

Development Strategies for Z County E-sports Town in Chongqing: Integration of E-sports, Tourism, and Agriculture under New Policies

Yuan Li^{1*}, Dexin Li², Yang Wang¹

¹Chongqing University of Science and Technology, Chongqing 401331, China

²Tianjin University, Tianjin 300072, China

*Corresponding author: Yuan Li, Liyuan@cqust.edu.cn

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Abstract: Chongqing Z County E-sports Town was once included in the “first batch of sports and leisure characteristic town pilot project list” issued by the General Administration of Sports of China. After several years of development, the e-sports industry in Z County e-sports town has struggled with issues such as a limited market, low popularity, poor business performance, and a lack of income generation capabilities. These challenges have severely hindered the town’s development, resulting in its exclusion from the recent “Chongqing characteristic town list.” Under the requirements of new policies, it can no longer promote itself, attract investment, or undertake project construction under the name of a “characteristic town” and must undergo redevelopment. This paper employs case analysis and comparative investigation methods to conduct an in-depth empirical study on the development of Z County E-sports Town. It is proposed that under the new policy environment, the town should foster the deep integration of its existing e-sports industry and culture with tourism and agriculture, transforming Z County E-sports Town into a new characteristic tourist destination. The findings of this paper offer a reference for the development of similar towns facing stagnation and provide case support for the construction of tourist destinations featuring e-sports.

Keywords: Characteristic town; E-sports; Deep integration of culture and tourism; Tourist destination

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1. Introduction

In May 2017, the General Office of the General Administration of Sport of China issued the “Notice on Promoting the Construction of Sports and Leisure Characteristic Towns”^[1], aimed at guiding the development of sports and leisure characteristic towns across the country. In response to this national policy, the People’s Government of Chongqing Z County raised funds from various sources to establish the Chongqing Z County E-sports Town in Zhongzhou Town, featuring the e-sports industry. The core project of the town, “Three Gorges

Harbor E-sports Hall,” covers an area of 110 mu, with a total construction area of 114,000 square meters, accommodating 6,096 visitors. The total investment in the project is 1.4 billion yuan. In October 2017, the Chongqing Z County E-sports Town was listed in the “first batch of sports and leisure characteristic town pilot projects” issued by the General Administration of Sport of China ^[2].

On September 27, 2021, the National Development and Reform Commission of China, together with the General Administration of Sport of China and ten other ministries and commissions, jointly issued the Notice on Issuing Guidelines for the Standardized and Healthy Development of National Characteristic Towns ^[3]. On March 1, 2022, the Chongqing Development and Reform Commission released the “List of Chongqing Characteristic Towns in 2022” ^[4], which did not include the Chongqing Z County E-sports Town. As a result, it was mandated that “no institution, social organization, or market entity shall name or promote a town as a characteristic town unless it is included in the list. Publicity, investment attraction, and project construction must not be conducted under the name of a characteristic town not listed.”

Against this backdrop, the question of how to develop and position Chongqing Z County has become a critical issue. It is suggested that the e-sports town in Z County should follow current trends and closely align with national policies. In addition to strengthening the e-sports industry, the town should actively integrate with tourism, culture, and agriculture based on the characteristics of the e-sports sector. This approach aims to address existing problems, such as a narrow tourist market, low consumer popularity, poor business performance, and insufficient income and profitability. By redefining its development direction and formulating targeted strategies, the town should strive to transform from an “e-sports town” into a multifunctional tourist destination, offering e-sports competition viewing, sports and leisure, and vacation tourism, thus promoting sustainable development.

