

ORIGINAL ARTICLE



# Scenario Planning of the Future of Sports Tourism Industry in Mashhad

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## ABSTRACT

**Background.** The concept of sport tourism has become very popular in recent years as a field of study and a tourism product and has attracted the attention of many researchers. **Objectives.** This study aimed at future scenario planning of the Mashhad metropolitan sports tourism industry. **Methods.** It was an applied future analytical exploratory research. The information was collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with 13 management, marketing and sports tourism experts including 7 sections and 50 key indicators. A 50 \* 50 cross-over matrix was used to analyze the data collected by Mic Mac Software. **Results.** Based on the findings of the study, seven general categories of factors (influencers to being influenced) were identified: natural drivers, social-cultural drivers, managerial and programmatic drivers, economic drivers, advertising drivers, service drivers, and infrastructure drivers. **Conclusion.** Mashhad has great potential for attracting sports tourism in the near future with great human, natural and religious potentials and talents. It is hoped to take steps to improve tourism in the city.

**KEYWORDS:** *Scenario Planning, Futures Research, Sport Tourism, Mashhad*

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of sport tourism has become very popular in recent years as a field of study and a tourism product and has attracted the attention of many researchers. Diversity in the definition of sport tourism is high and has always been considered a problem for researchers. In response to the question why sports tourism has suddenly become a prominent issue, one can look at the history of sports tourism: it has been argued that people have been involved in sports-related trips for centuries; however, in the last ten years, the popularity of these travels has increased enormously (1).

Tourism has a variety of forms, with sports tourism being one of the subdivisions that has

received the highest growth among different segments of tourism (2). The importance of sports tourism is to such an extent that the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the World Tourism Organization hold international conferences to analyze issues related to sports tourism during the Olympics and work towards a joint understanding between the two organizations. Even in some countries of the world, tourism and sports activities are planned and implemented by a special ministry called "Sport Tourism" (3).

Since the tourism industry has been around for three decades, it has become one of the strongest and largest industries in the world (4) as an

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important type of human activity that can have a profound impact on the local community. These effects are most visible in the target communities, where tourists are connected to the economic, socio-cultural and biological environment of these communities. Therefore, categorizing tourism effects into three socio-cultural, economic, and environmental groups is commonly accepted (5).

In addition, in recent years, tourism in the world has increased at higher rates. Kolenberg and Batra (2019) showed that sports tourists and non-sports tourists are different, but both are important components for the development of sports tourism. Sports tourism in general involves three major behaviors: participating in active sports tourism, watching (event tourism or inactive) and visiting popular sports attractions such as visiting athletes, museums, stadiums, and etc. (Sports Diary Tourism) (6).

Events are an important part of the sports and tourism industries that are increasingly developed in both (sport and tourism) environments; events can bring about positive changes in the long-term tourism demand (7). Research in China has shown that the number of people interested in participating in various forms of sports, leisure and tourism is increasing day by day. Marathon, cycling, mountaineering and sports tourism have been the focus and serious choice of leisure in recent years, so, marathon events as a tourism event have increased dramatically over the past six years (8) so, there is a need for proper advertising and these events should be introduced to enthusiasts in order to promote sports tourism.

Future research, like a number of new and up-to-date methods in management, and in particular sport management, has a special place in the world today's research in this field. It carefully analyzes the areas of progress and issues facing organizations, individuals and sport fields in the near or distant future and is attractive to researchers as well as the target community.

In this regard, Babiak et al. (2017) in their future research of sport management examined the relationships between organizations in the field of sport. The results showed that more attention is paid to structure and dimensions in the core processes of relationships between organizations (9). Gajdošíková et al. (2019), in their research in Slovakia, showed that the country has a high potential for future Carpathians tourists; in this case, the future of

winter sports tourism goals are subject to conditions such as climate change that require regular planning and attention. These are in line with the promotion of sports tourism this season of the year (10).

Sport has always been one of the most important recreational activities of tourists and tourism and travel are also associated with different types of sport. In other words, sport is one of the main motivating factors in tourists. International sports events, due to their diversity and wide range, attract a large number of domestic and foreign tourists each year; As existing research and statistics emphasize, events such as the World Cup, the Olympics And Islamic countries' games significantly attract media attention and thus increase the number of tourists (active participants, spectators, etc.) and have a positive impact on the host community (11). Gravand et al. (1993), in research, showed that interest in a particular sport, attending among friends, taking an interest in the history of cities, and intercity circulation are the most important factors in attracting inactive sport tourists traveling to the provinces of West of Iran (Ilam, Kermanshah, Lorestan and Hamedan).

