

## Evaluation of Factors Affecting the Development of Sports Tourism in haemshahr City

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**Abstract.** Ghaemshahr city has a great potential to attract tourists in view of its sports and tourism attractions. But due to lack of planning and city management it cannot be in the realm of sports tourist attraction. Of course with a functional and accurate planning, correct methods for attraction of sport tourists can be applied in this city. This eventually leads to the development of sports tourism and increase employment and improves the competition and training venues etc. this is a descriptive – analytical study, in the field of applied researches. The study sample was all natives of the city, according to Morgan table 384 of them are randomly selected for direct inquiry. The results show that Ghaemshahr's requirements are not suitable to attract sports tourists to the city. Among these requirements, 8 items were selected and the highest rank was for "having national and international athletes in the city" with average rate of 5.89 and the lowest one was for "unsuitable recreational spaces in the city as well as inadequate information for the tourists through various ways of advertising" with an average rate of 3.84.

**Keywords:** Sports Tourism - City of Ghaemshahr - Development of Sports Tourism

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the most important production sources and one of the largest industrial activities in the today world. In recent years, due to its excellent profitability and income, humans and the governments have paid attention to it (Fathollahi and Moharramzadeh, 2007). This industry bringing foreign exchanges to the country and it has a specific rule in the world's economy and it is an effective factor in the interaction of cultures, dialogue of civilizations and the establishment and consolidation of familiarity and affection between nations. If the government pays enough attention to it and with proper planning, systematic and efficient use of its full capacity, the industry is an important factor in the development and prosperity of the economy of the society (Parsaian et al., 2003). Based on performed research by WTO, the number of worldwide tourists has an annual 4.3 percent growth and in 2020 the number of tourists will reach to 1.6 billion people in the world. In addition to the presence of tourists, spending of the tourists in the world increases 6.7 percent per year. Its turnover will be more than \$ 2 trillion for the countries that are active in this field (WTO, 2001). According to statistics and gained results, tourism is one of the major industries in the world, and the biggest and most diverse industry in the world (Gay, Chuck Way, 2003) with a wide variety of types including sports tourism, that among other sectors it has the highest growth (Ehsani et al., 2010) and since its profits and income is high (Hadavi et al., 2004), government invest on it to reach to economic growth in many countries (Malmir, 2006). Therefore, any country that can provide

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the benefits of using this resource as an opportunity to generate income and employment, will be benefited (Hadavi et al., 2004). Based on the statistics, many countries that have the right conditions in sports tourism manage a large part of their economy in this way (using sports tourism economy) (Hadavi et al., 2004). Today, the sports tourism industry receives particular attention of many governments due to its clean industry properties. And since tourism is a fun and attractive experience that will cause completion and activities for individuals, it created a special system with tight relationships (Afsah Hosseini, 2006). On the other hand, sports tourism is a service industry and mainly due to the quality of services it will be affected (kouzehchian et al., 2011, 19). Obviously, in order to use this area of sports industry, the managers and people involved shall have a specific and accurate strategic plan (Shojaei et al., 2012, 173). Many countries consider this dynamic industry as the main source of income, employment, private sector growth and development of their infrastructure (Gay, Chuck Way, 2003). Therefore, addressing it can lead to development of tourism and sports tourism and increase employment and reduce unemployment (kouzehchian et al., 2011, 19).

## 2. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Ghaemshahr City is one of the major city centers in the field of sports and winning sports medal in the Northern provinces bordering the Caspian Sea. The city has great athletes in different sports that the majority of those are active in the professional sports and most of them are medalists in Iran and international events. The city has a lot of sports potential but sometimes the low quality of gyms and sports facilities forces the athletes to move to the other cities and even provinces with high quality gyms and sports activities. They are forced to replace their residential location to these qualified cities or provinces. Over time the sports equipments experience wear and some of them need to be repaired or replaced, and all of these changes cannot be seen in the sports hall of the city. Sometimes, especially in individual sports the equipment for athletes is not enough and we are facing a shortage of sporting goods. This will interrupt the professional exercise of the athletes and will decrease the growth of sports. Therefore, using a proper planning, the sports managers may improve the quality of equipments and sports halls and these activities together with advertisements may turn this city to a great host for sports events.