2. SWOT analysis of building the original “Z County E-sports Town” into a comprehensive tourism destination

2.1. Strengths

- (1) Z County, the location of the project, has abundant historical and cultural resources. Z County is one of the heritage sites and birthplaces of Pakistan culture and has been recognized as a “China Tourism Culture County” by the Chinese government. The “Loyalty and Justice Culture” is a typical representation of its heritage. Bai Juyi, a famous poet from the Tang Dynasty, left behind beautiful poems and related architectural heritage in the area. The county is also renowned for its citrus culture. High-quality tourist attractions include Shibaozhai, Bai Gong Temple, Huanghua City, and Hanque. Additionally, the newly developed large-scale live performance “Feng Yan San Guo,” themed around the loyalty and justice concepts of the “Three Kingdoms,” enjoys widespread popularity and influence nationwide.
- (2) The project’s location benefits from a well-established transportation system. Z County holds strategic importance within the Belt and Road Initiative and the Yangtze River Silk Road Economic Belt. It is connected to the national expressway network by three main highways and four expressways. In terms of rail transport, three railway lines are currently under construction: Chongqing West High-speed Railway, Guizhou Zhongguang Railway, and Yanhe Railway. The famous Yangtze River Golden Tourism Line stretches 88 kilometers across the county’s borders.

2.2. Weaknesses

- (1) The tourism infrastructure of the project site is not fully developed. Although the professional construction of e-sports facilities in the former “Z County E-sports Town” is among the best in the country, the lack of relevant construction experience has resulted in incomplete supporting tourism infrastructure.
- (2) The tourism brand needs reconstruction. The e-sports brand of the original “Z County E-sports Town” is still in its early stages, with a narrow market audience. Currently, only e-sports players are familiar with it, while the general tourist population remains largely unaware.
- (3) A lack of innovation in e-sports tourism culture construction exists. E-sports culture plays a pivotal role in the development of the original “Z County E-sports Town,” yet its construction has been neglected. This oversight could negatively affect the future growth of the e-sports town, leading to a lack of standout projects and a distinct identity. In light of the national emphasis on the deep integration of culture and tourism, finding ways to better utilize the unique cultural advantages to create a competitive industry requires active exploration.
- (4) Visitor numbers are highly unstable. E-sports is a competitive event conducted on electronic devices and the internet, not requiring large physical venues or equipment. For most individuals, playing games and watching live broadcasts suffice. Field research shows that while visitor numbers increase during official events, few visit during unofficial events, and there is virtually no visitor traffic during non-event periods.

2.3. Opportunities

- (1) The integration of e-sports and tourism is advancing in practice. E-sports has become a popular competitive event, meeting the growing demand for electronic entertainment and contributing to the diversity of e-sports culture. With the continuous expansion of the e-sports market and its audience, e-sports tourism is maturing and evolving.
- (2) The “e-sports craze” continues to grow in China and attracts tourists. As network and computer technology have developed, and with the rise in living standards and quality of life in China, e-sports have gradually become a popular form of public leisure and entertainment. This “e-sports fever” continues to intensify across the country.

2.4. Threats

- (1) New policies present additional requirements for characteristic town projects. Chongqing has positioned its characteristic towns as testing grounds and policy integration hubs for various reforms. Relevant districts and counties have been tasked with accelerating the enhancement of policies to support characteristic town development, optimizing the quality and function of towns, and formulating comprehensive construction plans. Additionally, there is a focus on strengthening key industries, enhancing the roles of modern communities, culture, and tourism, and ensuring both quality and efficiency. The original “Z County E-sports Town” must actively respond to these policy changes to overcome potential barriers to its development.
- (2) Competitors exhibit strong comprehensive competitiveness. Cities such as Chengdu, Hangzhou, Wuhan, and Xi’an have vigorously developed e-sports competitions, with Chengdu in particular excelling in

terms of location, economy, and culture. These cities host large, stable groups of e-sports enthusiasts and have established themselves as hubs for e-sports events and clubs, surpassing Z County E-sports Town in both quantity and quality. This has attracted e-sports fans and diverted potential visitors.

