



How can adventure sports be developed in emerging countries

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Abstract

The development of adventure sports can increase recreation and improve the health of society. It can also attract domestic and foreign sports tourists, leading to economic prosperity for the country. Additionally, adventure tourism can create permanent employment opportunities for young people and serve as an important source of foreign exchange. This research aimed to examine how the development of adventure sports is formed in emerging countries. The research method used was qualitative, and thematic analysis procedures from Braun & Clarke (2006) were employed. The study involved a statistical population of champions and coaches of adventure sports, as well as managers of nature tours and zip lines in the IRAN (N=23). Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with the participants. The research findings identified seven main themes (management factors, infrastructural factors, cultural and social factors, financial and economic factors, natural features, supporting factors, and the construction of adventure parks) and seventeen sub-themes. Therefore, the results suggest that organizations responsible for sports and tourism should adopt a broader perspective when considering these factors. They should take basic steps based on the extracted findings to address any inadequacies and shortcomings in order to promote the development of adventure sports.

Keywords: Adventure sports, construction of adventure parks, emerging countries, tourism, Iran

Introduction

Sport tourism has emerged as one of the most dynamic and rapidly expanding sectors of the global tourism industry, contributing substantially to economic growth, destination competitiveness, and regional development. Over the past three decades, sport tourism has evolved from a niche recreational activity into a strategic development tool capable of generating employment, attracting investment, enhancing destination image, and stimulating local economies (Poudel *et al.*, 2018; Hritz & Franzidis, 2018). As tourism demand increasingly shifts from passive sightseeing toward immersive and experience-based consumption, adventure tourism has gained considerable attention among both researchers and practitioners. This transition reflects broader changes in tourist behavior, whereby travelers increasingly seek authentic, emotionally engaging, and transformative experiences that combine physical activity with interaction in natural environments (Gardiner & Kwek, 2017).

Within this context, adventure sport tourism has become one of the fastest-growing segments of contemporary tourism. Adventure sports encompass a diverse range of activities characterized by varying degrees of physical challenge, uncertainty, exploration, and perceived risk. Unlike conventional tourists who primarily engage in observation-oriented experiences, adventure tourists actively pursue novelty, achievement, self-discovery, and personal development through participation in sport-based activities (Eastbrook & Collins, 2020) ^[17]. Consequently, adventure sports have become increasingly important in shaping tourism experiences and influencing destination attractiveness, particularly in regions endowed with unique natural resources and environmental assets.

Beyond their experiential value, adventure sports generate substantial economic, social, and environmental benefits. Previous studies have demonstrated that adventure tourism

can stimulate local entrepreneurship, create employment opportunities, diversify regional economies, and encourage infrastructure development, particularly in rural and peripheral destinations (Buckley, 2012). Furthermore, because many adventure activities are closely linked to natural environments, they contribute to environmental awareness and promote responsible interactions with ecological resources (Pomfret & Bramwell, 2016). As a result, adventure sport tourism has increasingly been recognized as a mechanism for achieving sustainable development objectives by simultaneously supporting economic prosperity, social well-being, and environmental conservation (Weaver, 2001).

Despite the growing importance of adventure sport tourism, its development remains highly dependent on a complex set of interrelated factors involving infrastructure, governance, stakeholder collaboration, environmental resources, community engagement, and financial investment. Existing research has predominantly focused on tourist motivations, risk perceptions, destination experiences, and behavioral outcomes (Buckley, 2012; Bui & Kiatkawsin, 2020). Although these studies have substantially enhanced understanding of adventure tourism demand, considerably less attention has been devoted to examining the structural and institutional conditions that facilitate or constrain the development of adventure sport tourism destinations, particularly in developing countries.

