

Designing sports tourism developmental factors model of Sabalan mountain

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ABSTRACT

Aim: the present study has aimed to design a sports tourism developmental factor model for the Sabalan mountain. **Methodology:** this study is an applied research with a mix of a quantitative and qualitative method. To do the study, 15 individuals in the qualitative sector and 15 individuals in the quantitative sector were selected as the research sample. To develop the research model, the interpretive – structural model (ISM) was utilized and the Mic-Mac analysis method (MICMAC) was used to determine the type of factors and to measure the degree of penetration and dependency of the factors. **Findings:** given the results, 7 factors were identified as the most important sports tourism developmental factors of Sabalan mountain. Infrastructural reinforcement and desirability were recognized as the most important factors in the developmental model for sports tourism of Sabalan mountain and they must be taken into consideration. **Conclusion:** given the research findings, Sabalan mountain has a significant potential in the field of sports tourism development and attraction. Thus, it can be concluded that through more accurate research, better planning, more of a follow-up in the respect of development of sports tourism of Sabalan mountain, managers and those in charge in the field of sports tourism, whether region-wide or at larger levels, could perform more effectively with the purpose of the economic development of the region.

Keywords: designing the model, sports tourism, Sabalan mountain.

Introduction

Given the increasing changes of the small global village in all its dimensions, development of phenomena that lead to an increase in the economical power of the societies must be the center of attention. One of the most important phenomena in this age, given the changes in the needs of the people in the field of entertainment and how they spend their leisure time, the tourism phenomenon is receiving a great deal of attention. Tourism is a collection of relationships resulting from the interaction between tourists, those who supply tourism services, host societies,

source and target governments and nongovernmental organizations ^[1]. The tourism industry is one of the largest and most diverse industries in the entire world. Many countries recognize this dynamic industry as their main source of income, increasing employment, growth of the private sector and development of infrastructures ^[2]. Different countries in the world appreciate sports tourism as a revenue-generating industry which leads to the creation and development of business and focus so much of their efforts in its development and expansion ^[3]. Countries such as Iran could take measures and focus on developing this industry to exit their oil-oriented mono-economic phenomenon. Iran has many diverse attractions and has a high capacity for tourism ^[4]. Iran has natural potentials in the domain of sports and could potentially have a desirable position in sports tourism ^[5]. Tourism and sport are two driving forces for stability in business and economic growth, increased employment and enhanced income and infrastructural development; thus nowadays, many countries gain their income from this industry ^[6]. Given the development of sports tourism,

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the country takes necessary steps towards social and economic reconstruction, building standard and desirable sports facilities in different regions, increasing income and employment and overall economic prosperity and cultural – social development. All these steps are directed towards accurate planning and the results of them are undeniable and in general, they increase the living standards of people in different regions ^[7].

Natural resources are among the most important factors that impact the development of sports tourism of any country. Out of different natural resources, mountains have been recognized as a tourist attraction due to their special conditions such as their height and relative isolation ^[5]. Mountain tourism is recognized as one of sectors of sports tourism with high potential for attracting investors and tourism from various regions in the entire world. As it has been mentioned, 15 to 20% of the world's tourism industry is associated with mountainous areas ^[8]. Based on previous studies, if a city was surrounded by mountains, it would have a good opportunity for economic development and regional development ^[9, 10]. Ardebil province has a high capacity in this regard and therefore could exploit it to its advantage. Increasing attraction of mountainous areas as a tourist destination ^[11] leads to the development of recreational activities and enhancement of welfare facilities and infrastructures; therefore, mountains can be considered as an area with special potential for tourism, recreational and entertaining facilities as well as research activities ^[12]. Tourism in mountainous areas creates and increases employment and increases revenue-generation. Although, in many cases, due to the vulnerability of mountainous ecosystems, these areas are sensitive to human interference and are less adaptable. Therefore, developing tourism in these areas have negative impacts on these areas. Currently, mountains and mountainous areas have diverse geographical, biological and climatic features or even cultural and social specifications and exquisite landscapes and therefore have become one of the unique destinations for aerobic sports and a factor for sports tourism development ^[5]. Mountainous area attractions are among the most important landscapes that attract the attention of tourist over the years. In our country, Damavand, Sabalan and Sahand mountains are among the most important mountainous attractions that welcome tourists from different parts of the country and the world due to their pure and untouched nature. Urban environments, especially large cities, have large problems such as pollution, traffic, etc.; although they might include the most valuable tourism resources (such as parks, natural landscapes, rivers, etc.) that attract people to themselves. Mountains, lakes, forests, deserts and other natural areas have presented us with the opportunity of getting away from urban areas and seek shelter in nature and this movement from an ordinary place to an extraordinary one is an experience tourist enjoy.