- (3) Negative public perceptions of e-sports remain widespread. E-sports, as a competition derived from electronic games, is often equated with video games and online gaming, which have been criticized. Although the formalization and legalization of e-sports have progressed, mainstream public opinion still does not fully recognize it as a “sport,” and many continue to view e-sports as merely a form of entertainment. Some even regard it as a “frivolous distraction.” As a relatively new phenomenon, the development of e-sports requires structured publicity and guidance to shift public opinion.

Through this analysis, it is clear that the former “Z County E-sports Town” has the potential to develop into a tourist destination. By recognizing its strengths and weaknesses, focusing resources effectively, seizing opportunities, and mitigating threats, the deep integration of e-sports culture with tourism can be realized, allowing for a redefined development direction.

3. Tourism development countermeasures for the former “Z County E-sports Town”

3.1. Build the original “Z County E-sports Town” into a tourist destination with e-sports characteristics

China’s top 20 reports have emphasized the importance of “shaping tourism through culture, highlighting culture through travel, and promoting the deep integration of culture and tourism,” which offers valuable insights for the development of the former “Z County E-sports Town.” The town should fully leverage the attraction of e-sports by adopting the “e-sports + tourism” model and developing Z County E-sports Town into a tourist destination with distinct e-sports characteristics.

- (1) Under the “industrial chain” concept, and by relying on e-sports resources and local culture, it is crucial to fully utilize and carefully integrate available resources. This approach should focus on developing both sightseeing tourism and the leisure vacation economy, while simultaneously promoting comprehensive e-sports development. Unified planning, resource sharing, and mutual promotion will create a development model that deeply integrates industries. The “Z County E-sports Tourism Vacation” should be developed into a leading tourism product, serving as a characteristic industry, a window for external promotion, a medium for engaging the market, and a new space for project development and profit growth.
- (2) The rich tourism resources around the area, such as Shibaozhai and Z County’s “National Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Demonstration Zone” achievements, should be fully utilized. Representative tourism projects with strong local and national characteristics should be developed, creating a distinct regional identity with a profound cultural heritage. Through a series of promotional activities, more consumers can be attracted to Z County.
- (3) The “Feng Yan San Guo” large-scale modern virtual reality performance venue should be leveraged to create an immersive experience where “gongs and drums sing from across the river, and the e-sports venue is brightly lit, filled with cheers.” This atmosphere will ensure that tourists are captivated by the cultural and e-sports experience, emphasizing the theme of “loyalty” and building a unique tourism

brand for the e-sports town.

3.2. Build a distinctive tourism destination through differentiation

- (1) Different products should be developed to cater to the needs of both e-sports fans and non-e-sports fans. For e-sports enthusiasts, e-sports venues and equipment can be made available for on-site experiences, allowing their companions, who may not be interested in e-sports, to also enjoy the activities. For non-e-sports fans, VR experience halls can offer the chance to experience the blend of illusion and reality, along with competitions between e-sports enthusiasts and professional athletes.
- (2) Different experience products should be designed for tourists of different age groups. A Youth E-sports Culture Palace and an E-sports Experience Hall for teenagers can be established to encourage scientific and reasonable engagement with e-sports. For middle-aged tourists, an E-sports Science and Technology Museum and a competition hall can be created to help them appreciate the excitement of e-sports competitions. For elderly tourists, an E-sports Health Culture Center can be set up to highlight the unique benefits of e-sports for health.
- (3) Given the immersive nature of e-sports, a range of unique “immersive tourism” products should be developed in collaboration with neighboring attractions such as “Feng Yan San Guo.” This will promote the establishment of a distinct “immersive experience” tourism destination brand.

3.3. Develop e-sports events and new tourism destination network brands

- (1) The former “Z County E-sports Town” is home to Asia’s most professional e-sports venue, the Three Gorges Harbor E-sports Venue, which provides a solid foundation for the development of e-sports. It is essential to continue hosting distinctive events, enhance the e-sports competition brand, and create a mature, comprehensive system of various e-sports leagues.
- (2) The appeal of electronic events can be utilized to organize a variety of related tourism activities, creating e-sports viewing and experience tourism activities, and ultimately transforming the area into a new e-sports sightseeing and vacation destination.

