

Development Dilemma in China's National Sports Tourism Industry and Countermeasures

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Abstract

After more than one decade development, sports tourism industry does not achieve the expected size and benefit. Industrial development faces bottleneck dilemma. The author reviews the industrial development of past ten years, analyzes the development dilemma of Chinese sports tourism industry by means of files analysis, spot investigation, and interviews, and presents relevant countermeasures, offering theoretical support for the development of sports tourism industry.

Keywords: Sports tourism, Sports industry, Development dilemma

1. The Emergence of Problem

With the development of China's reform and opening up, China has become an important pole of world economy, and also a vital engine for world economic development. Economic globalization promotes the diversification of China's industrial economy, and industrial structural proportion is adjusted gradually. The agriculture and industry, as basic sectors, contribute less to economic development. The service industry and information industry, as the most powerful sunrise industries, grow fast and well. Tourism, as a representative of service industry, is widely supported by the state and government. Tourism is the only industry that does not need large costs and original investments. It plays an active role in earning foreign exchange and expanding domestic needs. Nationally, sports tourism industry develops several clusters: the sand and cold sports tourism in northwestern, the ice-and-snow sports tourism in northeast, the exploration and outdoor sports tourism in eastern China and southern China, etc. Sports tourism industry, as the newborn best player, wins wide attentions in the industry. However, during the nearly ten-year development, sports tourism industry is still at an academic and weak stage. Its development suffers from certain social factors and internal industrial factors. This paper analyzes the development dilemma of China's sports tourism industry as follow:

2. An Analysis of Development Dilemma of Sports Tourism Industry

2.1 The Dilemma of Positioning Is A Premise Factor

The dilemma of positioning is from the industry itself. At present, sports tourism industry does not form the accumulated and sustainable industrial economic effect, since it still grows in the shadow of two matured industries, the sports and the tourism. This primary reason is the uncertainty of industrial division. Sports tourism industry should be an independent industry. Its core product, sports tourism, looks like the combined output of sports and tourism, but in nature, it is the deep alienation and sublimation of tourism activities, the senior sports activities, and the living environment for people. It pursues for the self harmony of individual by means of participation and visit (invisible participation), as the ultimate goal. It is a leisure and experiential way of living with flexible sports and tourism. The positioning dilemma of sports tourism product mainly focuses on two aspects: without strong unique characters, and strong market acceptance of substitutes. At present, some popular sports tourism products, such as skiing, rafting, outdoor, outward bound, hiking, and spring outing, are sold by regular ways. Tourists just love to play and experience. They are not aware of sports tourism products, which are pursued and purchased later. The fuzzy market positioning is appropriate for fast developing a market at an early stage. But for the long-run consideration, as for the positioning of product, to build a brand is the right way for

industrial development. Meanwhile, the market acceptance of substitute product is also a key element restricting the positioning of sports tourism product. Take the outward bound for example. One same product is operated by dozens of firms. It is profitable in the market. But, different levels of outward bound lead to various prices. And the competition is mainly about price, which will kill them all. Once tourists find that they can not be served well even if they pay high, they may choose some substitutes with high market acceptance.

2.2 The Dilemma of Product Development Is A Basic Factor Restricting Sports Tourism Industry

China has a vast and abundant land. The sports tourism resources are very rich, what found the base for the development of China's sports tourism industry. How to transform these sports tourism resources into relevant products that satisfy market needs has gained professionals' attentions more and more. Currently, the development of sports tourism products is in a random state in China, which causes a bottleneck for further development. Some initially-developed sports tourism products lost their competitive advantages and attractiveness along with the social development and the emergence of new products. At the same time, not any new sports tourism product appears, causing a gap between traditional products and new ones. As a result, the industry lost its core competence in market gradually. First, the blind and repetitive development is always the relatively chief constraining factor during the development of sports tourism products. Secondly, the development of sports tourism products is not based on local conditions, what results in amounts of similar or same products in many different areas. Although it will enrich the forms and contents of sports tourism products, and sports tourists have more choices, it may cause a bigger trouble, that is, short of local features for sports tourism products. As a result, the attractiveness of sports tourism products is declining.

2.3 The Planning Dilemma Is the Essential Factor Restricting the Development of Sports Tourism Industry

With China's success in bidding to host the 2001 Olympic Games, the whole nation is enthusiastic for physical exercises. Sports tourism becomes a city life style. This new way of living and choice suddenly entering our life seems to not make too much progress in the way of industrialization. In all provinces, the sports international tourism agencies make profits more on selling regular tourism products. More professional sports tourism products do not win necessary attentions here. Meanwhile, ordinary tourism agencies also sell sports tourism products. The fundamental reason for present market phenomenon is the bottleneck dilemma of planning sports tourism products. Reasons for the bottleneck dilemma include: first, absence of planning theories. Sports tourism is analyzed as a branch of tourism, a special tourism style, in theoretical fields. And the theories directing planning practices are taken as theories of tourism planning. Few theories are right for sports tourism planning. The essence of the phenomena is that theoretically there is not a distinct division between sports tourism products and non-sports tourism products ----- experience. This experience is an external presence of people, as the natural creature, desiring for the nature, with enthusiasm. Second, the absence of talents for sports tourism planning. In China, real tourism planning institutes and talents are in tourism universities and scientific research centers. There is not this subject for master study in universities (not so much for tourism planning). Third, the dilemma of classifying sports tourism industry. As we come to this issue, there seems to be a problem of positioning sports tourism industry. Both sports industry and tourism industry love to include sports tourism industry in economic analysis. But in operation, sports tourism industry merely grows between the cracks. In nature, sports tourism industry should be independent in the third industry, and sports and tourism are just relevant industries.

