

Developing Principles and Criteria of Planning Ecotourism for Sustainable Management of Tourism

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Abstract: In recent years tourism has been extremely important. This issue is seen as a major thrust for the development of industry and economic - social growth.

Iran is one of the ten countries with historical attractions and one of the five countries with the highest climatic and biological diversity. It has potential in many fields particularly Ecotourism (Nature Tourism) in the world.

Ecotourism is the travel in nature and intended to enjoy that occurs the goals of sustainable development. Ecotourism Study is necessary of the different views: scientific and professional, social - cultural, physical, economic and environmental.

Main aim of this paper is to achieve the appropriate model for ecotourism in natural areas along the sustainable tourism management. In line with is mentioned this objective: initially defined, the history, significance and role tourism and particular ecotourism in world. Then is discussed to identify principles and criteria for sustainable tourism development, ecotourism projects and components forming the terms tourism planning. Finally offered practical suggestions for Management resorts to considering the principles of environmental management along the principles of tourism management. Research paper method is analytical and based on practical planning process and environmental design.

Keywords: Ecotourism, Planning, Sustainable Development, Tourism Management.

Introduction

Tourism has long been common, either within or between nations and it has grown with the gradual development of its infrastructure, and has led to greater economic prosperity of human communities. In this regard, because of political, economic, social and environmental importance of tourism, it has been paid a lot of attention in many countries and it is considered as the most important source of income. A look at global statistics and the role of tourism in the world and its major economic role makes us more aware of the importance of the industry.

Iran is one of top ten countries with historical attractions and one of the top five countries with the highest biodiversity in the world's climate and enjoys a lot of potentials in tourism industry. Considering all the natural potentials, and demographic, cultural, geographical characteristics for the development of tourism in Iran, tourism can be considered the base of social development and economic growth. However, due to the fact that basically tourism can change the environment, more studies are needed to investigate the methods of developing this industry in a way that it does not hurt the environment. Principled schemes with respect to environmental design criteria along with assessing the environmental impact of tourism activities in executive planning stages and development can have a great role in removing or decreasing negative effects of tourism on environment and both help social, economic development and maintain and improve regional and national environment.

This article tries to find an appropriate pattern of ecotourism in natural areas for the sustainable development of Tourism Management. To this end, in the present article, first the definition, history, importance and role of ecotourism in natural areas are presented and then, the principles and criteria for sustainable development of tourism, eco-tourism standards of development and components of tourism planning are identified. Finally, some solutions and suggestions are presented for management system of entertainment centers. The method of the study is analytic-applied and is based on the process of environmental planning and design.

Concepts, perspectives and theoretical foundations

Definitions and concepts

Tourism

One of the best definitions for tourism was suggested by Watison and Vaal in 1982: “When people move away from their homes and workplaces temporarily and go to a place with life facilities where they stop doing their daily routines, it is called tourism”.

Ecotourism

There are several definitions suggested by international NGOs and institutions. The Persian equivalent of it can truly communicate the meaning. The International Ecotourism Society defines ecotourism as: Ecotourism is a trip to nature to enjoy it and is according to the objectives of sustainable development.

The International Ecotourism Society in 1991 defined ecotourism as: Ecotourism is any trip to untouched natural places for enjoying and using nature (and every cultural phenomenon in it whether related to the past or the present) which has few negative impacts, strengthens conservation of resources, activates local population and is economically beneficial for them. Although a tourist or traveler during his visit to historical attractions considers nature too, an eco-tourist diverse in nature and the main purpose of his trip is enjoying nature.

