

## Identification of Barriers against Sports Tourism in East Azerbaijan Province

Elham khanzadi\*

*M.A of Physical Education (Sports management), Islamic Azad University, Science and Research Branch, Hormozgan, Iran*

\*Corresponding author's e-mail: e\_elham2004@yahoo.com

**ABSTRACT:** Sports tourism is an industry that has come to existence by combining sport and tourism industries. Many of countries used to realize this industry as the main source of employment, income and development in private section as well as infrastructures. Regarding the increasing role of sports in developing countries, considering this important industry is essential. The fruit of regarding sports tourism is the mental, spiritual and physical peace of the society. Furthermore, its economic and foreign currency revenues are effective to economic cycle of society. The main aim of this paper is to get a full understanding of sports tourism. The population of this research includes 53 managers and specialists of physical education and tourism related organizations that were active academically mainly in this part. To collect data, a researcher-made questionnaire, consisting of 32 questions was provided, noticing the barriers against the growth of sports tourism. After reviewing the validity and reliability of the questionnaire ( $\alpha=0.95$ ), it got distributed. By use of the collected data, the amount of each factor was identified and ranked according to Friedman Ranking criteria. The results showed that all political, socio-cultural, managerial, technological, infrastructural and economical barriers have meaningful importance; however the political and economic barriers were identified as the most important ones. Regarding all of issues and discussions, it is clear that for removing the encountered barriers against the development of sports tourism of East Azerbaijan, the best way is the friendly and hard cooperation and camaraderie of different institutions and organizations, specially their top managers and organizers. There is a hope that this will be done due to the interest of the society.

**Key Words:** Barriers, Sports Tourism, East Azerbaijan

Received 11 Jan. 2014  
Accepted 19 Mar. 2014

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

### INTRODUCTION

Tourism is noticed by human beings in different communities from ancient time, but it has changed to one industry while entering to the modern age. New lands discovery; culture and customs exchange; science and trade development are only a small part of benefits of tourism. Considering these facts and in order to boost it, different sectors of this industry should be identified to achieve its real place in international arena. Sports tourism is one of the most important sections of this industry to work more on. Nowadays, sport tourism is a huge source of profit and income. If a country can establish necessary conditions to exploit these profits and at the same time tries to overcome obstacles, it will get huge benefits. The statistics shows that most of the countries with suitable condition in terms of tourism, manage their own economy through sport tourism. Evaluating effects of tourism and sport is difficult all over the world, but sport tourism industry rate is estimated about 10% per year [1]. Rich cultural, historical and natural potentials accommodate Iran among 10 superior countries in the field of unique tourism attraction; however it couldn't use such potentialities in an effective way to obtain proper market share so far [2]. Government must be huge policy maker and present a clear as well as practical strategy for this industry, but it is facing some administrative issues in this field. Lack of sufficient security, social and culture problems make movement of this industry slow in Iran. Meanwhile, world tourism industry has progressed with high speed [3].

In spite of having more sport talents, huge tourism resources, natural, sport and cultural attraction resources, Iran couldn't obtain its own proper place in sport tourism in the international area. Every year, thousands of people from far distances all over the world travel regularly to the host country for watching their favorite sports that is considered as an economic success for that country. Unfortunately, our country has failed to have such benefits due to lack of capability of holding top tournaments of the world. Though this subject is very important for governors of developed countries, so that they try more to achieve being host of international competitions such as the world cup etc. [4].

To deal with these problems we need huge costs like building stadiums and standard sport saloons and other necessary infrastructures across the country [5].

Presently not only there are no clear plan and strategy for tourism, but also all activities are based on personal experiences or short-term plans. So, sport managers' weak planning in terms of sport tourism industry can be considered as the biggest retardation factor [6].

Problem like shortage of financial resources for developing and equipping needed installations for tourism, lack of private sector tendency to invest in this area, lack of ownership guarantee and preparation, lack of

government's protection no proper habitation site in full-travel seasons of years, unstable prices, inflation and multiplicity in rating, lack of necessary transportation means for individual and group travels, fuel quota as a new problem on other hand makes tourism to face various problems in Iran[7].