This limitation is particularly evident in countries possessing substantial natural tourism resources but facing institutional, managerial, and infrastructural challenges. Iran represents a notable example in this regard. The country possesses exceptional geographical diversity, including extensive mountain ranges, deserts, forests, rivers, coastlines, and protected natural areas that provide favorable conditions for a wide variety of adventure sport activities. Nevertheless, despite these considerable natural advantages,

the development of adventure sport tourism in Iran remains relatively underexplored and underdeveloped. Challenges related to infrastructure provision, governance arrangements, investment mechanisms, stakeholder coordination, environmental management, and public participation continue to limit the sector's growth potential. Consequently, a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing adventure sport tourism development is essential for unlocking the country's tourism capacities and enhancing its competitiveness in the international tourism market.

From a theoretical perspective, the present study draws upon Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984) and Sustainable Development Theory (WCED, 1987) to explain the multidimensional nature of adventure sport tourism development. Stakeholder Theory suggests that successful destination development depends upon effective collaboration among multiple actors, including governmental agencies, sport organizations, tourism authorities, private investors, local communities, environmental institutions, and tourists. Simultaneously, Sustainable Development Theory emphasizes the necessity of balancing economic growth, social equity, and environmental protection to ensure long-term destination viability. Together, these theoretical perspectives provide an appropriate framework for understanding how diverse actors, resources, and institutional arrangements contribute to the development of adventure sport tourism.

Given the limited empirical evidence concerning the developmental requirements of adventure sport tourism in emerging tourism destinations, the present study seeks to identify and explain the key factors influencing the development of adventure sport tourism in Iran through a qualitative thematic analysis approach. By exploring the experiences and perspectives of experts, athletes, and practitioners, this study contributes to the literature in three important ways. First, it extends existing knowledge by identifying the multidimensional factors shaping adventure sport tourism development in a developing-country context. Second, it integrates stakeholder and sustainability perspectives to provide a comprehensive conceptual understanding of destination development processes. Third, it offers practical insights for policymakers, tourism planners, sport managers, and investors seeking to promote sustainable and competitive adventure tourism destinations.

Theoretical Foundations and Literature Review

Adventure tourism is recognized as one of the fastest-growing segments of the global tourism market. Beyond attracting high-value tourists, it contributes to local economic development, supports entrepreneurship, promotes employment creation, and encourages sustainable destination management (UNWTO, 2014). Furthermore, adventure tourism has the capacity to attract both domestic and international visitors throughout different seasons of the year, thereby reducing seasonal fluctuations and creating more stable economic opportunities for local communities (Visser, 2016). For example, approximately one hundred million international adventure tourism trips are undertaken annually by European travelers, with a substantial proportion of tourism expenditures being spent directly within destination communities, thereby contributing to local economic growth and development (Kelly, 2021).

A growing body of literature has examined different dimensions of adventure tourism and adventure sports. Within Iran, researchers have investigated topics related to tourism development, environmental capacities, management challenges, and opportunities associated with adventure sports (Ghezelsefloo *et al.*, 2021; Karimi *et al.*, 2020^[17, 25]; Khaksari & Dehghan, 2014; Majidi *et al.*, 2020)^[17]. Similarly, international studies have explored issues such as tourist motivations, destination competitiveness, risk perception, sustainability, and experience management in adventure tourism settings (Bangari, 2024; Dar, 2014; Ebert *et al.*, 2024; Janowski *et al.*, 2021^[16]; MacKay *et al.*, 2013; Mohamed *et al.*, 2018).

The findings of previous studies indicate that destinations suitable for adventure sports typically possess distinctive environmental and geographical characteristics, including pristine natural landscapes, ecological diversity, relative remoteness, and opportunities for physically challenging activities. More importantly, these destinations provide experiences associated with excitement, uncertainty, risk, exploration, novelty, and personal challenge, which represent the core motivational drivers of adventure tourists (Moharramzadeh *et al.*, 2020)^[27].