3.4. Diversified integration: developing e-sports-themed cultural and creative tourism products

- (1) Based on market demand for e-sports, products targeting users immersed in e-sports should be developed. These can include incorporating e-sports competition storylines, virtual image-driven influence, and competition traction effects. Animation elements, including “two-dimensional culture,” should be integrated into tourism product development, using cartoon characters to enhance personality and appeal. A series of creative products, such as toys, clothing, food, and souvenirs, can be developed, forming a unique tourism commodity system.
- (2) Given the relevance and market-driving potential of tourism, the development of tourism products should support the local area’s post-conversion projects (such as farmland-to-forest initiatives), turning its resource advantages into economic benefits and forming a sustainable tourism industry chain.

3.5. Strengthen the branding of e-sports competitions

The former “Z County E-sports Town” is currently only known within the industry and lacks significant

influence outside it. In developing new e-sports tourism destinations, it is important to actively create a distinctive tourism IP that caters to modern consumers' preferences. Through vibrant marketing activities, people across the country can become familiar with the fact that Chongqing Z County boasts a world-class e-sports venue and a unique e-sports tourism destination.

- (1) Tourism variety shows should be promoted. The loyalty culture can be leveraged to create an “e-sports + loyalty” tourism IP, integrating unique tourism IP into promotional videos or “micro-films” to enhance brand influence. Continued collaboration with major domestic variety shows, such as promoting variety shows with live recordings at the e-sports town, will further increase Z County E-sports Town's popularity.
- (2) A distinctive, time-intensive promotional strategy should be adopted, encouraging e-sports venues, tourist attractions, e-sports hotels, and other businesses to collaborate on marketing activities during specific festivals, with government support.
- (3) New media promotion should be emphasized, using big data and analytics to carry out targeted precision marketing. Platforms like Weibo, Douyin, and XiaoHongshu should be used to release promotional content aimed at capturing the attention of potential customers and boosting travel consumption.
- (4) Joint promotional activities for tourism package products should be undertaken. For instance, the “E-sports + Feng Yan San Guo” activity can combine e-sports experiences with the large-scale immersive performance of “Feng Yan San Guo.” Visitors can participate in e-sports activities during the day and enjoy the performance at night. Promotions such as “E-sports + two-dimensional culture” can also be implemented, alongside integrated marketing campaigns across various industries, including agriculture.

4. Conclusion

The former Chongqing Z County E-sports Town was established as a characteristic town under the policy environment of its time, but it experienced a period of unsuccessful operation. Based on the changed policy landscape and the issues encountered during the initial development of the Z County E-sports Town, this paper concludes, through SWOT analysis, that the town possesses the resources and market conditions necessary to evolve into a distinctive tourist destination. It highlights that, under the new circumstances, the former Z County E-sports Town needs to actively adapt to the current policy environment. By fostering the deep integration of e-sports culture with tourism, agriculture, and cultural industries, and implementing various tourism marketing strategies, the town can be transformed into a new tourism destination with strong e-sports characteristics. Additionally, leveraging its tourism appeal will promote the sustainable development of related industries and regions.

This research is primarily based on field observations and in-depth interviews. As the construction of small towns with Chinese characteristics is still in an exploratory phase, verifying the effectiveness of certain strategies remains challenging due to the lack of sufficient empirical research and long-term tracking data. Future research could focus on the following directions:

- (1) Strengthening research on demand and supply by combining quantitative investigations with in-depth interviews, and gathering more data on market demand and supply to develop products that better meet

market needs.

- (2) Continuously monitoring the supply dynamics of similar services and adjusting development strategies in response to changes in the policy environment, as this is crucial for the sustainable development of small towns with Chinese characteristics.

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