In addition, research has shown that interest in culture, music, antiquity, marketing, and tourism agency services, need to plan travel time for sporting events, ease of preparation for sports accommodation and ease of appropriate accommodation in the host country are important marketing factors for the tendency of sports tourists (12). Alves et al. (2017) in their study, which analyzed social usefulness management in a coastal region in southern Spain, found that the majority of the sample under study preferred areas adjacent to a densely populated city or region with strong social components (13).

The concept of futures research refers to the systematic study, discovery, invention, presentation, testing and evaluation of possible, probable and desirable future. Future research brings different choices about the future of individuals and organizations and helps us to choose and build the most desirable infrastructure for the future (14). In addition, futurism has a mutual relationship with the ideology and culture of nations. Considering the future and its effects on human life is one of the most important topics that arouse human curiosity and considering that future analysis is one of the environmental issues in strategic discussions and scientific developments

of this topic play an important role in the scientific process of these strategic issues, the purpose of futures research is exploration, creation and testing of desirable and probable futures to improve decision making (15). The macro environment is always full of unexpected changes and sometimes it is difficult to identify ambiguous events, often long-term forecasts are of little value at the moment; when faced with such situations, senior executives can partially solve this problem with the help of scenario planning. The main purpose of the scenarios is not to predict the future, but to create images of the future development of the external environment. Applying this approach can influence some senior managers' decisions by identifying uncertainties (16).

The city of Mashhad is the second largest religious metropolis of the Islamic world due to the blessed presence of the Ali Ibn Musa al-Reza. It is the base of Islamic and religious education, the gathering place and demand for the presence of millions of pilgrims from all over Iran and the world. It is one of the cities of Khorasan Razavi in the center of the province and is located at an average elevation of 970 meters above sea level and has hot and dry summers, cold and humid winters (17). It had a population of 3,057,676 in 2016.

According to the Iranian Census Bureau, Mashhad's share of total spring trips in the past two years was about 3.5 percent. More precisely, in the spring of last year, some 3.8 million people visited the city, with a total of 16 and 17 million overnight stays, respectively, between 2018 and 2019. The average length of stay for Mashhad pilgrims and tourists is between 4.3 and 4.5 days. The number of pilgrims and tourists in Mashhad reached 3.8 million in April, May and June. If we include only 800,000 pilgrims and spring tourists after mid-March, the number of tourists in Nowruz 2019 was around three million (<https://www.isna.ir/news/98052210651>).

The number of tourists in Mashhad has increased from about 10 million to 20 million in 2012. This increasing trend in the number of entrants to Mashhad metropolis indicates the high travel coefficient of this metropolis as the first religious metropolis of the country (18).

According to the statistical yearbook presented in 2016, Mashhad covers an area of 108,767 hectares, has 13 regions, 40 districts and 158 neighborhoods (Statistical Yearbook of Mashhad, 2016, 17). Mashhad is located at 36 degrees 26 minutes to 36 degrees 43 minutes longitude and at

36 degrees 10 minutes to 36 degrees 24 minutes latitude (17). Based on what has been discussed, the most important purpose of future research is to identify new issues and how to deal with them and to perform long-term and short-term planning to prevent the adverse consequences of unforeseen events. As exercise is considered differently among different people, various demographic characteristics of its users can lead to future research with different approaches; as a result, sports tourism requires more comprehensive planning among different types of tourism, and given that future research in the country's sports tourism industry can put right way in front of senior executives in this field and regarding the bad economic conditions today, planning can be targeted with the identification of suitable future profitability in the near future which can lead many of the key economic issues facing the sport and help the deprived parts of country.

Moreover, creating a culture of sports tourism among Iranian families, increasing the level of vitality among our families and especially the youth of our country, it can contribute to the mental and physical wellbeing of the community and is a major step towards a healthy society free from drug addiction and social immorality. According to Safdel et al. (2014), the holy shrine is the most important factor in attracting tourists to Mashhad (19). Therefore, it is necessary to plan and take a long-term view of the concept of sports tourism as a logical and practical solution to prevent damages in this metropolis. For this purpose, the present study attempted to plan the future scenarios of the sports tourism industry in Mashhad in order to identify the problems facing sports tourism in this city and to provide scientific solutions and logical policies with scientific support to serve the beloved people of Iran and the city of Mashhad.

