

## The identification of effective factors on the sports tourism Empowerment in Gilan province

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** Today, the tourism industry is one of the growing parts on an international level as world's largest industry and among service industries. The purpose of this study was to identify effective factors on the sports tourism potentials in Gilan province.

**Methodology:** this study was a practical (in terms of results), descriptive (in terms of research purposes), and field (in terms of data collection) research. The statistical population of this study was 30 employees of the cultural heritage, 60 sports experts, and 600 sports tourists in Gilan province. The instrument for collecting of data was valid. The collected data were classified by descriptive statistical methods and were analyzed by one-Sample t-Test and Friedman test. The SPSS software was used for data analysis ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ).

**Results:** 67% of the sample were men and 33% of it were women. The results of this study showed that employees of cultural Heritage, sports experts, and sports tourism believed that tourism status was desirable. Sports tourists' satisfaction was significantly below the average about sports facilities, but the recreational and sports facilities on the beach, the mountains, and the health system was in moderate level. Also, the attention to effective factors was in unsatisfactory level and lower than the average in the development of sports tourism industry.

**Discussion and Conclusion:** it seems that the suitable location choice for tourism and the providing of service facilities are effective factors in sports tourism. It can be said that Gilan province is capable in terms of sports tourism attractions and this province needs infrastructures, welfare facilities, and standard sport facilities for the exploitation of these resources due to the development of sports tourism.

**Keywords:** Sports tourism, Empowerment, Gilan province

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### Introduction

Sport tourism is an economic, social, political, and cultural phenomenon as well as attractive mixture of both sport and Tourism (1, 2). Many countries consider this dynamic industry as the main source of income, employment, private sector growth, and development of infrastructures. In today's world of sport tourism is a rich source of profit and revenue and any country that can provide the conditions of use of this sources will benefit from advantages (3).

Today, the tourism industry is one of the growing parts on an international level as world's largest industry and among service industries so that many countries consider this dynamic industry as the main source of income, employment, private sector growth, and development of infrastructures (4). Statistics show that many of countries that have the right conditions in sport tourism, a large part of their economy run by sport tourism economy (5).

The results of studies show that factors such as quality of service, the enjoyment of urban attractions like natural and scenic areas, cultural and historical places, and even the possibility of creating trade opportunities have a significant effect on sport tourists (6, 7). But it seems that identification of tourists' needs and expectations and high-quality tourism have a significant effect on tourists' return and investors (8, 9). The relationship between tourism and sport has created a new kind of tourism that the new and comprehensive structure has created for leisure and recreation with human mental and physical vitality (10). The sport tourism can bring positive effects and countless short and long-term benefits (11). Studies show that Sports tourism has become as the economic supplement of tourism so that many cities try to arrange sport events or festivals to help the tourism industry and hotelier when their hotels have empty capacity (12). Sport as big business is a longstanding issue. For example, auto racing can be introduced classic case and that sport and sports events can be create a social return and visit again (13). Championship sports are widely supported by governments because those bring many benefits for society through the stimulation of national pride, happiness, and welfare (6, 13). On the other hand, established facilities for international sports events can be used years for tourists' entertainment, cultural, and sport purposes. Advanced countries have identified potential capacities of sports tourism in each region of their country by taking further steps so that they succeed in attraction of sport tourists with investment on tourism attractions in each region and they can create economic opportunities for their country (14). Fatollahi, et al., (2009) studied barriers in Azerbaijan sport tourism (15). They reported that management problems, lack of information, lack of advertising, and lack of appropriate services were the most important barriers to attract sports tourism (15). Ajhdari, et al., (2011) examined the effect of facilities and situation on fans attraction (6). They expressed that equipping of sport places with comforts facilities such as a suitable place for spectators to see as well as having adequate lighting and water cooler were important factors in the development of sports tourism industry (6). Visia, et al., (2011) studied effective factors on the improvement of sport tourism in Khuzestan (16). They introduced accommodation facilities, places of interest, natural landscapes, historical places, and easy preparation of residence were the most important effective factors on the development and promotion of tourism industry (16). Daniels, et al., (2004) stated that these events can be considered as a subscale of sport tourism with a proper planning and assessment to examine and identify individuals' reasons for participation in these events as a fixed tournament (7). They believed

