The Operational Logic and Resolution of Dilemmas Driving Urban Cultural Tourism Development through Ice and Snow Sports: A Case Study of Harbin

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Abstract. Since the macro goal of "300 million people joining in ice and snow sports activities" was put forward, and the purpose was to advocate Winter Olympics, familiar winter sports have entered the public domain. The baton of "net-famous cities" has regained prosperous vitality into Harbin, an old-fashioned heavy industry city in Northeast China. The city has gained widespread attention among public, not only propelling Harbin to a prominent position on the tourism radar, but also triggering numerous hot topics. Under the guidance of various levels of policy, the new business models of ice and snow culture and distinctive sightseeing in Harbin will undoubtedly cultivate a nationwide sports atmosphere. With the upcoming hosting of multiple domestic events, the commercial value of urban sports events is also improving. However, tourism popularity always experiences gradual ebb after its illustrious peak with the weakening of public attention and enthusiasm. How Harbin can deeply tap into its own natural advantages when public interest diminishes, develop characteristic winter events. It is worthwhile to consider how to integrate snow and ice-related sporting events with metropolitan tourist attractions in an environmentally sound way.

1 Introduction

The accumulated number of people receiving more than 3.04 million people during the New Year's Day holiday in Harbin about three days, with a total tourism income as high as 5.914 billion yuan. Both the volume of tourists' reception and total tourism income have reached a very considerable historical peak. Unlike the widespread popularity of track and field events, ice and snow activities, accompanied by the implementation of diverse policies and the construction of tourist destinations, are increasingly favored by people.

Despite some twists and turns during the explosive rise, the government cleverly resolved them. The widely circulated "Letter to the General Public Tourists" successfully turned the attention of national netizens from the "ticket refund" turmoil to ensuring the subsequent tourism economy of the city, leading to outstanding economic data during the subsequent Spring Festival holiday. The widely disseminated slogan on media platforms, "It's not that you can't afford Scandinavia, it's just that Northeast China offers better value for money" has truly found its justification in this city.

In order to consolidate and develop the achievements of "pushing forward 300 million people to taking part in distinctive winter sports activities," Heilongjiang province has deeply implemented "Heilongjiang Province Ice and Snow Economic Development Plan (2022-2030)" through multiple measures. At the same time, the Harbin Municipal Government, through the organization of the "2023-2024 Harbin Ice and Snow Season Activities" press conference, has proposed a series of comprehensive approaches, focusing on activating, heating up, igniting, and energizing high-quality snow and ice tourism, dissecting and shaping cultural and tourism activities that can showcase the natural artistry of Harbin's winter culture. Additionally, based on the real-time progress of sports events, a collective sports and cultural tourism atmosphere is being created. For instance, "Dragon Year Ice City Tour · Welcoming the Asian Winter Games Together" has successfully rely on natural advantages and online platforms to integrate holiday travel with festival features, traditional culture, sports competitions, and other experiential forms, presenting a more precise slice of wintertime cultural tourism.

The prosperity of urban ice and snow-related cultural tourism is also an integral part of eco-friendly wellness with the help of strong local resource advantages, combining magnificent ice and snow attractions with experiential sports activities, it allows visitors to deeply appreciate the cultural connotation of citified ice and snow. While winter sports projects may encounter numerous challenges during their marketization process, the flourishing new business models in urban cultural tourism bring forth new possibilities for development.
The conception of policies and the promotion of platforms not only ignite urban cultural tourism popularity but also provoke significant contemplation. For instance, Zibo has made people willing to line up with salivating barbecue, while a stranded cruise ship in Weihai has successfully become a photo-check-in template on social media for several weeks. Additionally, Xi'an's ubiquitous Hanfu costumes and makeup have opened up a new avenue for affordable travel photography. The development of urban cultural tourism is not instantaneous; the seemingly casual "tourism hotspots" bursting into the limelight require deep contemplation of the real operational logic and underlying mechanisms.

