



The Impact of Sport on Social Relationships and Tourism in Urban Recreational Spaces

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Abstract

Background and Objective: In recent years, expanding recreational spaces and promoting public sports have emerged as effective strategies for enhancing mental well-being and fostering social connections within urban settings. Despite this, the social dimensions of sports in public and tourism-oriented spaces have received limited attention in many Iranian cities, highlighting a gap in evidence-based policymaking. This study aims to investigate how participation in sports activities influences social relationships, mental health, and social identity within recreational and tourist environments.

Methodology: This applied research adopts a descriptive-survey approach. The target population includes individuals who utilize urban recreational and sports facilities. Using GPower software and statistical parameters ($\alpha = 0.05$, power = 0.80, medium effect size = 0.50), a sample size of 106 participants was determined. Data were gathered through a researcher-designed questionnaire encompassing indicators such as sports participation, quality of recreational spaces, mental health, social relationships, social identity, and the influence of social media. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS software. The Shapiro–Wilk test assessed data normality, and non-parametric tests—including Spearman's correlation and the Mann–Whitney U test—were applied for inferential analysis.

Findings and Conclusion: The findings revealed a significant positive correlation between participation in recreational sports and mental health ($r = 0.56$, $p < 0.01$), as well as with the willingness to attend sports events ($r = 0.41$, $p < 0.05$). Moreover, significant gender-based differences were identified in the domains of social interaction and the perceived impact of sports on social identity ($p < 0.05$). Overall, engaging in sports activities within recreational environments contributes positively to psychological well-being, social engagement, and life satisfaction. Future research is recommended to explore additional factors that influence social interaction and to examine the role of digital media in encouraging public involvement in sports.

Keywords: Sports, Social Relationships, Tourism, Recreational Spaces, Urban Space.

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Extended Abstract

Introduction:

Bridges have long stood as one of the most remarkable achievements of architecture and Sport, as a multifaceted social phenomenon, has been widely examined by scholars due to its diverse societal functions. Among these, its role in fostering community health stands out as particularly significant (Abdollahi et al., 2024, p. 3). The transformative influence of sports participation on individuals' lives is readily observable, positioning sport as a cornerstone of both personal and societal development in modern communities. Its capacity to shape social dynamics and human interactions is profound.

Within the realm of tourism, especially in recreational environments, sporting activities serve as powerful catalysts for social connectivity and cohesion. Beyond their well-documented physical and psychological benefits, these activities create valuable opportunities for enhanced social engagement between visitors and local populations. Recreational venues - including urban parks, coastal areas, and public sports facilities - function as ideal platforms for nurturing social relationships and strengthening community ties. This dynamic contributes substantially to the sustainable social development of tourist destinations (Kiviniemi & Koivisto, 2022, pp. 104-396).

Despite notable expansions in recreational infrastructure and public sports initiatives in recent years, many Iranian urban centers have yet to fully appreciate the social and interactive potential of sports (Yousefian et al., 2021, pp. 91-104). While existing research has thoroughly explored the individual health impacts of physical activity (e.g., Hassani et al., 2022), a conspicuous gap remains regarding its sociocultural dimensions in public and touristic contexts.

This study seeks to address this gap by investigating how sports influence social relations within recreational and tourism settings. The research particularly aims to demonstrate how sports participation can:

- Measuring public participation in sports activities within recreational spaces.
- Examining the effects of sports on mental health and stress reduction among users.
- Evaluating the role of sports in shaping or reinforcing social identity.
- Identifying barriers and opportunities for the social use of sports facilities.
- Analyzing the influence of social media in promoting sports participation in public spaces.

Methodology:

This research was conducted with the aim of investigating the impact of sports on social relationships in tourism within recreational spaces. In terms of purpose, the study is applied research, and in terms of data collection method, it is descriptive-survey. The data collection tool was a researcher-made questionnaire designed based on theoretical studies and previous research. To develop this questionnaire, key concepts and indicators were first extracted from relevant theoretical literature and empirical studies.

The statistical population of the study consists of all individuals who use sports and recreational spaces. The sample size was calculated using GPower software, considering a significance level of 0.05, a test power of 0.80, and a medium effect size of 0.50, resulting in 106 participants.

In data analysis, descriptive statistics methods, including mean and standard deviation, were initially used. Then, the Shapiro-Wilk test was employed to assess the normality of the data, which revealed that some indicators had a non-normal distribution. Accordingly, in the inferential analysis, Spearman's correlation test was used to examine the relationships between

variables, and the Mann-Whitney U test was applied to compare differences between groups in terms of gender. All analyses were performed using SPSS software.

Results and Discussion:

This study aimed to investigate the impact of sports on social relationships in tourism within recreational spaces. The results revealed that sports activities in these spaces have a positive effect on mental health, social interactions, and individuals' satisfaction. Sports participation showed a significant positive correlation with mental well-being and the willingness to engage in sporting events, a finding consistent with previous research such as García and López (2022) and Lee et al. (2021). These studies also emphasized that sports in recreational spaces can help reduce stress and enhance social interactions.

Additionally, a significant difference was observed between men and women in the indicators of "social relationships and human interactions" and "the impact of sports on social identity," with men benefiting more than women from social engagement and a sense of belonging. This finding aligns with the results of Khalilian (2021) and Yousefian et al. (2023), which demonstrated that group sports in public spaces can play a crucial role in strengthening social relationships.

Conclusion:

These studies also indicated that media alone cannot provide sufficient motivation for sports participation, highlighting the need for more comprehensive planning in this regard. The findings of this research demonstrate that sports participation in recreational spaces is significantly associated with improved mental health and increased willingness to participate in sporting events. Additionally, sports in these environments contribute to strengthening social relationships and fostering a sense of belonging.

However, gender differences in certain indicators, such as social interactions and social identity, reveal that men benefit more from these activities. These findings underscore that the development of recreational and sports spaces can serve as an effective strategy for enhancing social relationships and mental well-being in urban and tourism communities.

It is recommended that future research delve deeper into the factors influencing social interactions and the role of media in promoting sports. Furthermore, urban and tourism planning should facilitate equal access to sports and recreational spaces for all social groups, ensuring balanced participation between men and women.

Declarations

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