

Mount Erciyes and sports tourism: A study to evaluate the current situation

Ahmet Erdem, Mehmet Halit Akin*

ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Mount Erciyes,
Sport tourism,
High-altitude,
A*WOT.

In the changing and developing world, people's needs and requests have also begun to vary, and this situation has given the opportunity for the emergence of alternative tourism types on the basis of the tourism sector. Sports tourism, on the other hand, has emerged as an alternative tourism type that includes the active or passive participation of individual or group participants in different branches as a niche market. In this research, it is aimed to evaluate the potential of Mount Erciyes in terms of sports tourism and to present guiding knowledge for sector and public representatives. In this direction, prioritization was made with the SWOT analysis through interviews with fourteen stakeholders in the region, and then with the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) method in line with the findings obtained. Accordingly, it has been determined that Mount Erciyes has strengths and opportunities such as accessibility and being in the Cappadocia Region, as well as weaknesses and threats such as insufficient infrastructure and increased competition. In addition, it has been seen that global competition is a threat to destination, but accessibility is the most important criteria to gain a competitive advantage.

Article History:

Submitted: 16.03.2023

Revised: 29.06.2023

Revised: 05.07.2023

Accepted: 31.07.2023

Published Online: 31.07.2023

1. Introduction

Developments in information, communication, and transportation technologies have supported the tourism sector to reach a global extent (Akin *et al.*, 2020). The strong development of the sector has brought many economic benefits and cultural exchanges, paving the way for the effective and efficient use of resources in the destination (Yang *et al.*, 2020). Increasing competition conditions in the industry have directed both destinations and tourism businesses to product diversification in order to meet changing touristic trends (Bayraktar *et al.*, 2017). Türkiye has a different place and importance in terms of product diversification with its touristic supply resources. Considering its historical and cultural values and geographical location, it has characteristics that can compete at an elevated level in international market conditions in terms of alternative tourism types (Özçoban, 2019). Considering the opportunities Türkiye has in terms of natural, cultural, and historical riches, especially sports tourism is considered as an opportunity (Bayraktar *et al.*, 2017).

As one of the largest and fastest growing components of the travel and tourism industry (Singh *et al.*, 2016), the economic contribution of sports tourism has increased strongly in recent years. Sports tourism is characterized by

offerings built on diversified services. These offers appear as a combination of services as well as a set of services offered or sold in numerous ways (Pigeassou, 2004). Today, many number of people who want to benefit from this integrated service travel to certain destinations to participate in more sports organizations and to perform amateur and/or professional physical activities (Zauhar, 2004).

Sports tourism includes the active participation of tourists in sports, not just watching some sports events. It is also a way to experience the culture and characteristics of the destination through sports, as well as expend physical energy (Yang *et al.*, 2020). Sports events are among the most effective tools to attract the attention of tourists living in a different culture and country. Among these events, not only mega sports events such as the Olympic or Paralympic Games but also regional sports events play a key role in reflecting the local culture and identity (Takata & Hallmann, 2021). In addition to providing employment opportunities especially for the destination, it facilitates cultural interaction between visitors and the locals. It also helps maintain the sustainability of destination attractions by providing tourist activity throughout the year (Mesci *et al.*, 2021). In this context, societies not only gain financially from sports tourism but also gain in terms of the

*Corresponding Author

Ahmet Erdem : Asst. Prof., Harran University, Şanlıurfa, Türkiye, Email: ahmeterdem@harran.edu.tr, Orcid Id: 0000-0001-8120-3958 

Research paper

Mehmet Halit Akin : Asst. Prof., Erciyes University, Kayseri, Türkiye, Email: halitakin@erciyes.edu.tr, Orcid Id: 0000-0002-9455-0323 



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution (CC-BY) 4.0 License

sense of well-being in the society and the development of the prestige of the region (Deery *et al.*, 2004).

Like other components of tourism, effective management is especially important for the real use of the benefits derived from sports tourism (Deery & Jago, 2005; Yamaç Erdoğan, 2023). It should be guided by a strategic plan that identifies key objectives in the development of the region and includes a set of strategies aimed at achieving these objectives (Deery & Jago, 2005). Sustainable sports tourism activities that emphasize positive effects and minimize negative effects do not come about by chance and require careful planning and implementation. It is necessary to focus on the strategic planning necessary to drive the events towards positive results and sustainability for both the organizers and the local community (Chersulich Tomino *et al.*, 2020). In addition, the fact that sports activities are a part of cultural production and consumption also contributes to the development and marketing of destinations (Mesci *et al.*, 2021). The development of sports tourism in the destination is particularly noteworthy for its promise to improve the social well-being and quality of life of the host community. The commercial and traditional success of sports tourism contributes to the destination economically, socially, environmentally and culturally (Chang *et al.*, 2020).

Within the scope of the research, the potential of Mount Erciyes, which has an important touristic attraction and is accepted as a high-altitude center, in terms of sports tourism has been evaluated. For this purpose, interviews were held with stakeholders related to tourism in the destination. When the relevant body of knowledge is examined, the limited number of studies related to the subject and the absence of any study specific to the destination that is the subject of the research reveal the original aspect of the research. In addition, the results obtained within the scope of the research can be a guide especially for the sector managers in the necessary planning and / or investment processes for sports tourism. In this context, it can be stated that the results of the research will contribute to both theory and practice.

2. Conceptual Framework

High-altitude Center

The altitudes considered suitable to benefit from the benefits of high-altitude training are between 1700 and 2300 m. Establishing high-altitude centers below 1700 m has little stimulating effect; establishing above 2800 m may cause oxygen deficiency (erciyeskayakmerkezi.com). Studies about centers located at suitable heights have revealed that athletes contribute to their endurance levels by directly affecting their in-season performance levels. In addition, it has been seen that an average of 2-3 weeks of exercises will increase the efficiency to be obtained (Toy & Eymirli, 2012).