## MATERIALS AND METHOS

It was a practical future-looking, analytical and exploratory mixed research (combining qualitative and quantitative models); Documents and libraries methods were used for data collection. In the first stage, to gather drivers and key factors influencing the development of the sports tourism industry, existing documents were reviewed and in-depth interviews in the form of open and semi-structured questions were conducted with 13 experts in management, tourism and sports tourism and sports marketing from all over the country who had a history of

attending specialized or scientific sport activities in Mashhad for at least 3 months. After examining in-depth interviews averaging 1 hour and 12 minutes, the factors affecting the sports tourism industry in Mashhad were extracted and confirmed by the interviewee himself, with a total of 87 indicators and their primary factors. Then, based on these variables, the Delphi questionnaire was designed and provided to 10 sport management and marketing experts in Khorasan Razavi province who were different from previous stage experts to confirm the final statements. After three stages of rejecting or confirming the items by Delphi experts, a relative consensus was reached on the final variables of the study, resulting in 50 consensus variables identified and finally quantitative data in this study were prepared as numerical values and giving weights to the Delphi questionnaire.

After collecting the indices and variables, the interaction matrix was formed in two stages, so that the indices were placed in rows and columns. The final questionnaire was provided to tourism and sports tourism experts in the province who completed the questionnaire (Delphi method). Finally, to analyze the indices and variables in the final questionnaire, the first step was to use Mic Mac software to analyze the research, which is illustrated in Figure 1. After extracting the key factors for future scenarios of Mashhad sports tourism industry, different possible situations were considered for each of the key factors and a questionnaire was designed for the interactions that was completed by interviewing the statistical population after validating the questionnaire. Then, through the ensemble feature in Scenario Wizard Software, the questionnaires were entered into the software and the analysis was performed on them.

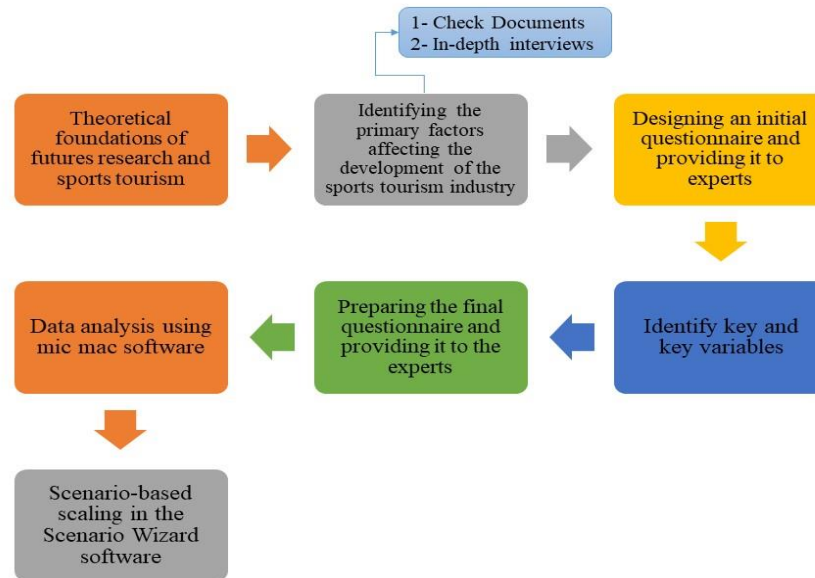


Figure 1. Research Process in the Future Research of Development of the Sports Tourism Industry of Metropolis of Holy Mashhad

## RESULTS

The demographic characteristics of the interviewees showed that 8 of them were sport management and marketing professors (mean of 45 years old) with 5 years' experience in sports tourism; 3 of them were tourism experts with a mean age of 38 and 3 years of experience in sports tourism and finally 2 of them were Mashhad metropolitan municipality experts with an average age of 42 years who had 4 years' experience in sports tourism. To identify the most important indicators of tourism development in Mashhad, 87 indicators were identified through in-depth research and interviews with management,

tourism, sports tourism and sports marketing experts in sports management, sports tourism and sports marketing. Thirty-seven of the 87 were eventually dropped, and 50 were re-examined by provincial experts, provincial managers, and tourism industry experts. Finally, key factors were adjusted in 7 sections and 50 key indicators with  $50 \times 50$  matrix width based on cross-effects were identified. By analyzing key indices and required data, the  $50 \times 50$  matrix dimensions with Mic Mac software and cross-effects analysis method was obtained and the matrix filling degree was 74.36%. Of the 1859 evaluable matrix relationships, 462

had 3 cross-effects, meaning that the indicators are both influential and affect each other, 786 relationship had 2 cross-effects, that is, it has a reinforcing role, 611 relationship had 1 cross-

effects indicating that it has more influence on other indicators and 641 relationships had 0 cross-effects were neither were affected nor affect anything (Tables 1, 2).