It seems that some requirements shall be observed to attract sports tourists to the city. These requirements are as follows: having athletes in national and international levels, the city infrastructure (water, access roads, electricity, etc.), and numerous sports venues in different spaces, having recreational space in the city, etc. in this regard, some solutions can be offered, including facilitating the necessary conditions for construction of major sport complexes and their development, proper management and planning of authorities to develop sports tourism, development of infrastructure (construction of hotels, as well as strengthening the transmission lines) and the introduction of attractions through the mass media, etc., they will introduce the tourism attractions of this city to the sports tourists.

Accommodation of athletes and sports fans that travel to the city is very important and they shall not leave the city with a disillusioned and weary of their journey. Therefore, the accommodation condition of these tourists shall be perfect to make them eager to revisit the city. In fact, all of these efforts are leading to creating jobs and they can be reached through correct and logical management including construction of hotels and motels, inns and so on.

The next issue is urban management that attracts the visitors to a city or district. All of these factors shall be performed together with observing civil rights so that after gathering and entrance of the visitors and tourists the private life of citizens does not jeopardize. It shall not have any diverse effect on urban traffic or safety. All of the above mentioned items may be controlled through expert management and planning.

Identifying the capacity and potential of sport takes place with use of experts with expertise in this field. This, together with providing a correct and logical solution to managers and those involved in sport, can help to attract many sport tourists to this city. All these measures and decisions will help to attract sports tourists and the development of all sports in the city. And finally it will increase the level of employment and reduce the rate of unemployment.

### **3. THEORIES AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **Concepts and Definitions**

Sport: competitive and non-competitive physical activities that are organized or non-organized and are carried out because it is fun, healthy and helps the wellness or even improve performance up to excellent level (Mojtabavi, 2008, 17).

Quality of Sport Complex: the quality of stadium or sports venue in which the sport events are take place and it includes the interaction of personnel of the complex, its environment, cost of tickets, and available products inside the complex (Shank, 2006).

Tourist: tourist is an individual who travels to a country other than his typical home or place of residence a while, at least one night and not more than one year, and his aim is not to work and make money in the country. (Kazemi, 2006)

#### **Types of Sports Tourism**

- 1- Active Sports Tourism: in this type of sports tourism the person will participate in sports activities.
2. Passive Sports tourism: In this kind of sports tourism the spectators and fans are traveling to watch the games (Kim 2006).

#### **Sports Tourism**

Sport Tourism is trip for non-commercial reasons in formal or informal manner and based on having fun or watching sports, or encouraging athletes to attend sporting events, and it is defended as short-term travel and takes place inside or outside the country (Mojtabavi, 2008, 17).

According to Wade and Bull, sports tourism is spending leisure time with sports activities, as spectators or participants (Isfahani, 2009). Sports fans are individuals who watch sporting events such as the Olympics, World Cup and international matches (Gibson, 1998).

#### **The Effect of Sports Tourism on Urban Development**

1. Sports tourist attraction during a sport event in one city leads to development of infrastructures such as sports facilities, hotels, restaurants, roads and so on.
2. Related industries to tourism such as, hotel industry, food industry, construction industry and sports industries will prosper in the cities.
3. In time of hosting the sports events, many jobs will be created and in this way one of the main problems of city, namely unemployment, will be reduced.

4. The hosting of sports events and attracting tourists in this regard will lead to recognition of the host country or city at international level and this advantage will lead to expansion of attracting tourists at the later stages.

5. The development of sports tourism can also contribute to cultural development and the development of personal and social health (Sheikhi, 2002).