Practicing at high-altitude centers positively affects sporting performances. The subject of high-altitude started to attract the attention of researchers after the 1968 Mexican Olympic Games. After the Olympics, the better performance of the athletes living at high-altitudes, especially in organizations that require endurance, brought up the issue of examining the relationship between high-altitude training and performance. Subsequent studies in this area have shown that high-altitude activities have a direct and positive effect on performance and endurance (Tuncay & Kılınç, 2018).

Since high-altitude increases the amount of oxygen, besides physical performance, high regions facilitate all mobility (Cerit & Erdoğan, 2019). Adaptation of metabolism to high-altitude provides an increase in red blood cells (30-50%). Athletes can provide various physiological benefits, such as an increase in blood cells, hemoglobin count and enzymes in muscle tissue because of training in centers established at suitable heights (erciyeskayakmerkezi.com, 2022). Especially pre-season training in such centers is particularly important in terms of the development of the athletes and their preparation for the season. High-altitude centers offer the opportunity for athletes to have a good preparation period at the beginning of the season.

Mount Erciyes High-altitude Center

Mountaineering activities provide significant benefits for the development of the regions where they are located. Considering the geographical structure of Türkiye, mountaineering tourism offers an important opportunity in terms of reducing the seasonal intensity of tourism and transferring the tourist flow from the coastal regions to the inner regions (Tanrısever *et al.*, 2018). One of the important tourism centers for the realization of mountaineering activities in Türkiye is Mount Erciyes in Kayseri.

Due to its location, Kayseri is in a convenient location, especially in terms of road transportation. In addition, the fact that there are many daily scheduled flights, especially from Istanbul, as well as from different airports, facilitates access to the city and therefore to the centers of attraction and contributes to the competitiveness in the market. The fact that Mount Erciyes is located 20-30 minutes away from the city center and the variety of urban transportation alternatives (such as bus, taxi and tram) can be considered as another advantage (Özçoban, 2019).

The main purpose of the establishment of the high-altitude center on Mount Erciyes is to spread sports and mountaineering activities throughout the year. The facility was put into service in 2020 by Kayseri Metropolitan Municipality. Erciyes High-Altitude Camp Center is located at 1840 altitude of Mount Erciyes. Considering that suitable heights for high-altitude centers are between 1700 and 2300 m, it is possible to say that the location of Erciyes High-Altitude Camp Center is ideal. Erciyes High-Altitude



Figure 1: Mount Erciyes High-altitude Center

Source: (erciyeskayakerkezi.com, 2022)

Camp Center has been transferred to Erciyes I.C. by the Metropolitan Municipality. The center, preferred by seven clubs, hosted 15 teams in 2022. In Türkiye, when the average temperature is 35-40 degrees, the athletes who prefer the center have the opportunity to train at 20-22 degrees. In addition to the two fields that can be used currently, the construction process for six grass fields and technical units continues (erciyeskayakerkezi.com, 2022).

3. Literature Review

The relationship between sport and tourism is not new, and researchers have seen the rise of sporting events as one of the most important components of event tourism (Chersulich Tomino *et al.*, 2020). There have been many studies on alternative tourism types. Sports tourism is perhaps the largest of these types, and the number of studies on sports tourism has increased in recent years (Mesci *et al.*, 2021). Sports tourism not only makes a significant contribution to the local and national economies but also has a strong potential to further improve this contribution (Deery & Jago, 2005).

Regarding the locals' perception of sports tourism, Chang *et al.*, (2020) state that if the local people are well informed about the sports tourism activity, they will be more excited and willing to participate in sports tourism events. In the study by Şanlıoğlu and Erdem (2017), in which the tourism perception of the local people of Kayseri was investigated, it was stated that the local people in Kayseri approached the development of the tourism sector positively and supported the development of the sector. This situation is important for the development of tourism in Kayseri and alternative tourism types can be developed.

Moradi *et al.* (2022) emphasizes that the development of sports tourism activities in the destination can affect numerous factors such as the destination's reputation, convenience, attractiveness, perceived image, optimal service quality, technology and innovation, human resources, cost-effectiveness, promotion and marketing, security and infrastructure. Similarly, in another study, investments in sports and event infrastructures, employment, long-term tourism season, new tax revenues and also the potential to attract media attention were

expressed. On the negative way, the high (and sometimes excessive) costs associated with the construction and preparation of infrastructures were highlighted (Chersulich Tomino *et al.*, 2020). In this context, it can be said that sports tourism activities are an opportunity to improve the competitiveness of the destination. In addition, public and private sector cooperation is important for investments to be made.

Another stakeholder in sports tourism is the athlete. Athletes' good preparation for the season and planning their training correctly are directly proportional to their success. Kaya and Gökdemir (2015) found that high-altitude training can positively affect the performance of athletes. In addition, Bayraktar *et al.*, (2017) emphasize the view that football camps at high-altitude are important in terms of athlete endurance and season-long performance. It is also stated that it minimizes seasonal vulnerabilities and if it is developed, the differences between seasons will disappear.

Considering the advantages of Mount Erciyes in Kayseri, it is especially important to reveal the potential. In particular, the fact that Mount Erciyes becomes a center of attraction for national and international teams and amateur and/or professional athletes will support the development of tourism in the destination. Managers who set visions and strategies for the development of sports tourism should have a strategic plan that is constantly reviewed, updated and widely accepted. Failure to do so will prevent the sector from realizing its potential (Deery & Jago, 2005). In this context, scientific studies on the subject will help managers plan.

