

The Study of the Development Path of the Ice and Snow Sports Tourism Industry in Hohhot, Inner Mongolia, Based on SWOT-PEST Matrix Analysis

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Abstract. The aim of this research is to examine the current status, obstacles, and future strategies for the ice and snow sports tourism sector in Hohhot following the successful bid for the Beijing Winter Olympics. Utilizing the SWOT-PEST matrix tool and analyzing the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the industry in Hohhot, this paper presents a comprehensive evaluation. The study findings suggest a multi-faceted approach: (1) The ice and snow sports tourism industry in Hohhot should implement a varied growth strategy, enhancing digitalization within the sector to improve customer experiences and operational efficiency. It should also create unique branding for ice and snow initiatives, emphasizing regional distinctiveness to attract a diverse audience. (2) There is a need to concentrate on enhancing the total competitiveness of the ice and snow sports tourism industry, with a particular focus on sustainability to ensure its long-term viability. (3) It's essential to develop appropriate development strategies that align with local circumstances, aiming to drive overall economic and social advancement within the region. This approach will help in positioning Hohhot as a premier destination for ice and snow sports tourism, leveraging its unique offerings and strategic location.

1 Introduction

The Beijing Winter Olympics' success in organization, deployment, and hospitality significantly boosted China's industries related to ice and snow, showcasing their growing economic, social, and cultural impact [1]. This event's success led to China introducing several strategies aimed at growing the ice and snow sector. These strategies, upon examination, focus on promoting widespread engagement in ice and snow activities among the public and the creation of unique ice and snow sports communities to bolster the tourism sector tied to these sports, thereby improving the overall industry framework [2].

In alignment with this national initiative, in 2016, Inner Mongolia unveiled its "Ice and Snow Sports Development Plan for the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (2016-2025)," which laid out a strategic "one core, one ring, two belts" design for the region's ice and snow sports development [3]. By leveraging the unique economic and resource strengths of its various municipalities, the region aimed to forge standout ice and snow tourism offerings. Furthermore, in 2019, Hulunbuir, a city within Inner Mongolia, released its "Implementation Opinions on Accelerating Ice and Snow Sports Development in Hulunbuir City," which was grounded in a people-centric approach, strategic coordination, and the fusion of competitive and recreational elements, tailored to local conditions. This

approach intended to solidify ice and snow sports' foundation, elevate their status, and foster the industry's growth [4]. By 2021, China had launched the "Ice and Snow Tourism Development Action Plan (2021-2023)" to enhance the availability of ice and snow tourism attractions and propel the sector towards superior development, satisfying the public's demand for ice and snow tourism experiences and pioneering a new paradigm in tourism development [5].

Seizing this momentum, Inner Mongolia energetically pursued the expansion of ice and snow tourism, elevating the sector's standards, and established 72 ice and snow sports facilities, including arenas for ice skating, short track speed skating, curling, and ice hockey. The region hosted the 14th Winter Games in 2020 and also managed 17 ski competitions of A-level status, along with the China Car Short Track Rally Championship and the China Snowmobile Cross-Country Race, among other notable events. These initiatives, spurred by strategic policy rollouts and local government engagement, have hastened the conversion of Inner Mongolia's "cold" ice and snow resources into "hot" economic drivers [6].

Hohhot, as the administrative, economic, cultural, scientific, educational, and financial hub of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, holds a storied and cultural significance, recognized nationally as a leading tourism city. Its commitment to expanding winter tourism, coupled with the burgeoning market for ice and

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snow tourism, plays a critical role in advancing Hohhot's winter tourism sector. This development not only enriches the local populace's leisure options but also bolsters employment and economic growth in the area.

2 Current status analysis of the ice and snow sports tourism industry in Hohhot

Situated in China's north, Inner Mongolia stretches across the northeast, north, and northwest, offering ideal conditions for ice and snow sports tourism thanks to its frigid winters [7]. However, when comparing it to established hubs like Heilongjiang and Jilin, Inner Mongolia's winter sports scene is still evolving [8]. Hohhot, in the eastern part of Inner Mongolia, is endowed with abundant ice and snow resources and distinct geographical features [9]. Positioned at Mongolia's heart, Hohhot benefits from accessible transport, winters that are less harsh than the northeastern region's temperatures below -20 degrees Celsius, and a multicultural demographic primarily comprising Mongolians, followed by Han Chinese, with significant Manchu, Hui, Korean, and 35 other ethnic groups contributing to a rich tapestry of cultural traditions [10]. Despite these advantages, Hohhot's ice and snow sports tourism sector is in its infancy, grappling with various challenges. As the regional capital, it has been slow to develop this industry, facing issues like inadequate infrastructure and underdeveloped venue facilities. The product offerings are technologically basic, lacking in global tourism appeal and advanced entertainment options, with minimal digital integration. Additionally, the industry's growth is primarily guided by governmental directives without specific policies, resulting in scant commercial investment and operation, which curtails development pace and market competitiveness. Furthermore, the low level of public engagement and awareness around ice and snow tourism hampers the industry's expansion. As this sector progresses, it might encounter new hurdles, necessitating ongoing focus and intervention by the pertinent authorities.

