

Strategic Planning to Develop Sports Tourism of Maragheh with a Focus on Water-Based Sports Mainly Canoepolo

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ABSTRACT: Tourism industry with its various branches not only can diversify needs of citizens, but is considered as a useful tool for sustainable urban development. Sport tourism is one of the tourism areas, and water sport is one of its fields. Water sports charm with vitality, dynamism and excitement that can be at the center of focus on a significant range of people (young and teenager). The main purpose of this research is strategic planning of sports tourism development in Maragheh, with emphasis on water sports and Canoepolo. The city with geographical prone conditions such as water rafting, environmental, structural, historical and cultural context can underlie the development of sports and sports tourism in the region. This is analytical-descriptive study; appropriate strategies were presented using library and field data and surveying 60 experts in tourism, sports management and SWOT technique. The findings of the external and internal factor matrix evaluation indicate that regarding the final score in the internal (3.9) and external factor (25.4), Maragheh has ideal conditions for using opportunities and strengths to develop sports tourism. Therefore, adopting aggressive strategies to the optimal management of water sports, especially sailing and Canoepolo, and optimal management of tourism in the city leads to sustain and enhance the quality of life for the citizens.

Keywords: Tourism, Sport Tourism, Urban Development, Water Sport, Canoepolo, Maragheh

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

PII: S225204301600001-6
Received 02 Nov. 2015
Accepted 15 Dec 2015

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays in majority of the places, tourism has changed into a very important economical activity (Hadavi et al., 2007). Sport is considered also as a significant sector having the capability to change into tourism industry through making ports tourism (Giami rad and Mohammad Zadeh, 2008). In the present century, sport is a must in the daily life and it is considered as a part of culture and identity of a nation. It is also one of the big industries employing lots of people around the world (Moein fard, 2007). Sports tourism is a source of income and profit and if a country can proceed in this sector, it will be able to exploit huge profit opportunities (Hadavi, 2007). In some countries, sport alone contributes 25 percent of the total income of the country through tourism (Giami rad and Moharram zadeh, 2008). During the last decades, this industry has acted as the major part of the economical success of the cities and their social dynamism, for this reason many cities in the world have tried to improve the existing condition of this industry (Moein fard, 2007). This valuable industry not only improves economical, social and political conditions (Giami rad and Moharram zadeh, 2008) but also increases employment, income and improvement of city infrastructures (Adabi firoz Jah, 2009).

Gratton and Henry consider creation of sports facilities as one of the factors that leads to the improvement of the city in the eyes of the tourists (Dabora and et al, 1996). Sport is not the only factor in attracting tourists, since some other factors such as climate, culture, historical background, domiciles, transportation, prices,

landscapes, entertainments, level of freedom and etc. can be effective factors (Gupta et al., 2002; Zhang and Marcussen, 2007; Kim and Petrick, 2005).

Studying the effects of holding major competitions (as a sign of sports tourism) shows the important role of this event in urban development. For example, world cup 2002 of Korea and Japan has caused great revolution in the cities of host countries, some of which are as follows:

1. 7.3 million dollars growth in GNP
2. Creation of 150000 full time and part time job opportunities
3. Attracting 1.32 million spectators (foreign tourists) from around the world
4. Attracting 174000 internal tourists to Sydney (Schneider et al., 2005).

Sports tourism is one of the effective factors leaving deep impacts on the city appearance and also amount and way of attraction and its concept. Sport and Tourism can be called as the engines to change the urban places. Urban places visited by the tourists are the most exciting places of the cities since they are the most comprehensive and advanced human bases. Cities are the most important places for communication; IT technologies and tourism industry that clearly identify the future appearance of the cities for 21st century (Zhang and Marcussen, 2007). As per the researches, sports tourism among all other branches of tourism has the highest amount of growth and created lots of economical capacities and optimum urban management for the cities and host societies (Mathius et al., 2010).

Different types of water-based sports can have attractions to the people from all age groups. Since young

people are interested in these sports and they contribute the major part of the population of the country and considering the exciting nature of these kinds of sports (particularly Canoepolo) for young people along with other natural, cultural and social attractions; they can be considered as a source of urban development and optimal urban management. Boating is one of the fun sports compared to others. It is kind of entertainment which is conducted in different ways such as calm waters rafting, Canoepolo, dragon boat riding, yachts, white waters slalom, rowing. So, compared to the other sports, it has got various branches among which canoe polo is having the highest excitement and attracts more young people and athletes (Ghafouri et al., 2014).

