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Determination of the current status and potential of sports tourism in Kocaeli province: Sports tourism destination model proposal

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Goal and objectives of the dissertation

Goal

The main purpose of this research is to determine the current status and potential of sports tourism in Kocaeli province in Turkey and to develop a sports tourism destination model.

Research questions

The main purpose of the dissertation is achieved by answering the following research questions:

- What are the sources of sports tourism in Kocaeli?
- What is the organisation of sports tourism in Kocaeli?
- What is the infrastructure and facility status of Kocaeli's sports tourism?
- Who are the managers of sports tourism in Kocaeli?
- How should the organisation and management of sports tourism be in Kocaeli?
- What are the barriers for sports tourism in Kocaeli?
- What is the impact of sports tourism in Kocaeli?
- What is the perception of the local people towards the development of sports tourism in Kocaeli?
- Does the perception of local people towards the development of sports tourism in Kocaeli differ according to various variables?

Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach that integrates qualitative and quantitative data collection, analysis, and interpretation (Creswell, 2016). The sample includes central and local administrators, academics, tourism and sports enterprises, non-governmental organisations, and residents. Qualitative data were collected from 23 sports and tourism managers through semi-structured interviews. Quantitative data were obtained from a survey of 410 residents. Descriptive and content analysis methods were used to examine the qualitative data (Merriam, 2015). The quantitative analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS 27, applying Kruskal-Wallis test, Mann-Whitney U test, and Spearman correlation statistical techniques.

Results

In order for sports tourism to be realised, individuals must engage in either participating in sports or watching sports. The key components of tourism include travel and accommodation, while the essential elements of sports encompass activities, events, and competitions. These findings align with previous studies (Higham & Hinch, 2018; Weed & Bull, 2009; Standeven & Knop, 1999; Hall, 1992b; Gammon & Robinson, 2003; Gibson, 1998). A crucial aspect that defines the concept of sports tourism is the involvement of visitors in a sports event or tour. Furthermore, sports tourists often visit destinations for entertainment and health-related purposes (Gibson, 2013; Marković & Petrović, 2013; Mijatov *et al.*, 2016).

Kocaeli Province in Turkey has significant potential for sports tourism. Its advantageous geopolitical location, combined with abundant natural resources and a skilled workforce, creates an ideal environment for various types of sports tourism. This research indicates that several factors are crucial for the success of sports tourism destinations, including natural and human resources, available sports activities, infrastructure, sports facilities, environmental conditions, safety, marketing efforts, stakeholder involvement, community engagement, and effective management.

Theoretical conclusions
As a result of developing a model for sports tourism destinations, the study demonstrates that various factors play a crucial role in the process of destination development, including resource analysis, policy formulation, planning, management, marketing, and the involvement of both managers and residents. Additionally, elements such as organisations, events, and sports associated with sports tourism are instrumental in establishing a successful sports tourism destination. The advancement of the sports tourism sector is vital for Turkey's economic, environmental, and socio-cultural development. Consequently, the model developed in this research serves as a valuable reference for enhancing sports tourism in other destinations. Furthermore, this study underscores the importance of stakeholder collaboration between the sports and tourism sectors in Turkey.

Practical Applications of the Dissertation
Stakeholders—including local residents, local governments, central governments, non-governmental organizations, sports enterprises, tourism establishments, and universities—should participate in the destination management process to foster the development of sports tourism. In this context, a "Sports Tourism Destination Management Organisation" should be established under the leadership of central governments, in collaboration with local governments and other stakeholders. The primary responsibility of this organisation is to identify the sports tourism resources available at the destination. In the development and management of sports tourism destinations, it is crucial to analyse resources, infrastructure, and superstructure, as well as to determine and plan the sports tourism destination policy. Stakeholders must collaborate effectively during the planning process. Additionally, managers should coordinate their efforts throughout this phase. Mapping the destination for sports tourism, constructing facilities, and determining carrying capacities are essential processes conducted at this stage. Furthermore, sustainability principles—encompassing economic, sociocultural, and environmental considerations—must be integrated into sports tourism policy and planning.

A sports tourism destination should prioritise the protection, support, and development of both the natural and human environments. Consequently, environmental, safety, health, and infrastructure measures are crucial factors to consider in sports tourism. These destinations must be promoted on local, national, and international platforms. Given the media's significant role in shaping the image and brand of sports tourism destinations, it is essential to incorporate social media into promotional strategies.

Content of the dissertation
This dissertation is structured into five chapters:

Abstract of Chapter 1
The introduction includes the problem, purpose and significance of the research, assumptions, limitations and some definitions about the research. It presents the research framework, provides an overview of the methodology and sets out the overall structure of the paper.

Abstract of Chapter 2
The second part of the research presents the concepts of sport, sport management, tourism, sport tourism and destination in detail. It also gives informations about Kocaeli province and describes the historical, geographical and climatic characteristics of Kocaeli city, examines the socio-economic and demographic structure of the region and finally sports tourism assets.

Abstract of Chapter 3
Chapter three provides a detailed description of the different stages of the research process. The researchers define the research problem and present the research model. This chapter includes information about both the qualitative and quantitative parts of the research. In the quantitative part, the researchers discuss the development process of the perception scale for sports tourism, developed by Zgurovski and Akın (2016), in detail. The chapter also explains the stages of data collection and analysis comprehensively.

Abstract of Chapter 4
Chapter four presents the research findings. This section gives qualitative research findings analysis, content and descriptive analysis methods, themes, coding and opinions. Quantitative research findings are also in this section. It includes the participants' perceptions of sports tourism and the findings related to the variables analysis. A summary table of the findings of the mixed research is in end of this section.

Abstract of Chapter 5
The fifth chapter of the research consists of the interpretation and discussion of the findings obtained from the research content, the conclusions and recommendations of the research. It includes the discussion of the findings obtained from the qualitative and quantitative parts of the research by interpretation them together with the researchs in the literature and the results of the research. In addition, "Sports Tourism Destination Model" is included in this section as the final output of the research.

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