**Table 1. Characteristics of the Primary Factors Influencing the Development of Mashhad Metropolitan Sports Tourism**

No	Section	Indicator
1	Natural drivers	Urban green space, environment, countryside villas with favorable climate, favorable climate, natural waterfalls and attractions and hiking in the province
2	Cultural-social drivers	Razavi holy shrine, conferences and seminars, sporting events, interacting with universities, museums and zoos, tourism laws and regulations, rising literacy rates in the country, paying attention to social components of physical health, increasing life expectancy, attention to gender equality in sports and leisure
3	Management and planning drivers	Skilled manpower, constraint reduction, macro-government policies, citizen participation in decision-making, tourism master plan, technical knowledge of managers, public safety in the region, increased number of trained sports management, cohesion and Cross-sectoral cooperation
4	Economic drivers	Budgeting, cost-effectiveness, reducing Sanctions and economic development of the country, entrepreneurship, increasing people's income, sport privatization, increasing health costs and finding self-care, globalizing the economy and finding sports tourism
5	Advertising drivers	Variety in advertising, media, new advertising, word-of-mouth marketing, provincial premier league teams, players and celebrities
6	Service drivers	Welfare services, recreational centers, beautification, tourism database, shopping centers, numerous and various water parks
7	Infrastructure drivers	Health network, infrastructure, regional transportation network, urban transportation network, stadiums, equipped sports halls, emerging sports phenomena and technologies

**Table 2. MDI Matrix**

Matrix Dimension	Repetition	No Effect	Effective	Reinforcing	Capability	Filling degree	Total
50*50	2	641	611	786	462	74/36	1859

The results of cross-effects analysis based on the MDI and MII matrices showed that many relationships, including media, new advertising methods, diversity in advertising, stadiums, venues and sports venues, parks, multiple and varied water poles, conferences and seminars, growth and literacy rates in the country, sports privatization, recreation centers, increased income, urban transportation network and the existence of the Razavi shrine play an important role in improving system relationships. These factors are the most important and influential indicators in the development of Mashhad's tourism industry and the future of Mashhad's tourism industry depends on the development of these drivers. In addition, as it is evident from the scattering of variables, 13 of these factors are in the first zone with high impact and least level of being influenced. These include: emerging phenomena and technologies in sports, tourism laws and regulations, inter-sectoral co-operation, regional transport network, macro-government policies, sanctions reduction and economic development of the country, funding, interacting with universities, endorsement of players and

celebrities, public safety in the area, cost-effectiveness, provincial Premier League teams and reduced restrictions. Considering the conditions of Mashhad metropolis, it is necessary to pay attention to these factors. Indicators and variables such as natural waterfalls and attractions and hiking, skilled manpower, technical knowledge of managers, tourism databases, shopping malls, entrepreneurship, increased management of sport, amenities, museums, zoos, attention to gender equality in sports and leisure, health networking and increased life expectancy lack a key role in the formation of Mashhad's metropolitan tourism industry organization, but they should not be completely forgotten.

Indicators and variables such as tourism master plan, increasing health costs and self-care importance, sporting events, urban green space, favorable climate, environment, attention to social and physical health components and landscapes with hiking abilities are more influential and less being influenced and are somehow influenced by the relationships between other key drivers and indicators (Figures 2, 3, 4, 5, 6).