### Sports Tourism Place in the World

Importance of sports tourism is increasing day by day and there are specialized institutions in this field. Estimates show that in 2004 more than 70 million people traveled to participate in sports events, especially watching the games. In this regard, sports tourism is turned to the complementary economy for tourism industry and in fact sports tourism has become a strategic discussion (Mojtabavi, 2008, 25). In these days, sports tourism is a full source of benefits and incomes, so that it is a large and serious competition between different countries, in order to get the hosting honor of major international competition (Mojtabavi, 2008, 26).

**Table 1-** Summary of Literature on Sports Tourism.

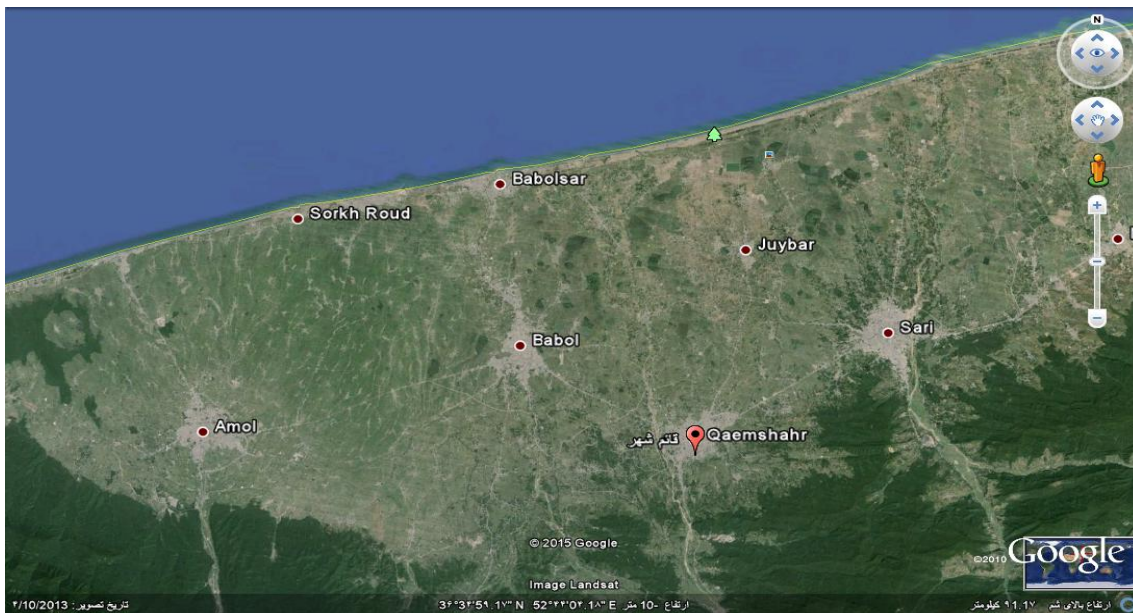
Author & Year	Subject	Results
Honarvar et al., 2007	Important factors in the marketing of sports tourism in Iran	Sports tourism marketers should pay attention to selecting target markets and developing marketing mixes
Ghiami Rad et al., 2007	The relationship between sports managers and tourism managers views and sports tourism factors in Iran	there was significant relationship between the perspective of sports managers and tourism managers about the attractions, on the other hand, there was no significant relationship about the preventing factors
Firouzjah et al., 2008	Study of the most important natural sports attractions affecting development of sports tourism in Iran from perspective of sports and tourism professionals	In Iran, the attractions that are less affected by seasonality phenomenon therefore have longer tourist season and more varied activities carried out in them, are more important in the development of sports tourism.
Khalilzadeh et al., (2010)	The feasibility of the development of sports tourism in the province of West Azerbaijan	There was a significant relationship between push factors and attracting factors and about the limiting factors, there is no significant correlation between the views of the staff of the physical education department and the Cultural Heritage Organization
Moeinfard et al. 2010	Review the status of sports tourism industry in Iran	About the sports tourism, achieving development and expanding it and using its various benefits and reaching to suitable status in the international level is not possible without correct management and planning.
Honari (2010)	Sports tourism rule in employment and income creation from the perspective of tourists, managers and stakeholders	Sports tourism industry is effective for creating employment and income development of the host region, in case of development of sports tourism and the creation of appropriate infrastructure.
Asadi et al. 2010	Study of various aspects of security in sports tourism	About security disruptive factors such as violence and beatings, murder, rape, and terrorism, the sports tourists did not feel any insecurity. While 53.6% of sports tourists during their participation in sports events in Iran experience no kind of security threat in Iran.
Gitoneli et al., 2011	Identify the capabilities of sports tourism in Golestan province	There is a significant relationship between the ability of the Golestan Province with the development of sports tourism $P < 0.01$ , $\chi^2 = 203.5$ ) and the attractions of the province with the development of sports tourism ( $P < 0.01$ , $\chi^2 = 186.1$ )
Shojaei et al. 2011	Analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of sports tourism in Mazandaran province	For development of sports tourism in the Mazandaran province, managers need to develop infrastructure related to the strengths and to take appropriate measures to reduce weaknesses of the industry.
Shojaei et al. 2011	Strategic Planning for Sports Tourism in Mazandaran Province	By identifying four areas of sports tourism, with optimal strategy for the development of the field, we can help the development of this industry in the province