Different kinds of tourism

Tourism is classified as:

- Cultural and educational tourism: groups with strong cultural motivation seek to get familiar with ancient cultures and civilizations.
- Medical tourism: This refers to trips organized for physical and mental treatment.
- Business and trade tourism
- Religious and pilgrimage tourism
- Sports tourism
- Political tourism
- Social tourism
- Natural tourism (ecotourism)
- Rural tourism
- Agricultural tourism

Tourism resources

Depending on the kind of resources, tourism has different classifications. Table 1 depicts it:

Table 1- Tourism resources (WTO, 1998)

	Tourism resources	Location
Natural resources	Coastal areas and small islands	Hara forest
		Beach
		Marine environment
	Mountain	Mountain
		High lands
	Agriculture	Wild life sanctuary
		National park
		Botanical garden
		Nature park
		Lake
Waterfall		
Forest Park		
Pardisan		
Human-made resources	Civil	Big cities
		Towns
		Suburbs
	Rural	Coastal areas and small islands
		Mountain
	Agricultural land	

Different recreational activities

Different recreational activities are common in different countries, some of which are:

- Joy driving
- Sightseeing
- Picnic
- Fishing
- Ecotourism
- Camping
- Playing (a variety of sports and games)
- Watching sports
- Cycling
- Hunting
- Horse riding
- Trekking
- Mountain climbing

Based on the kind of touristic activity in different regions, varying facilities and equipment which are compatible with the environment of the region and tourism objectives are chosen.

Theoretical foundations

The position and significance of tourism

According to WTO estimates, while the growth of tourism for the decade (2000-2010) is predicted between 4.3 to a maximum of 7.6 percent, the findings indicate that most of this growth has occurred in ecotourism and generally, the growth in this sector would be between 10 to 30%. It means the number of eco tourists will increase from 7% at the present time to over 20% (Reinsold and Lindber's estimate published in WTO's site). An interesting statistics published by US tourism information center shows annually 10 % of the people, or 43 million Americans, travel to see the nature, and only in 1996, the livelihood of three hundred thousand Americans was directly or indirectly related to ecotourism. Similarly, the growth figures in Nepal, which is a developing country, shows that the number of tours to nature increased 255 percent in the 90s. (Choong & Mjelde, 2006)

The development and growth of tourism

Today, 80% of the income of international tourism is earned by 20 industrial countries. According to Wood and Hous (1991) the reasons are:

- The increase in income
- The increase in leisure time
- The increase in years of living after retirement
- Improvements in transport infrastructure and transfer
- The formation of travel agencies to promote culture and social vision of tourism
- Raising public awareness about travel facilities
- Printing publications, brochures and advertising maps
- Improving the security of travel

The investigations in 1991 revealed France, USA, Spain, Italy, Hungary and Australia are top 6 countries for tourist destinations. It also revealed the counties which spent the most on tourism are USA, Germany, Japan, England, Italy and France, respectively. The countries which had the highest income were USA, France, Italy, Spain, Australia and England (World Tourism Organization, 1993). At the present time there is a serious competition between Korea, Thailand, Japan, China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Brazil and Indonesia. This competition is because the development of tourism has many benefits for countries.

Ecotourism standards

Although the base and destination of ecotourism is nature, any trip to nature is not necessarily called ecotourism. Considering the natural objectives of ecotourism, the following standards are needed to evaluate trips to nature:

- Minimum damage to the environment
- Minimum damage and maximum respect to the host culture
- Maximum financial benefits for ordinary host people (the public)
- Maximum recreational satisfaction for visitors

Since ecotourism is basically rooted in the goals of sustainable development, it brings about educational and spiritual experience.

Discussion

Investigating the effects and consequences of ecotourism

The consequences of ecotourism can be classified in two groups:

- Direct consequences: which are caused by tourists?
- Indirect consequences: which are the result of tourist activities and are unwanted?

Since ecotourism is a sub-category of tourism industry, it has almost the same advantages and disadvantages as tourism. However, since it is closely related to the environment, it is of vital importance to investigate its consequences, especially the negative ones. Below, the main advantages and disadvantages of ecotourism are discussed.

Economic impacts

Tourism can develop employment, as both simple workers and experts in different fields can be employed in different parts of it. Individuals can be prepared by short-term and medium-term training courses to be employed in different fields. Employment can locally develop fruitful industries. Construction of hotels, restaurants, transportation systems, handicrafts and tourism services at the local level are significant factors in regional development of tourism. Tourism transfers money and population from industrial centers to rural and natural areas and it can be considered the driving force for economic development in all countries; it can.