4. Methodology

The aim of the research is to determine the potential of Mount Erciyes as a high-altitude center in terms of sports tourism, prioritize the criteria related to the potential and present original and guiding knowledge about the recommendations that are important for the destinations in terms of planning and implementation. In this context, SWOT analysis and AHP were used together in the research. In the process of evaluating Mount Erciyes as a high-altitude center in terms of sports tourism, interviews were held with 14 stakeholders related to tourism in the

destination. In line with the fact that the number of participants in AHP analyzes can be performed with data obtained from one person or more than one person coming together for a common purpose (Steward, 1992; Paksoy, 2017, pp. 7), it is seen that the number of participants reached is sufficient.

A purposeful sampling method was used to determine the managers to be interviewed. Purposeful sampling is the preference of information-rich situations/people in the context of the relevant subject in order to conduct in-depth research in line with the purpose of the research (Altunışık *et al.*, 2012). Six of the 14 people determined as a sample in the research are representatives of the sector such as travel agencies, ski businesses, accommodation businesses, food and beverage businesses, tourist guides, three are tourism academicians, and five are public institutions and non-governmental organizations related to tourism. The businesses among the participants include those operating in the Erciyes Region. Tourism-related representatives from institutions and organizations such as Erciyes Inc., Provincial Culture and Tourism Directorate, Tourism Faculty, Tourism Enterprises Association participated in the paper. The interviews were held between 20-30 December 2022. For this study, the Ethics Committee's permission was obtained from the Scientific Research and Publishing Ethics Board for Social and Humanities of Erciyes University with the decision dated 27 December 2022 and numbered 556.

After the interviews were made for the SWOT analysis, the criteria determined for the sports tourism potential of Mount Erciyes were prioritized with the AHP method. During the SWOT analysis process, re-appointments were made with the interviewed participants and a second round of interviews was held between 23 January and 03 February 2023 on the days and times determined. The

hybrid use of SWOT analysis and AHP management (A'WOT) provides the opportunity to organize the decision process criteria for determining the potential of Mount Erciyes in terms of sports tourism, to evaluate the criteria based on pairwise comparison, and to determine the relative importance of each criterion (Shrestha *et al.*, 2004). The model of the research is given in Figure 2.

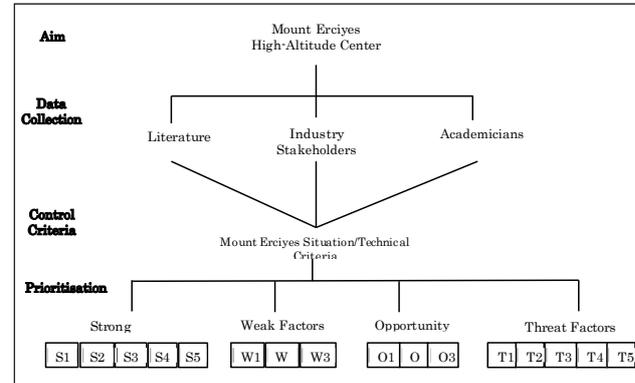


Figure 2. Research Model

Source: Adapted from Erdem *et al.*, (2022).

In Figure 1, the research process is illustrated in its simplest form. In addition, the details of the SWOT analysis and the AHP method (A'WOT) as well as the information about the analyses are given in the findings section, respectively.

5. Findings

Within the scope of the research, the findings regarding the demographic distribution of the participants were included. Accordingly, the demographic distribution of the participants was found to be between the ages of 31-40 (50%), male (85.7%), university (two or four years of education) graduates (64.2%) and sector representatives (42.8%). As a result of the SWOT analysis conducted with the participants in the study, five criteria were determined

Table 1. SWOT Analysis of Mount Erciyes

Strengths	Explaining
Awareness of Mount Erciyes	Hosting national and international events
Physical structure of Erciyes	Its physical structure is suitable for many sports activities such as camping, cycling and mountaineering.
Accessibility of Mount Erciyes	The fact that it is close to the city center and the quality of transportation makes Mount Erciyes stronger compared to other destinations.
Variety of facilities in Erciyes	The variety of sports facilities, the continuous increase in the variety of accommodation and food and beverage facilities, the enough accommodation and food and beverage facilities
Quality of facilities in Erciyes	The new accommodation and catering facilities and the quality of the accommodation and catering facilities
Weaknesses	Explaining
Lack of promotion and marketing	The perception of only skiing is widespread, the promotion and marketing of different sports branches is insufficient, and there is no travel agency dealing with sports tourism
Insufficient infrastructure	There are few world-class enterprises, insufficient facilities for other sports branches, a lack of entertainment life, insufficient organizations for different sports branches, parking problems and insufficient shopping (shopping mall, market) opportunities
Poor vegetation	Due to its structure, there is no particular tree diversity
Opportunities	Explaining
Having an effective management	Having destination management (Kayseri Erciyes I. C.)
Being in the Cappadocia Region	Kayseri has a central location, is located in the Cappadocia Region, and Kayseri has rich historical and cultural values.
It will be the last to be affected by the climate crisis.	According to the statements of the participants, the studies show that Mount Erciyes is the latest to be affected by the climate crisis compared to other regions.
Threats	Explaining
Climate crisis	The deterioration of the natural structure as a result of global warming worldwide
Managerial problems	The fact that the industry is prioritized in the city, different products cannot be developed, the Erciyes Master Plan has not been fully completed, there are managerial inadequacies, the number of alcoholic facilities, the increase in the effects of inflation and the inadequate planning pose a threat to Mount Erciyes compared to other destinations.
Increasing competition	The emergence of new competitors and touristic products in both national and international markets
Poor brand image	Insufficient impressions of Mount Erciyes, which is formed by tourists as a sports tourism destination
Lack of qualified staff	Insufficient number of qualified staff from sports tourism service to trainers

Source: Elaborated by Authors

for the strengths and threats of Mount Erciyes as a high-altitude center in terms of sports tourism, and three criteria for each of the weaknesses and opportunities. The criteria determined within the scope of the research and the explanations regarding these criteria are given in Table 1.