Iran has got unique natural attractions. Geographical surveys and feasibility study on investible ecological attractions show the fact that tourism is a unique economical source which is unfortunately forgotten (Hadavi, 2007). Some of the main problems of developing water-based sports in Iran are lack of proper planning, lack of required utilities and improper location of these facilities. Since there is shortage of water supply in the country, then proper planning is required to use these supplies in an optimum way (Ghafouri et al., 2014). From the other hand, taking tourism index of the country into account -which is growing due to the growth in the young people population of the country- signifies the importance of planning their entertainment and sport activities and consequently sports tourism (Zeitony et al., 2012).

Maragheh is one of the cities of East Azerbaijan province which is having high sports tourism potentialities, particularly rafting. Existence of waterful rivers mainly originating from Mount Sahand has made the conditions proper to develop rafting. Merdag and Sofi Chai are the most important and waterfall rivers of Maragheh. Existing rafting facilities and prerequisites in the city shows its capability to hold international and Asian competitions. During the last few years, good amount of rafting facilities have been created in the city through the hard work of Municipality office and Sport& Youngs Organization. Investment in sports can lead towards talents bloom and increased general health. Caneopolo national team in all levels of adults, young and women has got first position during the last few years in Asian competitions and it refers to the fact that there are lots of talents in this field to be discovered. So, it is required to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of rafting in this region and then to provide strategies to keep the existing position and to achieve even higher positions. In the present study, this aim is achieved through strategic planning.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Present research is applied in its goal and descriptive-analytical in its method and nature. Library research and observation are used to collect data. As per the collected data, strategic plan of developing sport tourism of Maragheh with its main focus on water-based sports and Canoepolo is studied. SWOT analysis is used for data analysis. In this method, environmental opportunities and threats as well as strengths and weaknesses are studied and a questionnaire is later distributed among tourism and sports managers to complete these data. The population in

this research includes all experts and journalists of the city (almost 60 people) from different offices such as Physical Education, Municipality office and etc., university professors teaching in some specific courses (like sports management, urban planning, urban management and economy). In both stages of questioning, each and every question is given scores from 1 to 5 while referring to relative effect of each factor in the present status of sports tourism and water-based sports in Maragheh and the effect of each factor on future status of sports tourism development with a focus on water-based sports and Canoepolo.

Next, the weighted scores are added to get the total score. Finally, considering the existing facts in the development of sports tourism and water-based sports in Maragheh, researchers tried to present a proper executive strategy to develop this field as well as getting out of the existing unpleasant situation.

Scope of the study

Maragheh is one of the oldest cities of Iran located on the side of Sofi Chai River. It is limited to Geshlag and Ashan mount from the north; Varjoy orchards from the south; farms and orchards from the east and Rasad mount from the west. It is located at the longitude of 37 degrees and 23 minutes of north and altitude of 46 degrees and 16 minutes of east. It is 1390 meters high from the surface of sea. As per the Iran Statistics Center, its population was around 162275 people in 2006 (Iran Statistics Center, 2011). Merdog and Sofi Chai are the most important and waterfall rivers of the region originating from mount Sahand. Considering the potentialities of these rivers, they can be used as rafting centers not only in regional but also in country level. Cohesive planning and management by all relevant organizations along with serious contribution of common people are required at the time of making use of these potentialities.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Once all the studies and surveys are done through Delphi method, the idea of physical education and tourism experts regarding strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of sports tourism and white water rafting in Maragheh, their coefficient (their level of importance in the present regional and trans-regional condition) and their rank (their level of importance in future regional condition) are summed to make their ultimate score. Finally, internal factor analysis summary (Table 1) and external factor analysis summary (Table 2) are extracted.