Positive impacts on the economy

- Prevent the migration of rural residents to city
- Help the creation of autonomous regions and ensure their economic security
- Distribute income and wealth fairly
- Develop transfer services and roads
- Support local handicrafts
- Develop creativity and artistic, economic and other talents
- Develop accommodation, catering and other facilities
- Be considered a source of foreign currency and help the economy of the region
- Increase agricultural products and inject capital into the local economy because demand increases in the region.
- Improve local and regional transportation, communications and infrastructure
- Cause beneficial and wise use of the land which is considered marginal by farmers. Therefore, a wide surface of land with vegetation remains in original form.
- Can be like a mechanism for the autonomy of national parks provided that tourism is well guided.
- Develop recreational facilities for visitors
- Be a tool for persuading authorities and public people to preserve natural areas.

Although the development of tourism has been very beneficial for tourist destinations in different countries, its plan-less development has caused negative and sustainable impacts on the ecological resources of these regions.

Negative impacts on the economy

- The emergence of false jobs and beggary
- The change of land use into tourist spaces
- The decrease of agricultural products of the local people

Social-cultural impacts

One dimension of sustainable tourism is paying attention to cultural and environmental values. Considering cultural issues, there are controversial ideas for sustainable development. Some people strictly believe cultural resources should be preserved in their original shape in a touristy area, while some other think culture and traditions should be changed in such a place. Tourism has a great role in transferring cultural information and increases people's level of understanding from other cultures. Tourism can affect architectural structure, traditions, language, accent and local music of an area. Although tourism has positive cultural and social influences, it has negative consequences too, including changing the pattern of consumption, decreasing values, increasing costs of living, social pressure in families, non-moral activities and materialism. (Wenjun Li, 2004)

Environmental impacts

Tourism projects have direct and indirect consequences and impacts on the environment. The table below presents the negative impacts of tourism on the environment along with methods to reduce them.

Table 2- The impacts of tourism on the environment (WTO, 1998)

contributing factor	Negative impact on the environment	Reducing the impact Proper functionality
population density	Pressure on humans and environment Change in behavior of animals and wildlife	Reducing the number of visitors Increasing the capacity
Unplanned development	Appearance of dirty areas The loss of habitat Destruction of vegetation Impact on the aesthetics of the area	Distributed to visitors to other areas Restoration Implementation of the rules on land use
Sound pollution	Disturbing wildlife Disturbing the life of inhabitants	Awareness rising Legislation of laws and regulations
Garbage	The dumping of waste and garbage in wildlife Damaging the beauties of environment Endangering health	Awareness rising Legislation of laws and regulations Preparation of containers for waste collection and dumping them in the right place
Hostility with art and brutality	The loss of historical and cultural values destruction of facilities	Awareness rising Legislation of laws and regulations More observations
airport noise	Stress on human environment and creatures	Changing the items of takeoff and landings Controlling land use near airports
traffic in roads	Stress on the environment and creatures	Increasing access to public transport vehicles
Off-road driving	Damaging vegetation, soil and wildlife	Reduced access Strict laws and regulations
engine boats	Disturbance to wildlife, especially in the seasons of laying and nesting Sound pollution	Denial of access to the site Planning environmental education
Hunting	Competition with natural hunters Reduced resources	Making sidewalks Planning environmental education
Walking and having fun in animal habitats	Disturbance to wildlife erosion of sidewalks	Restricted access Making sidewalks Planning environmental education
Collecting memento	Destruction of natural resources which are disappearing (coral-shells-tusks-rare plants) Destruction of natural process	Awareness rising Planning environmental education Legislation of rules
collection wood for fuel	Destruction of habitat wildlife death	Awareness rising Environmental education Using other fuels
feeding animals, sticking advertisement	Damaging vegetation, soil and wildlife	Awareness rising Environmental education Legislation of laws