Despite the increasing scholarly attention devoted to adventure tourism, several important gaps remain in the literature. First, most previous studies have concentrated on tourist motivations, destination attractiveness, and environmental impacts, while comparatively little attention has been given to understanding the broader developmental dimensions that influence the growth of adventure sports systems. Second, much of the existing evidence originates from developed tourism destinations, limiting our understanding of how adventure sports develop in emerging economies characterized by institutional, infrastructural, and managerial constraints. Third, previous studies have rarely adopted an integrated stakeholder-based perspective capable of explaining how environmental, economic, social, managerial, and policy-related factors collectively influence the development of adventure sports.

These limitations are particularly relevant in the context of Iran. Despite possessing exceptional natural capacities for adventure sports, including mountains, deserts, forests, caves, rivers, and coastal environments, the country continues to face numerous developmental challenges. These challenges include inadequate infrastructure, limited access to specialized equipment, shortages of trained professionals, fragmented governance structures, insufficient investment, and the absence of comprehensive development strategies. Such constraints may hinder the realization of the significant economic, social, and tourism-related benefits associated with adventure sports.

Given the strategic importance of adventure sports for tourism diversification, regional development, employment generation, and sustainable use of natural resources, there is a clear need for research that systematically identifies the factors influencing their development. Addressing this knowledge gap can contribute to both theory and practice by providing a comprehensive understanding of the developmental dimensions of adventure sports within an emerging-country context. Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to identify and explore the principal themes underlying the development of adventure sports in Iran. The findings are expected to provide evidence-based insights for policymakers, tourism planners, sport managers, investors,

and local communities seeking to promote the sustainable development of this sector.

Methodology

Given the exploratory nature of the study and the limited empirical knowledge regarding the development of adventure sport tourism in Iran, a qualitative research design was adopted. Specifically, a thematic analysis approach was employed to explore stakeholders' experiences and perceptions and to identify the key factors influencing the development of adventure sports. This approach was considered appropriate because it facilitates the systematic identification, analysis, and interpretation of recurring patterns within participants' accounts.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure the inclusion of individuals with substantial knowledge and practical experience in adventure sports. The sample consisted of 23 key stakeholders, including national-level adventure sport athletes, coaches, managers of adventure sport facilities, and operators of nature-based tourism businesses across different regions of Iran. Sampling continued until theoretical saturation was achieved, whereby no substantially new themes emerged from subsequent interviews.

Potential participants were initially contacted by telephone and invited to participate in the study. Upon obtaining their agreement, interviews were scheduled at a time and location convenient for the participants. Data were collected through face-to-face semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to elaborate on their experiences while ensuring consistency across interviews. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and lasted between 25 and 40 minutes, with an average duration of approximately 30 minutes.

The interview data were analyzed using the six-phase thematic analysis procedure proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006)^[7]. First, all interviews were transcribed verbatim and repeatedly reviewed to facilitate familiarization with the data. Second, initial codes were generated through a systematic line-by-line coding process. Third, related codes were grouped into preliminary categories. Fourth, categories were reviewed and refined into subthemes based on shared meanings and recurring patterns. Fifth, broader themes were developed and clearly defined. Finally, the themes were integrated into a coherent interpretive framework explaining the factors influencing adventure sport tourism development, supported by representative quotations from participants.

The rigor of the study was established using the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Credibility was enhanced through member checking, whereby participants reviewed interview transcripts and preliminary interpretations. Dependability was strengthened through peer examination and independent review of coding decisions by an experienced qualitative researcher. Confirmability was ensured through maintaining an audit trail documenting the research process and analytical decisions. Transferability was facilitated through detailed descriptions of the research context, participant characteristics, data collection procedures, and analytical processes, enabling readers to assess the applicability of the findings to similar contexts (Shenton, 2004)^[26].

Ethical principles were observed throughout the research process. All participants provided informed consent prior to

participation and were informed of the study's objectives, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. Participant anonymity and confidentiality were strictly maintained, and all data were used exclusively for research purposes.