As per the table 1; cultural, archeological and tourism attractions of Maragheh while considering its historical background is weighted 0.37 by the sports management and tourism experts and is defined as the most important strong points against the development of sports tourism in this city. Existence of different spas to cure different diseases; landscaping city entrance gates and the area around the rivers and etc. are weighted equally to 0.24 and occupying the second position. Finally transportation system having weighted score of 0.13 is considered as the next priority. Lack of proper hotels and restaurants to attract tourists is weighted 0.37, being the most important weakness against the development of tourism in Maragheh. Lack of equipped research centers for strategic

planning; lack of private sector interest to invest in this area and etc., having weighted score of 0.24 are the second priority. Finally, lack of different and quality

sports tours having weighted score of 0.13 is considered as the last priority.

Table 1. Sports tourism internal factor analysis summary (water-based sports, mainly Canoepolo) in the region of Maragheh (IFAS)

Factor	Title	Weight	Factor score	Final score
S1	Existence of different spas to cure different diseases	0.06	4	0.24
S2	Facility, welfare and recreational services with a logical price	0.045	3	0.13
S3	The potentiality of holding national and international tournaments	0.045	3	0.13
S4	Landscaping city entrance gates and the area around the rivers	0.06	4	0.24
S5	Availability of volunteer human resources	0.06	4	0.24
S6	Cultural, archaeological and tourism attractions of Maragheh, considering its historical background	0.075	5	0.37
S7	Proper transportation system	0.045	3	0.13
S8	Capacity of stadiums for spectators to hold country level events	0.06	4	0.24
W1	Lack of proper hotels and restaurants to attract tourists	0.075	5	0.37
W2	Lack of private sector interest to invest in this area	0.06	4	0.24
W3	Not enough help of medias to develop this industry	0.06	4	0.24
W4	Lack of equipped research centers for strategic planning	0.06	4	0.24
W5	Lack of financial supplier and lack of managerial supports in the city	0.06	4	0.24
W6	Lack of different and quality sports tours	0.045	3	0.13
W7	Lack of funds specified for this branch	0.06	4	0.24
W8	Lack of sports tourism advertisements in weblogs, websites, posters, billboards, leaflets, catalogues and publications	0.06	4	0.24
W9	Lack of awareness of natives with rafting	0.06	4	0.24
Total		1	66	3.9

Source: field studies and calculations by authors (2012)

Table 2. Sports tourism external factor analysis summary (water-based sports, mainly Canoepolo) in the region of Maragheh (EFAS2)

Factor	Title	Weight	Factor score	Final score
O1	Existence of required conditions to hold different provincial, national and international festivals	0.072	4	0.29
O2	Less expenses on service and human resources	0.072	4	0.29
O3	Growth of different sport activities, considering pleasant climate	0.072	4	0.29
O4	Being in the vicinity of megacities like Tabriz, etc.	0.09	5	0.45
O5	Being in the vicinity of Sahand, Dosh dam, Alavian dam and etc. to do sports activities such as hiking, skiing, rafting and so on.	0.072	4	0.29
T1	Lack of proper facilities for private sector	0.09	5	0.45
T2	Lack of cohesion and collaboration between different organizations	0.09	5	0.45
T3	Lack of officials' trust in the development and exploitation of this industry	0.072	4	0.29
T4	Limited seasons to practice rafting, considering geographical conditions of the region	0.072	4	0.29
T5	Unknown regional potentialities to those who are interested in this field all around the country	0.072	4	0.29
T6	Lack of effective supervision on the development of sports tourism	0.072	4	0.29
T7	Shortage of required facilities and utilities in order to give proper services to tourists and rafters	0.072	4	0.29
T8	Lack of strategic and major policies in the province as well as the country	0.072	4	0.29
Total		1	55	4.25

Source: field studies of the author, 2012

As per Table 2, conducted calculations by sports managers and tourists experts signify the fact that the most important opportunities and facilities of Maragheh in developing sport tourism are as follows: being in the vicinity of megacities like Tabriz and etc. having weighted score of 0.45 is the most important opportunity from the tourism experts' point of views. Existence of required conditions to hold different provincial, national and international festivals; less expenses on service and human resources and etc. having equally weighted score

of 0.29 are at the next priority. Challenges and restrictions in experts' point of view are as: Lack of proper facilities for private sector; Lack of cohesion and collaboration between different organizations both having weighted score equal to 0.45 are considered as the most important threats in this area. Lack of required facilities and utilities to provide proper services to tourists and rafters; Lack of strategic and major policies in the province as well as the country both having weighted score equal to 0.29 are considered as the next priorities.

