



Evaluating the role of ecotourism and its position in environmental protection

(with an emphasis on Iran)

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Abstract

Tourism has traditionally been implemented by means of different motivators. Tourism began in 1951 and the Ecotourism is the main reason for the development of personality and promotion of cultures. Circulating in the nature is a course of thinking for scientists in Islam. Ecotourism is a branch of tourism and it enters the world of its literature in 1970. Ecotourism has been doubled in comparison with tourism, and it shows the growth of responsible and targeted travels in nature. Among the options of tourism, Ecotourism with protection of the environment, commitment to community development and respect for cultural features, including an option that is most compatible with the concept of sustainability. Ecotourism has a wide scope including climbing, tourism, migration, nature cure, beach sports, hunting and etc. we can cite a lot of natural attractions Like the high peaks, the Lakes, northern forests, rivers, mineral water, etc. The preservation of biodiversity and contributing to the welfare, are the goals of ecotourism. Also, contributing to the local economy and promoting the environmental culture are the positive effects of ecotourism. Environmental pollution, environmental degradation and destruction of plant and animal species are its negative effects. To maintain ecotourism, sustainability must be considered which can be achieved by organizing, planning, community participation and education. Evaluating the ecotourism is the main purpose of the research. Our findings show that there is not enough trustee and they emphasizes on mismanagement of ecotourism.

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INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism approach in a spatial pattern in nature tourism. Nowadays, it is taken into consideration. Ecotourism aims to occupy a wide geographical space in the twenty-first century, and it will create a new spatial pattern in the different geographical areas. In the current years, sustainable development has been considered as a new method for the communities. Thereby, people can think about the standard of living, social justice and conservation (English Tourist, 2000, p. 78). Ecotourism or tourism in nature, is the most important kind of tourism that is most compatible with development. Currently, most countries are in a close competition, seeking to exploit the capabilities of their country. They want to obtain a greater share of income from the tourism industry, and the easiest way to job creation (Molae Hashjin & Khoshnood, 2007, p. 1). Our country has a variety of tourist attractions, but it failed to make a good use of these advantages. Although our natural attractions can be considered to attract domestic and foreign tourists, sufficient planning is still in its infancy and exploring the natural attractions has not been achieved. Based on WTO, the leading development of tourism for the first decade (2000 to 2010) is estimated between 4.3 to 6.7 percentages, but the findings indicate that most of the growth has been occurred in ecotourism sector and it will grow 10 to 30 percentage. It is expected that the number of tourists will reach from currently 7% in the world to the 20% in the next decade (Karami, 2003, p. 184).

Iran pays about a billion for the travel of its citizens annually. In other words, Iranian households with an average of five members, pay \$ 85 of the share of their national production to the global market for tourism. They do so without a great share in this market (Zohorian & Amiri, 2005, p. 426). This has raised the attention to the obstacles and challenges of ecotourism development in our country. While Iran has unparalleled opportunities that can take advantage of them in order to develop its ecotourism. However, there is not any research in this regard and most studies have examined the obstacles and

strategies for the development of tourism in the country. While ecotourism development requires recognizing the challenges and provide effective solutions for its development. Rostami (2003), Saqae (2005), Nemati (2005), Zolfaqari (2005), Lotfi & Raesi (2005), Zare (2005), Rahimi (2005), Darvish Motevali et al. (2005), SahatiMehr (2005), BeigMohammadi (2006), evaluated different strategies for the promotion of tourism and provided relevant results. Rezvani (2005), examined the environmental consequences of tourism in the dam Latyan using SWOT model. His research has raised the challenges of ecotourism for the country. Shayan et al. (2007), expressed the problems of Geotourism with an emphasis on Loot desert and its geotourism position in Iran. Zarabi et al (2006) in a study entitled "The program of spatial ecotourism development in Sistan and Baluchistan" using the Z-Score method, classified the Sistan-Baluchistan province's Iran pays about a billion for the travel of its citizens annually. In other words, Iranian households with an average of five members, pay \$ 85 of the share of their national production to the global market for tourism. They do so without a great share in this market (Zohorian & Amiri, 2005, p. 426). This has raised the attention to the obstacles and challenges of ecotourism development in our country. While Iran has unparalleled opportunities that can take advantage of them in order to develop its ecotourism. However, there is not any research in this regard and most studies have examined the obstacles and strategies for the development of tourism in the country. While ecotourism development requires recognizing the challenges and provide effective solutions for its development. Rostami (2003), Saqae (2005), Nemati (2005), Zolfaqari (2005), Lotfi & Raesi (2005), Zare (2005), Rahimi (1384), Darvish Motevali et al. (2005), SahatiMehr (2005), BeigMohammadi (2006), evaluated different strategies for the promotion of tourism and provided relevant results. Rezvani (2005), examined the environmental consequences of tourism in the dam





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▪ Literature Review

Tourism and ecotourism in terms of History and Statistics

Most dictionaries, have defined the word "travel" as going out of the community for business or pleasure, and not for work or education. The Statistical Center of Iran in 2002 with the Organization of Tourism (WTO), have defined the word "Tourism" as follow: "A person who travels to a country or a city other than his environment not for a period of less than 24 hours and more than a year, and his intentions are excursion, recreation, playing sports, visiting relatives and friends, attending a seminar, conference or meeting treatment, research or taking part in religious activities". Iran has been developed gradually from 1951s in the field of tourism. The

improvement of transportation system in 1949 to 1978 ranging from the creation and supply of semi-finished roads, railways, ports and airports of the