Table 1: Demographics of the participants

Row	Names	Gender	Education	Age	Record
1	Mohammad	Male	B.A.	30	15
2	Farshad	Male	B.A.	32	12
3	Sirvan	Male	M.A.	29	15
4	Hossein	Male	B.A.	30	7
5	Sohrab	Male	B.A.	43	5
6	Mohsen	Male	B.A.	34	12
7	Mohammad	Male	B.A.	50	7
8	Sahib	Male	M.A.	59	40
9	Aziz	Male	Diploma	27	15
10	Ehtesham	Male	B.A.	39	14
11	Zahra	Female	B.A.	31	15
12	Hooman	Male	M.A.	40	22
13	Seid Hossein	Male	B.A.	29	12
14	Farshad	Male	B.A.	25	8
15	Mohammad	Male	B.A.	34	18
16	Ali	Male	M.A.	40	15
17	Ahoora	Male	B.A.	40	16
18	Moin	Male	B.A.	29	5
19	Arezo	Female	M.A.	37	20
20	Morteza	Male	B.A.	54	30
21	Mohsen	Male	M.A.	59	40
22	Arsalan	Male	B.A.	33	10
23	Ali	Male	M.A.	30	15

Finding

The thematic analysis of participants' experiences revealed seven overarching themes and twenty-four associated subthemes that collectively explain the developmental requirements of adventure sport tourism in Iran. These themes comprised: (1) infrastructure factors, (2) management factors, (3) utilization of natural resources and environmental assets, (4) cultural and social factors, (5) financial and economic factors, (6) institutional support and inter-organizational cooperation, and (7) development of adventure parks. Together, these dimensions illustrate a multi-level framework encompassing physical, managerial, socio-cultural, economic, and environmental determinants of adventure sport tourism development.

Themes 1: Infrastructure Factors

Infrastructure emerged as one of the most influential themes affecting the development of adventure sport tourism. Participants consistently emphasized that inadequate facilities, poor service provision, and limited access to specialized equipment significantly hinder both participation and destination attractiveness. Deficiencies in sanitary facilities, accommodation services, changing rooms, and gender-sensitive amenities were identified as major challenges, particularly in mountain climbing and motorsport activities. Participants further highlighted that inadequate waste management in natural environments negatively affects both visitor experiences and environmental sustainability.

In addition, several interviewees stressed the limited availability and high cost of specialized adventure sport equipment. International sanctions, import restrictions, and inadequate domestic production were perceived as factors

constraining access to quality equipment and limiting the country's capacity to host large-scale international competitions. These findings suggest that infrastructure deficiencies extend beyond physical facilities and encompass broader issues related to service quality, accessibility, equipment provision, and environmental management.

Themes 2. Management Factors

Management-related issues constituted another critical theme emerging from the data. Participants emphasized the importance of professional leadership, specialized expertise, and strategic planning in advancing adventure sport tourism. A recurring concern among interviewees was the appointment of non-specialist managers who lack practical experience and sufficient understanding of adventure sports. Participants argued that ineffective management not only limits athlete development and talent identification but also undermines long-term planning and organizational effectiveness. Several interviewees highlighted the absence of former athletes and experienced practitioners in managerial positions, resulting in weak communication between decision-makers and sport communities. These findings indicate that managerial competence, stakeholder representation, and evidence-based decision-making are essential prerequisites for sustainable development within the adventure tourism sector.

Themes 3. Utilization of Natural Resources and Environmental Assets

The utilization of natural landscapes emerged as a distinctive competitive advantage for adventure sport tourism development. Participants emphasized that Iran possesses a wide range of unique environmental assets, including mountains, deserts, forests, rivers, and coastal areas capable of supporting diverse adventure activities. Beyond the mere existence of these resources, participants highlighted the importance of effectively promoting natural attractions through traditional and digital media channels. Interviewees suggested that many potential destinations remain largely unknown to domestic and international visitors due to inadequate marketing and limited destination branding initiatives. Consequently, the effective presentation and promotion of natural assets were viewed as essential mechanisms for enhancing destination visibility and attracting adventure tourists.