Identifying strategic location, codifying strategies and prioritizing them

The main aim of this stage is to identify administrable strategies. Through internal and external matrix along with the ideas of tourism experts and Likert, administrable strategies are identified. Next, field studies and questionnaires are quantified. Finally SWOT matrix of sports tourism development in the desired city will be as Table 3. The results of Internal Factor Analysis Summary (3.9) and External Factors Analysis Summary (4.25) signify the fact that competitive-aggressive strategy is the best strategy to apply.

Codifying strategies with the help of SWOT matrix

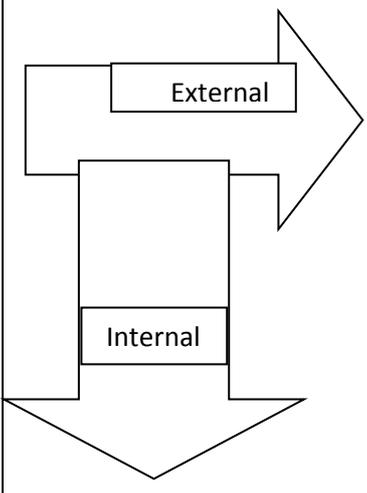
In this step, different strategies were studied through SWOT matrix (Table 4). After identifying internal factors

(strengths and weaknesses) as well as external factors (opportunities and threats) against the development of sports tourism through IEF and EFE (Internal and External Factor Analysis Summary), SWOT matrix is made and proper developmental strategy is codified.

Table 3. SWOT matrix

Internal-External factors	Strengths (S)	Weaknesses (W)
Opportunities (O)	Competitive-aggressive strategy (SO)	Review strategies (WO)
Threats (T)	Variation strategies (ST)	Defensive strategies (WT)

Table 4. Sports tourism developmental strategies in Maragheh

SWOT analysis	Opportunities (O):	Threats (T):
 <p>The diagram shows a central box labeled 'Internal' with a downward-pointing arrow. Above it is a box labeled 'External' with a rightward-pointing arrow. The rightward arrow from 'External' and the downward arrow from 'Internal' both point towards a large rightward-pointing arrow on the right side of the diagram.</p>	<p>Opportunities (O):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Existence of required conditions to hold different provincial, national and international festivals 2. Less expenses on service and human resources 3. Growth of different sport activities, considering pleasant climate 4. Being in the vicinity of megacities like Tabriz, ... 5. Being in the vicinity of Sahand, Dosh dam, Alavian dam and etc. to do sports activities such as hiking, skiing, rafting and so on. 	<p>Threats (T):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of proper facilities for private sector 2. Lack of cohesion and collaboration between different organizations 3. Lack of officials' trust in the development and exploitation of this industry 4. Limited seasons to practice rafting, considering geographical conditions of the region 5. Unknown regional potentialities to those who are interested in this field all around the country 6. Lack of effective supervision on the development of sports tourism 7. Shortage of required facilities and utilities in order to give proper services to tourists and rafters 8. Lack of strategic and major policies in the province as well as the country
<p>Strengths (S):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Existence of different spas to cure different diseases 2. Facility, welfare and recreational services with a logical price 3. The potentiality of holding national and international tournaments 4. Landscaping city entrance gates and the area around the rivers 5. Availability of volunteer human resources 6. Cultural, archaeological and tourism attractions of Maragheh, considering its historical background 7. Proper transportation system 8. Capacity of stadiums for spectators to hold country level events 	<p>Competitive-aggressive strategy (SO):</p> <p>S3S5S8010305 proper utilization of the regional potentialities to hold different festivals and matches in both regional and national levels.</p> <p>S5S802 proper utilization of quality human resources to develop sports tourism</p> <p>S1S3S40305 landscaping the areas around the rivers and spas to develop sports tourism and to hold matches there</p> <p>S2S5020305 improving infrastructures and spreading public and expertise sports in the regional (e.g. rafting, fishing, hiking, skiing and etc.), considering pleasant climate.</p> <p>S2S5S6S702030405 utilizing the megacities to develop different sports tourism activities, considering proper transportation, logical price of services and rich culture</p>	<p>Variation strategies (ST):</p> <p>S2S5T2T3T7 lack of trust and cohesion among authorities to develop sports tourism while considering the availability of human resources and facilities</p> <p>S1S2S3S3T2T3T6 efforts to create collaboration among different institutes and to supervise them for better utilization of regional potentialities.</p> <p>W3W8S8 liberalizing the advantages of major strategies to develop sports tourism at all regional, national and international levels</p> <p>W3W40405 optimum utilization of the potentialities of spas in order to hold sports competitions in all levels of regional, national and international while keeping in mind the limited number of seasons for water-based sports</p>
<p>Weaknesses (W):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lack of proper hotels and restaurants to attract tourists 2. Lack of private sector interest to invest in this area 3. Not enough help of medias to develop this industry 4. Lack of equipped research centers for 	<p>Review strategies (WO):</p> <p>W2W3W5W80305 codifying a prospect to the support of medias and private sectors from different types of sports tourism.</p> <p>W3W5W7010304 allocating budget and financial support for advertisement of sports tourism in Maragheh.</p> <p>W6W7W9010305 allocating enough budget</p>	<p>Defensive strategies (WT):</p> <p>W3W8W9T5T7 procurement of proper mass and dynamic communication tools of advertisement for better understanding of regional potentialities.</p> <p>W2W5T1T7 convincing private sector and financial suppliers to invest in infrastructures and to eliminate existing</p>