country, and the implementation of the so-called master plan for tourism providing relatively few facilities in this industry, resulted in its gradual growth in the next decades. The growth of tourism industry in a country requires special features and superior factors called FACTORLE – ENDOWMENT. These assets or advantages are vital in choosing a country's position in the tourism industry and they can be divided into three categories: Natural, historic, artistic and cultural assets, Human Capital assets in the field of work and work – related skills, and infrastructure and capital assets (Farbar, 2002). All three of these assets exist in Iran. Unfortunately, the country is now a major tourist destination in the world, and the domestic tourism market is very active but seasonal. Tourism statistics show that in 1999, approximately 1.3 million international tourists and 32 million domestic tourists visited the country. Statistics of international tourists between 1990 and 2000, experienced the average annual growth of 33.5%. Generally, the international tourism market of Iran, is a regional market. About 30% of the international tourism market is consisted of business activities and commercial markets. Also, 10% of the international tourism market is for visiting sights and attractions, 4% for conferences, 30% for religious tourism and 26% for visiting families and relatives (NiyazMand, 2002). Investigations in 2000 show that the tourism industry generated revenues of US \$ 476, has been included 12% of the global economy. The tourism industry had a growth rate of 7.4 percent in that year, and the number of tourists was 699 million. According to the forecast made by the WTO, the number of tourists will reach 1.56 billion in 2020 (Balmaki, 2003). According to the World Tourism Organization, Iran is one of the top 10 countries in the world in terms of tourism attractions. But in 1997, it only owns 9% of numbers and 0.06% of tourism income in the world. Now, 5% of the whole country are in the form of protected areas. However, the failure of Iran in staying on the list of top 80





countries in terms of tourism is very unfortunate (Vafaei, 2003).

▪ **The need for tourism and Ecotourism from the perspective of religion and society**

It should be noted that regular tourism is fundamentally different from nature tourism. Nature tourism has fewer effects on the environment and cultural context, and demands fewer infrastructures. The life-giving guidelines of Islam, have been encouraged Muslims to see different lands and cultural interactions. Islam, has been referred to cultural exchange and frequent peaceful interactions derived from the trip in both Quran and the tradition. There are more than 40 verses in the Holy Quran that respect travelling and they subject Traveler's Prayer to discounts. Travelers are also exempt from the obligation of fasting. Imam Ail (peace be upon him), have listed five properties for tourists including increasing the awareness of tourists to visit the valley of the various lands and familiarity with various scientists and scholars (Balmaki, 2003). In Islam, protecting nature is focused. Since breaking tree branches is like breaking an angels wings or watering trees equates to saving human life. Ecotourism from the perspective of social psychology, will cause the growth of personality and talent and improve the level of knowledge. People will realize the diversity of cultures, different ethnicities national values, so that discrimination will overcome and people will achieve unity (Ashtari, 2005).

▪ **The introduction of Iran's natural heritage in terms of ecotourism**

Iran with more than 1648000 square kilometers, has 1880 kilometers coastline on the Persian Gulf and Oman Sea, and 630 kilometers coastline on the Caspian Sea. Geographically, Iran has turned into a unique country in the world. The prevailing climate in the country is hot and dry. The central deserts of Dashte Kavir and Loot, are a great appeal for European tourists. Around 1.3 territory of Iran is

covered by dust. Geographical features, climatic diversity and environmental characteristics along with rich cultural attractions, make Iran as one of the top ten countries in the world in terms of tourist attractions (Niyazmand, 2002).

▪ **The challenge of ecotourism in Iran**
In general, the major challenges of ecotourism in Iran can be expressed as follow:

- 1) Insecurity in the deserts.
- 2) Shortcomings of infrastructure services such as roads in winter in the North, North West and West of the country and in the eastern region in the summer, because of extreme storms.
- 3) The lack of complete understanding and recognition of the amazing phenomena of ecotourism.
- 4) The lack of airport facilities in areas prone nature in winter, and revocation Many air flights due to inclement weather.
- 5) There is no shortage of professional managers in the field of ecotourism and ecotourism zone management in universities in the country.
- 6) The cultural gap between the host community and visitors.
- 7) Failure to meet the needs of tourists by hotels.
- 8) The lack of understanding the true value of natural resources (the host society).
- 9) The lack of growth and community awareness to take advantage of other areas as a large part of the country and even desert areas (Saburi & Yusefi, 2007, p. 101).

▪ **Iran ecotourism development opportunities**

Despite numerous obstacles, there are many opportunities for ecotourism development that they can be expressed as follows:

- 1) Placement of the Abrisham Road as a road between the West and the East, can





introduce Iran as one of the most tourist countries in the world.

- 2) Iran with one million and 200 thousand hills and 150 thousand monument is among the top ten tourist attractions in the world and the world's top five countries in the field of diversity and ecotourism attractions.
- 3) The diversity of vegetation in different regions of the country is an important natural attraction that attract many tourists every year.
- 4) In Iran, just 14 percent of the land is cultivated. 8 percent of the land is desert and forest, 55 percent is natural and 23 percent is desert. So there is a considerable potential in ecotourism attraction (Saburi & Yusefi, 2007, p. 102).

▪ **Conclusions and suggestions for policy making**

From this research, we conclude that in the context of ecotourism, our country has the necessary potential, but in general there are a series of obstacles that the most important of them was mentioned above and the followings are recommended for improvement:

- Establishing the National Committee of ecotourism and provide reasonable guidelines for the development of industry. Experts should hold regular meetings for the promotion and development. They should be economists, biologists, natural resource experts, sociologists of organizations, natural resources, environment, heritage, tribal Affairs and agriculture, national Library and Ministry of Interior.
- Necessity to develop a strategy for tourism development environment in conjunction with the National Committee for sustainable development.
- Introduce ecotourism areas and upgrade the information of people to conserve natural

resources through education, promotion and media.

- Participation of local communities in the planning, development and protection of natural resources in the areas of ecotourism.

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