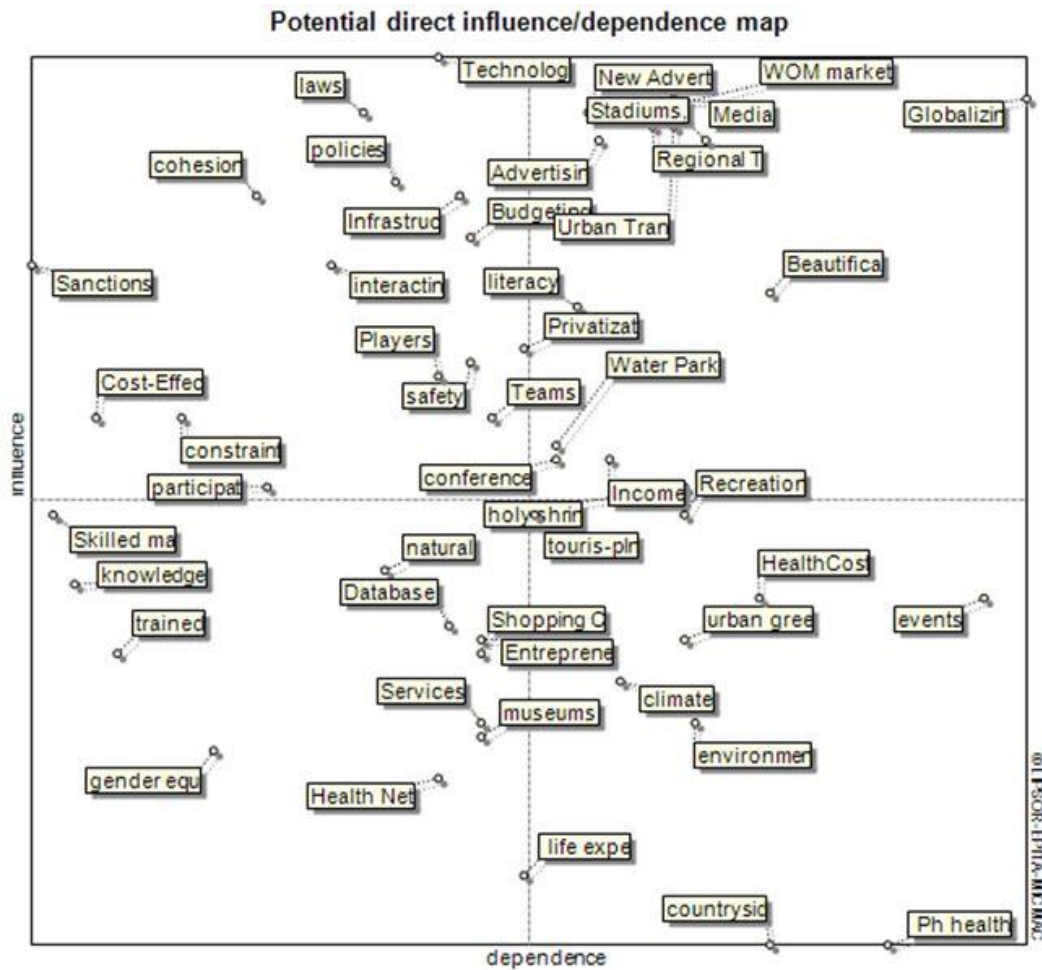


Figure 2. Distribution of Variables Proportional to the Extent of Their Impact

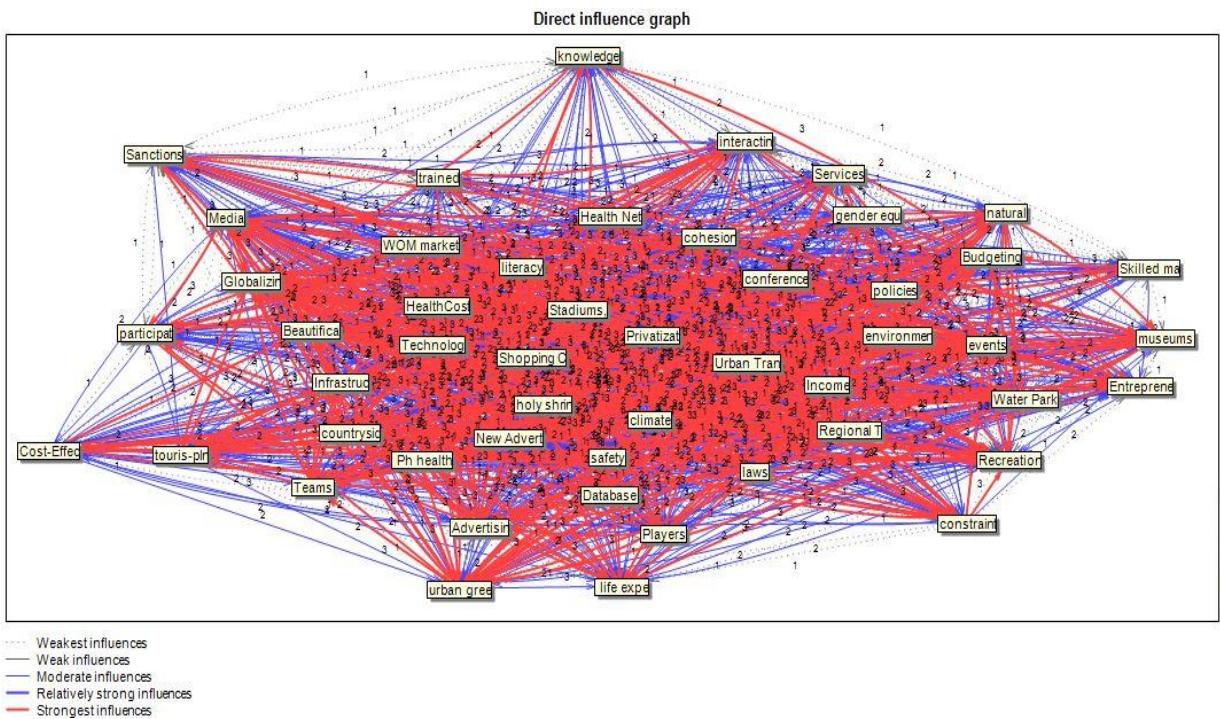


Figure 3. Direct Relationships Between Variables with 100% Coverage (Very Weak to Very Strong Effects)