that the type and nature of the sport, participants' age and the presence of side activities such as historical and artistic visions were the most important effective factors on the amateur sport tourism (7). Unrealistic Advertisements of Iran, organizational and institutional problems, investment problems, lack of transportation, lack of residential facilities and hotels, the high cost of travel, the lack of trained personnel, and lack of appropriate services are the most important obstacles in the development of the tourism industry (17). Adabi, et al., (2009) concluded in their study that sports tourism provides the possible of optimal use of sport natural attractions to attract sports tourists and revenue from tourism (18). Therefore, the investment on attractions that have greater importance in experts' idea for the attraction of sports tourism is necessary (18,9). The results of studies about effective sport natural attractions on the improvement of sport tourism shows that nature attractions with a 79% load factor, beach sports and water attractions for the summer with a 87% load factor, and fishing and recreation attractions with a 75% load factor are the most importance in the development of sport tourism in the country (18). So, the identification of sporting tourist capabilities and attractions of each region is important so that the identification of sporting tourist capabilities and attractions is an important factor that can promote tourism industry of country (19). The analysis and evaluation of capabilities and resources represent an important first step in the development and management of sports tourism purposes (19). Since Iran is grappling with a difficult job more than ever and the oil economy has more self-reliant so that policy-makers seek solutions to reduce dependence on oil revenues more than ever, tourism can be a good option for this alternative so that United Arabic Emirates has changed its focus from an economy based on oil and gas for years and as a result it observed the growth in service industries related to health, sport, recreation, and tourism (20). While Iran shares of the total international tourists had been only about 1 million and 230 thousand and its revenue about 634 million dollars in 1999 and this figure is very low in comparison with 77 million international tourists in France (21). It is obvious that our country should step on the path of advanced countries to progress in sports tourism industry so that it can develop tourism and sports tourism in each region by the identification of tourism attractions in that region and provide a field for its development of tourism. Gilan province is also one of the most beautiful provinces in the country in terms of natural attractions and it has the high potential for the development of tourism industry. Type of geographical conditions of province (topography) especially in terms of height factor divides this province to the coast, plains,

foothills, and mountain. The climate in the coastal plains and the foothills of the mountain has provided the possibility of tourists' attraction and keeping over the years. Other tourism capacities are perennial rivers flowing across the province from West to East and from North to South of the province, the beach across the province with facilities of utilization for all tourists, vegetation, forest, and pasture cove, and the distribution of rural, tribal, and city settlements (22). Despite all tourism natural assets, infrastructure work has not been done in tourism and sport tourism in this area and employment as a result of tourism has not been enough to eradicate unemployment in this area. It should adopt measures for the creation of employment and the acquisition of revenue from sports tourism due to the high rate of youth unemployment in Gilan province which is often the cause of their migration to industrial cities. The purpose of this study was to identify effective factors on the sports tourism potentials in Gilan province.

**Materials and Methods**

This study was a practical (in terms of results), descriptive (in terms of research purposes), and field (in terms of data collection) research.

**Participants**

The statistical population of this study was 30 employees of the cultural heritage, 60 sports experts, and 600 sports tourists in Gilan province.

**Instruments and Tasks**

The instrument was a researcher-made questionnaire. A list of the most important variables related to the subject were prepared after studying of theses, scientific articles, sports management professors' opinions, and experts of sports tourism that a team of university professors confirmed face and content validity. The questionnaire with 5-point Likert scale was adjusted after the necessary reforms ranging from (1= very low, 5= very high) for a pilot study. Subjects completed 25 questionnaires in a pilot

study. The reliability of questionnaire was estimated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient  $\alpha=0.83$  after the analysis of questionnaires. Research questionnaire was consist of two parts. The first part collected subjects' individual information (age, gender, occupation, education level, marital status) with 5 questions and the main part collected information on sports tourism potentials of Gilan province.

**Procedure**

The researcher distributed questionnaires among subjects. He explained the questionnaire for subjects before its completing. The subjects completed questionnaires without name due to the subjects' security sense.

**Data Analysis**

The collected data were classified by descriptive statistical methods and were analyzed by one-Sample t-Test and Friedman test. The SPSS software was used for data analysis ( $\alpha \leq 0.05$ ).

**Results**

67% of sample were men (N= 362) and 33% of it were women (N=174) from 536 completed questionnaires. The results in table (1) show the status of sports tourism attractions in Gilan province using one-Sample t-Test. The results in table (2) show the status of sports tourism facilities in Gilan province using one-Sample t-Test. The results in table (3) show the status of attention to effective factors on the development of sports tourism industry in Gilan province using one-Sample t-Test. The results in table (4) show suitable sports activities for the development of sports tourism in the high mountains covered with snow of Alborz using Friedman test. The results in table (5) show suitable sports activities for the development of sports tourism in dams and lakes of Gilan province using Friedman test. The results in table (6) show suitable sports activities for the development of sports tourism in the plains of Gilan province using Friedman test.