Themes 4. Cultural and Social Factors

Cultural and social considerations emerged as another influential dimension affecting the development of adventure sport tourism. Participants highlighted the need to establish harmonious relationships between tourists and host communities, particularly in rural and environmentally sensitive regions. Interviewees reported that increased visitation occasionally creates disruptions to local livelihoods, agricultural activities, and traditional ways of life.

Consequently, participants emphasized the importance of educational programs designed to familiarize visitors with local customs, values, and environmental responsibilities. In addition, social perceptions and family attitudes toward adventure sports were identified as significant barriers to participation. Several participants noted that concerns regarding safety and risk often discourage families from

supporting their children's involvement in adventure activities. Therefore, public awareness campaigns, positive media representation, and educational initiatives were viewed as important mechanisms for fostering social acceptance and expanding participation.

Themes 5. Financial and Economic Factors

Financial and economic considerations constituted one of the most frequently discussed themes. Participants argued that insufficient investment, limited funding opportunities, and high participation costs substantially restrict the growth of adventure sport tourism. The financial burden associated with purchasing specialized equipment was considered a major barrier preventing broader participation, particularly among lower-income groups.

Furthermore, participants highlighted the absence of structured investment programs and the frequent allocation of tourism facilities to individuals lacking technical expertise. Such practices were perceived as contributing to poor-quality infrastructure and increasing safety risks. At the same time, interviewees emphasized the substantial economic benefits that adventure tourism can generate for local communities through employment creation, business development, and destination revitalization. Accordingly, both public and private investment were identified as essential drivers for improving infrastructure quality, supporting local entrepreneurship, and enhancing destination competitiveness.

Themes 6. Institutional Support and Inter Organizational Cooperation

Institutional support emerged as a distinct theme reflecting the importance of coordinated governance structures. Participants repeatedly emphasized the necessity of collaboration among sport organizations, environmental agencies, municipalities, telecommunications authorities, and other relevant stakeholders. According to the interviewees, fragmented governance structures and weak inter-organizational coordination often create operational barriers and safety challenges.

Participants also highlighted the absence of dedicated federations, specialized administrative units, and earmarked budgets for adventure sports. This institutional ambiguity was perceived as limiting strategic planning and reducing the visibility of adventure sports within national sport development agendas. These findings underscore the importance of integrated governance systems and coordinated stakeholder engagement in facilitating sustainable tourism development.

Themes 7. Development of Adventure Parks

The final theme concerned the development of adventure parks as controlled environments for introducing individuals to adventure sports. Participants viewed adventure parks as strategic facilities capable of reducing perceived risks while simultaneously increasing accessibility and participation opportunities. Such facilities were considered particularly valuable for children, adolescents, women, and families who may be hesitant to engage directly in natural adventure settings.

Interviewees further suggested that adventure parks can serve as entry points for skill development, confidence building, and experiential learning. By offering safe and supervised environments, these facilities may encourage

broad participation and foster long-term engagement in adventure sports. Consequently, participants regarded adventure parks as an effective mechanism for expanding the participant base and strengthening the future development of adventure sport tourism.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to develop a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing the development of adventure sports in Iran. Through a qualitative inquiry involving experts and stakeholders in the field, seven interrelated dimensions were identified: infrastructure factors, management factors, utilization of natural resources, cultural and social factors, financial and economic factors, institutional support, and the development of adventure parks. Taken together, these findings suggest that the development of adventure sports is a multidimensional and systemic phenomenon that extends beyond sport participation itself and is shaped by the interaction of environmental, organizational, economic, and socio-cultural conditions. By examining these factors within the Iranian context, this study contributes to the growing body of literature on adventure tourism and sport development while addressing a notable gap in research conducted in emerging adventure tourism destinations.