Presence of Sabalan mountain in Ardebil province is one of the most important potentials in the field of tourism which is quite famous and reputable at a national and international level. Given the capacities such as climatic diversity, the possibility of using

rivers and warm water sources, this opportunity could be taken advantage of, to develop sports tourism and to improve the area. Holding sports competitions leads to the creation of basic and essential changes in the infrastructures, the transportation system and even though these facilities require a great deal of capitals, space and equipment and are accompanied by increased rate of employment and reputation for an area ^[13] and guides the area on the journey of economic, physical, social and cultural development. However, unfortunately, there are only a few sports competitions and international events that are held in the Sabalan area. Therefore, sports tourism has not received the attention it needs which could be result of factors such as lack of profitability and low financial return of these events. It could also be the result of not recognizing the factors affecting tourist attraction, lack of a comprehensive plan to develop sports tourism, legal barriers and problems on the part of governments and lack of support from national and international investors, weak management, and lack of accurate, scientific and precise planning for the development of sports tourism in the country and shortage of education for experts and specialists in this area and lack of a specialized university major associated with the concepts of sports tourism, lack of proper infrastructures to attract tourists and/or because there is no proper advertisement and marketing for attracting tourists to international sport events, whether national or international. And also, there is not enough information available in this field ^[14].

Therefore, sports tourism in Ardebil province, especially the issue of tourism of Sabalan mountain, could be one of the most significant strategies for the economic development of the province. The present study has aimed to review the ways this development could occur. To achieve a high level of performance in sports tourism of Sabalan mountain, the present study has aimed to identify and assess effective features, factors and obstacles in the development of sports tourism of Sabalan mountain and to categorize and determine their relationships through the interpretive – structural model by identifying and focusing on factors that have the most significant impact on other factors and on sports tourism and reinforce sports tourism of Sabalan mountain. In addition, some strategies for developing this industry in relation with Sabalan mountain will be presented. Based on studies, identifying, examining and analyzing factors and obstacles affecting the development of this industry in Iran as a developing country are quite necessary ^[15]. Finally, the present study has attempted to use the interpretive – structural model for the development of sports tourism of Sabalan mountain. It has also aimed to answer the following question: what are the factors affecting the development of sports tourism of Sabalan mountain? How is the relationship between the factors and the relationship between factors and development of sports tourism of Sabalan mountain? How could these factors be rated? Can a model be created for the development of sports tourism of Sabalan mountain? By reviewing the research literature, it was clear that factors and obstacles affecting the development of sports tourism of Sabalan mountain have not been examined thoroughly and an

effective model has yet to be presented. Therefore, researcher attempted to describe an interpretive – structural model for the development of sports tourism of Sabalan. By using this model, the required resources such as financial resources and manpower could be used more effectively for the development of the sports tourism industry of Sabalan mountain. In this study, after identifying the factors impacting the development of the sports tourism industry of Sabalan mountain, the most important elements were rated using the ISM method and the relationship between various concepts are examined. In other words, a comprehensive structure of a complex collection of concepts is created. By using the findings of this study, the rate of effectiveness of the elements on one another is identified and a precise emphasis is put on more effective factors. The findings of this research could be regarded as a practical guideline for managers and policymakers of the sports tourism industry of the area and given that the economical condition of this region is not desirable, this could lead to its economic growth and development.

Research Method

The present study is of a mixed type (quantitative – qualitative) which has been executed as a field study. The statistical population of this study consists of 15 individuals in the qualitative sector and 373 individuals in the quantitative sector who were selected through a simple random and purposeful sampling method. Research variables were as follows: tourism, development of sports tourism of Sabalan mountain, interpretive – structural model. Information collection tools included an interview, a researcher-made questionnaire for the development of the sports tourism industry of Sabalan mountain. The designed questionnaire contained 45 questions about different factors of development of sports tourism of Sabalan mountain. The validity of the tools was confirmed by professors and experts in the field of sports management and the reliability rate of the measurement tools was obtained to be 0.89 which is an indication of the desirability of the reliability of the measurement tool used in this study. To examine the role of various factors in the development of sports tourism, the one-sample parametric t-test was used. To review the most important variables of the research sample, the nonparametric test was used. To review the data, the SPSS software version 21 was used and the exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis and ... software were used to develop the model. In addition, to design the research model, the ISM technique and MICMAC analysis were used and given the objectives of this research, the interpretive – structural model of the development of sports tourism of Sabalan mountain was used.