presented by the Wizard Scenario include four highly rated scenarios and the probability of further occurrence in Mashhad's sports tourism industry, of which the first scenario shows promising and desirable conditions, the next two scenarios being relatively favorable and intermediate and the fourth scenario shows the critical and unfavorable situation for the future of sports tourism in Mashhad. [Table 3](#) shows the high adaptation scenarios and probable statuses of each key factor, and [Table 4](#) shows the adaptation value corresponding to the probable statuses of each of the key factors that, according to the results, privatization in sport had the most Compatibility in the field of sports tourism industry in Mashhad.

## DISCUSSION

The tourism industry is one of the major industries in the world. It is one of the important elements of sustainable development and a great opportunity for cultural, economic and social promotion of cities. Meanwhile, sport plays an important role in attracting tourists, which should be guided by rigorous planning for development of sport tourism to make the most of the benefits of attracting tourists. Nowadays, in the planning and management of sport tourism development, the use of new futures research methods, especially scenarios, has been instrumental in formulating flexible strategies for solving territorial problems. It is imperative to think about the future for man's current work and actions. Reaction is possible without thinking about the future, but action is not possible because action needs to predict. Therefore, future images (aspirations, goals, intentions, hopes, worries and aspirations) are the forerunners of our current actions; the future is something that people can design and shape with their purposeful actions. In order to act wisely, people need to be aware of the consequences of their actions and that of others and examine the reactions of others and forces outside their control. These consequences only show themselves in the future. This plays a significant role in improving the sports tourism industry.

With the advent of the new millennium, the sports tourism industry has begun a new era, and despite the many problems ahead, it is expected to add to its importance in the global economic system, so policymakers must constantly address the underlying issues surrounding the growth, direction and impact of this industry in the future.

According to the aforementioned, the purpose of the study was to guide the future scenario planning of the sports tourism industry in Mashhad. After interviews and analyses by Mic-Mac Software and scenario wizards, the effective variables on this industry have been identified and the relationships among these variables have been obtained and we discussed these variables and their relationships.

Based on the findings, Scenario 1 is the best driving scenario for the development of sports tourism in Mashhad. With this scenario, 100% of the determinants of sports tourism development will be realized. All 11 key factors in this scenario are desirable key factors and none of them were in a static or critical state. In this scenario, all the key factors are positive and, over time, there are positive changes in the development of sports tourism in the province.

Possible situations in this scenario are: proper utilization of all types of media, application of new and varied advertising methods, establishment and refurbishment of sports facilities and water parks for men and women throughout Mashhad, various sport related conferences and seminars, enhancing the growth of people's literacy, paying great attention to the privatization of sport in Mashhad, creating a variety of attractive and entertaining recreational centers for the general public, raising the income of the population and reducing inflation, proper organization of transport in and out of the city and the existence of the Razavi holy shrine. All of these factors have a great positive impact on Mashhad's sports tourism development factors. These factors are the most important and influential indicators in the development of Mashhad's tourism industry and the future of Mashhad's tourism industry depends on the development of these drivers. One of the advantages of Mashhad's metropolis compared to its neighboring cities and similar provincial capitals is the availability of modern and up-to-date sports equipment such as stadiums, halls and sports venues, numerous and varied water parks in this city. Saffdell et al. (2014) also emphasized that from the perspective of experts and managers, effective factors in the development of sports tourism with emphasis on natural sport attractions include tourism and pilgrimage attractions, natural healing and hot water attractions and summer sports are the most important topics in Khorasan Razavi that needs to

be exploited with the greatest potential in clever planning (19).

Studies conducted in other provinces of Iran also confirmed the above results, as Mousavi et al. (2018) used scenario wizards to develop scenarios of factors affecting tourism development in West Azerbaijan province (20). They found that four scenarios had the most impact and, among them, the first one explained the favorable and driving scenario, the second one was intermediate and the other two expressed the critical state of tourism in West Azerbaijan Province. Moreover, Pursohrab and Zali (2018) with a research called Regional Development Predictability with Integrated Scenario Approach and SWOT Analytical Model, Case Study: Guilan Province - achieved 5 Final Scenarios out of which the first 3 scenarios were optimal and the last two are critical situations for the future of the province (21). This type of research shows how important the future study of an industry can be so as to realize the scenarios that lead to critical situations and prevent them. Now, with proper planning, we can achieve the ideal goals in sports tourism in Mashhad.