2 Literature review

General Secretary Xi Jinping has pointed out that: "Tourism is a detailed and extensive industry and crucial driving force mechanism for economic growth." Shu Xia explores the thickness of the connotation with tourism IP between paradigm transformation and information products, offering innovative concepts for format cooperation, product creation, and advertising interaction across both snow and ice tourism platforms [1]. The opulent connotation development of ice and snow tourism includes the system integration of sports activities, landscape ecology, and health preservation. According to big data analyst from Mafengwo Travel, from the onset of winter in 2020, there has been a significant increase in the frequency of searches for terms related to ice and snow sports such as "skiing" and "ice sports". In the development process of the tourism industry, the supply-side tourism resource improvement and the demand-side maintain a delicate dynamic balance. Wenhao Chen pointed out in his investigation on the impact force of events on urban economy that sports tourism, as a peculiar form of tourism, attracts tourists to destinations with sports events as the main attraction [2].

Wu Junxia and Li Jing proposed that construction of ice and snow leisure tourism brands in Zhangjiakou should focus on deepening the cultural connotation transmission of the brand in the context of the Beijing Winter Olympics, improving quality awareness and enhancing brand associations, which will be conducive to regional development and win-win cooperation for brands [3]. Dayong Zhong pointed out from the perspective of the industrial ecological chain that sports events are at the core, and unique IP of each event is the most core value, exerting strong radiation and driving outcomes [4]. Wenting Xue and Xiaoqing Meng suggested that large-scale international sports events provide an excellent stage for the host cities to establish their image, as sports are an important manifestation of urban modernity [5]. Li Ziyang and Wang Hui discussed the ways where ice and snow tourism IP promotes the sustainable and high-quality development of the ice and snow industry based on content mining using ROST CM6 software [6].

Based on the successful case of Harbin ice and snow cultural tourism, this article aims to cultivate the sports tourism industry chain in cities that eager to develop ice and snow casual sports tourism formats, thereby accelerating economic development while maintaining ecological and social sustainability.

3 Ice and snow urban cultural and tourism resource advantages

Harbin, located in the northeastern part of China, enjoys superior natural conditions characterized by a cold temperate continental monsoon climate, featuring long, cold, and dry winters. These natural conditions provide an unparalleled environment for the development of ice and snow sports. Compared to other cities, Harbin enjoys a longer duration of the ice season, reducing weather unpredictability and fostering a more hospitable atmosphere for visitors from other cities and countries. The successful stage of the 1996 Harbin Asian Winter Games brought unprecedented opportunities for sports activities to the local area, with facilities such as the Harbin Global Exhibition and Sports Center Stadium, Yabuli Resort, Harbin Ice Arena, and Harbin Sports Academy Skiing Center providing ideal venues for local sports activities. Harbin also serves as a representative of China's ice and snow cities, reflecting the nation's capability to host international and professional ice and snow sports events [7]. The Beijing Winter Olympics has brought light to numerous athletes such as Daqing Wu, Ailing Gu, and Mengtao Xu, whose outstanding performances and the narratives behind them have captivated and inspired countless spectators, contributing significantly to the promotion and development of ice and snow sports.

Harbin boasts a profound ice and snow culture, with a long-standing tradition earning it the title of "Ice City." Its people exhibit a strong passion for ice and snow sports, nurtured from a young age, leading to a vibrant array of ice and snow arts and activities. During the winter season, numerous winter landscapes are constructed, accompanied by unique performances such as ice ballet, all integral parts of Harbin's ice and snow culture. Furthermore, with the increasing demand in the domestic tourism market and the improvement of living standards coupled with the diversification of the tourism market, ice and snow sports are becoming a preferred choice for more and more tourists. Developing specific ice and snow leisure sports in Harbin can meet the diverse needs of tourists. It allows visitors to not only experience the local culture and cuisine but also engage in unique ice and snow activities, providing a distinct tourism experience. Constructing multi-level ice and snow facilities in both the urban area of Harbin and its surrounding regions can offer diversified alternatives for snow and ice-related activities sports.

Winter and glacier activities can not only serve as tourism attractions but also integrate with related industries such as sports and culture, driving industrial upgrading and economic development in Harbin. For instance, setting up distinctive dining, accommodation,
and shopping malls in ice and snow resorts can provide comprehensive tourism services. As an internationally renowned ice and snow sports city, Harbin enjoys a high reputation globally. Hosting international ice and snow events can further enhance Harbin's international visibility and influence, attracting more tourists to come and participate in or witness these events.