Findings

Given the results presented in table 1, out of all factors of the development of sports tourism of Sabalan mountain, the highest

mean was associated with the infrastructural reinforcement and desirability factor (4.54±0.62) and the lowest mean was that of the cultural - educational factors (4.19±0.57).

Table 1 – descriptive statistics associated with the factors of sports tourism development

Variable	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maxim
Infrastructural reinforcement and desirability	4.54	0.62	2.12	5.00
Economic factors and investment development	4.38	0.61	1.12	5.00
Cultural – educational factors	4.19	0.57	1.28	5.00
Advertisement and marketing factors	4.28	0.59	2.01	5.00
Natural factors	4.22	0.68	1.89	5.00
Managerial factors	4.32	0.72	2.62	5.00
Governmental and legal factors	4.47	0.66	1.17	5.00

How is the prioritization of the factors of the development of sports tourism of Sabalan mountain?

The Friedman test was used to set the prioritizations in the development of sports tourism of Sabalan mountain. Given the information displayed in table 2, there is a significant relationship between the factors associated with the development of sports tourism of Sabalan mountain regarding their prioritization. The highest priority was associated with “infrastructural reinforcement and desirability” and “governmental and legal factors”.

Table 2 – rating of the factors of the development of sports tourism of Sabalan mountain

Factors	Mean rate
Infrastructural reinforcement and desirability	4.98
Legal and governmental factors	4.67
Investment development and economic factors	4.46
Managerial factors	4.34
Advertisement and marketing factors	4.21
Natural factors	3.87
Cultural – educational factors	3.12

How is the interpretive – structural model of the factors associated with the sports tourism of Sabalan mountain?

The result of the self-interactive matrix has been specified on table 3.

Table 3 – self-interactive matrix of the factors associated with the development of sports tourism of Sabalan mountain (SSIM)

Development of sports tourism of Sabalan		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Legal and governmental factors		X	V	V	A	V	V
2	Managerial factors			V	V	V	V	A
3	Infrastructural reinforcement and desirability					X	A	X
4	Investment development and economic factors						A	X

5	Natural factors	A	A
6	Advertisement and marketing factors		X
7	Cultural – educational factors		

To achieve the matrix at the preliminary availability, all symbols presented in table 3 were turned to zeros and ones. For this purpose, if i, j in the SSIM matrix is like V, then (i, j) turns to one and (j, i) turns to zero. If (i, j) is like A in the SSIM matrix, (i, j) turns to zero and (j, i) turns to one. If (j, i) is like X, thus the (j, i) in the matrix turns to one and (i, j) turns to one. If (i, j) is entered as O, thus both (i, j) and (j, i) are zeros. After developing the SSIM, it has to be made sure that it has internal compatibility; for instance, if aim 1 changed to aim 2 and aim 2 changed aim 3, then aim 1 changed aim 3.

Table 4 - the R matrix of the factors associated with the sports tourism of Sabalan mountain

Development of sports tourism of Sabalan	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Penetration power
1 Legal and governmental factors	1	1	1	0	0	1	1	6
2 Managerial factors	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	6
3 Infrastructural reinforcement and desirability	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	3
4 Investment development and economic factors	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	3
5 Natural factors	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	3
6 Advertisement and marketing factors	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
7 Cultural – educational factors	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Rate of dependency	2	2	5	5	2	5	3	

In the table above, the penetration power and rate of dependency of each of the factors have been calculated.

Table 5 – paths of the model of the development of sports tourism in Sabalan mountain

Paths of the model of the factors affecting the development of sports tourism of Sabalan mountain	Standard coefficient of regression	T-value	P value
Infrastructural reinforcement and desirability → development of sports tourism in Sabalan mountain	0.876	18.121	0.001
Investment development and economic factors → development of sports tourism in Sabalan mountain	0.821	13.326	0.001
Cultural – educational factor → development of sports tourism in Sabalan mountain	0.584	6.234	0.001
Advertisement and marketing factors → development of sports tourism in Sabalan mountain	0.749	9.752	0.001
Natural factors → development of sports tourism in Sabalan mountain	0.641	7.891	0.001
Managerial factors → development of sports tourism in Sabalan mountain	0.736	12.682	0.001
Governmental and legal factors → development of sports tourism in Sabalan mountain	0.847	13.427	0.001