**Table 1. The survey of status of sports tourism attractions in Gilan province using one-Sample t-Test**

Variable	Statistic	The amount of test:3			
		t	df	Sig	Mean
<b>Experts</b>	Tourism attractions on the coast	14.41	75	0.001	4.34
	Sports Tourism Attractions related to hunting	14.64	75	0.001	4.39
	Attractions related to Nature Cure	12.20	75	0.001	4.28
	Attractions related to nature	13.61	75	0.001	4.01
<b>Tourists</b>	Tourism attractions on the coast	28.38	460	0.001	3.76
	Sports Tourism Attractions related to hunting	27.43	460	0.001	3.57
	Attractions related to Nature Cure	26.83	460	0.001	3.42
	Attractions related to nature	28.21	460	0.001	3.66

The results in table (1) showed that staff of cultural heritage, sports experts, and tourists reported that

the status of sports tourism attractions was favorable in Gilan province (P=0.001).

**Table 2. The survey of status of sports tourism facilities in Gilan province using one-Sample t-Test**

Variable	Statistic	The amount of test:3			
		t	df	Sig	Mean
<b>Experts</b>	Recreational and sports facilities on the beaches of the sea, mountains, and tourism regions	-1.25	75	0.271	2.78
	Sports Complexes for the holding of local sports events	-2.42	75	0.025	2.64
	Recreational and sport facilities in parks of Gilan	-1.34	75	0.001	2.44
	Public transport for tourists' welfare	-0.75	75	0.001	2.57
	Health system for water, electricity, and telephone networks in the areas of sports tourism	-1.67	75	0.395	2.84
<b>Tourists</b>	Recreational and sports facilities on the beaches of the sea and mountains and tourism regions	1.66	459	0.097	3.01
	Sports Complexes for the holding of local sports events	-5.16	459	0.001	2.71
	Recreational and sport facilities in parks of Gilan	-5.45	459	0.001	2.67
	Public transport for welfare of tourists	-2.98	459	0.002	2.79
	Health system for water, electricity, telephone Network in the areas of sports tourism	-4.23	459	0.001	2.73

The results in table (2) showed that staff of cultural heritage, sports experts, and tourists' satisfaction was significantly less than the average about sports tourism facilities in Gilan province (P=0.05). The negative value of t represented that the mean was smaller than the amount of test for these variables. But, sports experts (P=0.271) and tourists (P=

0.097) reported that recreational and sports facilities on the beaches of the sea, mountains, and tourism regions was in moderate condition. Also, sports experts (P=0.395) reported that health system for water, electricity, and telephone networks in the areas of sports tourism was in moderate condition.

**Table 3. The survey of status of attention to effective factors on the development of sports tourism industry in Gilan province using one-Sample t-Test**

Variable	Statistic	The amount of test:3			
		t	df	Sig	Mean
<b>Experts</b>	Development of infrastructures	-5.08	75	0.001	2.70
	Attention to tourism attractions	0.198	75	0.86	3.07
	Advertising activities	-6.34	75	0.001	2.38
	Adjustment of macro policies	-3.42	75	0.001	2.65
	Regulation of strategies based on the distribution of attractions	-4.47	75	0.001	2.48

The results in table (3) showed that staff of cultural heritage, sports experts, and tourists reported that status of attention to effective factors on the development of sports tourism industry was

unsatisfactory and below the mean in Gilan province (P=0.86). The negative value of t represented that the mean was smaller than the amount of test for these variables.

**Table 4. The prioritization of suitable sports activities for the development of sports tourism in the high mountains covered with snow of Talesh and Darfak using Friedman test**

	Sports Activities	Rank of Mean	Chi-squared	df	Sig
<b>Experts</b>	1 Mountaineering and Rock Climbing	3.81	144.09	4	0.001
	2 Air sports (kite, paragliding)	3.59			
	3 Cycling, mountain motor riding	3.24			
	4 Snow skiing	3.18			
	5 Sport for all	2.05			
<b>Tourists</b>	1 Mountaineering and Rock Climbing	4.29	1111.59	4	0.001
	2 Cycling, mountain motor riding	3.64			
	3 Air sports (kite, paragliding)	2.76			
	4 Snow skiing	2.30			
	5 Sport for all	2.01			

The results in table (4) showed that opinions about suitable sports activities for the development of tourism were significantly differ. Mountaineering and rock climbing with the 4.29 ranking in tourists and with the 3.81 ranking in experts has earned the

highest mean (P=0.001). Sport for all with the 2.01 ranking in tourists and with the 2.05 ranking in experts has earned the lowest mean than other sports (P=0.001).

