

Explaining the Key Drivers of Sports Tourism Development in Khuzestan Province

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Abstract

Objective: Sports tourism, as one of the most popular branches of the tourism industry, plays an important role in the economic, social, and cultural development of various regions today. Khuzestan Province, with its abundant natural and historical attractions, has a high potential for the development of this type of tourism. However, realizing this potential requires identifying and explaining the key drivers that can help develop sports tourism in this province. In this regard, the present study, with a futures research approach, has analyzed the key role of effective parameters on the development of sports tourism in Khuzestan Province.

Method: The present study was conducted with an applied purpose and a descriptive-analytical approach. Library sources and documents as well as a questionnaire were used to collect data. The statistical population of this study consisted of 50 experts in the field of tourism and sports in Khuzestan province.

Findings: Using Delphi methods and the Micmac matrix, this research has identified 25 key factors affecting the development of sports tourism in Khuzestan Province from among 40 initial parameters. The results show that the most important factors with a direct impact on this area include the construction of hotels for income generation, the study of sports tourism infrastructure, and the existence of recreational and sports facilities. Also, factors with an indirect impact, in order of importance, include the construction of hotels, the study of sports tourism infrastructure, and the quality of the environment. In general, these factors will have the greatest impact on the future development of sports tourism in Khuzestan Province.

Conclusion: According to the research findings, the development of sports tourism in Khuzestan Province is in a critical situation, but this research can serve as a guide. To improve the situation, investors and planners should prioritize three key actions: first, investing in the construction of hotels and sports infrastructure to attract tourists; second, paying attention to indirect factors such as environmental quality and pollution reduction to ensure sustainable development; And third, using the results of this research as a scientific roadmap for developing operational plans and optimal resource allocation.

Key Word: Tourism, Sports Tourism, Future Studies, MICMAC, Khuzestan Province.

Research Article

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Purpose

Sports tourism is one of the most dynamic and lucrative forms of tourism in the world, having experienced significant growth and attracting the attention of many planners and policymakers. This type of tourism goes beyond traditional travel, focusing on the active or passive participation of individuals in sporting events and activities. Sports tourism creates an interactive experience of activities, people, and places, and as a set of economic activities centered on sports, it helps enhance health, entertainment, and leisure. With the increasing development of this industry, its reliance on related social, environmental, and technological aspects is also growing. Many countries around the world are seeking to strengthen their sports tourism industry because it holds high potential for generating income and creating positive economic, social, cultural, and environmental impacts. Although Iran has numerous capacities in this field, it has not yet secured a suitable position among leading countries. This highlights the necessity for comprehensive research and planning to identify the needs and desires of sports tourists in order to effectively leverage existing potentials. Many developed countries have successfully transformed this industry into an economic generator by focusing on sports activities rooted in their history and culture. Despite its unique potentials such as diverse natural and historical attractions, sports infrastructure, and suitable climate, Khuzestan province has not secured a desirable position on the country's sports tourism map. This issue stems from the lack of a comprehensive strategy and the failure to identify key driving factors. Accordingly, this research, with a future-oriented approach, seeks to identify and explain the key drivers of sports tourism development in this province. The main goal is to provide a roadmap for managers and investors to help diversify the economy, reduce dependence on the oil industry, contribute to the province's sustainable development, and build a positive image of it at the national and international levels.

Method

This research employs a descriptive-analytical approach to identify and explain the key drivers of sports tourism development in Khuzestan province. In the initial phase, primary variables were compiled through a documentary review and interviews with experts. Following a comprehensive literature review, these variables were refined into final indicators using the Delphi method. Subsequently, to measure these indicators, a questionnaire with high reliability (Cronbach's Alpha > 0.7) was administered to a 50-person sample of experts selected via snowball sampling. Finally, using the MICMAC method and based on expert opinions, the variables were assessed for their influence and dependency. This process helped to identify the main strategic drivers that will have the most significant impact on the future of sports tourism in the province.

Findings

The results of this research are divided into two sections: descriptive and inferential. The descriptive section examines a statistical sample of 50 experts in sports tourism from Khuzestan province, including faculty members, specialists, and researchers. The inferential section used MICMAC software to analyze the interdependencies of

40 key indicators. The findings revealed that the relationships among these indicators are highly complex and influential, especially those with moderate to high impact. The analysis categorized the variables into five main areas (influential, two-faced, regulatory, dependent, and independent), indicating the system's unstable and complex nature. The most significant findings show that indicators such as attracting foreign investment, providing incentives and promotional policies, and establishing specialized sports clubs have the greatest influence on the development of sports tourism. In contrast, generating income through hotel construction and improving the transportation system showed the highest degree of dependency. Ultimately, a comprehensive analysis of the variables identified 25 key factors that directly and indirectly impact the future of sports tourism in Khuzestan province. These findings suggest that to achieve sustainable development in this industry, a focus on these key influential factors is essential to meet economic, social, and environmental goals.

Conclusion

Based on the research findings, the development of sports tourism in Khuzestan province is in a critical state, but this study can serve as a guiding framework. To improve the situation, investors and planners must prioritize three key actions: First, invest in constructing hotels and sports infrastructure to attract tourists. Second, pay attention to indirect factors such as environmental quality and pollution reduction to ensure sustainable development. And third, use the results of this research as a scientific roadmap for developing operational plans and optimizing resource allocation.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors have completely avoided publication ethics, including plagiarism, misconduct, data falsification, or dual submission and publication, in relation to the publication of the submitted article, and there are no commercial interests in this regard.

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