4 Transformation and upgrading of Harbin’s urban competitiveness

Harbin, which is in northern China, has a number of ice and snow resources as well as geographic advantages that provide a solid basis for the growth of ice and snow tourism. Harbin can use its distinctive ice and snow landscapes and activities as primary attractions by establishing itself as a destination for ice and snow tourism. This will allow Harbin to target particular market segments with targeted marketing campaigns. In the light of the increasingly fierce competition among cities, as evidenced in the annual "China Urban Competitiveness Report," Harbin must rapidly enhance its overall urban competitiveness and seek new breakthroughs to elevate its soft power. Harbin should clearly define the strategic direction of integrating culture and tourism development from the perspective of urban comprehensive development and overall regional development, achieving structural optimization through quality improvement and efficiency enhancement [8].

Tourism consumption is one of the key factors driving the development of the tourism industry. By stimulating tourist consumption demand, it is possible to increase tourism revenue and employment opportunities, thereby promoting regional economic growth. Harbin employs differentiated marketing strategies, such as encouraging social media influencers, short video bloggers, etc., to promote and expand its influence. In the future, urban cultural tourism needs to adapt to the communication trends of the information age. Currently, the Internet Plus model is mainstream. In ice and snow tourism destinations, ski resorts, and other places, utilizing technologies that simulate reality can allow newcomers to experience the excitement and joy of wintertime sports and events from a sensory perspective [9].

The government plays a crucial role in the development of the tourism industry. The Harbin municipal government has announced a series of guidelines and regulations to facilitate the steady development of wintertime tourism. These measures include providing financial support, optimizing the business environment, and enhancing infrastructure construction. These policy measures have provided strong guarantees for the development of Harbin's ice and snow tourism industry. Building upon the magnificent goal of "Three Hundred Million People Joining in Ice and Snow Activities," the government is pushing hard to make winter recreation more appealing, increase the amount of ice and snow on the ground, incorporate these endeavors into the national fitness plan, encourage the people of Harbin to participate in mass ice and snow sport events, and quicken the city's transition into a major player in the field of sports [10].

5 Challenges faced by long-term empowerment

5.1 Seasonal restrictions

The primary tourist attractions of ice and snow cities typically stem from ice and snow landscapes and activities such as skiing and sledding. However, these activities cannot be conducted during the summer or non-snow seasons, leading to the occurrence of tourism off-seasons. This results in the tourism business of ice and snow cities having only a few months of peak periods throughout the year, with the possibility of a sharp decline in tourist numbers during other times.

5.2 Climate restrictions

Ice and snow cities often experience cold climates, posing a test to tourists' physical strength and endurance. In extreme weather conditions, tourists may be unable to enjoy ice and snow activities and may even face health and safety risks. Furthermore, the cold climate may also affect the normal operation and maintenance of tourism facilities.

5.3 Singular tourism products

The tourism products in ice and snow cities primarily pay close attention on ice and snow entertainment activities and landscape ecology, lacking diversity and innovation. This may lead to tourist aesthetic fatigue after multiple visits, reducing repeat visitation rates. Most ice and snow tourism projects are presented with single functionalities such as skiing, ice skating, and snow sightseeing, lacking diversified and compound ice and snow tourism products. Moreover, they often fail to highlight cultural characteristics.

6 Recommendations for sustainable development of urban cultural tourism

Ice and snow cities possess unique natural ecological environments, which are crucial factors in attracting tourists. Therefore, protecting the ecological environment is the foundation for achieving sustainable tourism development. In the 1950s, following the aftermath of wars, many countries rushed into rapid development, resulting in extensive environmental pollution and severe resource depletion, which severely hindered human social progress. Hence, the term "sustainable development" was first proposed in 1982, in the book "Building a Sustainable Society" by American scientist Lester R. Brown, laying the initial theoretical groundwork [11]. It was formally introduced in the report "Our Prevalent Future" by the World Commission on Environment and Development, pushing for
advancement that satisfies modern needs without sacrificing the ability of future generations to satisfy their own needs. This fundamental concept has become one of the basic needs of the scientific development notion [12].