Among the identified dimensions, infrastructure emerged as one of the most influential determinants of adventure sports development. Participants consistently emphasized the importance of transportation systems, accommodation facilities, communication networks, safety standards, event-hosting capacity, and accessibility to adventure destinations. These findings are consistent with previous studies suggesting that tourism infrastructure represents a fundamental prerequisite for destination competitiveness and visitor satisfaction (Boroujerdi *et al.*, 2023; Rhoden & Kaaristo, 2020; Weed, 2020) [6, 24]. However, the findings of the present study extend previous research by demonstrating that infrastructure should not merely be viewed as a physical asset but rather as an integrated support system that facilitates participation, safety, destination attractiveness, and long-term sustainability.

Particularly noteworthy was the emphasis placed on safety and risk management. Participants repeatedly highlighted the need for improved emergency response systems, sanitary facilities, athlete protection measures, and safety standards in adventure tourism destinations. This finding reflects the inherently risky nature of adventure sports and supports the argument that perceived safety significantly influences participation intentions and destination choice (Buckley, 2018). Furthermore, recent research has suggested that effective risk management contributes not only to participant well-being but also to destination reputation and competitiveness (Houge Mackenzie & Brymer, 2020) [15]. Consequently, investments in safety infrastructure may generate both social and economic returns by increasing public confidence and encouraging sustained participation.

The development of transportation and communication routes also emerged as a critical issue. Consistent with previous findings (Boroujerdi *et al.*, 2023) [6], participants viewed accessibility as a key determinant of destination attractiveness. Poor road conditions, inadequate signage systems, and limited transportation networks were perceived as significant barriers to participation and tourism growth. In the context of adventure tourism, where activities

frequently occur in remote and geographically challenging environments, accessibility becomes particularly important because it influences not only visitor convenience but also emergency response capacity and destination management effectiveness.

Management factors constituted another major theme influencing the development of adventure sports. Participants emphasized the importance of strategic planning, specialized leadership, effective governance, training systems, human resource development, and monitoring mechanisms. These findings support previous studies highlighting the central role of managerial capacity in tourism and sport development (Bryson, 2018; Gaspari & Çela, 2015; Müller *et al.*, 2016) [8, 12, 22]. More specifically, respondents expressed concerns regarding the appointment of managers lacking expertise in adventure sports, suggesting that inadequate leadership may hinder innovation, reduce stakeholder trust, and limit organizational effectiveness.

The findings further indicate that adventure sports development requires a shift from traditional administrative approaches toward more specialized and evidence-based management systems. This observation aligns with contemporary theories of strategic sport management, which emphasize the importance of adaptive leadership, stakeholder engagement, and long-term planning in emerging sport sectors (Bryson, 2018) [8]. The need for specialized managers may be particularly relevant in developing countries where adventure sports often remain institutionally fragmented and lack dedicated governance structures. Therefore, establishing professional development pathways and specialized managerial training programs may represent an important step toward strengthening the sector. Another important finding concerns the role of education and human resource development. Participants emphasized the need for continuous training for athletes, coaches, tour operators, and destination managers. This finding resonates with previous research indicating that knowledge transfer and professional capacity-building contribute significantly to organizational effectiveness and tourism competitiveness (Amaize *et al.*, 2011) [4]. From a broader perspective, educational initiatives may also contribute to promoting responsible adventure tourism practices, enhancing environmental awareness, and reducing safety-related incidents.

The utilization of natural resources emerged as another central dimension. Participants viewed Iran's diverse landscapes including mountains, rivers, lakes, forests, deserts, and coastal areas as significant assets capable of supporting a wide range of adventure sport activities. This finding is consistent with previous studies demonstrating that natural environments constitute the core resource base of adventure tourism (Allan *et al.*, 2020; Alves *et al.*, 2017; Giddy & Webb, 2016) [2, 3, 13]. However, the present study suggests that possessing natural resources alone is insufficient for successful destination development. Rather, the strategic management, preservation, and sustainable utilization of these resources determine their long-term value.