**Table 5. The prioritization of suitable sports activities for the development of sports tourism in dams, lakes, and wetlands using Friedman test**

	Sports Activities		Rank of Mean	Chi-squared	df	Sig
<b>Experts</b>	1	Boating	2.78	17.79	3	0.001
	2	Fishing	2.63			
	3	Track and Field and cycling around the lake	2.32			
	4	Hunting	2.28			
<b>Tourists</b>	1	Boating	2.92	167.56	3	0.001
	2	Fishing	2.43			
	3	Hunting	2.41			
	4	Track and Field and cycling around the lake	2.23			

The results in table (5) showed that there was a significant difference between suitable sports activities for the development of tourism in dams, lakes, and wetlands of Gilan province (P=0.001). Boating with the 2.78 ranking in experts and with

the 2.92 ranking in tourists has earned the highest mean (P=0.001). Track and field with the 2.23 ranking has earned the lowest mean in tourists and hunting with the 2.28 ranking has earned the lowest mean than other sports in experts (P=0.001).

**Table 6. The prioritization of suitable sports activities for the development of sports tourism in the plains using Friedman test**

	Sports Activities		Rank of Mean	Chi-squared	df	Sig
<b>Experts</b>	1	Polo	2.27	6.42	2	0.001
	2	Track and Field	2.04			
	3	Rally	1.68			
<b>Tourists</b>	1	Polo	2.63	42.375	2	0.001
	2	Track and Field	1.86			
	3	Rally	1.51			

The results in table (6) showed that there was a significant difference between suitable sports activities for the development of tourism in the plains of Gilan province (P=0.001). Wicket with the 2.27 ranking in experts and with the 2.63 ranking in sports tourists has earned the highest mean (P=0.001). Rally with the 1.68 ranking in experts and with the 1.51 ranking in sports tourists has earned the lowest mean than other sports (P=0.001).

sports tourism has been widely regarded by experts in recent years (12). The results of conducted studies in countries where sports tourism is as a major source of their income confirm that proper planning in the field of identification of tourists' interests such as tourism attractions, welfare facilities, level of competitions and appropriate ads have a significant effect on tourism through sporting events (23, 24). Chia, et al., (2009) examined the motivation of sports tourism in United States competitions and they reported that welfare facilities with the possibility of easy departure using comfortable vehicles sporting have a significant affection sport tourists' attraction (25). In fact, the discussion of economic resources of sports tourism attraction is a common theme of sports marketing with other marketing in business and politics. Many studies has been conducted to identify factors and barriers of sports tourism attraction in recent years in the country. These studies have an emphasis on the preparation of a strategic and applied plan by the planners and sports experts in addition the referring to the direct

**Discussion and Conclusion**

Sports tourism has become economy a source of economic wealth because sports has become an economic competition market at the present time. Iran also have a high potential to attract sports tourists due to the special geographical, historical, and cultural conditions and natural capacities and favorable weather conditions (23). Therefore, the recognition and assessment of strategies for the increasing of economic and cultural benefits from

and indirect economic sources of sports tourism attraction with the identification of motivations of individuals' presence at sports events that it causes the providing quality services (16, 23, 26, 27). The status of sports tourism attractions are in good condition province in terms of natural assets to attract sport tourists in Gilan. This result of this study is consistent with the results of Rahmani's (2013) study that he had examined the nature of Gilan Province for the capable sport tourism (28). Gilan also has good conditions for slopes, water sports, and hunting attractions (29). This result of this study is consistent with the results of Karami's (2000) study that he studied Iran Ecotourism (29). Also, this result of this study is consistent with the results of Gadarzvand Chegini and Molayi's (2009) study (30). Adabi (2007) surveyed effective factors in sport tourism development with an emphasis on natural sports attractions (31), he stated that the lack of standard and recreational sports facilities, the lack of adequate welfare facilities and services for tourists, and weakness in the land, air, and rail transportation system are effective factors on the reduction of sports tourists' attraction in a region (31) that this result is consistent the results of Hall, et al., (2010) and Gilmore's (2002) study (32, 33). Hall, et al., (2010) expressed that if the audience have the satisfaction from facilities such as transportation system and parking, they will again attended in the event (32). Gilmore's (2002) stated that the development of infrastructure plays an important role in the development of sports tourism industry (33). Therefore, paying attention to intended infrastructures is important for the development of sports tourism. However, the status of sports infrastructures as well as facilities and welfare services has been assessed unfavorable in this province. Advertisement can also be an important factor to introduce sports tourism attractions for tourists in Gilan province. In fact, the bulk of our attitude to the world has roots in the media messages that are pre-made (34). Kim, et al., (2007) expressed that media advertisement and the increasing of the sensitivity of competition through the mass are the most important effective factors on individuals' presence in competitions (35). According to this study, Gilan province can attract many sports tourists since it is capable in terms of sports tourist attractions. But, studies shows that Iran suffers from many shortcomings in the field of tourism infrastructures such as health facilities, standard sports complexes, and transportation system. Standard sports facilities are very low in suitable areas for the development of sport tourism. So, Gilan province has not favorable situation in terms of infrastructure facilities and in spite of its sports tourism attractions that have shown in this study needs infrastructure facilities to apply these natural sports tourism attractions. Because its infrastructure facilities such as hotel facilities and