3 SWOT-PEST analysis of the development of the ice and snow sports tourism industry in Hohhot

The SWOT-PEST framework provides a comprehensive analysis, outlining the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats facing Hohhot's ice and snow sports tourism sector against the backdrop of political, economic, social, and technological dimensions as shown in Table 1. This analytical approach enables a detailed evaluation to identify actionable insights and strategic directions.

3.1. Strengths analysis of the development of the ice and snow sports tourism industry in Hohhot

Political Strengths: By utilizing ice and snow culture and tourism, Inner Mongolia hopes to revitalize the local economy through strategic planning and policy formulation. This commitment to the ice and snow economy is visible. There is a clear goal to create new economic drivers and structural rejuvenation, as evidenced by documents such as the "Ice and Snow Sports Development Plan of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region (2016-2025)".

Economic Strengths: Hohhot enjoys significant economic advantages as the political and economic hub of Inner Mongolia, boasting a robust manufacturing sector that benefits from economies of scale and reduced operational costs. Moreover, China's extensive tourism market presents a fertile ground for Inner Mongolia, traditionally a popular summer destination, to transform and capture a crucial slice of the national tourism market by diversifying into winter tourism.

Social Strengths: The region's ample customer base, advantageous geography, long periods of stable snowfall, and existing tourism infrastructure position ice and snow tourism projects for success. The proximity of suitable areas for such tourism to Hohhot, especially around Daqing Mountain, offers easy access, wide spaces, convenient transport, and minimal urban pollution, ensuring high-quality snow and environmental conditions.

Technological Strengths: Hohhot's established ice and snow tourism brands like Taiwei Ski Resort and Northern Lights Ski Resort, along with events like the Hasuhai Ice and Snow Tourism Festival, have garnered recognition and demand for their offerings. Additionally, the maturity of service technologies at ski resorts, encompassing training, equipment maintenance, and slope upkeep, ensures a comprehensive, enthusiastic, and professional experience for visitors.

These strengths, underpinned by strategic political initiatives, economic clustering, social demand, and technological advancement, provide a solid foundation for Hohhot's ice and snow sports tourism industry to overcome its developmental hurdles and harness the untapped potential of winter tourism.

3.2. Weaknesses analysis of the development of the ice and snow sports tourism industry in Hohhot

Political Weaknesses: Hohhot's approach to developing its ice and snow tourism resources shows a lack of comprehensive policy coordination, leading to a narrow focus on skiing at the expense of other types of ice and snow tourism. This has resulted in a fragmented development landscape where potential synergies among different tourism sectors are not realized, reducing the diversity of attractions available to tourists and potentially decreasing their interest in repeat visits.

Economic Weaknesses: The region faces challenges in establishing a robust ice and snow industry due to its late start and insufficient market recognition, especially when compared to traditional ice and snow provinces in the northeast. The lack of a systematic approach to

product and market development has left the local ice and snow industry foundation weak and lagging, with a reliance on external entities to drive product development during the local ice and snow season, which undercuts the growth of local enterprises.

Social Weaknesses: The influence of ice and snow culture in Hohhot is minimal, and marketing efforts have not effectively promoted this aspect of the local heritage. The sporadic and concentrated nature of ice and snow publicity, coupled with a lack of focus on the city's rich cultural narratives, has diminished its appeal to potential visitors. Furthermore, the region's transportation infrastructure, crucial for developing the tourism market, requires significant enhancements to better connect Hohhot with the rest of China and international destinations, particularly during the challenging winter months.