As it can be seen from the results, all of the identified factors affecting the development of sports tourism of Sabalan mountain have an acceptable and positive value and are considered to be

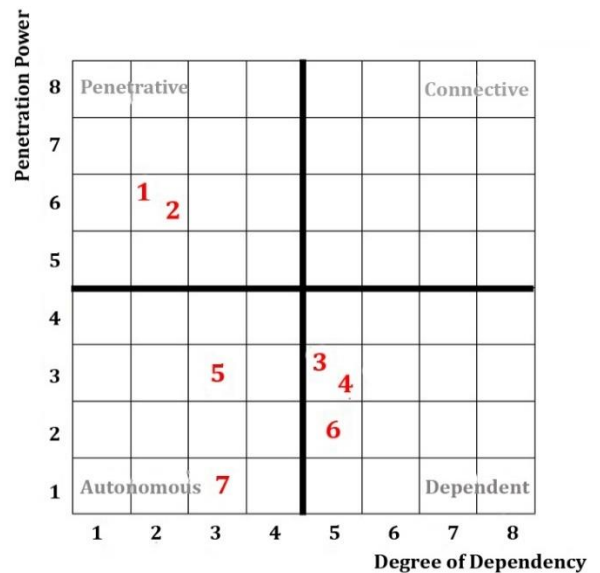


Figure 1- the result of MICMAC analysis

Figure 1 displays the rate of dependency and penetration power for each of factors (aims). Accordingly, factors 1 and 2 are in the penetrative area, factors 5 and 7 are in the autonomous (independent) area and factors 3, 4 and 6 are in the dependent area and there is no factor in the connective area.

Does the model of the effective factors in the development of sports tourism of Sabalan mountain has proper fitting?

According to the seven identified factors affecting the development of sports tourism industry of Sabalan mountain, the model for the effective factors will be designed by taking these seven factors into consideration.

effective factors as far as the development of sports tourism of Sabalan mountain is concerned.

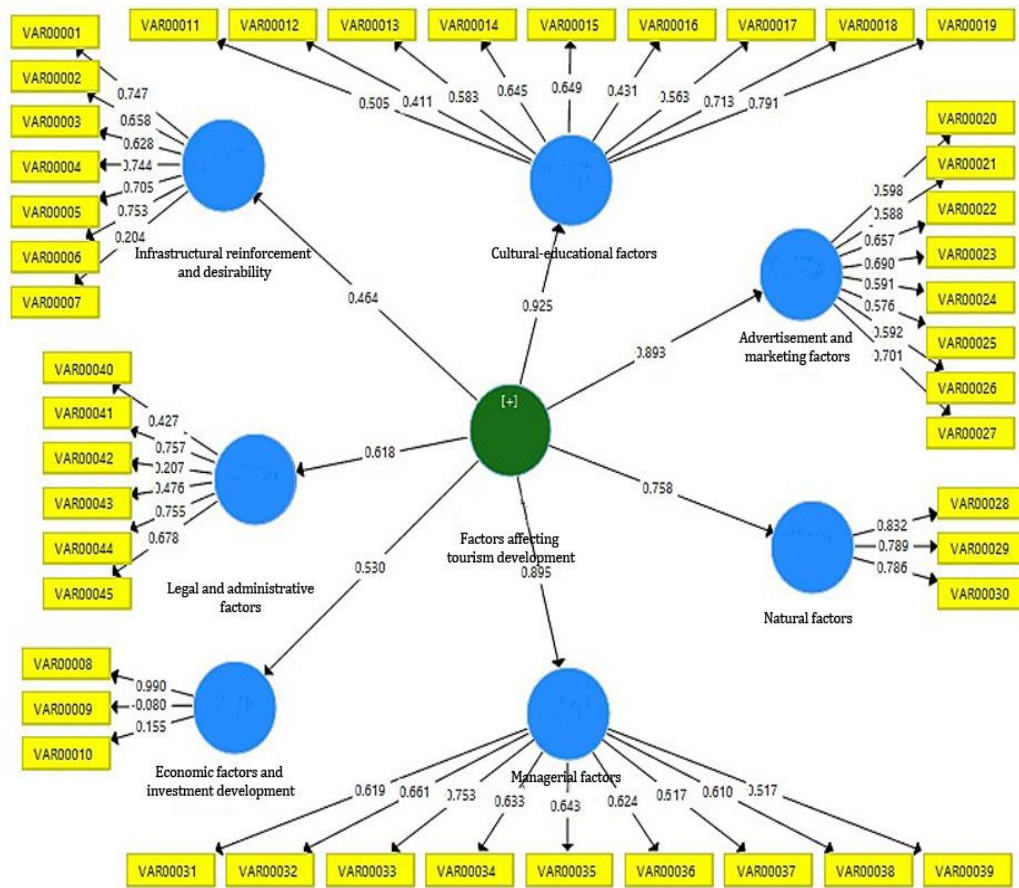


Figure 2- model of the factors affecting the development of sports tourism of Sabalan mountain