tourism infrastructures should be improved for tourists' attraction (36). The creation of the necessary infrastructures for the development of sports tourism is essential that this has a direct relationship with the investment. So, we can be successful in sports tourists' attraction to the province of Gilan by the investment in the field of tourism infrastructures and the privatization of sports tourism industry in Gilan province. Also it have coordination with the next 20 years tourism program that this program should attract 20 million tourists and should earn \$ 25 million revenue from in this way (37). The results of prioritization of suitable sports activities for the development of sports tourism in the high mountains covered with snow of Alborz showed that mountaineering and rock climbing had first rank, air sports (kite, paragliding) had second rank, and cycling, mountain motor riding, snow skiing, and sport for all had respectively third to fifth rank. Winter sports such as skiing had the last priority in terms of the attraction in Adabi's (2007) study (31). Adabi's (2007) finding is consistent with this study (31). This can be due to the lack of facilities for winter sports and the difficult access. The prioritization of suitable sports activities for the development of sports tourism in dams, lakes, and wetlands using Friedman test showed boating had first rank. Hunting and track and field around the lake had respectively the next priorities. The results of this study showed that sports experts and tourists reported that recreational facilities, standard sports places, and sports tourism facilities had not good conditions. Other results of this study about the prioritization of suitable sports activities for the development of sports tourism in plains of Gilan province showed that Polo sport had first rank, track and Field had second rank, and rally had third rank from the viewpoint of sport experts and tourists. Now polo sport is also booming in Chokam village. That is a village around the Anzali Lagoon. The residents of this villages believe that the village has many horses so that horse breeding has flourished due to the very good grazing on the edge of wetlands especially in Chokam village of Anzali and its hippodrome is active. (37). According to this study, polo sport has first rank in the development of sports tourism. So, the development of sports such as polo sport is assessed for sports tourists' attraction in this province. Thus, the investment for the learning of this sport and the construction of special sports places for competition is important in this sport. Standard sports resorts also increased due to the beauty and charm of this area provides the possibility of holding international and regional competitions. Also, the increasing of standard sports tracks provides the possible of holding of world and regional competitions with its beauty and attractiveness.

We can conclude that Gilan province is capable in terms of sports tourism attractions. This province needs infrastructure and welfare facilities and standard sports complexes to exploit these resources for the development of sports tourism. Sports tourism provides the possible of optimal use of natural sports attractions for sports tourists' attraction and the increasing of revenue from tourism. Therefore, the investment in attractions that are more important in experts and tourists' idea is essential that this also requires investment in the public and private sectors. This study shows the importance of the ancient sport (polo) in the development of sports tourism in Gilan province so that sports tourism can be developed in Gilan province and benefit from it on the economic dimension with the creation of necessary facilities in order to revive polo sport and the investment for the its boom as well as using media advertisement. Also, Gilan province can effectively attract tourists with its natural attractions such as hot springs in the therapeutic nature and with investments in this sector and the creation of welfare facilities for tourists. The adjustment of macro policies, the review of the tourism rules for the securance of sports tourism needs, more attention to the identification and creation of new sports tourism attractions, the creation of appropriate infrastructures for tourism services in addition to media advertisement, and other advertisement proportional to kind of audience can develop tourism of Gilan province. We can take adequate advantage of sport and sports tourism as a strong industry on the economic dimension. It is hoped that authorities pay attention to all effective aspects on the development of sports tourism in Gilan province due to the results of this study so that sports tourism is properly developed in this province.

#### Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest

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