The findings also reinforce arguments advanced by Buzzacott and Mease (2018) [9], who noted that the influence of environmental characteristics on adventure tourism behavior remains underexplored. Participants indicated that environmental quality, scenic attractiveness, and ecosystem

integrity strongly influence tourists' motivations and experiences. These observations suggest that environmental conservation should not be viewed solely as an ecological responsibility but also as an economic and strategic necessity. Sustainable destination management practices may therefore play a crucial role in maintaining the attractiveness of adventure tourism destinations while simultaneously protecting fragile natural ecosystems.

The cultural and social dimension identified in this study further illustrates the complexity of adventure sports development. Participants highlighted the importance of local traditions, festivals, community engagement, cultural awareness, and social acceptance. These findings align with previous research emphasizing the role of socio-cultural resources in shaping tourism experiences and destination identity (Dayour & Adongo, 2015; Karimi *et al.*, 2020) ^[11, 17]. Beyond their economic benefits, cultural resources may contribute to creating authentic experiences that distinguish destinations within increasingly competitive tourism markets.

Importantly, participants also acknowledged potential tensions between adventure tourists and host communities. Previous studies have demonstrated that tourism development may generate social disruption, cultural commodification, and resident dissatisfaction when local stakeholders are excluded from decision-making processes (Golzadeh *et al.*, 2018) ^[14]. The present findings suggest that fostering positive relationships between visitors and host communities requires proactive communication strategies, educational programs, and participatory governance mechanisms. Such initiatives may enhance social sustainability while reducing resistance toward tourism development projects.

Financial and economic factors constituted another significant dimension influencing adventure sports development. Participants emphasized the importance of marketing, investment, entrepreneurship, budget allocation, and private-sector participation. These findings support previous research indicating that financial resources and market development are essential drivers of tourism growth (Janowski *et al.*, 2021; Rhoden & Kaaristo, 2020) ^[16, 24]. Adventure tourism has increasingly been recognized as one of the fastest-growing segments of the global tourism industry, generating substantial economic benefits for local communities and national economies (Adventure Travel Trade Association, 2018).

The findings further suggest that adventure sports may represent an important diversification strategy for economies seeking to reduce dependence on traditional revenue sources. In the Iranian context, participants viewed adventure tourism as a potential mechanism for regional development, employment creation, and entrepreneurial activity. Consistent with Daniele *et al.* (2017) ^[10], the findings highlight the importance of encouraging entrepreneurial initiatives capable of transforming natural and cultural resources into sustainable tourism products. Furthermore, participants stressed the need for strategic marketing efforts aimed at increasing domestic and international awareness of Iran's adventure tourism opportunities. Such efforts may contribute to destination branding and enhance competitiveness in global tourism markets.

Institutional support emerged as another critical factor shaping adventure sports development. Participants

emphasized the importance of inter-organizational cooperation among governmental agencies, sport organizations, tourism authorities, municipalities, environmental agencies, educational institutions, and local communities. These findings support stakeholder-based approaches to tourism development, which argue that successful destination management requires coordinated action among multiple actors (Procopio *et al.*, 2019) ^[21]. The complexity of adventure tourism activities, many of which occur within environmentally sensitive areas, makes such collaboration particularly important.

The findings suggest that fragmented governance structures may limit development efforts by creating regulatory inconsistencies, resource inefficiencies, and coordination challenges. Consequently, establishing collaborative governance frameworks may improve policy implementation, facilitate investment, and enhance destination sustainability. Moreover, stronger partnerships between sport and environmental organizations may contribute to balancing tourism development objectives with conservation priorities.

A particularly novel contribution of this study concerns the identification of adventure parks as a distinct developmental pathway for promoting adventure sports participation. Unlike traditional adventure tourism activities that rely heavily on natural settings, adventure parks provide controlled environments where participants can experience adventure-based activities under supervised conditions. Participants viewed these facilities as valuable mechanisms for introducing young people and families to adventure sports while reducing perceived risks and participation barriers.

