



Identifying and Prioritizing Factors Affecting the Sustainable Development of Sports Tourism Destinations in Tehran

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Abstract

The sustainable development of sports tourism destinations is recognized as one of the most important goals and aspirations for many countries. This development is indebted to the complex and multidimensional influences of economic, socio-cultural, and environmental factors. The primary objective of this research was to identify and prioritize the factors affecting the sustainable development of the sports tourism destination in the metropolis of Tehran. The study is applied in purpose and employs a mixed-methods (qualitative-quantitative) approach. In the qualitative phase, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 14 experts, selected through purposive sampling. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the six-step framework proposed by Braun and Clarke. In the quantitative phase, a questionnaire, developed based on the qualitative findings, was distributed among 35 academic and executive experts using stratified sampling. The reliability of the questionnaire was confirmed using Cronbach's alpha, and its validity was verified by specialists. Finally, the quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS software. The analysis resulted in the identification of 6 main themes and 20 sub-themes. The results indicated that all six dimensions were statistically significant and rated above average. The dimension of "Development of New Technologies" emerged as the most critical factor, with the highest mean score (4.657) and the lowest standard deviation (0.398). In contrast, the dimension of "Smart Management and Sustainable Urban Development" had the lowest mean score (4.022) and the highest standard deviation (0.591), ranking last in importance. The Friedman test results further confirmed this prioritization. In conclusion, for the sustainable development and strengthening of Tehran's sports tourism destination, these dimensions must be considered in a multidimensional and comprehensive manner. Such

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an approach not only brings the benefits of sustainable development but can also provide practical strategies and pathways to create a foundation for sustainable development in Tehran and transform this metropolis into a model for other major cities.

Extended Abstract

Introduction

Sports tourism is a rapidly growing segment of the tourism industry that offers new perspectives for strengthening sustainable destinations. As a revenue-generating activity, sports tourism has become a serious focus for various countries. The sustainable development of sports tourism destinations depends on the consideration of economic, socio-cultural, and environmental factors across various domains. Tourism destinations refer to places where tourists choose to spend time away from home - these geographical units visited by tourists can be independent centers. Conceptually, regional economic development is defined as a process where local governments and their communities manage available resources through public-private partnerships to create new jobs and stimulate economic growth. For successful sports tourism development, sustainable design and management are essential. As the capital of Iran, Tehran boasts numerous sports facilities serving both domestic and international tourists. With its sports/recreational complexes and specialized centers, the city has significant potential to deliver sports tourism services and products. As literature review indicates, sustainable development of sports tourism destinations can generate various economic, socio-cultural, and environmental benefits. This necessitates in-depth analysis, making the current study's main objective the identification and prioritization of factors affecting sustainable development of Tehran's sports tourism destinations using mixed methods.

Materials and Methods

This applied research employs a mixed-methods approach. The qualitative phase uses thematic analysis to identify factors influencing sustainable development of Tehran's sports tourism destinations, while the quantitative phase prioritizes these themes through survey research. Qualitative data was collected via semi-structured interviews with 14 experts in sports management, tourism management, public administration, development management, urban planning, and public policy. Using purposive sampling and theoretical saturation criteria, interviews continued until no new themes emerged. Extracted themes were then prioritized in the quantitative phase through stratified sampling of experts with both academic and professional backgrounds. Thematic analysis identifies patterns/themes in qualitative data through Braun and Clarke's six-phase inductive approach (moving from specific to general).

Discussion and Results

The thematic analysis yielded 6 main themes and 20 sub-themes. All extracted themes showed strong interconnections, indicating alignment. In the subsequent quantitative phase, sports and tourism experts reviewed and completed questionnaires, revising judgments as needed and providing rationale for dissenting opinions. Questionnaire validity was confirmed by 7 experts (face/content validity). Internal reliability was established through acceptable Cronbach's alpha coefficients. Participants included academics, executive managers, and sports tourism specialists. Stratified sampling identified 39 potential respondents, with 35 completed questionnaires returned. Data analysis included descriptive statistics, inferential statistics, and analysis via SPSS 26 and Smart PLS 4. All dimensions and components were statistically validated.

Conclusions

Sustainable development of sports tourism destinations requires balancing economic, social, environmental, and managerial dimensions. This study identified and prioritized factors for Tehran's sustainable sports tourism development, revealing that sustainability demands simultaneous attention to multiple key components requiring specific capacities. With proper planning and smart management, these capacities can enable sustainable development that balances economic growth, environmental conservation, social justice, and stakeholder satisfaction. Tehran's unique geographical location along the Alborz mountain range provides exceptional climatic/natural diversity, enabling development of diverse sporting activities. Strategic planning should leverage Tehran's natural advantages, address the identified priority factors, and develop operational strategies tailored to local conditions. This approach can position Tehran as a model for sustainable sports tourism development in metropolitan contexts while preserving its environmental and cultural assets.

Keywords: destination management, sports tourism, sports tourism destination, sustainable development, Tehran