The criteria for opportunities and threats, as well as strengths and weaknesses, were determined based on the responses of the participants to the SWOT. For example, the fact that Mount Erciyes hosts national and international organizations, which different participants expressed as a strength, was evaluated by the researchers as the criteria for 'awareness of Erciyes'. Therefore, a total of 16 criteria were determined within the scope of the research. At this point, the point to be noted is that the criteria are 'accessibility of Mount Erciyes' as strengths, 'having an effective management' in opportunities and 'managerial problems' in threats. Accessibility is basically an opportunity for the destination, but according to the evaluations of the participants, what is wanted to be emphasized about accessibility is that the accessibility criteria make Mount Erciyes stronger compared to other destinations. Similarly, the situation of 'having an effective management', which is expressed as an opportunity, is a strength that Erciyes has, but the participants evaluate the opportunities offered by an effective management within this scope. 'Managerial problems' is actually weakness for a destination, but the participants express the threats that managerial problems pose to Mount Erciyes.

After the SWOT analysis, the AHP method was used to compare the sub-criteria among themselves and to prioritize the criteria. If SWOT analysis and AHP are used together, the importance of each criterion in the decision-making process can be measured quantitatively (Yüksel & Akin, 2006, pp. 255). In the AHP process, the participants were first asked to compare the main criteria and sub-criteria among themselves. While AHP data was collected, according to the 1-9 scale created by Saaty (1990) (1=Equal importance, 2=Weak, 3= Moderate importance, 4= Slightly above medium, 5= Strong importance, 6= Slightly above strong, 7= Very strong importance, 8= Very very strong importance 9= Absolute importance) pairwise comparison matrices were created.

Then, the process of calculating the priority values of the pairwise comparison matrices was started. To calculate the priority values of the matrices, first of all, the normalization process should be performed. To normalize the matrices, each column must be summed (Yılmaz & Güneren, 2023). In addition, each value in the matrix must be divided by the sum of the columns (F1). In this way, the priority value is obtained by averaging each row of normalized values. The matrix on which the normalized operation is applied is called the "normalized pairwise comparison matrix". The relevant formulas used in this process are shown below.

$$C_{ij} = \frac{a_{ij}}{\sum_{i=1}^n a_{ij}} \tag{F1}$$

$$C = \begin{bmatrix} c_{11} & c_{12} & \dots & c_{1n} \\ c_{21} & c_{22} & \dots & c_{2n} \\ \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ c_{n1} & c_{n2} & \dots & c_{nn} \end{bmatrix} \text{ (Normalized pairwise comparisons matrix)}$$

By using the normalized pairwise comparison matrix, the average of the row components in the C matrix is taken with the F2 equation formula to obtain the importance values of the criteria among themselves. As a result of this process, the priority value of the criteria in the pairwise comparison matrix is calculated. The priority vector W emphasizing the priority value of the criteria is a column vector shown below.

$$w_i = \frac{\sum_{j=1}^n c_{ij}}{n} \tag{F2}$$

$$W = \begin{bmatrix} w_1 \\ w_2 \\ \vdots \\ w_n \end{bmatrix} \text{ (Priority Vector)}$$

In the process of calculating the consistency ratio (CR), the consistency of the comparisons made between the criteria can be tested. In the calculation part of the consistency ratio, AHP compares the number of criteria with a coefficient (λ) expressed as the "Basic Value". In the process of calculating λ , firstly the D column vector is obtained from the matrix multiplication of the comparison matrix A and the priority vector W.

$$D = \begin{bmatrix} a_{11} & a_{12} & \dots & a_{1n} \\ a_{21} & a_{22} & \dots & a_{2n} \\ \vdots & \vdots & \ddots & \vdots \\ a_{n1} & a_{n2} & \dots & a_{nn} \end{bmatrix} \times \begin{bmatrix} w_1 \\ w_2 \\ \vdots \\ w_n \end{bmatrix}$$

Returns the basic value (E) for each evaluation criteria from the division of the reciprocal values of the D column vector and W column vector reached, as defined in the formula (F3). The arithmetic mean (F4) formula of the relevant values provides the basic value (λ) for comparison.

$$E_i = \frac{d_i}{w_i} \quad (i = 1, 2, \dots, n) \tag{F3}$$

$$\lambda = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n E_i}{n} \tag{F4}$$

After determining the λ value, the Consistency Indicator (CI) is reached using the following formula (F5).

$$CI = \frac{\lambda - n}{n - 1} \tag{F5}$$

At the last stage, the CR value is obtained by dividing the consistency indicator (CI) by the standard correction value, which is expressed as the Random Indicator (RI) and included in Table 2. The relevant value corresponding to the number of criteria should be selected from the table showing the random index values below.

Table 2. Random Index Values

N	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
RI	0.0	0.58	0.90	1.12	1.24	1.32	1.41	1.45	1.49

Source: (Karakuş, 2019)

$$CR = \frac{CI}{RI} \quad (F6)$$

A CR value greater than 0.10 indicates a calculation error made by the researcher(s) or the inconsistency of the sample in the process of comparing the criteria. In this respect, for the decision matrix to be consistent, the CR value should be less than or equal to 0.10 (Doğan & Sözbilen, 2014).