In the next section of the article, table 6 displays the fitting indexes of the model have been presented and based on them, it can be said if the model is properly fitted or not.

Table 6 – fitting indexes of the model of the factors associated with the development of sports tourism of Sabalan mountain

Fitting indexes	Value of indexes	Interpretation
Chi-square	721.18	-
Degree of freedom	372	-
Ratio of chi-square to degree of freedom (χ^2/df)	1.968	Desirable
RMSEA	0.54	Desirable
Compatible fitting index (CFI)	0.917	Desirable
Normalized fitting index (NFI)	0.942	Desirable
Increased fitting index (IFI)	0.971	Desirable

Based on the results presented in table 6, the fitting indexes of the model have been desirable, and the research model is confirmed. The value of the RMSEA is equal to 0.051 and the value of CFI is equal to 0.917.

Discussion and Conclusion

In general, the presence of physical infrastructures, especially the infrastructural reinforcement and desirability factor, is one of the important factors for the development of sports tourism and this

factor is rated as the first factor in the development of sports tourism of Sabalan mountain based on the measures with a factor load of 4.48. Providing entertainment and sports facilities in various parts of the area for sports tourists, facilitating equipment for a quick and easy access to different areas for sports tourists, opening stadiums and proper spaces for sports tourists, maximizing the access to sports services with minimum costs, developing sports-related and unrelated infrastructures in the area, along with infrastructural development and desirability for the tourism sector, can be effective on the growth and development of sports tourism. The governmental factor and legal frameworks, with a factor load of 4.35, is rated as the second factor in the development of sports tourism of Sabalan mountain based on the metrics. Many governments could develop industrial policies that sometimes appear as approved and announced plans and in this way, they can determine their goals more precisely. Therefore, they can play various active and crucial roles in forming various industries. Sufficient support from the government and its planning, and presentation of guidelines and rules and regulations for the development of this industry in the country and creation of the necessary interactions between organizations could be effective as far as the growth and development of sports tourism is concerned. Economic factors and investments include huge investments in infrastructures and introduction of sports tourism in the target markets, development of facilities and increasing the financial power of

organizations responsible for the development of tourism, giving legal encouragements for investments and providing facilities and supporting the private sector investors to attract investors, producing and supplying the proper conditions for sports tourist in the respect of reducing the final price for the tourists. Investment and economic factor, with a factor load of 4.21, is the third factor for the development of sports tourism of Sabalan mountain based on the metrics. As a result of identifying and attracting credits from financial supporters, promotion of sports tourism with financial supports, paying attention to the income obtained from sports tourism activities, developing a plan for using financial resources and paying subsidies, encouraging financial supporters to support sports tourism events and activities could be some things that could be done for the development of this industry. Managerial factors, with a factor load of 4.21, is the third factor of the development of sports tourism of Sabalan mountain based on metrics. Accurate planning and management for the development of sports tourism, developing policies and plans by consulting other groups involved and beneficiaries, executing alternative plans, evaluating the current tourism industry, planning and achieving the goals of development, optimizing the economic advantages, planning to reinforce the positive impacts and reducing negative environmental, social and cultural impacts, evaluating the final policies and plans are somethings that could be done to develop this industry. The cultural – educational factor, with a factor load of 4.20 is rated as the fourth factor associated with the development of sports tourism of Sabalan mountain based on the metrics. This matter has become more and more significant at this age where cultural values are considered as important resources for developing sports tourism and producing economic values. Nowadays, development of tourism and the attention that is paid to culture and education has increased significantly and in all countries, this has been attracting some attention as one of the main factors for establishing and creating the culture of accepting tourism and tourists, making efforts for provide the necessary educations for individuals so that they could move forward in the journey of improving the sports tourism industry. Thus, the effect of cultural and educational factor on the development of tourism industry has to be studied more precisely. Paying sufficient attention to this matter could be quite effective in the development of the area and individuals must successfully go through the necessary educations and trainings. The natural factor, with a factor load of 4.15, is rated as the fifth factor associated with the sports tourism of Sabalan mountain based on the metrics. It is necessary for group media, especially broadcast, to play an active role in introducing the sports tourism attractions, and various fields of sports given the capacities presented as a result of natural resources and beautiful landscapes. Additionally, strong advertisements can play a crucial role in providing tourists with information about the weather and the climatic changes of a certain area, social and cultural conditions, different areas such as food, clothing, customs, etc. Access to the sea, beach, river and forests, healthy and clean air