Eastern Azerbaijan province as one of tourism spots is specially noticed by tourists. So, this province is the most talented tourism regions of country, mostly due to valuable historical background of this province. Additionally, East Azerbaijan province with suitable climate in every season together with natural and God-giving attractions like high mountains , snowy regions, roaring rivers and other factors have a high potentiality for attracting sport tourists. Mountain and natural snowy regions (Sahand summit) can be a suitable place for ski competition and its roaring rivers can be a proper place for rafting as well. Iran, especially East Azerbaijan province can provide its background for sport tourism development with entrance to big national and international competitions due to having different native sports and continuous experience in these sports and introducing them to the world. Nowadays, sport is one of important and big industries in the world and more people are involved in this field across the world. Also sport is one of current motivations for tourists, that's why sport tourism is an industry made from both tourism industry and sport industry [7]. This industry as the most expanded world service industry has a special position and is contributing 12% of gross product [7].

According to comprehensiveness, attraction and safety characteristics of sport tourism, it can be one of the fundamentals of consistent development in every country. Successful example on this subject can be observed in Greece 2004 Olympic and China 2008 Olympic in the world races in which they presented attractions and capabilities of their own country in a successful way to the worlds through comprehensive and targeted plan in addition to holding sport races [8].

Since recent sport events in East Azerbaijan are increasing (like growing football events specially province's football team "Teractorsazi team"), it is necessary to pay more attention to tourist attraction and sports market related research works in this region.

According to the conducted surveys, Iran is one of attractive countries for tourism in the world [9], while it has a small share in the world tourism industry. Since share of gross domestic product of Iran is 1% [10]. Its name is not among many of statistics presented by the world tourism organization. One of the most important reason of this is shortage of serious intention in general public resulting less domestic interests due to weak management .But Iran and East Azerbaijan province has the capability to exploit important tourism sectors namely sport tourism due to their own natural climatic and tourism capacities. Present gaps in strategic planning and some wrong policies made by authorities in the field of sport and tourism cause the country not to be able to fully exploit the available opportunities. So, a systematic and formulated research is needed for identifying and solving the existing obstacles. Result of this research can be used to solve tourism industry problems and tourism agencies responsible for planning and managing the tourism activities. Physical education organization, cultural heritage, tourism and hand craft and sport federations etc. can use the results of this research work for targeting sport tourism market and even other tourism parts.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

**\*Previously conducted domestic research works:**

Adabi [11] while trying to study effective elements on developing sports tourism, did a comprehensive survey mainly focusing on natural attractions as well as major problems in this area. He analyzed the provided answers of 112 people (mainly the experts of Tourism and Cultural Heritage Organization, Travelling Agency experts as well as the experts of different sports federations) in this regard. He concluded that natural attractions related to Hiking and Mountain climbing; beach, summer and water sports and haunting are having the highest importance in the development of sports tourism. Moreover, other attractions having less seasonal fluctuations and long tourism period are of prime importance to help to the development of sports tourism. Further; cultural, managerial and infrastructural barriers are some of barriers against the development of this sector.

**\*Previously conducted foreign research works:**

Bul, believes that in most cases, development of tourism in the host country contains already built resources including sports equipments as well as tourism related infrastructures. Sport may include facilities that can be achieved through construction, such as stadiums, water, river and sport fields' facilities. Capacity for the development of sport tourism in the host country can be identified through the existence of required sports and tourism infrastructures. A comprehensive list of sport tourism may include all information about physical environment; already built sport facilities; tourism transportation facilities; infrastructures; political, economic and cultural resources [12].

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

This research is applied in its target and strategy and it is descriptive in its method. For this purpose a list of barriers against sport tourism in the province is identified through current interviewing elites and experts as well as surveying research. Then this barrier in the form of questionnaire was sent to experts, answers are collected and their comments were taken. Population in this research consisted of 3 categories: 1.Department heads of physical education and province sport board (n=22), 2.Teachers and sport management specialists of the province (n=20),

3. Experts of tourism and cultural heritage offices of the province (both women and men, n=11). Due to small population, sampling is not done. This research used methods of census. Totally 70 specialists were identified as qualified and questionnaire delivered to all of them, 53 questionnaires received with completed responses and they were used in statistical analysis .