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Kousehchian et al. 2011	The rule of quality of tourism services in satisfaction of sports tourists	Each of the dimensions of the quality of sports tourism has a specific effect on tourist's satisfaction that have to be taken into consideration.
Balali et al. 2011	Study the point of view of managers and experts about the development of sports tourism industry in Khorasan Razavi province	Considering the awareness about the effect of tourism industry and barriers of this sport event in the province, and the importance of development of sports tourism and the necessity of using different benefits for attracting the sports tourists to the province, it feels that it is necessary to develop the sport tourism by the planners and policy makers of the province.
Falahi et al., 2012	Study of natural attractions affecting the development of sport tourism in Kurdistan	there was no significant difference differences between the three under study groups based on rating, natural / sports attractions on the development of sports tourism in Kurdistan province.

### Area and Method of Research

Ghaemshahr County is located in Mazandaran province near the Caspian Sea and the capital of this county is Ghaemshahr city. The city has a total area of 458.5 square kilometers, which is 1.93% of the total area of the province. The city is limited to Savadkooch from the south and to Jouybar from north and to Sari and Babol from east and west respectively. Ghaemshahr County has 2 cities, 2 districts and 7 villages Longitude and latitude of Ghaemshahr County is between 36' and 21'' to 36' 38'' north latitude and 52' 43'' to 53' and 3'' east of the Greenwich meridian, and the population of the city according to the latest census in 2011 is equivalent to 320.741 people (Statical Calendar of Mazandaran Province, 2011).



**Figure 1.** The position of Ghaemshahr on Google Map 2013.

The article is based on a study that was performed in university and based on its nature, subject and objectives; it is analytical and descriptive research. Since questionnaires are used in this research together with interviews to collect the necessary data, therefore this study can be considered as a survey research as well. The required information is documentary (literature) and field information. The population of this research was the entire citizens who attend the sport venues to watch the games. Since the exact number of these individuals is unknown, 384 samples was selected based on Morgan Table in simple random method and they were directly

questioned through questionnaires. It seems that some requirements shall be observed to attract sports tourists to the city. These requirements are as follows: having athletes in national and international levels, the city infrastructure (water, access roads, electricity, telecommunications, internet access, etc.), and numerous sports venues in different spaces, having recreational space in the city, informing the tourists through different promotional methods to introduce the attractions of the city to them, hosting numerous sports events in national and international levels, structural conditions (appearances) of the city and management ability, that was evaluated through SPSS software and binomial nonparametric test to determine the correlation between these variables.

#### 4. RESULTS

1- In this study, the highest incidence rate equal to 62.5 percent was for men and 37.5 percent for women. The results on the age of the respondents indicated that more than 66.1% of respondents are between the ages of 20-40 years.

2- The survey results show that most of the respondents (70%) have high school diploma to bachelor's degree and least of them have PhD by 1 percent. 16.9% of respondents are high school dropouts and 12 percents of them have master's degree.