Investigating the factors contributing to the demand for resorts

- Income: As an annual income and level of social welfare increases, the demand for resorts increases too.
- Spare time: spare time is the time one is free of responsibilities and can have fun.
- Management of resorts: resorts should be managed dynamically and effective methods should be adopted to increase demand. By correct management, the demand increases. However, the quality of services and facilities can have a great role too.
- Supply: to increase demands, the quality and quantity of supply should increase. However, the increase in supply should not be beyond the capacity of the region. Specific identity of a resort and the uniqueness of its design, and facilities contribute to the success of it. When designing and equipping resorts, the relationships between demand and supply should be taken into account.
- Population: any changes in population can greatly affect the demand for resorts. In predicting future demand of resorts, the rate of population growth, geographical changes, the growth of immigration, and changes in population factors should be taken into consideration.
- Availability: using resorts necessarily needs movement. People should travel to reach a resort and use it. The ease of use and availability of railway, air and land transport network are important factors in increasing the demands.

Analysis of the findings**Codification of principles of eco touristic planning and designing****Principles of sustainable development of tourism**

In a conference in Vancouver, Canada, WTO suggested the following principles for sustainability of tourist activities:

- Planning and development of tourist activities should be cohesive and include different state organizations and private sector which have many potential benefits.
- Organizations, groups and individuals should conform to local rules and principles which guarantee respecting the culture, traditions, environment, social behavior, political pattern and economy of the host community.
- Tourism should be sustainable and planned by correct use of human and natural environment of host community.
- Financial benefits obtained by tourism should be fairly shared by local people and the developers of this industry.
- True information and research studies about tourism and its impacts on humans and cultural environment should be available especially for the local people (in order to be involved in the process of planning and development).
- With the help of financial, commercial, governmental and other parts, local people should be encouraged.
- Considering environment and social- economic planning, systemic analysis should be done in details and with special considerations.
- All stages of tourism development should be meticulously evaluated in order for local people and other groups to benefit from the opportunities.
- Strategies should be used to offer activities matching the capacities of each region and finally social, economic and cultural development of each region should take place through eco touristic resources of that region.

Principles of formation of ecotourism projects

Ecotourism projects are formed based on the following principles:

- The resources should not be destroyed
- They should have long-term benefits for the local community and the resources should be protected socially, scientifically, economically and culturally.
- They should be based on cooperative activities.
- They should have educational benefits in all levels including local, governmental, and private levels before, during and after the trip.
- They should enhance the values.
- They should pay attention to consumption management
- They should increase cooperation in all levels
- They should create moral- behavioral responsibility for every one toward cultural and natural environment.

Considering the items mentioned above, a national park, as an example, can attract tourists continually provided that it is well managed and the factors work in cooperation in order to preserve the quality of the park.

Conclusion and recommendations

It seems necessary to have a scientific look at the subject of ecotourism development and through evaluation of ecologic potentials, an appropriate plan for recreational equipment and facilities should be offered.

For the management of an ecosystem, mutual understanding of the ecosystem and numerous systems of social political communities in relation to the ecosystem should exist. Planning the development of ecosystem needs the following stages:

- Doing non-financial preparations (with an emphasis on spiritual aspects)
- Planning processes which encourage the cooperation between decision makers and land owners and host community

The first and the most important step in better planning of ecotourism is probably making a strong relationship between private and non-private sectors. Governmental sector is very important in managing national parks, wide life sanctuaries and regions the maintenance and protection of which helps attracting eco tourists; for example, rain forests, mountain high lands, Mangrove lagoons, and oak tree forests.

Private sector can pioneer in services like travel agencies, tours with tour guides, equipping accommodations, catering services and tourist transport. There is also a third part working in cooperation with these two: the participation of local communities. A project cannot be successful without the cooperation of local communities. Plus, their experience and information can be very useful. Through the cooperation of these three, economic conditions can be improved and public support for protecting resources can be increased.

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