In this study data collection was done in 2 parts. 1. Library resources, internet, essays, thesis on sport tourism. 2. Questionnaire with 32 questions and designed in 3 main parts.

Questionnaire is based on Likret scale of five degree including option of too high, high middle, low, very low (5 score is for too much, and 1 score is for too little).

Content and face validity of questionnaire was examined by five numbers of experts and professors having experience in the field of sport tourism. For determining permanent research tool, methods of internal coordinate and cronbach alpha formula was used.

**Table 1.** Coefficient Alpha for the total questionnaire and each of its elements

Elements	Question number	alpha cronbach
Technological	4	%826
Management	7	%87
cultural-social	7	%868
Substructure	7	%892
Economic	6	%877
Political	3	%755
Total	32	%955

As we see all of the numbers of alpha that were obtained are above %7. So it can be claimed that research tool used a suitable internal coordinate.

This research with regard to the objectives and research questions of the descriptive statistic was used and data in form of frequency, mean, percentage frequency and cumulative frequency percentage are used. Research hypothesis is tested through binominal test and firedman test.

## RESULTS

As it is evident from viewpoint of tourism, sport managers and experts, politic obstacles are the main obstacles against tourism growth in the province with an average rate of 3.94. They are generally divided into 2 sections:

1. International politic obstacles: Sanctions are imposed due to nuclear activity to our country and they have got effects on sport tourism and sport society, where the number of country taken part in cycling tour in Azerbaijan (Around uremia river) in 2012 decreased from 20 countries to 13 countries, it was the least rate of attendance from holding time of these races. In this time, eastern Azerbaijan has been affected by this sanctions and advertisements too and main damaged one on sport events is cycling tour.

2. Domestic politic obstacles: It can be claimed that most of races traditionally and for a long time were held in Tehran and sometimes in Khorasan and Esfahan, other provinces like Eastern Azerbaijan has not have any chance to host sport events. This case shows the monopolistic and monolateral attitude of sport mangers towards holding of events sport. Though, eastern Azerbaijan in terms of many aspects of tourism and even sport is more suitable than other provinces like Tehran.

Sport managers answering this questionnaire similar to other individuals have noticed more on economic component. This is clear every country or province with more financial resources will be better host for sport events. One of economic obstacles for sport tourism development is devoted costs for holding and hosting such events that are not enough anytime. Management component holding third rank is other important factor of sport tourism obstacles with average rating of 3.81. In most cases, managers of both tourism and sport courses don't have education qualities and capability related to these cases. This is clear that decisions taken in such conditions of management will be unsuitable or even incorrect.

Component of cultural and social obstacles of sport tourism with average rating of 3.32 holds fourth position. Cultural differences among people and societies are clear and undeniable. This cultural difference may act as an obstacle in tourism development.

Religious problems make conditions for tourist entrance. Especially for women who must have Hejab in their first entrance. These regulations are obligations for tourists, so tourists attract fewer toward Iran's sport events.

Sport tourism technology obstacles component is holding fifth position with average rating of 3.04. Separating today's daily life from technology is impossible. Sport tourism industry is not except from this regulation, too. Development of this industry needs technology. Though 30% of its tourists, Malaysia indebted to electronically tourism. Iran's share in this area is zero due to lack of suitable information about its capabilities.

Sport tourism infrastructure obstacles: Among all obstacles, infrastructure is less important than other component. While East Azerbaijan is not having more infrastructure facilities but there is some sport courses that can be held with present infrastructures. Courses like wrestling, cycling, football, volleyball, epicures etc. don't need special and complicated infrastructure. But lack of equipments and infrastructures in terms of other courses like swimming, gymnastic, hockey, baseball, and bestriding, driving car cannot be ignored.

Hudson and Gilbert, in their research supposed economical factor as the most important obstacles and preventive factor in tourism limitation in ski agree with present research.