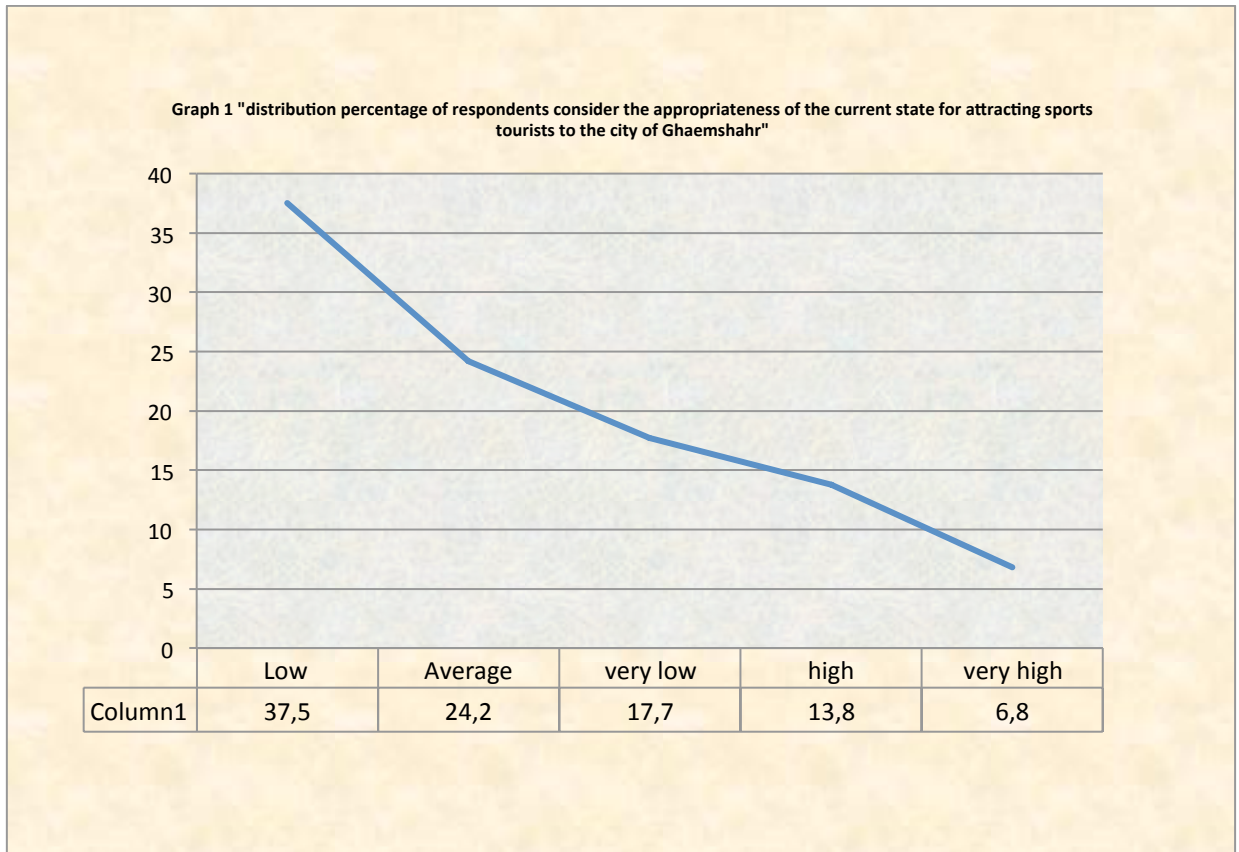
3- Considering the results it is indicated that most of respondents are administrative employments (clerk and retired) with 39.3% and after that the 2<sup>nd</sup> place goes to students with 22.1%, self-employed individuals with 20.1, and housewives with 14.3% and unemployed individuals with 4.2%.

4- The results indicated that 39.6% of them were single and 60.4% of them were married. The most populated families had 4 members with 33.9% frequency, after that 3 persons families with 32.8% and 5 persons families with 14.8% and 2 persons families with 9.6% and the least frequency was for 5 persons families with 8.9%.

