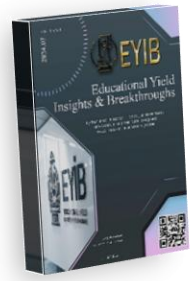
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THE ROLE OF SUSTAINABLE SPORT TOURISM IN REGIONAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN UZBEKISTAN

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Annotatsiya

Sport Tourism is an emerging sector of tourism. Uzbekistan has huge potential for sport tourism due to a range of sporting activities available. This includes mountainous regions, lakes, desert areas, historic cities, traditional sports and developing event infrastructure. Sport tourism can encourage tourists to visit more rural areas, increase their length of stay, increase local businesses and improve the destination. This article will look at how sustainable sport tourism can be used to develop tourism in Uzbekistan. A qualitative approach was taken and research was carried out using academic and policy sources. Sport tourism can create new employment opportunities, provide diversity to the tourism sector, make use of natural and cultural resources and combat seasonality. In order to make sport tourism successful in the long term it is important to consider community involvement, sustainability of natural resources, suitable infrastructure, safe environments and working with other sectors.

Kalit so'zlar: sport tourism, sustainable tourism, regional tourism development, active tourism, adventure tourism, sports events, local communities, Uzbekistan.

Introduction

Tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors of the global economy and an important tool for regional development. Modern tourists are looking for more from their holidays and are seeking more interactive, educational and engaging activities. One of the most appealing activities is sport. Activities such as hiking, trekking, cycling, climbing, skiing, running and rafting can encourage people to visit places they wouldn't have otherwise. Sport tourism is now seen as its own market sector of tourism with its own stakeholders, products and development needs. It attracts a large amount of tourists, but also valuable tourists. Active tourists and sports enthusiasts often travel in groups and families, staying for longer, spending more on accommodation, food, transport and equipment and are keen to return to the same place for another event/season. Sports can be a key part of creating a positive image for a destination, using the media and word of mouth from those participating. Sports can be classed as a form of cultural activity and can help further develop the region. There are many facilities available in Uzbekistan for this type of tourism. The mountain ranges of

Tashkent region, such as Chatkal range, Chimgan and Charvak area can be used for hiking, trekking, climbing, paragliding and winter sports. Water based activities and fishing can be done at lakes, reservoirs and rivers. The beautiful steppe and desert areas of Kyzylkum and Karakalpakstan can be used for cycling, jeep and camel trails. The country has a rich sporting culture with many national sports and games such as kurash, horse sports and sporting competitions during national holidays. This shows that there is both modern and traditional sporting tourism available in the country. Recently there has been an increase in sports within Uzbekistan. New stadiums, sports complexes, ski and mountain resorts have been created. International competitions are being held more regularly in Tashkent and other cities. The country has become more accessible with visa facilitation, improvements to the air and rail links and new hotels and guesthouses. In large cities such as Tashkent, Samarkand and Bukhara there is the opportunity to host marathons, cycling and competitions. This can also be done in smaller areas. This gives an opportunity to integrate sport into the culture of the countries. As sport is the main attraction in the country it is a great opportunity. For example, the second Tashkent International Half Marathon was held in September 2026. This had a total of around 24,500 athletes. Over 2000 international athletes from 50 different countries (Tourism Committee of Uzbekistan, 2026). By using local guides, guesthouses, restaurants, equipment and transport sustainable relationships can be formed with the local community. This will help small businesses and encourage tourists to visit areas they wouldn't normally. Young people will benefit from sport tourism as they are motivated and can become guides, instructors, coaches, volunteers and organisers. Local people will also benefit from improved sporting facilities, roads and services. These have been set up for tourists however are now being used on a daily basis. Risks of sport tourism include pressure on the sensitive mountainous and desert areas, water and waste due to the high numbers involved. If sport is not managed well there could be accidents. If only a few large companies or external investors are making money then the local community will not benefit. Large events can be expensive and facilities may not be used. Sport tourism can also be affected by the weather and seasons. This research will look at how sport can be balanced with nature, culture and local development. This article looks at how sustainable sport tourism can be implemented to increase tourism in the regions of Uzbekistan. By involving the local community, looking after the environment, using resources appropriately and providing safe and quality services. This study looks at economical, cultural, social and environmental factors. Providing practical advice for tourism organisations and local authorities.