6.1. Grasping the trend of wellness tourism

With the intensifying competition in the tourism market, Harbin cannot remain stagnant but needs to continually promote the upgrading of the tourism industry, enhancing the quality of tourism products and service levels. Wellness tourism is emerging as a future trend in the tourism industry after the wave of the pandemic. Harbin can leverage its advantage in ice and snow resources to develop green and healthy tourism.

Ice and snow sports, which initially served as survival skills for residents during winter hunting activities, have evolved from royal leisure entertainment to widespread folk participation, and further developed into activities such as ice skating and skiing. These activities help participants improve physical fitness, enhance mood, and foster willpower. With appropriate city promotion and marketing, visitors can undoubtedly experience a state of natural harmony in body, mind, and spirit. Therefore, it is essential to guide tourism destinations in forming a systematic, comprehensive, and efficient service system during development. This will provide visitors with a more comfortable and high-end travel experience, thereby balancing the seasonal differences in the tourism industry.

6.2. Cultivating awareness of stakeholder participation

Community residents are important stakeholders in tourism development, and their involvement is crucial for achieving sustainable tourism development. Encouraging a sense of service and responsibility among participants at various stages of the ice and snow cultural tourism commercial enterprise chain can subconsciously mitigate some tourists’ negative experiences. This enhances their sense of identification and belonging to tourism development, advocating for the service concept of "everyone is a tourism image, and each individual is a tourism ambassador."

Tourism promotes cultural dissemination, and culture is also a form of marketing for tourist attractions. Cultivating a distinctive cultural attitude can increase the recognition of tourist attractions. The infectiously charming characteristics of Northeastern cities often create a relaxed and enjoyable cultural atmosphere [13].

6.3. Seeking multi-party collaboration for win-win cooperation

In the process of urban cultural tourism development, guided by the perspective of cultural creativity, Harbin needs to adhere to its local cultural characteristics and highlight the city's uniqueness and personality to create a vibrant tourism brand. This requires multi-party collaboration. For example, innovative initiatives from cultural departments and policy formulation by government departments should aim to innovate forms of urban cultural expression, expand imaginative space, and extend cultural significance [14].

Meanwhile, Harbin can strengthen cooperation with international tourism organizations, introduce advanced international tourism development concepts and experiences, and enhance its international visibility and competitiveness.

6.4. Upgrading traditional services in the information age

Conscious efforts are needed to develop personalized customized services for tourists. Sports activities vary from person to person, requiring a detailed refinement of the ice and snow sports service process. With the assistance of big data computing power models, suitable travel itineraries should be planned according to the different age groups, physical conditions, and training levels of tourists, ensuring that each visitor has a satisfying experience. This enhances the quality of service interaction and enterprise management, updates the technical support of service management systems, strengthens data analysis capabilities, and scientifically arranges tourism routes, scales, and admission times [15]. The "Internet Plus Culture and Tourism" approach not only creates unique promotional hotspots for specific cities but also provides cities with novel, multidimensional cultural elements. Integrating ice and snow sports into the industrial chain of daily cultural and tourism development, within the confines of strictly seasonal limitations, innovative digital technologies can extend and broaden the radiation space of the industrial chain. By organizing various stakeholders such as urban entities, cultural and tourism industry institutions, and creators, a mature cultural industry ecological network system can be constructed, thus promoting the digital transformation of traditional culture [16].

7 Conclusion

Studies have indicated that the growth of metropolitan cultural tourism is heavily influenced by ice and snow sports, which in turn affects the connected sectors’ financial growth in cities. Sports represent an essential aspect of urban modernization, and the branding of ice and snow sports provides an excellent platform for city image building, serving as a key indicator of urban competitiveness. However, seasonal limitations also present potential challenges for resource development. In the future, the emphasis will be on strengthening snow and icy conditions cities’ capacity for long-term prosperity and using their unique advantages to expand tourism for wellness and diversify ice and snow tourism services. The phenomenon of the ice and snow economy has surged, bringing about vigorous vitality to cultural tourism. The future agenda revolves around how ice and snow cities can capitalize on their strengths to ensure the prosperity and stability of the tourism industry, and how
to further develop the tourism industry, making it a pressing topic of today.

Authors Contribution
All the authors contributed equally and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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