planning to develop sport tourism in provinces of Mazandaran, Guilan and Golestan when they are host of sport events. It can help to develop more studies and researches in sport tourism too.

Adabi Firooz (1996) conducted a study to investigate the effective factors in the development of Iran's sport tourism with the emphasis on sport natural attractions. The results showed that attractions relevant to beach sports, hot water and water-therapy, hill climbing, climbing, caving, hunting and winter sports respectively are the most important attractions in attracting sport tourists to Iran. Karami (1999), in another research, tackled capability-evaluating of Iran's eco-tourism attractions and aimed to identify and introduce the most important natural attractions of sport

tourism. Based on the results, natural attractions were composed of hill climbing, hunting, eco-tourism of tribe wandering-village rambling, winter sports, beach sports, nature-therapy, climbing and caving (21). Dolinkar (2003) in his article as "surfing tourism in Australia" stated that sport tourism has had a considerable effect on Australia through creating billions of dollars and making ten thousands of jobs. At the present time, surfing tourism has grown rapidly and it is estimated its worth is equal to eight billion dollars. It has also been estimated that 366200 Australians have taken part in surfing events in 2001 (12). Kiw (2003) in his study as the survey of sport tourism in Africa continent took tourism in sport events into account and stated that the other types of tourism in which tourist's main aim is doing sport are significant too. Africa's northern countries such as Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt and the continent's other countries like Kenya and Southern Africa earn a considerable income through holding water sports in their countries shores (8). Another study was done by Kosassi (2005) as sport tourism in India. He resulted that India's most important sport natural attractions are winter sports such as skiing and skating in Golmarch region of Keshmir, hill climbing, and spending leisure in boat houses in Dal lik region, cart riding, gulf (25). Miranda & Anderz (2005) investigated sport tourism in Spain. They found that among Spain's sport natural attractions, water sports with 36.84%, and excursion and walking with 31.58% respectively are the most important in attracting sport tourist (5).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The present study is an application type which was conducted in survey form (descriptive- analysis). 118 subjects (including 26 sport management specialists, 92 boss, assistant and specialist of universities, Physical Education, Cultural Heritage and Education Organizations of three provinces) participated in this study. Regarding the study aims and limitations of subject selection, however, the total statistical society was selected as study sample (N=n).

Research Performance

This study made use of questionnaire for gathering data. Whereas there isn't any standard questionnaire relevant to the study topic, the researchers through investigating the study topic's related sources, books and articles identified many effective factors in the development of sports tourism of Iran's Northern provinces. These factors were categorized into seven general factors: 1. Beach sports 2. winter sports 3. Climbing and caving 4. Hot water and nature- therapy 5. Attractions related to hunting 6. Attractions related to hill climbing and nature-rambling 7. Attractions related to jungle-rambling. In next step, a 38-items questionnaire in Likert 5 scales was designed. After the validity of the designed questionnaire was done by the specialists (in tourism and sport planning and management) three items were omitted and a 35-item questionnaire was prepared for pilot study. During pilot study, questionnaires were distributed among 30 subjects (27 sophisticated people of sport tourism and 3 managers of Tourism and Cultural Heritage Organization) to see how much reliable the prepared questionnaire is. As a result, the questionnaire consisted of 31 items with a reliability of ($\alpha=0.92$). This questionnaire consisted of two parts, one personal characteristics and another main part including the research questions.

Data Analysis

This study made use of one of ways of descriptive statistics (frequency, proportion, mean and standard deviation) in order to evaluate demo-graphic characteristics and determine the significance rate of each attraction. The present study used Kolmogorof- Smirnof Test to see how much normal the data distribution is and Parametric and non-parametric Tests (Kruskal-Wallis H, Mann-Whitney U, Anova and Tukey) in significant level of ($p\leq 0.05$) were applied to examine the research question.

RESULTS

The results showed that 72% participants of this study were men. The age average of 33.1% subjects was between 40 to 49. 69.5% subjects had a Diploma and bachelor degree. Also, faculty members of universities consisted of 22.1% participants. 26.3% subjects had a work experience less than 5 years. 26.3% subjects were three provinces' staff of Physical Education Organization. At last, 35.6% subjects of this study were from Guilan providence.

Table 1, as the most important effective common attractions in the development of sport tourism, shows that in subjects' opinion some attractions enjoy the higher importance level than other attractions. These attractions consisted of respectively: 1. forest rambling, 2. Beach sports, 3. Hot water and nature- therapy, 4. Hill climbing and nature-rambling, 5. Hunting, 6. Climbing and caving, 7. Winter sports.

This study used Kruskal-Wallis H, Mann-Whitney U, tests to determine the most important common attractions in the development of sport tourism and compare the value of each of common attractions from subjects' view. On the other hand, ANOVA and Tuki Post Hoc tests were applied for the variables whose data distribution is normal.