Three participants whose evaluations were not consistent were interviewed again, and within the scope of the evaluation made by 14 participants (CR1= 0.02, CR2=0.02, CR3=0.04, CR4=0.05, CR5=0.06, CR6=0.05, CR7=0.02, CR8= 0.03, CR9=0.01, CR10= 0.06, CR11=0.07, CR12=0.03, CR13= 0.03, CR14= 0.09) for the main criteria, they were listed as strengths (30%), weaknesses (28%), threats (25%) and opportunities (17%). Participants then prioritized the strengths and weaknesses, as well as the sub-criteria of opportunities and threats, by making a pairwise comparison among themselves.

Accordingly, the combined importance values and order of the SWOT groups and sub-criteria are given in Table 3.

As a result of the evaluations, it has been determined that 'the accessibility of Mount Erciyes' has the highest weighted average among the strengths criteria as a high-altitude center, while the 'quality of the facilities in Erciyes' has the lowest weighted average. In the evaluation of the participants for the sub-criteria of the weaknesses dimension of Mount Erciyes, the criteria with the highest weighted average (0.42) is 'insufficient infrastructure', while the criteria with the lowest weighted average (0.26) is 'poor vegetation'. As a result of the evaluation made for the dimension of opportunities, the criteria with the highest weighted average rating (0.46) was 'being in the Cappadocia Region', while 'having an effective management' was the criteria with the lowest weighted average (0.20). On the other hand, as a result of the prioritization made on the basis of the threats dimension sub-criteria, "increasing competition" was the criteria with the highest weighted average (0.29), while "lack of qualified staff" was the criteria with the lowest weighted average (0.08).

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The diversification of touristic trends with globalization and technological developments also diversifies the products and services offered by destinations. The natural and artificial resources of destinations are the most fundamental determinants of the diversity of these products and services. Therefore, it is important to determine the current situation of destinations for alternative tourism types, to evaluate them and to reveal them based on criteria,

Table 3. Integrated Significance Values and Order of SWOT Groups and Sub-Criteria

SWOT Groups	SWOT Groups		Sub-Criterias		Weighted Averages Within the Factor's Group
	Weighted Averages	O			
Strengths	0,300	1	S1	Accessibility of Mount Erciyes	0,329
			S2	Physical structure of Erciyes	0,235
			S3	Variety of facilities in Erciyes	0,156
			S4	Awareness of Mount Erciyes	0,154
			S5	Quality of facilities in Erciyes	0,125
Weaknesses	0,280	2	W1	Insufficient infrastructure	0,425
			W2	Lack of promotion and marketing	0,307
			W3	Poor vegetation	0,268
Opportunities	0,170	4	O1	Being in the Cappadocia Region	0,466
			O2	It will be the last to be affected by the climate crisis.	0,330
			O3	Having an effective management	0,204
Threats	0,251	3	T1	Increasing competition	0,290
			T2	Climate crisis	0,240
			T3	Managerial problems	0,209
			T4	Poor brand image	0,176
			T5	Lack of qualified staff	0,085

Source: Elaborated by Authors

in terms of effective and efficient planning. In line with this information, the availability of products and services related to different sports branches in Mount Erciyes as a high-altitude center and winter tourism destination, the importance of evaluating the current situation of Mount Erciyes in terms of sports tourism has emerged. In this direction, within the scope of research and publication ethics, a SWOT analysis was conducted to determine the strengths and weaknesses, as well as opportunities and threats, regarding the current situation of Mount Erciyes regarding sports tourism, through interviews with tourism-related stakeholders in this research. In addition, criteria were determined in terms of being a sports tourism center and then these criteria were prioritized with the AHP method.

As a high-altitude center, the criteria of awareness, physical structure, accessibility, variety and quality of facilities have been determined regarding the strengths of Mount Erciyes in sports tourism. As a result of prioritization, accessibility had the highest average. Therefore, in terms of accessibility, Mount Erciyes gains a significant competitive advantage as the opportunity it has makes the destination strong. Considering that accessibility is a crucial factor in destination preferences (Handy, 2005), qualities such as proximity to the city center and the quality of transportation opportunities offer important opportunities in terms of sports tourism and make the destination strong. In terms of average, the accessibility criteria is followed by the physical structure, the diversity of the facilities, the awareness and the quality of the facilities, respectively. These criteria express the important values that destinations should have in the global tourism market (Kavacik *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, although its priority for sports tourism differs, it is seen that Mount Erciyes has the qualities that will provide a competitive advantage in the global tourism market. These characteristics include the destination's hosting of organizations, the continuous increase in the variety and quality of facilities, and the land structure suitable for various sports activities.

According to the prioritization order regarding the weaknesses of Mount Erciyes, the criteria of insufficient infrastructure, lack of promotion and marketing and weak vegetation were determined. Inadequate infrastructure, few world-class enterprises despite having adequate facilities, insufficient facilities for other sports activities despite the appropriate infrastructure, entertainment, shopping, parking etc. It was in the first place due to reasons such as inadequacies in terms of issues. Infrastructure facilities are indispensable for tourists to have a positive experience and impression in terms of destinations (Jovanović & Ilić, 2016). Therefore, infrastructure has a particularly major place for destinations, and according to the data obtained within the scope of the research, it has been seen that the inadequacy of infrastructure is the top priority criteria for Mount Erciyes. The second rank in prioritization is the lack of promotion and marketing, which cover processes related

to perception and advertising. In addition to perceptions about the value and characteristics of the destination, promotion and marketing activities create a critical point of attraction and direct the preferences of potential tourists (Meng & Uysal, 2008). In this context, the lack of promotion and marketing is an important problem for Mount Erciyes to gain a competitive advantage in terms of sports tourism in global markets. On the other hand, it is known that skiers prefer destinations that are rich in trees and more have landscape beauty (Landauer *et al.*, 2014). This situation shows an important weakness of Mount Erciyes in terms of sports tourism on the basis of vegetation.