5- The statistics indicated that 33.6 percent of the respondents are living in the city for 21 to 30 years and the least term of stay is 5 years with 3.6%. 21.6% were citizens of city for more than 31 years, between 5 to 10 years was 14.3% and between 11 to 15 years was 14.1% and between 16 to 20 years was 12.8%.

6- 37.5 percent of respondents believed that the available requirements in the city for attracting the sports tourists are low, 6.8% believed that it is very suitable and 24.2 percent evaluated it as average, 17.7% very low and 13.8% very high.

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7- About 39.3% of respondents have average awareness about sports tourism and they were most frequent ones, the least awareness was 2.6 percent for very low and respectively, 29.2% had very high awareness and 17.7% low awareness and 11.2% very high awareness about the concept of sports tourism.

**Discussion and Conclusion (The Results of the Study Hypothesis Testing and Analysis)**

**Evaluating the Normality of Variables**

**Table 2.** The Results of One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test.

Variables  Indexes		Dependent Variable: The Utility Of Sport Facilities In Order To Attract Tourists	Independent Variables							
			There are different levels of ational and international athletes	Status of Urban Infrastructures	Sports Venues	Recreational spaces	Informing the tourists	Hosting national and international competitions	Structural Status of City	Management Abilities
N		384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384	384
Normal Mean		2.5443	3.4088	2.8333	2.6692	2.4244	2.4166	2.625	2.6276	2.615
Parameters Std. Deviation		1.1348	1.1366	0.9899	1.173	1.2261	1.2592	1.2599	1.1422	1.269
Most Extreme Absolute		0.236	0.1958	0.2257	0.1924	0.2135	0.2051	0.2135	0.1902	0.181
Differences	Positive	0.236	0.143	0.2143	0.1924	0.2135	0.2051	0.2135	0.1899	0.181
	Negative	-0.139	-0.1958	-0.2257	-0.134	-0.1226	-0.1302	-0.112	-0.1902	-0.125
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		4.631	3.8387	4.4228	3.7704	4.1842	4.0201	4.1839	3.7289	3.541
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

As it can be seen in table 2, z in Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test for all of the related variables of the study is less than the determined z in the table and significance level is less than authorized error. Therefore the difference of distribution of data of all variables was significant with normal distribution and distribution of data of research hypotheses cannot be assumed normal.

**Assessment of Main Research Hypothesis**

H1: it seems that the sport tourism capacities of Ghaemshahr are not suitable for tourism attraction to this city.

H0: it seems that the sport tourism capacities of Ghaemshahr are suitable for tourism attraction to this city.



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**Table 3.** The Results of Binominal Test to Compare Frequency of less than the average responses with average and more than average responses about the capacities of sports tourism in the Ghaemshahr city to attract sports tourists to the city.

		Category	N	Observed Prop.	Test Prop.	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
The available requirements in the city to attract Sports tourists to Ghaemshahr	Group 1	<= 3	305	.79	0.05	<sup>a</sup> .000.
	Group 2	> 3	79	.21		
	Total		384	100		

a. Based on Z Approximation.

Since the distribution of data was not normal in the hypothesis, therefore, to test the hypothesis the non-parametric binomial distribution was used. The provided results in table 3 show that: the frequency of “less than the average” responses was 305 items (79%); and the frequency of “more than average” responses was 79, or 21 percent. Given the significant level is less than 0.05, so the difference in frequency of two groups of responses was significant at the 99% level. Thus, null hypothesis that “it seems that the sport tourism capacities of Ghaemshahr are suitable for tourism attraction to this city” is rejected and the H1 hypothesis is accepted.