Table 1. Kolmogorof- Smirnof Test

Statistics Attractions	Mean	Std. Deviation	Most Extreme Differences	K-S, z	Sig
Beach sports	3.80	3.78	0.162	1.76	0.004
Winter sports	2.57	3.21	0.155	1.68	0.007
Climbing and caving	3.22	3.68	0.106	1.14	*0.144
Hot water & nature- therapy	3.65	2.28	0.150	1.62	0.010
Hunting	3.38	3.13	0.153	1.65	0.008
Hill climbing & nature-rambling	3.48	3.26	0.117	1.27	*0.077
forest rambling	4.04	2.30	0.181	1.97	0.001

*: Data distribution is normal.(05.P≤0)

Table 2. Kruskal-Wallis H test, compare Common sport Natural attractions based on group(Managers and assistants, Faculty, Expert)

Attractions	Group	Mean Rank	Chi-Square	D f	Sig
Beach sports	Boos & assistants Faculty	62.02	4.867	2	0.088
	Expert	69.58			
		54.05			
Winter sports	Boos & assistants Faculty	49.72	7.721	2	0.021*
	Expert	47.87			
		66.42			
Hot water & nature- therapy	Boos & assistants Faculty	71.68	3.201	2	0.202
	Expert	58.48			
		56.49			
Hunting	Boos & assistants Faculty	63.68	9.848	2	0.007 *
	Expert	41.10			
		64.99			
forest rambling	Boos & assistants Faculty	57.68	1.40	2	0.565
	Expert	54			
		61.99			

*:significant differences(05.P≤0)

Table 3. ANOVA test results for hill climbing & nature-rambling and climbing Attractions

Attractions	Mean square	D f	f	Sig
Climbing and caving				
Whit in Groups	12.08	2	7.96	0.001 *
Between Groups	87.26	115		
Hill climbing & nature-rambling				
Whit in Groups	0.56	2	0.416	0.661
Between Groups	77.47	115		

*:significant differences(05.P≤0)

Table 4. Mann-Whitney U test, difference between the views of participants for the Attractions of winter sports, and hunting

Attractions	Group	Mean Rank	Mann-Whitney U	Z	Sig
Winter sports	Boos. assistants whit Faculty	24.45	241	-0.427	0.670
		22.77			
	Boos. assistants whit Expert	35.78	505.50	-2.049	0.040*
		49.48			
	Faculty whit Expert	38.60	652.50	-2.305	0.021*
		53.44			
Hunting	Boos. assistants whit Faculty	28.58	158.50	-2.28	0.022*
		19.60			
	Boos. assistants whit Expert	45.60	702	-0.17	0.863
		46.75			
	Faculty whit Expert	35	559	-3.05	0.002*
		54.74			

*:significant differences(05.P≤0)

Table 5. Tukey test, differences between the views of participants in climbing

Attractions	Group	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig
Climbing and caving	Boos. assistants whit Faculty	0.85	0.25	0.004*
	Boos. assistants whit Expert	0.106	0.220	0.878
	Faculty whit Expert	-0.74	0.19	0.001*

*:significant differences(05.P≤0)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results showed that attractions relevant to forest, beach sports, hot water and nature-therapy, hill climbing and nature-rambling, hunting, climbing, winter sports respectively possess the highest importance in the studied provinces' development of sport tourism. The findings of this study are compatible to the studies done by Adabi Firooz (2006) and Karami (1999) in terms of common attractions scope (1, 21); however, they are different in terms of the preference of factors. Probably difference in preference is resulted from cultural differences or potentials of studied regions. If we take a look at Adabi Firouz's study results, we find that the preference of attractions in these two studies, the present study and Adabi Firouz, are compatible. As in this study the attractions related to jungle, beach sports, hot water and nature- therapy, hill climbing and nature-rambling, hunting, climbing, and winter sports are of the most significance.

According to studies, attraction relevant to jungle has a major importance in attracting tourist (4, 11, 26), which these findings are compatible with the present study' results. There are three reasons for importance of jungle and beach sports attraction rather than other attractions: 1. Width of these natural attractions in Iran's north nearly thousand kilometers of coastal border. In Iran, Khazar Lake, the largest world lake, is a favorite summer haunt of tourists fond of trip. Iran's coastal strip located between Alborz's northern range and Khazar's southern coasts have created a collection of the most beautiful natural landscapes. Ideal combination of sea beach, mountain and forest has changed this region into Iran's most major tourism pole. 2. Broad variety of sport activities which can be done in these attractions. Sports done in beaches, lakes, rivers consist of swimming, diving, sailing, skiing, surfing, beach sports and Cano, and sports in mountain ranges and hills include walking, jogging, cycling, equestrian, gulf and recreation. 3. Less impressionability of these attractions against seasonal-being phenomenon.

Studies carried out in hill- climbing, nature-wandering and climbing and caving stated that mountains and their ranges are suitable places for leisure and recreation. We shouldn't ignore this natural gift but we can benefit it economically by a detailed, accurate planning and investing in this field (3, 30,31). It shouldn't be neglected that, moreover, Iran's Northern provinces are of country's tourism poles due to the plant cover and beautiful mountains as well as meeting with beach of Khazar Lake have created one of beautiful natural scenes which provide tranquility for every tourist in this region.

All of many studies carried out in hunting attraction have considered it as one of the most important attractions in attracting tourist. In this study, also, in subjects' view this attraction has a third place among other attractions in terms of significance. In this case, therefore, this study is compatible with other researches (29). In winter sports, this study is contrast to Kossaci study (2005) because in that research this attraction has a first place among other attractions while the present study come to different results (25). In this case, the reasons are 1. Atmospheric fluctuations and decrease of snow falling in some years lead to decrease the season term of skiing and other winter sports in Iran's north while European countries and other countries located in northern zone enjoy more and longer snow falling. As a result, these regions enjoy more attractions related winter sports. 2. Poor identification of resources and facilities of winter sport tourism in country's Northern provinces 3. Loss or lack of standard skiing pists with suitable facilities 4. Difficulty of access to available skiing pists in winter season.

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