The fact that Mount Erciyes is located in the Cappadocia region, will be least affected by the climate crisis, and has effective management creates opportunities for participants. The Cappadocia region, which has significant global recognition, is important for Mount Erciyes to gain more recognition as a high-altitude center. In particular, presenting integrated tourism products as a package will provide an opportunity to attract more tourists based on sports tourism. On the other hand, considering the significant impact of the climate on the development of winter sports (Cingi, 2021), the fact that Mount Erciyes has the latest impact from the climate crisis is quite important in terms of the sustainability of the products and services offered. Despite being a strong advantage, another opportunity offered by Mount Erciyes, which is evaluated based on this strong advantage, is its effective management, which is ranked third in priority. Destination management organizations, whose main function is to market and manage the marketing activities of the destination (Elbe *et al.*, 2009), are important in making effective decisions and speeding up decision-making processes. In this context, having a management organization for Mount Erciyes has been seen as an opportunity by participants.

The factors that pose a threat to Mount Erciyes regarding sports tourism have been identified in order of priority as increasing competition, climate crisis, managerial issues, weak brand image, and shortage of qualified staff. As previously mentioned, technological developments in particular are globalizing destinations and putting them in an intensely competitive environment (Akin *et al.*, 2020). Therefore, global competition is seen as an important threat to Mount Erciyes based on sports tourism. Another threat is the climate crisis. As mentioned in the opportunities section, although Mount Erciyes is least likely to be affected by the climate crisis, there are certainly some threats posed by global warming that the participants have considered. Managerial issues prioritized third in terms of threats refer to problems believed to be related to weaknesses in central and local governance, while effective management, presented as an opportunity, can also pose a threat in some applications. For example, the inability to develop various products is expressed as a weakness of the destination management organization,

while prioritizing industry in the city is expressed as a weakness of other managerial factors and the threat that this weakness can create is also mentioned. There are some significant global changes within managerial issues, but threats that may arise at the destination level have been considered by the participants. The last two criteria identified as threats are the weak brand image and the shortage of qualified staff. The brand image of destinations not only affects tourist preferences but also directly affects tourist satisfaction (Martins, 2015). Qualified staff are one of the most key factors in the products and services offered by destinations (Rahimi *et al.*, 2020) and, like brand image, have a significant impact on tourist satisfaction. Therefore, for Mount Erciyes to stand out from its global competitors as a high-altitude center, it is necessary to make some improvements in these areas.

Based on the findings obtained through the SWOT analysis and AHP regarding the current situation of Mount Erciyes as a high-altitude center for sports tourism, it is possible to propose some recommendations not only for Mount Erciyes but also for different destinations. Therefore, within the scope of the research, first and foremost, recommendations can be made for Mount Erciyes, including;

- Based on SWOT groups, preserving and sustaining the strengths in order to ensure the continuity of competitive advantage in global markets,
- Diversification of products within the physical structure,
- Increasing world-class enterprises for not only accommodation but also other sectors, providing facilities for other sports branches, and eliminating inadequacies especially related to entertainment and shopping, to eliminate the inadequacy of infrastructure related to weaknesses,
- Carrying out activities to break the perception that it is only winter tourism,
- Removing the weaknesses related to vegetation by artificial means, with the thought that they cannot be eliminated by natural means,
- Making significant use of these opportunities through activities such as the presentation of integrated touristic products, the activation of effective management elements, and the presentation of the resources allowed by the climate, based on opportunities that are important for the sustainability of the region and reaching more audiences,
- In terms of the factors posing a threat, it is recommended to take measures to address global competition, the protection of natural resources, the climate crisis, managerial problems that may affect tourist demand and satisfaction, strengthening the image as a brand, and eliminating the shortage of qualified staff for different touristic products.

On the other hand, it is possible to present some recommendations for different destinations within the

findings of the research. These recommendations are important in terms of having common characteristics for both Mount Erciyes and destinations with similar structures and resources:

- Considering that accessibility is one of the most important aspects of competitive advantage, enabling easy and fast access not only physically but also in terms of communication,
- Focusing on tourist satisfaction, brand image and positive word-of-mouth marketing, with the presentation of fully diversified products and services with all aspects of eliminating the shortage of qualified staff as well as infrastructure deficiencies,
- Taking measures to eliminate the problems that may arise from the central and local governments as well as the destination management organization,
- Activating action plans against the climate crisis, as the effects of global warming on destinations as well as in all processes of life are inevitable,
- Adoption of practices such as e-marketing and real-time marketing that can reach more audiences through promotional and marketing activities aimed at creating positive perceptions and increasing awareness,
- Product diversification by making use of the opportunities offered by the region as well as other sources as much as possible,
- It is recommended to provide facilities for all sectors in terms of diversity and quality and to increase them quantitatively.

In addition to the limited number of studies on the determination of the current situation in sports tourism, especially with the AHP technique, the lack of any study specific to the destination that is the subject of this research constitutes the reason for the emergence of this research in terms of filling the gap in the relevant body of knowledge. In other words, the presentation of the knowledge that is expected to have a widespread impact on the body of knowledge related to this research reveals the original aspect of the research. Guidance evaluations and recommendations were presented to sector representatives and researchers, especially with the knowledge based on different techniques. While the outputs of the research provide a comparative evaluation opportunity for research to be conducted based on different destinations, it includes a general evaluation for the sector representatives to create a strategy. Despite these contributions to sector representatives, researchers and related body of knowledge, some limitations of the research can be mentioned. It can be stated that these limitations also include recommendations for future research. Although this research, which is based on Mount Erciyes, contains sufficient knowledge about the determination of the current situation of sports tourism in the relevant destination, researches to be carried out in the universe of larger destinations and with the participation of different stakeholders will provide more generalizable findings. In addition, the development of strategies based on the

findings and the execution of applications for destinations as much as possible will bring the widespread impact of these studies to the fore.