Undoubtedly, the most important tourist attraction in Mashhad for more than one billion Muslims worldwide is the presence of the holy shrine of Hazrat Reza in this city. So, with managerial and thoughtful planning, we can use this enormous potential to promote the culture of sports tourism and system development and health in our beloved country as well as around the world. Furthermore, we can export this good culture to all over the world using the best of word-of-mouth marketing.

However, Olsen et al. (2008) believe that religious tourism is an emerging phenomenon and there is a need in terms of human resource education and training, and employing highly educated, specialized and trained people in terms of social and cultural attitudes in the future so that Mashhad's metropolitan tourism becomes a voluntary ambassador for spreading Razavi sports tourism culture to other parts of our country, Asia and even the world (22). In this regard, Mirzazadeh and Abdolmaleki (1395), who also examined the barriers to sports tourism in Mashhad, emphasized the necessity of education at the city level and universities (23). According to them, as far as there are no training in the city for the public and experts ideas are not used in this regard, one cannot expect a lot from the

emergence of sport tourism in this city. Mehdizadeh et al. (2014) used SWOT model of sports tourism in Mashhad and found that in prioritizing the indicators, economic and marketing indicators are more effective than other indicators in sport tourism in Mashhad (24). Saffdell et al. (2014) also emphasized the important role of the holy shrine of Razavi in attracting sport-religious tourists to Khorasan Razavi province (19). Pilgrimage places are effective in attracting tourism and making them aware of the impacts of tourism industry development and removing obstacles and restrictions on Khorasan Razavi province.

Advertising has always played an important and decisive role in the marketing world, as many scholars such as Ganjoui et al. (2017) have considered advertising and public relations as the first and second priority in creating awareness and knowledge in sports tourism (25). Advertising is especially important to create a desire to promote sales and build confidence, buy, sell, and conduct direct marketing. Given the fierce competition and rapid growth of markets as well as rapid changes in consumer behaviors, newer advertising methods need to be adopted day by day to achieve the main goals of sports tourism, which is to create social vigor and community health. The media has always been one of the most prominent advertising tools of the day. According to Rahimi et al. (2016) research, the needs of today's world and the tourism industry is to use media, especially Internet media, to promote tourism (26). The important role of media in tourism has been well documented in many studies, for example Javid and Asadi (2018) showed that mass media play the most role in human resource training and sports tourism marketing, as well as Ramonau et al. (2008), in their research, identified the Internet as the most important tool in representing the security of tourism destinations (27).

Accordingly, it is necessary for relevant authorities to develop sports tourism in Mashhad by creating appropriate media platforms for mass media as well as designing secure and up-to-date internet platforms equipped with online translation system in all languages of the world. Furthermore, investment in emerging social media such as Instagram and etc can enhance sports tourism potentials of the city of Mashhad and familiarize the domestic and foreign tourists with it and encourage them to attend this beautiful and religious-athletic city.

Increasing the literacy rate in the country leads to a need for specialized seminars in different disciplines in order to keep up to date with the information of students, professors and professionals of every discipline, including sports marketing and management and more specifically leisure and sports tourism. In order to benefit from the valuable presence of sports professionals in Mashhad, comprehensive planning is needed with the cooperation of major and prominent Mashhad universities such as Ferdowsi University, Islamic Azad University and more. Andam et al. (2015) presented a multi-dimensional measurement model to evaluate the quality of sports tourism services by providing empirical evidence from sports conferences as a sports tourism event and proved that participants in more than one day sport conferences are considered as sport tourists (28). They identified effective factors in the perceived quality of these tourists' services. Metani (2018) goes a step further by introducing media literacy and examining it in tourism. He states that media literacy in Mazandaran province plays a role in the management and planning of tourism only to the extent of publishing photos and images of tourist attractions and providing some tourism services. This important role must be highlighted day by day in order to witness the growth of tourism in this province.

## CONCLUSION

Emerging phenomena and technologies in Sport, Tourism Laws, integration and inter-sectoral co-operation, regional transport network, macro-government policies, sanction reduction and development of the country's economy, budget, interaction with universities, endorsement of players and celebrities, public safety in the region, cost-effectiveness, existence of provincial Premier League teams and the reduction of restrictions are in the first zone and these factors have high effectiveness and are least affected, which should be taken into consideration with regard to Mashhad metropolitan conditions. Zali and Atrian (2016) in their research, "tourism scenario writing in Hamadan city" considered factors such as: instability features and changes in government policies, restrictive laws, increased tourism budget share, increased provision of appropriate financial facilities, restriction on information networks, media, moderate use of information technology, growing conflicts more than interactions, creating human resources

training programs, supporting current investors, upgrading and improving tourism infrastructure facilities, enhancing cultural conflicts and etc. as effective on the future of Hamedan tourism and believed that these factors are put in a scenario that follow a slow process of change and should be maintained in the status quo in the future. Although the scenario presented by these researchers is quite reasonable, it should not be overlooked that other factors such as sanctions, laws and regulations related to sports tourism should be taken into consideration given the current difficult economic conditions of Iran. Therefore, the relevant authorities may need to plan and predict such changes in the environment, so that the factors will not threaten the sports tourism industry in Mashhad.