Literature review

Sport tourism has been widely discussed in the literature. Gibson (1998) defines sport tourism as "travel outside a person's community for leisure purposes to participate in sport, observe sport or religious activities". Research by Gibson found there are 3 types of sport tourism; active sport tourism, event sport tourism and nostalgic sport tourism. This is still widely used as it distinguishes between tourists who want to participate, observe or visit sport sites and museums. This also shows that different services will be required for each type. Research by Standeven and De Knop (1999) and Bull and Weed (2003) has shown there has been a long history of sport and tourism being divided in policy and management. They are however interdependent. Sport tourism is seen as "complex interrelationships between activities, people and

places" (Bull and Weed). They focused on the importance of people, policy and providers. This research is important for regional development as it shows how sport tourism can only be successful if there is cooperation between sporting organisations, tourism businesses and public authorities. Gammon and Robinson (2003) developed a conceptual framework to show the difference between sport tourism and tourist sport. Sport tourism is when the primary reason for travel is due to sport whilst tourist sport is when sport is a secondary activity. This is useful for developing destinations as those travelling for sport will require specialised facilities, staff and events. Those travelling for sport as a secondary activity will want something simple, safe and accessible. Destinations such as Uzbekistan who are known for cultural tourism can begin to offer sport as a secondary activity and begin to develop products for sport motivated tourists. Higham and Hinch (2018) looked at the spatial, temporal and destination characteristics of sport tourism developments. This demonstrates how natural resources can have a major impact on what a destination has to offer and how many tourists can be sustained. For countries with mountainous and desert regions it shows that they have to make sure that resources are suitable for the activity and taking into consideration carrying capacity. Research into adventure and outdoor tourism has shown that risk management, skilled guides and clear information is an important part of the product. Event tourism has been a major area of research. Getz (2008) concluded that planned events are a key driver in tourism. This can help improve the destination image, increase the number of tourists and reduce seasonality. Research into large and small scale sporting events has shown that the economic impact will depend on the size of event, how many external tourists are attracted to the event and how many local suppliers are used. The idea of legacy has been identified by researchers. This means that events can leave a lasting impact on the infrastructure, skills, pride and tourism image of the area. Smaller recurring events are often seen to be more sustainable. Getz and Page (2016) looked into the development and future of event tourism research. Deery, Jago and Fredline (2004) questioned whether sport and event tourism were the same area. This is relevant as there will be many sport tourists attending events. Sustainability is a major part of sport tourism research. Sustainability is an important aspect to consider in tourism. UNEP and World Tourism Organization (2005) state that tourism should maximise environmental resources, while respecting the sociocultural authenticity of the host community and providing long term economic benefits. This could be done in sport tourism by ensuring natural areas are protected, the number of participants is limited and there is a positive impact on the local community. Research has shown it is important to involve the local community in the planning process to gain their support which will ensure the long term success of the tourism product. Research has also been conducted into the foundations and pathways of sport tourism and sustainable destinations (Hinch, Higham and Moyle, 2018). This shows sustainability is a key part of sport tourism. There has been little research into sport tourism within Uzbekistan however this is increasing. Mamadaliyev (2024) gives an insight into the current state of sport and wellness mountain tourism within Uzbekistan and links this to public health and economic growth. It also suggests ways to ensure sustainable growth. Mamadaliyev and Yallaqayev (2024) discuss various types of extreme sports tourism and ways to attract regular tourists. G'ofurov (2023) looks at organisational and social pedagogical principles for developing sports tourism. Safarov

(2024) discusses ways to develop sports marketing within Uzbekistan. Official sources also show increased focus on this topic. In September 2025 the Tourism Committee of Uzbekistan had a round table on active/sports tourism. A roadmap was provided stating the creation of a national coordination centre, digital platform for routes and permits, specialised rescue service and training and certification for instructors and guides (Tourism Committee of Uzbekistan, 2025). Overall it appears the main requirements would be coordination, safety and trained staff. There are many references to sport being an important aspect to branding and culture. Traditional sporting games can be seen as intangible cultural assets. If presented to tourists well, they can be preserved by enabling the community to manage the presentation. Sport can be used as a unique way of branding a destination, attracting tourists looking for authentic experiences. Uzbekistan has great potential for developing sport tourism. The country has a variety of landscapes, famous cultural attractions and is now investing more into its tourism and sport infrastructure. Samarkand and Bukhara are famous tourist attractions however there is opportunity to link these to active experiences in the surrounding rural and mountainous areas. There are many factors to consider including community involvement, local economy, environmental preservation and tourist safety. This research explores many factors associated with sport being used as a resource to develop tourism in the regions.

Methodology

This research has used a qualitative approach. As the aim was to understand and explain the role of sport tourism within regional development descriptive analysis and literature reviews have been used. This is suitable as the topic includes tourism, sport, culture and environmental aspects. Sport tourism is a new topic within Uzbekistan. References were searched for on sport tourism, sustainable tourism development, event tourism, adventure and outdoor tourism and regional development. Books, journal articles and international organisation guidelines were looked at to compare the main concepts, categories and findings. Information was taken into account about the natural and cultural aspects of Uzbekistan to apply the general theory to the country. This research looked at four main factors within sustainable sport tourism. These are economic, cultural, social and environmental. This will show what benefits could be gained from sport tourism. The economic factor looked at how sport tourism can create jobs within the area. This would help small businesses, guides, equipment suppliers, accommodation and the local supply chain. The cultural factor looked at how traditional sports, games and local culture are maintained. The social factor looked at how the local community, family run business and local knowledge holders are involved with tourism. The environmental factor looked at how natural areas are maintained, how many visitors there are, how much water and energy is used and how waste is minimised. Examples have been taken from Uzbekistan to demonstrate the variety of sport tourism. The mountainous areas of Tashkent offer opportunities for hiking and winter sports. Cycling and rural tourism can be found in the Fergana valley and other areas. Adventure tourism can be found in the desert areas. Running events and tournaments can be found in the historic cities of Samarkand and Bukhara. This example was used to demonstrate the variety of resources available and at what level each region has developed their tourism industry. As this research was based on secondary data and conceptual analysis, no interviews, questionnaires or statistical

analysis were used. This is a limitation of this research as it is unable to show exactly how sport tourism has affected the economy of each region. However, it does demonstrate areas that could be developed to encourage tourism through sustainable sport tourism and provides a basis for future quantitative research.