2.4 The Dilemma of Selling Is the Further Development Bottleneck of Sports Tourism Industry

The dilemma of selling in sports tourism industry is mainly from the sales mode. Currently there are two ways of selling sports tourism products or even tourism products: one is the random sale, and the other is vertical sale. The random sale is to advertising the products among all potential clients between tourism agencies and clubs. The vertical sale is to sell the products to wholesalers and retailers vertically. As a company designs a tourism product and makes market promotion, other tourism agencies and clubs can earn returning by selling it for the company. At present, the vertical sale is the dominant mode in the market. It is this mode that brings about the selling dilemma for the sports tourism industry and even the tourism industry. To design a tourism product is a complicated process. After a series of processes, such as investigation, line observation, investment, and design, finally the manager will check on its feasibility. Theoretically, the cost of new product (the sports tourism product) is small. But after these processes, the product possesses high added values. In other words, the product is an intellectual output with creation. However, in the vertical mode, the products will be mastered by other competitors in market quickly. After all, sports tourism product is not about technologies. With one experience, similar companies can copy similar lines and products, or even make it better. This sale mode is not chosen by companies freely, especially for the third industry. Therefore, the dilemma of selling is also an important factor

bothering the development of sports tourism industry. A new sale mode that can protect intellectual right and is right for the development of sports tourism industry needs to be developed as soon as possible.

2.5 The Dilemma of Buying Is the Direct External Fact Restricting the Development of Sports Tourism Industry

Buying is the end activity of an industry, which is a direct fact driving industrial development. The buying dilemma of sports tourism industry is derived from wrong market segmentation and pricing strategies. China has the biggest population in the world. During recent years, along with the social progresses and economic development, per capita income is also rising. However, compared with other countries, China significantly lagged behind considering no matter what is the number of sports tourists or the purchase power. Two reasons contribute to this phenomenon: first, although currently the national income rises, most people stay at a moderate living state, which merely guarantee necessary clothes and foods. The disposable income is small. Meanwhile, many sports tourism items are based on economic conditions, such as “noble sport” golf, rock climbing, and desert exploration. Therefore, China does not possess strong purchase power in sports tourism. It is a fact and reasonable. Second, in China most tourists have no motives for buying sports tourism products at present. As a matter of fact, more tourists just care about “seeing mountains and waters” and “plays”. They are not interested in these stimulating sports tourism products. Subconsciously, they do not accept these dangerous sports tourism projects, such as cross, downhill, and upstream. In other words, they are not prepared to accept the brand-new form of tourism psychologically. It directly affects the tendency of consumers buying sports tourism products, and indirectly hinders the normal development of China’s sports tourism industry. Sports tourism products target the social elites and white collars. Now the pricing dilemma is that the elites think the form of sports tourism is cheaper and the price lower and they are not interested in participation, and common people think that the price is too high for a new thing. The wrong pricing strategy weakens the buying power. The industry is at an unfavorable state. Therefore, the psychological pricing strategy is relatively reasonable and proper for the development of today’s sports tourism industry.

3. Countermeasures for Dealing with Development Dilemmas of Sports Tourism Industry

3.1 Establish industrial Position and Classification

In perspective of academy, sports tourism is the combination of sports and tourism, or the child disciplinary of tourism, on the surface. But as a relatively independent industrial sector, it lingers for years between sports industry and tourism industry. A clear industrial position is based on official approval in nature, considering Chinese conditions. Only when the government confirms the position of sports tourism industry, it can get necessary policy support and legal protection. The “name- correction” process is also the root of factors restricting the development of China’s sports tourism industry for many years.

3.2 Strengthen the Training of Sports Tourism Talents and Emphasize on the Higher Vocational Education for Sports Tourism

Tourism belongs to the third industry. Its operation needs people. And its targets are people. People are the decisive factors for the development level of industry. The level of talents directly affects the industrial development. The shortage of sports tourism talents produces the short board of tourism resource planning and development. Professionals who are engaged in sports tourism industry must know the development laws of sports, relevant outdoor knowledge, and normal skills of tourism. All these qualities can be acquired by means of higher vocational education. With the popularization of higher education, to acquire necessary professional skills by higher education will be the first way of breaking the dilemma of sports tourism industry. At present, the only platform solving the problem is higher sports colleges. The important breakthrough is to enhance the construction of tourism management disciplinary in colleges and open relevant sports tourism courses in vocational schools.

3.3 Encourage the Third Sector to Enter the Industrial Market and Improve the Industrial Vitality

This third sector is between the government and the company. It does not belong to the public sector, either the market economy sector. The institutes that aim at serving the public instead of collecting profits, and do not earn for any specific individual belong to the third sector. To encourage the third sector to enter the industrial market is to enhance the industrial competitiveness and to improve the industrial vitality. The non-profit third sector is to offer services, which is an effective and important way for industrial development. For the development of sports tourism industry, most tourists and consumers prefer to buying relevant products by joining in outdoor clubs. These clubs are associations in nature, belonging to the third sector, and living not for profits. Meanwhile, services provided by these clubs are supposed to be offered by sports tourism agencies. The third sector in form of clubs can effectively alleviate the current dilemma of industrial development, which is an important way to

improve the vitality of sports tourism industry from the point view of public sector.

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