and food, beautiful nature, presence of beautiful landscapes and natural attractions can be effective in the growth and development of the sports tourism. Based on the findings of the present study, the advertisement and marketing factor, with a factor load of 3.96, is rated as the sixth factor associated with the development of sports tourism of Sabalan mountain based on metrics. Providing people and those in charge with the necessary information, expanding their knowledge of sports tourism and its positive impacts, introducing the attractions and the advantages of sports tourism through media, researches and studies for having useful strategies to develop marketing and communicative systems, information technology, branding the products and an increase in the income of the area; therefore, developing marketing and advertisement for the tourism sector could be effective in the growth and development of sports tourism.

These factors and indexes (items) are in compliance with the perspective of other researchers such as Pashayi *et al.* (2019), Lotfi Pamchal *et al.* (2017), Soroor *et al.* (2017), Morovvati *et al.* (2016), Ranjbar (2016), Mirzazadeh *et al.* (2016), Amin (2016), Shahriyari *et al.* (2015), Firooz Jaeeyan *et al.* (2013), Kiyani *et al.* (2019), Ziyakasand Tarandofilova (2018), Akbari *et al.* (2016)^[16-25].

However, Rahimi (2016) has done a study using model for the development of sports tourism in the field of volleyball. In the present study, the researcher has identified 45 developmental indexes in the form of 7 main factors. The results of the present study, in relation with the role of legal and governmental supports, as the most important factor for development, comply with the results of the study done by Rahimi. In Rahimi's study, the degree of effectiveness of the factors has not been measured or considered and this result does not comply with their study^[26]. Taghavifard *et al.* (2016), in their study, presented an interpretive – structural model to develop electronic tourism. However, the author in the present study has aimed to present an ISM for sports tourism and the factors were considered and identified in a more general way; however, the interpretive – structural modeling has been used in both studies. In other studies, such as the study done by Hematinejad *et al.* (2015), the sports tourism attractions have been rated. Accordingly, holding competitions, water sports, hiking, mountaineering and caving, forest walks, spas and nature therapy, hunting and hunting and winter sports are among these attractions, which is not compatible with the present study, because more attention has been paid to natural attractions in this research. In the present study development of natural factors has been one of the priorities. Amini *et al.* (2019), in their study, have reviewed and categorized the developmental factors in three different sections, namely, the infrastructural, managerial and political, social – cultural sections. In the present study, factors had somethings in common and other factors such as marketing and researches, cultural – educational factors and natural factors have also been identified. The present study has been consistent with the studies done by Kiyani *et al.* (2019), Ziyakas and Tarandofilova (2018) in some subcomponents of development; however, in their

studies, only some factors of the development of the sports tourism have been mentioned and all factors have not been rated or recognized which has not been compatible with their studies [24, 25].

Applicable recommendations for managers

Given the findings of the present study and considering that the factors under review affect the development of sports tourism of Sabalan mountain, it seems to be essential to pay attention to these factors as far as the administrative guideline for executive managers is concerned. Given the significant relationship between factors affecting development and given the rate of governmental and legal development, infrastructural development and desirability, paying attention to this rating could play an important role in increasing the efficacy of the future attempts to develop the sports tourism for Sabalan.

Using different marketing and advertisement strategies to develop sports tourism.

Building infrastructural facilities and improving welfare and accommodation in the host areas to attract sports tourists.

Investment development in various sectors of tourism and attracting national or international investors.

Training and educating sports tourist experts and professionals.

Developing the culture to accept sports tourism in the area.

Marketing and advertisement with predetermined plans for developing sports tourism in the area and having a plan to remove inaccurate and unrealistic beliefs about the region.

Presenting strong leadership and management strategies and being able to coordinate various sectors of the sports tourism industry.

Analyzing economic and cultural advantages of sports tourism.

Using the experiences and policies of countries with amazing tourism industry.

Taking into account important factors and components identified in this project.

Forming a committee for developing sports tourism composed of sports tourism experts and professionals.

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