Furthermore, cohesion and collaboration between departments is one of the most important factors of Mashhad's sports tourism development, but Mirzazadeh and Abdolmaleki (2017) showed that there is no strategic planning and coordination between organizations responsible for sports tourism such as municipality, administration of sport or youth, cultural heritage, etc. to integrate the support and management of sports tourism in Mashhad. Considering the high importance and influence of this factor, it is necessary for one of the organizations to first take responsibility for this important issue for the development of sports tourism in Mashhad metropolitan area and establish coordination among other organizations and their departments in order to increase the growth of tourists in the near future. Indicators and variables such as natural waterfalls and attractions and hiking, skilled manpower, technical knowledge of managers, tourism databases, shopping malls, entrepreneurship, increased educated individual in sport management, amenities, museum, zoos, attention to gender equality in sports and leisure, health network and increased life expectancy lack a key role in the formation of Mashhad's metropolitan tourism industry organization, but should not be completely forgotten. The four-season climate in Mashhad has always been one of the tourist attractions of this city, which has attracted many tourists, especially in the areas of Torghabe and Shandiz. There are also beautiful waterfalls that fall on the bed of igneous rocks in the mountains around Mashhad which can be properly planned for and hardware and software facilities in addition to suitable places for recreation and natural beauty should be considered for rock climbing and holding classes.

Similarly, the existence of high mountains like Binalood around Mashhad has made this city one of the main targets of hikers throughout the country. With proper planning, this huge potential can be used to attract sports tourists from abroad. The presence of large and beautiful shopping malls in the city of Mashhad is another strength of this city that can establish a centralized and modern shopping center with specialized clothing and sports accessories to attract in order to attract the sport tourist in the near future. It can change to the shopping center for Iranian and Middle Eastern and increased training of sports management, sports marketing, leisure management in sports and sports tourism in this city as well as increasing technical knowledge of senior managers of Mashhad metropolitan organizations can accelerate this critical and long process.

Indicators and variables such as tourism master plan, increasing health costs and self-care importance, sporting events, urban green space, favorable climate, environment, attention to social and physical health components, landscapes with hiking abilities are more influential and less influenced and somehow affect the relationships between other key drivers and indicators. Since these categories are more influential than being influenced, they require constant monitoring as these indices are unwittingly and unintentionally altered by other indices.

In general, it can be argued that Mashhad metropolitan area has great potential for attracting sports tourists in the near future with great human, natural and religious potentials which requires more attention from respected authorities in sport. Considering the religious city of Mashhad and the presence of eighth Imam, the merging of the spiritual space of the city with the morality and chivalry of the sport will also help to expand this issue which should be further explored in further research regarding how to explain Razavi ethics and the use of the spiritual space of Mashhad affect tourism and helps to attract sports tourism. Moreover, the

respected researchers can provide the authorities with a detailed plan to guide the direction of sports tourism in the city of Mashhad. Future researchers also need to compare the capacities and successes of Mashhad metropolitan in terms of attracting sports tourists to similar cities and the so-called sister cities of Mashhad such as Qom, Isfahan and Shiraz.

### APPLICABLE REMARKS

- Developing a comprehensive plan for sports tourism in Mashhad.
- Use of media and advertising interactions - One of the most important steps in the development of the sports tourism industry in the metropolitan area of Mashhad, is to introduce different opportunities, capabilities, attractions and possibilities of sports tourism in the city and province to the domestic and foreign visitors. The media are the benefactors of this movement by playing an influential role in the quantitative and qualitative developments in various aspects of life and in the development of communication from different aspects.
- Use of experts as well as the cooperation of academics, elites, researchers and students in different areas of Mashhad sports tourism industry development.
- Holding training classes and specialized conferences and seminars to promote the culture of sports tourism in the indigenous community based on domestic and foreign sports tourism.
- Investing in the private sector.
- Increasing recreational amenities and infrastructure facilities; strategies for developing sports tourism will require a balanced growth, that is, the increase in the number of sports tourists require increase in the infrastructure.
- Investing in transportation and boosting in and out of city transportation.

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