strategic planning 5. Lack of financial supplier and lack of managerial supports in the city 6. Lack of different and quality sports tours 7. Lack of funds specified for this branch 8. Lack of sports tourism advertisements in weblogs, websites, posters, billboards, leaflets, catalogues and publications 9. Lack of awareness of natives with rafting	to conduct varieties of sports tours and festivals to make people aware of sports tourism. W1W4W50305 convincing private sector and investors to develop and improve the infrastructures and research centers while taking into account the good regional potentialities.	relevant issues. W4W6W8W9T2T3T5: strategic planning to create collaboration between institutes and organizations trying to hold different sport tours to enhance the awareness level of local people.
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CONCLUSION

Cities are considered as main tourism destinations. Having wide variety of attractions such as museums, sport stadiums, recreation centers, parks and etc., cities attract lots of internal as well as foreign tourists. Sport is as one of the most important sector that can improve tourism industry and lead to the creation of sports tourism. It provides the opportunity of proper utilization of natural sport attractions and also leads to increased income of this industry. Sports tourism is a multidimensional event and success in this branch of tourism requires identification of potential tourism destinations and proper utilization of these attractions. Maragheh has got high potentialities to develop tourism. Considering the initiation of rafting in the city and other tourist attractions including optimal ecological conditions, historical buildings, ecotourism and geo-tourism attractions and etc., it can attract more sports tourists. Conducting national competitions of Canoe polo for the first time in Maragheh is a sign of development capabilities of this sport and sports tourism in the region. In the present study, through a systematic approach and by evaluating internal and external conditions of sport tourism and development of water-based sports (mainly Canoe polo), SWOT model based strategies for sports development are introduced. For this purpose around 60 experts are questioned and according to their replies the ultimate weight of each factor is assigned and strategic position of development of sports tourism is identified. As per the calculations, aggressive developmental strategies are selected, some of which are as follows:

- S3S5S8010305 proper utilization of the regional potentialities to hold different festivals and matches in both regional and national levels,
- S5S802 proper utilization of quality human resources to develop sports tourism,
- S1S3S40305 landscaping the areas around the rivers and spas to develop sports tourism and to hold matches there,
- S2S5020305 improving infrastructures and spreading public and expertise sports in the regional (e.g. rafting, fishing, hiking, skiing and etc.), considering pleasant climate,
- S2S5S6S702030405 utilizing the megacities to develop different sports tourism activities, considering proper transportation, logical price of services and rich culture.

Finally, according to the research objectives, following recommendations are provided:

1. Development of water-based sports up to championship levels.

2. Descriptive plan of identifying investment opportunities and attracting investors to invest in sports tourism of Maragheh

3. To create strong public relations with hotels, inns and apartment managers in order to collaborate with their clients.

4. To hold ecotourism and sport festivals in order to introduce the capabilities of Maragheh to the whole country.

5. Proper utilization of local human resources to develop sports tourism industry.

6. To use integrated tourism in sports tourism and to develop it, considering the hidden potentialities of the city.

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