Friedman Variance analysis test was used for prioritizing 6-dimensional elements of eastern-Azerbaijan provinces tourism development obstacles. Table 2 show statistical indices relating to this test. As seen here, there is statistically meaning full difference between 6-dimensional elements ( $p < .05$ ). Prioritizing of elements using ranking average also show that economic and political obstacles are the most important obstacles and sub-structure and technology are insignificant between above-mentioned obstacles.

**Table 2.** Results of Friedman test prioritizing elements of eastern-Azerbaijan provinces sport tourism obstacles

Rank	Elements	Ranking average	df	Khi-2 statistical	Meaningful value
1	Political	3.94	5	15.12	0.01
2	Economical	3.89			
3	Managerial	3.81			
4	Social-cultural	3.32			
5	Technologic	3.04			
6	Sub-structure	3.00			

## DISCUSSION

**Sport tourism management obstacles:** This is clear that native manager, know capability and capacity of every province better than nonnative manager, however they be very compassionate. It suggests a unit group of skilled and experienced manager form a huge planning by determining correct path. A path that notices today and future days need.

**Sport tourism social and cultural obstacles:** It suggest, sport and tourism managers with the help of national media, arrange enough knowledge for public [12].

**Sport tourism technology obstacles:** It seems that the first and best step for removing these obstacles is improvement of connection and electeronical channels. It suggests that tourism and sport managers in consultation with related authorities try to develop these connection channels and unify level of this connection at least with the Middle East. Achieving new technology should be done in many aspects.

- Equipping province sport and tourism centre to public IT parts

- Improving connection lines to new technology that are common across the world, like 3G mobile channels in all of operators coordinate with famous and international communication company in the world.

**Sport tourism infrastructure obstacles:** It suggested:

1. To establish sport tourism deputy in organizations, provinces and city's Physical Education officials and to provide sport centre for entertainment such as joining sport centre established before. So they can be suitable for cases such as making culture centre, museum, concert hall, welfare equipment like hotel, park, etc. or they can make sport centers near the huge tourism centers like fun places as Elgoli, museums and historical centers.

2. Establishing sport tourism courses in universities, just like other developed countries in the world

3. Make external attractions in sport center's environments and buildings.

## REFERENCES

- Hall, C, 1992b. "Adventure, sport and health tourism", in Special Interest Tourism (edited by M. L. and C. M. Hall), Bellhaven Press, London.
- Doroshgi, p. 2009. Role of sport Tourism management in creating employment opportunities from sport designing and management specialists and Tourism management point of views. M.A Thesis, Central Tehran University.
- Mirganeh Negini, A., Hosseini, S., Samadian, A. 2009. Teaching role on sub-structures development in Iran tourism industry: human geographic research scientific quarterl: No.4, 105-118.
- Ghiamirad, A., Moharramzadeh, M., Hosseinpour, B. 2008. Relationship between sport managers point of view and tourism manager of country and sport tourism factors in Iran. Olympic quarterly, 2: 51-61.
- Honarvar, A., Gafari, F., Sharifian, A. 2007. Important factors on sport tourism marketing in Iran: Olympic quarterly, No. 4. 31-34
- Homafar, F., Honari, H., Heidary, A., Heidary, T. & Emami, A.2011. The role of sport tourism in employment, income and economic development Journal of Hospitality Management and Tourism Vol. 2(3): 34-37
- Gammon & Robinson, T. 1997. "Sport and Tourism: a conceptual framework. Journal of Sport Tourism"
- Mosavi Gilani, R. 2010. Dividing Iran sport Tourism Market for Foriegn Tourist and offering target markets model. Medical Thesis Tehran University.
- Cultural heritage news agency: 26 esfand, 2009. Economic problems effect on Tourism industry.
- Amirian, S. 2000. Tourism economical effect in Islamic Republic of Iran, M.A Thesis, Tarbiat Modares University.
- Adabi Firouzjah, j, 1388, Study effective factors on country sport tourism development emphasis on sport natural attractions. M.A Thesis, Tarbiat Modares University.
- Amirian, S. 2000. Tourism economical effect in Islamic Republic of Iran, M.A Thesis, Tarbiat Modares university