Technical Weaknesses: A significant gap in the availability of skilled professionals within the ice and snow sports tourism sector hampers Hohhot's ambitions for industry development. The absence of specialized education and training programs in ice and snow sports contributes to a scarcity of qualified personnel for venue management, maintenance, and operation. Moreover, the industry's high turnover rate, driven by strong seasonality and limited market size, exacerbates the talent shortage, impacting the industry's capacity for sustainable growth and innovation. Addressing these weaknesses requires a strategic and integrated approach, encompassing policy reforms, market development initiatives, cultural promotion strategies, infrastructure improvements, and educational investments to nurture local talent and enhance the competitiveness and appeal of Hohhot's ice and snow sports tourism industry.

3.3. Opportunities analysis of the development of the ice and snow sports tourism industry in Hohhot

Political Opportunities: The Winter Olympics' strong push has led to a more diverse consumption environment for ice and snow sports in China, which is helping the industry grow quickly and establishing the groundwork for future market expansion. In order to promote the high-quality development of Hohhot's ice and snow business, local governments should take advantage of the market opportunities for the large-scale development of the ice and snow economy during the post-Olympic and Asian Winter Games influence period.

Economic Opportunities: Hohhot has a large market potential from a demand standpoint. As stated in the "2020 China Ski Industry White Paper," China has the most indoor ski resorts worldwide and has been the only ski market in the world to grow at a high rate over the last five years. China's winter tourism industry will eventually be centered around the ice and snow economy. Data from the "China Ice and Snow Industry Development Report (2021)" indicates that more than 500 million ice and snow visitors are anticipated in China by 2025, bringing in more than 1.1 trillion yuan in income. However, compared with other countries, the

penetration rate of skiing in China is still very low, with the proportion of skiers in the total population only 1%, while Switzerland's skiing penetration rate is as high as 35%, France 13% Japan 9%, and the United States 8%. This indicates that the proportion of skiers in China is far below that of the aforementioned countries, revealing a vast market potential.

Social Opportunities: With the country's development and the improvement of people's material living standards, the public's demand for tourism has become increasingly strong, and the tourism economy has gradually become an important part of the national economic development. As a new economic growth point, the ice and snow sports tourism industry has formed a corresponding scale and industry model, gradually developing from the initial natural scenic area development and cultural scenic area management into a comprehensive industry combining sightseeing, leisure, cultural entertainment, dining, accommodation, and sports.

Technical Opportunities: The success of "Harbin" has aided in the growth of ice and snow sports tourism, which has improved the industry chain and spurred technological advancement. There is fierce competition in the ice and snow tourism sector in Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, and the three northeastern provinces. It is feasible to further improve industry management capabilities, increasing the competitiveness of firms, through collaboration and exchange with several established industries in the three northeastern provinces.

3.4. Threats analysis of the development of the ice and snow sports tourism industry in Hohhot

Political Threats: Intense competition from traditional ski tourism areas domestically and internationally. Western developed countries, represented by the United States and Germany, have been vigorously developing ski tourism and competitive skiing projects for a long time, achieving accomplishments unmatched by other countries. In the Asian region, South Korea and Japan, the two countries that first developed the ski tourism industry, not only have a high market degree but also have formed a relatively obvious brand effect.

Economic Threats: Hohhot prioritizes economic gains over cultural construction when developing ice and snow sports tourism projects, which has resulted in the development of numerous ice and snow sports tourism venues. However, the city's strong commercial environment prevents further improvements to the caliber of ice and snow sports tourism products.

Social Threats: Folk ice and snow tourism and ice and snow event tourism have rich ethnic folklore and cultural implications, even though Hohhot's ice and snow sports tourist initiatives have not yet reached their full potential. Consequently, the experiences that tourists have with ice and snow sports are restricted to the more popular ones, like skating and skiing. This undermines the tourism experience and the industry's technique of producing products, which is detrimental to the long-

term, high-quality expansion of Hohhot's ice and snow sports tourism.

Technical Threats: The ice and snow industry lacks a strong sense of technological innovation and endogenous motivation. Taking ice and snow equipment manufacturing as an example, China faces pressure from both domestic and foreign brands: on one hand, foreign brands have monopolized the ice and snow equipment market for many years, making the prices expensive; on the other hand, domestic manufacturers, due to lack of core technology and scarcity of independent brands, are reluctant to produce, resulting in insufficient supply. Hohhot's ice and snow equipment manufacturing industry is primarily composed of spontaneously formed small enterprises with poor independent innovation capability, facing numerous difficulties in product research and development due to limited conditions, lack of technological innovation drive, unable to form high market share, leading-edge core technology independent brands, nor a healthy industry cluster, lacking endogenous motivation.