Findings

There are many positive impacts of sustainable sport tourism. Firstly, it can create a unique brand. Each region will have its own unique characteristics, such as landscapes, climates and traditions. This can create many opportunities, for example mountainous regions can offer trekking and skiing whilst valleys and cities can offer cycling and running. Secondly, local businesses such as guides, instructors, guest houses, restaurants, transport and equipment hire will all benefit from participants and spectators. This can help create strong relationships between tourism businesses and local businesses. Thirdly, it can help to reduce seasonality. Winter sports, hiking and cycling can be offered during the spring and autumn. Events can be created outside of the busy summer months. Fourthly, it can help to preserve traditions. National sport displays, festivals and community events can encourage young people to get involved. Skilled trainers and athletes can be recognised and earn money. Lastly, it can encourage diversification. Events and routes can be created to offer tourists different areas. This can benefit rural regions if they have the correct resources and willingness. Sustainable sport tourism can create eco friendly activities for example small groups, clear trails, local services and less waste. This will greatly depend on how the activities are planned, managed and monitored. There are many challenges to overcome for example uneven infrastructure, lack of certified guides/instructors, safety and rescue services, poor marketing online and pressure on natural areas. This shows that just because a region has natural and sport resources does not mean it will develop. Careful planning is required to ensure cultural, economical, social and environmental aims are met.

Discussion

Sport tourism can provide tourists with an active and authentic experience. This can involve trekking with local guides, cycling around villages, traditional sports displays and participating in sporting events. It is important to consider the region. Uzbekistan has a diverse landscape meaning there are many products available. Samarkand and Bukhara are well known for their culture and heritage but provide sport packages such as running, cycling and sporting events. Other areas provide mountainous areas, lakes, country roads and traditional sport packages. This can help boost tourism within the country. Sport tourism can help link tourists to local products and small businesses. Hotels and guest houses can use local produce, transport and services. How involved local businesses are will depend on how involved they are. Policies can be put in place to provide training, certifications and partnerships between sporting organisations and hospitality businesses, providing genuine opportunities. It is important to be cautious when considering culture and nature. Traditional sport should not be made into a show for tourists. Local communities should have a say in how they wish to display traditional sport. Sustainability should also be considered. Large events can cause issues with water, waste, transport and fragile landscapes. Limitations should be put in place to limit the amount of tourists, ensuring trails are safe and waste is managed. This will be most successful when tourism organisations work closely with local authorities, sporting federations, businesses and communities.

Partnerships will need to be in place between regions to create routes, events and festivals. Technology can be used with multilingual resources to provide information. Promotion should be supported with quality service, safety and realistic expectations. Limitations This is secondary research so cannot provide accurate information on how sport tourism has impacted employment, income to households, spending and the environment in specific regions of Uzbekistan. Further research can be done by interviewing local guides and operators, using questionnaires with participants and spectators and comparing popular destinations with new destinations. Overall sport tourism can provide many benefits but must be well implemented to ensure locals are involved, nature is protected and there is a good balance with commercial aims.

Conclusion

Sport tourism can play a key role in developing tourism in regions of Uzbekistan. It can provide a thrilling way to promote local areas such as nature and culture, increase local businesses and create more activities for tourists. The country has a variety of different products to offer due to the different landscapes (mountains, lakes, deserts) and historic cities and sporting culture. Sport tourism can create more opportunities for local guides, small businesses and service providers. It can also create new jobs for young people. It can help to reduce seasonality by encouraging tourists to stay longer and visit other areas outside of the main cultural areas. This can only be done if there is community involvement, appropriate facilities, trained and certified staff, safety and rescue measures and good links between tourism, sport and public sectors. Resources will not automatically be developed. Strategies should be put in place in the regions. These should include clear outdoor/cycling routes, community sport, regular sporting events with a clear sustainability strategy, responsible management of natural areas, local guides and entrepreneurs and more promotion via online means and multilingual. Events should be planned to ensure facilities and skills are still beneficial to the locals. This should be specific to each region and worked on with local communities. As this study has used secondary sources and there is no primary data from the field further research can be carried out. This can look at how demand varies between regions, the impact sport tourism can have on local households economically, opinions of locals and tourists and the environmental impact of tourism businesses and events. Overall sport can be seen as an attractive asset and a living resource which can be used sustainably within the region. This will help Uzbekistan develop into a more diverse and inclusive tourism industry.

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