References

- Akın, M. H., Öztürk, Y., & Karamustafa, K. (2020). Destinasyon rekabetçilik analizi: Kapadokya bölgesi örneği. *Anatolia: Turizm Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 31(2), 161-171.
- Altunışık, R., Coşkun, R., Bayraktaroğlu, S., & Yıldırım, E. (2012). Sosyal bilimlerde araştırma yöntemleri spss uygulamalı. Adapazarı: Sakarya Yayıncılık
- Bayraktar, Y., Aksakallı, Z., & Selçuk, G. N. (2017). Yeni turistik ürün olarak futbol-kamp turizmi: Erzurum Yüksek İrtifa Kampı örneği. *Uluslararası Türk Dünyası Turizm Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 2(2), 199-210.
- Cerit, M., & Erdoğan, M. (2019). Yüksek irtifa fizyolojisi ve adaptasyonun askerî fiziksel hazır bulunurluk seviyesine etkilerinin değerlendirilmesi. *Kara Harp Okulu Bilim Dergisi*, 29 (1), 1-15.
- Chang, M. X., Choong, Y. O., & Ng, L. P. (2020). Local residents' support for sport tourism development: The moderating effect of tourism dependency. *Journal of Sport & Tourism*, 24(3), 215-234. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14775085.2020.1833747>
- Chersulich Tomino, A., Perić, M., & Wise, N. (2020). Assessing and considering the wider impacts of sport-tourism events: A research agenda review of sustainability and strategic planning elements. *Sustainability*, 12(11), 4473. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12114473>
- Cıngı, M. C. (2021). Destinasyonlarda kış turizminin geliştirilmesinde kış sporları ve turizm merkezlerinin önemi: Erciyes kış sporları ve turizm merkezine yönelik bir değerlendirme. *Erciyes Akademi*, 35(4), 1324-1337.
- Deery, M., & Jago, L. (2005). The Management of Sport Tourism, *Sport in Society*, 8:2, 378-389, DOI: 10.1080/17430430500087252
- Deery, M., Jago, L., & Fredline, L. (2004). Sport tourism or event tourism: are they one and the same?. *Journal of Sport & Tourism*, 9(3), 235-245. DOI: 10.1080/1477508042000320250
- Doğan, N. Ö., & Sözbilen, G. (2014). Kaya otel işletmeleri için en uygun stratejinin belirlenmesi: Bir SWOT/AHP uygulaması. *Anadolu Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 14(4), 95-112.
- Elbe, J., Hallén, L., & Axelsson, B. (2009). The destination-management organisation and the integrative destination-marketing process. *International journal of tourism research*, 11(3), 283-296.
- erciyeskayakmerkezi.com. (2022). Erciyes Yüksek İrtifa Kamp Merkezi, retrieved from <https://www.erciyeskayakmerkezi.com/erciyes-yukse-irtifa-kamp-merkezi> at 21.11.2022.
- Erdem, A., Unur, K., & Şeker, F. (2022). Şanlıurfa'nın akıllı turizm destinasyonu olabilmesi için gerekli stratejilerin a'wot yöntemi ile belirlenmesi. *Güncel Turizm Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 6(1), 73-91.
- Handy, S. (2005). Planning for accessibility: In theory and in practice. In *Access to destinations* (pp. 131-147). Emerald Group Publishing Limited.
- Jovanović, S., & Ilić, I. (2016). Infrastructure as important determinant of tourism development in the countries of Southeast Europe. *Ecoforum journal*, 5(1), 288-294.
- Karakuş, Y. (2019). Identifying the best alternative tourism product for a destination: the case of Cappadocia. *Revista Anais Brasileiros de Estudos Turísticos - ABET*, 9 (1, 2 e 3). <https://doi.org/10.34019/2238-2925.2019.V9.16929>
- Kavacık, M., Zafer, S., & Mehmet, İ. (2012). Turizmde destinasyon markalaması: Alanya örneği. *Erciyes Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi Dergisi*, (39), 169-192.
- Kaya, İ., & Gökdemir, K. (2015). Yüksek irtifada yapılan antrenmanların kastamonu beden eğitimi ve spor yüksekokulu öğrencilerinin bazı fiziksel özellikleri ve çeşitli kan parametreleri üzerine kronik etkilerinin araştırılması. *Sportif Bakış: Spor ve Eğitim Bilimleri Dergisi*, 2 (2), 79-86.
- Landauer, M., Haider, W., & Pröbstl-Haider, U. (2014). The influence of culture on climate change adaptation strategies: Preferences of cross-country skiers in Austria and Finland. *Journal of Travel Research*, 53(1), 96-110.
- Martins, M. (2015). The tourist imagery, the destination image and the brand image. *Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Management*, 3(2), 1-14.
- Meng, F., & Uysal, M. (2008). Effects of gender differences on perceptions of destination attributes, motivations, and travel values: An examination of a nature-based resort destination. *Journal of sustainable tourism*, 16(4), 445-466.
- Mesci, M., Pekerşen, Y., & Mesci, Z. (2021). An overall assessment of sports tourism articles, *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights*, 4(5) ,676-707. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JHTI-04-2020-0054>
- Moradi, E., Ehsani, M., Saffari, M., & Hosseini, R. N. S. (2022). How can destination competitiveness play an essential role in small island sports tourism development? Integrated ISM-MICMAC modelling of key factors. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Insights*, (ahead-of-print). <https://doi.org/10.1108/JHTI-03-2022-0118>
- Özçoban, E. (2019). Türkiye'de kış turizmi ve erciyes kayak merkezi üzerine bir değerlendirme. *Journal of Tourism and Gastronomy Studies*, 7 (3), 1606-1625. DOI: 10.21325/jotags.2019.438.
- Paksoy, S. (2017). *Çok kriterli karar vermede güncel yaklaşımlar*. Adana: Karahan Kitabevi.
- Pigeassou, C. (2004). Contribution to the definition of sport tourism. *Journal of Sport & Tourism*, 9(3), 287-289. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1477508042000320205>
- Rahimi, R., Hassan, A., & Tekin, O. (2020). Augmented reality apps for tourism destination promotion. In *Destination management and marketing: Breakthroughs in research and practice* (pp. 1066-1077). IGI Global.