Table 1. SWOT-PEST analysis of ice and snow sports tourism industry in Hohhot.

Category	Political (P)	Economic (E)	Social (S)	Technological (T)
Strengths (S)	(SP1) The government optimizes industrial layout	(SE1) Located at the development center, with numerous manufacturing clusters	(SS1) Ample customer base, good location, suitable conditions	(ST1) Many ski resorts, high demand
	(SP2) Introduced many preferential policies targeting weaknesses	(SE2) Large domestic consumer market, Inner Mongolia has strong tourism capabilities	(SS2) Convenient transportation, beautiful environment	(ST2) Most ski resorts have mature service technologies
Weaknesses (W)	(WP1) Uncoordinated resource development, single development concept	(WE1) Only ice and snow products, no ice and snow industry	(WS1) Weak influence of ice and snow culture	(WT1) Lack of professional talent
	(WP2) Focus only on skiing projects	(WE2) Lagging development of ice and snow products	(WS2) Subject to winter climate and safety factors	(WT2) Strong seasonality, small market size
Opportunities (O)	(OP1) Increasingly diversified ice and	(OE1) Huge market potential, many ski	(OS1) The public's travel demand is getting	(OT1) Frequent cooperation with established

	snow consumption scenarios	resorts	stronger (OS2) The tourism industry has become a new point of economic growth	companies in recent years
Threats (T)	(TP1) Intense competition in ski tourism both domestically and internationally	(TE1) Neglected cultural construction of ice and snow sports tourism	(TS1) Insufficient development of the cultural connotation of ethnic folklore	(TT1) Poor technological innovation, insufficient internal motivation

4 Strategic choices and practical paths

4.1. Strategic choices for Hohhot's ice and snow sports tourism industry

Through the SWOT-PEST analysis, this paper understands the development dynamics of Hohhot's ice and snow sports tourism industry, which shows a balance of internal strengths and weaknesses against external opportunities and threats. Nonetheless, the prospects for development remain positive. A diversified development strategy is identified as most suitable for Hohhot, given its current stage, emphasizing the need to leverage political and economic advantages while addressing the external challenges posed by competitive pressures and technological advancements. Hohhot's strategic positioning calls for a focus on leveraging strengths, mitigating weaknesses, and exploring new opportunities for growth and innovation in the long term.

4.2. Practical paths for the development of Hohhot's ice and snow sports tourism industry

Based on the strategic analysis, several practical pathways are proposed to guide the development of Hohhot's ice and snow sports tourism industry, adhering to the principles of leveraging advantages, addressing weaknesses, and seizing market opportunities.

4.2.1 Integration of the ice and snow sports tourism industry and the Internet

The integration with the internet is crucial for enhancing the accessibility and appeal of ice and snow sports tourism. By leveraging online platforms for information dissemination and booking, Hohhot can provide personalized and comprehensive tourism experiences to a wider audience, driven by the advancements in internet technologies and the 'Belt and Road' initiative.

4.2.2 Innovation in ice and snow project branding

Innovative branding strategies that highlight Hohhot's rich cultural heritage and distinctive ethnic customs are essential. Developing unique tourism projects, such as ethnic ice towns and ice and snow hot springs, will enhance Hohhot's brand image in the ice and snow tourism market and attract more visitors.

4.2.3 Regional innovation and branding

Leveraging Hohhot's natural beauty through the development of ice and snow viewing activities and resort towns will capitalize on the region's aesthetic value. This approach aims to transform Hohhot into a leading destination for leisure and vacation tourism.

4.2.4 Developing effective strategies to expand potential consumer markets

Targeted marketing strategies are essential for expanding Hohhot's consumer base in the ice and snow tourism sector. Initiatives like university ski holidays can widen the market reach and attract diverse visitor demographics.

4.2.5 Leveraging environmental advantages for effective development of ice and snow projects

Sustainable development practices that utilize Hohhot's environmental advantages are key to the long-term success of ice and snow tourism projects. This approach emphasizes the importance of ecological and cultural sustainability in promoting tourism growth.

5 Conclusion

As Hohhot progresses with its strategic development plan for the ice and snow sports tourism industry, it faces a pivotal opportunity for growth and innovation. By increasing investment, enhancing infrastructure, and fostering regional collaborations, Hohhot can establish itself as a premier destination in the ice and snow tourism market. The focus on diversity, innovation, and sustainability will be crucial in realizing the full potential of Hohhot's ice and snow sports tourism industry.

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