The most important point in this study is to prioritize the acceptance of existing capacity to attract sports tourists to the city. The results of comparative analysis of the perspective of participants in this study to determine their priorities about the level of acceptance of available sport requirements and capacities of the city that is provided in table 4 indicates that among 8 determined requirements, the highest rate belongs to “having athletes in the national and international levels” with mean rate of 5.89 and the lowest rate belongs to unsuitable “Recreational space in the city” and unsuitable method for “informing the tourists through different advertisement methods” with a mean rate of 3.84. Having athletes in national and international level not only leads to increase of quality of sport clubs and employment of coaches in different fields, but also the same factor will lead to attraction of the athletes to the city from other provinces and this fact can be seen in some of the cities of province clearly. The obvious example is the presence of foreign wrestlers in the Jouybar city. In this regard, the management abilities are very important. The managers can provide necessary requirements for hosting sport events in different fields and also attract the sports tourists and athletes to the city. All of these decisions and policies are leading to creation of a sport place inside the city and consequently, promotes the development of sports and sports clubs in the city. If the problem goes deep into, the factors will lead to job creation and this is still the question of how management can affect it. Infrastructures of a city such as access roads, telecommunications, electricity, water, internet, etc. can attract or repel tourists and travelers to a city or a region and have a direct impact on it. In this regard, sports, and clubs and residential places are the infrastructure and if Ghaemshahr city has these infrastructures, it can attract sport tourists. In contrast, the old and inefficient and poor infrastructure leads to stagnation and disposal of sports tourists from the city. Having various sports venues for different fields give the possibility to eager and interested people to sports, to participate in different fields and their talents will be seen based on their features. This will help the city to have enough athletes for hosting different national and international events to participate in the same as a team and represent the city and attract the sports tourists to watch national and international events. Another outstanding point to develop the sport in this city is correct and logical management that is performed based on plan and planning of an experienced and powerful manager who can create a beautiful city to attract numerous tourists including sport tourists to the city. Having good recreational spaces in the city can attract many tourists to the Ghaemshahr city but this city has a poor performance in this regard. Even in this regard the management method and using specialists and wise consultants may provide suitable methods for attracting sports tourists. The last thing that shall be considered by managers and sports activists; in order to inform the tourists, different methods

can be used and the city has a poor strategy in this regard, in fact, this matter is not taken seriously by city officials. If we compare this with other countries, we will see that some of them even spend millions of dollars for sports advertisement to attract athletes to a sport event. All of these actions will lead to employment, income and sports development in different fields and introducing the city to national and international visitors.

**Table 4.** Friedman Ranking Test to Compare the Platforms of the Ghaemshahr City to Attract Sports Tourists to this City.

Facilities	Mean	Friedman Ranking Average	Chi square	Degrees of freedom	Significance Level
Having national and international athletes	5.89	1	254.460	7	0.000
The city infrastructure (water, access road, electricity, telecommunications, the Internet, etc.)	4.90	2			
Various Sports Spaces for Different Fields	4.44	3			
Having recreational space in the city	3.84	7			
Informing tourists through various advertising methods to know more about city tourist attractions	3.84	7			
Hosting Sport Events in National and International Level	4.28	6			
Structure (Appearance of City)	4.41	5			
Management Ability	4.40	4			

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results, below recommendations are offered to enhance and promote sports tourists' attraction to the city and in result, this will lead to development of sports tourism in Iran.

1. The material and spiritual support of athletes at the national and international events
2. The development of city infrastructure such as water, access road, electricity, telecommunications and the Internet and so on.
3. Facilitate the development of various sport spaces in different fields to recognize the talents among sports enthusiasts
4. The creation of recreational areas in the city, such as amusement park and beautiful parks.
5. Informing tourists through various ways of advertising such as magazines and newspapers, etc.
6. Hosting numerous sports competitions in different sport fields in the city to attract tourists
7. Changing the surface area of the city (to make attractive inner city areas)
8. Using proper and rational management methods by sport managers to attract and develop sports tourism in this city
9. Planning on existing investment to develop sports tourism in this city
10. Construction of residential buildings, such as hotels, motels, etc. for the stay of tourists in order to attract sports tourists

11. Developing the proper culture for citizens of Ghaemshahr to deal effectively with sports tourists

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