- Saaty, T. L. (1990). How to make a decision: the analytic hierarchy process. *European journal of operational research*, 48(1), 9-26.
- Şanlıoğlu, Ö., & Erdem, A. (2017). Kayseri örneğinde yerel halkın turizm faaliyetlerini nasıl algıladığının tespitine yönelik bir araştırma. *Pamukkale Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi*, (27), 277-298.
- Shrestha, R. K., Alavalapati, J. R., & Kalmbacher, R. S. (2004). Exploring the potential for silvopasture adoption in south-central Florida: an application of SWOT-AHP method. *Agricultural systems*, 81(3), 185-199.
- Singh, S., Dash, T. R., & Vashko, I. (2016). Tourism, ecotourism and sport tourism: the framework for certification, *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 34 (2), 236-255. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MIP-09-2014-0180>.
- Steward, T. J. (1992). A critical survey on the status of multiple criteria decision making theory and practice. *Omega*, 20(5-6), 569-586.
- Takata, K., & Hallmann, K. (2021). A systematic quantitative review of authenticity in sport tourism. *Journal of Sport & Tourism*, 25(1), 26-41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14775085.2021.1877564>
- Tanrısever, C., Kara, C., & Pamukçu, H. (2018). Dağcılık Faaliyetlerinin Turizm Ekonomisine Kazandırılması. III. Uluslararası Al- Farabi Sosyal Bilimler Kongresi 9-11 Kasım 2018, Ankara.
- Toy, S., & Eymirli, E. (2012). Erzurum'un Yüksek İrtifa Sporcu Kampları Açısından Potansiyeli. Erzurum: T.C. Kuzeydoğu Anadolu Kalkınma Ajansı.
- Tuncay, A. H., & Kılınç, F. (2018). Yüksek İrtifa Merkezlerinin Yönetim Organizasyon Boyutları ile İncelenmesi: Davraz'a Yeni Model Öngörüsü. *Strategic Public Management Journal*, 4 (8), 17-34. DOI: 10.25069/spmj.475004
- Yamaç Erdoğan, Z. (2023). Evaluation of recreation activities in nature parks and tourism potential. *Journal of Multidisciplinary Academic Tourism*, 8 (2), 185-192. DOI: 10.31822/jomat.2023-8-2-185
- Yang, J. J., Lo, H. W., Chao, C. S., Shen, C. C., & Yang, C. C. (2020). Establishing a sustainable sports tourism evaluation framework with a hybrid multi-criteria decision-making model to explore potential sports tourism attractions in taiwan. *Sustainability*, 12(4), 1673. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12041673>
- Yılmaz, V., & Güneren, E. (2023). Determining destination competitiveness in medical tourism: A study based on AHP-QFD framework. *Journal of Multidisciplinary Academic Tourism*, 8 (2), 141-157. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.31822/jomat.2023-8-2-141>
- Yüksel, İ., & Akın, A. (2006). Analitik Hiyerarşi Proses Yöntemiyle İşletmelerde Strateji Belirleme. *Doğuş Üniversitesi Dergisi*, 7(2), 254-268.
- Zauhar, J. (2004). Historical perspectives of sports tourism. *Journal of Sport & Tourism*, 9(1), 5-101. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1477508042000179348>.

INFO PAGE

Mount Erciyes and sports tourism: A study to evaluate the current situation

Abstract

In the changing and developing world, people's needs and requests have also begun to vary, and this situation has given the opportunity for the emergence of alternative tourism types on the basis of the tourism sector. Sports tourism, on the other hand, has emerged as an alternative tourism type that includes the active or passive participation of individual or group participants in different branches as a niche market. In this research, it is aimed to evaluate the potential of Mount Erciyes in terms of sports tourism and to present guiding knowledge for sector and public representatives. In this direction, prioritization was made with the SWOT analysis through interviews with fourteen stakeholders in the region, and then with the Analytical Hierarchy Process (AHP) method in line with the findings obtained. Accordingly, it has been determined that Mount Erciyes has strengths and opportunities such as accessibility and being in the Cappadocia Region, as well as weaknesses and threats such as insufficient infrastructure and increased competition. In addition, it has been seen that global competition is a threat to destination, but accessibility is the most important criteria to gain a competitive advantage.

Keywords: Mount Erciyes, Sport tourism, High-altitude, A'WOT.

Authors

Full Name	Author contribution roles	Contribution rate
Ahmet Erdem	Conceptualism, Methodology, Software, Validation, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Resources, Data Curation, Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review & Editing, Visualization, Supervision, Project administration, Funding acquisition	50%
Mehmet Halit Akın	Conceptualism, Methodology, Software, Validation, Formal Analysis, Resources, Data Curation, Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review & Editing, Visualization, Supervision, Project administration, Funding acquisition	50%

Author statement: Author(s) declare(s) that All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. **Declaration of Conflicting Interests:** The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article

Ethics Committee Satatement: Ethics committee report is available for this research and it has been documented to the journal

Ethics committee: Erciyes University Social and Human Ethics Committee

Date of ethics committee decision: 44922

Ethics committee decision number: 556