Because research on adventure parks within the Iranian context remains extremely limited, this finding represents a potentially important contribution to the literature. Existing studies suggest that adventure-based recreational environments can facilitate physical activity participation, skill development, social interaction, and psychological growth (Badau & Badau, 2018) ^[5]. The present findings extend this perspective by suggesting that adventure parks may also serve as gateways to broader participation in adventure sports and tourism. Accordingly, policymakers and private investors may consider such facilities as strategic investments capable of supporting both public health objectives and tourism development goals.

Theoretical Contributions

This study makes several theoretical contributions to the literature on adventure sports and tourism development. First, it advances a multidimensional framework that conceptualizes adventure sports development as the outcome of interactions among infrastructural, managerial, environmental, socio-cultural, economic, and institutional factors. This perspective extends existing studies that often focus on isolated determinants of tourism development.

Second, the findings provide context-specific insights from Iran, an emerging adventure tourism destination that has received limited scholarly attention. By highlighting how adventure sports development is shaped by unique institutional, cultural, and environmental conditions, the study contributes to the growing call for contextually grounded sport management research.

Third, the qualitative approach employed in this study provides a richer understanding of stakeholder perceptions

and experiences than would be possible through purely quantitative methods. The findings therefore contribute to theory development by uncovering mechanisms and relationships that may not be captured through survey-based research alone.

Practical Implications

The findings offer several practical implications for policymakers, sport federations, tourism authorities, and private-sector stakeholders. First, investment priorities should focus on improving transportation systems, safety infrastructure, accommodation facilities, and destination accessibility. Second, specialized governance structures and professional management systems should be established to enhance strategic planning and organizational effectiveness. Third, marketing initiatives should promote Iran's natural and cultural assets while strengthening destination branding in international markets.

Furthermore, collaborative partnerships among government agencies, tourism organizations, environmental authorities, and local communities should be strengthened to ensure coordinated development efforts. Finally, the construction of adventure parks may provide an innovative strategy for increasing participation among youth and families while creating new opportunities for entrepreneurship and tourism development.

Limitations and Future Research

This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on adventure sport tourism development; however, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the findings were derived from qualitative interviews with key stakeholders involved in adventure sports in Iran. While this approach enabled an in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and perceptions, the findings are context-specific and may not be directly transferable to other geographical or institutional settings. Second, given the emerging nature of adventure sport tourism in Iran, access to comprehensive documentation, historical records, and empirical evidence was limited. Third, despite efforts to include a diverse range of participants, some relevant stakeholders were unavailable for interview, potentially restricting the breadth of perspectives captured in the study.

These limitations provide several avenues for future research. First, future studies could employ quantitative or mixed-method approaches to validate and examine the relationships among the factors identified in the present study. Such research would contribute to the development and empirical testing of a comprehensive model of adventure sport tourism development. Second, comparative studies across different countries or regions could enhance understanding of how institutional, cultural, and environmental contexts shape adventure tourism development processes. Third, given the emergence of adventure parks as a prominent theme in the findings, future research should investigate their effectiveness in promoting sport participation, tourism engagement, youth development, and family-oriented recreation. Finally, longitudinal studies are needed to examine how adventure tourism destinations evolve over time and how stakeholder collaboration, infrastructure development, and sustainability initiatives influence long-term destination competitiveness and resilience.

Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive qualitative examination of the factors influencing the development of adventure sports in Iran. The findings indicate that successful development depends on the interaction of infrastructure, management capacity, natural resource utilization, socio-cultural conditions, economic investment, institutional support, and innovative facilities such as adventure parks. Collectively, these factors form an interconnected system that shapes the sustainability and competitiveness of the adventure sports sector. By offering a contextually grounded framework and highlighting the perspectives of key stakeholders, this study contributes to both theory and practice in sport management and adventure tourism research. Ultimately, the findings suggest that the sustainable growth of adventure sports in Iran will require coordinated policy action, strategic investment, stakeholder collaboration, and long-term planning aimed at balancing economic development, social benefits, and environmental stewardship.

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