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Assessment of the Sustainability of Ecotourism Development in the Tandooreh National Park-IRAN

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Abstract:

The main aim of the study was to help sustainability of ecotourism development in Tandooreh National Park for minimizing the environmental impacts, maximizing the visitor's satisfaction and optimizing the benefits to the local people. Sustainable tourism is the main pivot for Tandooreh National Park and to achieve this pair wise matching (SO, WO, ST, and WT) has been done. Thus by comparing internal and external factors in the matrix of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) acceptable strategies. In order to maximize the internal strengths and external opportunities and to minimize internal weaknesses and external threats on the TNP several strategies have been suggested for the sustainable ecotourism development and management.

Keywords: Ecotourism; Local economy; conservation of resource; protected area management

1. Introduction

In 1976, the Tourism Society of England defined Tourism as: "Tourism is the temporary, short-term movement of people to destination outside the places where they normally live and work and their activities during the stay at each destination which include movements for all purposes (Allan, 1998). In 1981 the International Association of Scientific Experts in Tourism defined tourism in terms of particular activities selected by choice and undertaken outside the home. Ecological tourism commonly known as Ecotourism is travel to frail, untouched and usually restricted areas that struggle to be low impact and often in small scale. It's potential as a tool for contributing to sustainable livelihoods of local communities and for conservation of natural environments was recognized internationally when the United Nation declared 2002 as the International Year of Ecotourism.

In ecotourism tourists come in small numbers but stay for longer and hence have less impact on the local community, their culture and the environment. This would generate more income than other tourists since local communities may provide guided visits, accommodation, food, vehicle rentals, taxis, means of recreation, crafts, etc. In addition ecotourism also promote local communities working with tourists to develop a sense of pride in their environment which could result in making them responsible custodian of their resources.

Iran has an extraordinary and specific position because of the variety of climate and weather, cultural richness, deserts, forests, geomorphological position, national parks, wildlife refuges and extraordinary seas and beaches, natural landmarks, mountains, pastures, lagoons, lakes and islands (Asadi, 2012) and hence ecotourism can be the most important competitive advantage of Iran ecotourism industry (Zangiabadi et al., 2006; Tavangar, 2010). Although Iran ranks second in the south region of Asia in attracting the greatest number of tourists and the revenues in this section are only second to attract India (Ebrahimzadeh and Aghasizadeh, 2009) Iran is not yet an ecotourism destination for international visitors as most of the travel is by local people (Tavassoli, 2002) and hence it is essential to identify the important problems and to address them.

Ecotourism has proven to be an effective concept in the sustainable utilization of natural resources and development of various communities (Carlos and Libosada, 2007). Often regarded as an economic justification for resource conservation, ecotourism is providing a concept that is easily understood and appreciated by local communities and stakeholders. This paper focused on sustainability of ecotourism in the Tandooreh national park in Iran.

2. Method of Study

SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) research method is often used in business fields it has now been extended to natural resource management to assess the decision and policy directive in a systematic manner (Schmoldt et al,

2001) and also in an assessment of sustainable tourism (NOAA, 2011). The strengths and weaknesses (local analysis) are the internal factors while opportunities and threats (global analysis) are external factors (Harfst et al., 2010). In this study the SWOT analysis was conducted on the Tandooreh National Park in order to assess the sustainability of ecotourism development. In this process the internal factors (strengths and weaknesses) and external factors (opportunities and threats) were identified and listed. For evaluation of internal and external factors internal factor estimate matrix (IFEM) and external factor estimate matrix (IEEM) were used. Similarly in case of EFEM the total of weighted scores with a value more than 2.5 means opportunities are more than strengths (Monavari et al, 2007).

3. Results and Discussion

Sustainable tourism is the main pivot for Tandooreh National Park and to achieve this pair wise matching (SO, WO, ST, and WT) has been done. The comparing internal and external factors in the matrix of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) acceptable strategies were formulated which are as follows.

S-O strategies: Proposed opportunities that fit well with the park's strengths are

- Establishment of welfare places and hotels for ecotourism in the region.
- Use the local potential for conservation of natural ecosystem.
- Developing local market.
- Reducing entrance fee and promoting service quality for visitors.

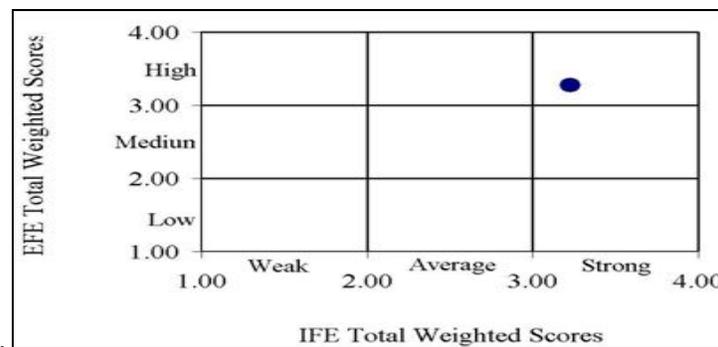


Figure 1: The incidence point of the internal and external factors of Tandooreh National Park ecotourism. The IFE factors are strong while EFE factors suggest high potentials of ecotourism

Table No.1 Weighted Score for the strengths and weaknesses (Internal factor estimate matrix; FEM)

Strengths		Weight	Score	Weighted Score
1	Tandooreh National Park is a well-established tourism destination with a variety of natural attractions like the Cheetah, Wild goat, Wild ship etc, unique culture of local people having ancient culture; magnificent local language and historical holy Shrine.	0.1190	4	0.4762
2	The local people strongly supporting the need of ecotourism in this region as good number of domestic tourists visit this destination.	0.0779	3	0.2338
3	The region has good weather and climate, unique ecosystem, great biodiversity and valuable wildlife.	0.0606	3	0.1818
4	The existence of a large number of protected areas (national, natural parks and reservations) included in the Fourth National Report to the Convention on Biological Diversity (2010) with reduced pollution in the majority of rural areas;	0.0844	2	0.1688
5	Variety and ethnic richness in indigenous areas with traditional cuisine and regional specialties;	0.0519	4	0.2078
6	Much incentive for the local people from tourism in terms of income generation.	0.0649	3	0.1948

- Weighted Score for the strengths and weaknesses (Internal factor estimate matrix; FEM) (Cont.)

Strengths		Weight	Score	Weighted Score
Weaknesses				
1	Lack of coordination among local people and low involvement of local people in tourism.	0.0758	3	0.2273
2	Lack of infrastructures and fundamental facilities like accommodation (hotels and resorts), travel and ecotourism agencies, public transport, recreation.	0.0866	4	0.3463
3	The lack of foreign tourists;	0.0498	2	0.0996
4	The lack of strategies that ensure the promotion and marketing of ecotourism in the protected areas.	0.0628	3	0.1883
5	Seasonality of ecotourism and unequal distribution of tourism	0.0996	3	0.2987
6	High rate of inflation and unsuitable domestic economy which hardens the development of ecotourism and increases the expense of travel;	0.0714	5	0.3571
7	Absence of strict rules for entering the Tandooreh National Park as there is absence of proper zoning and border fencing around the park parameter	0.0563	3	0.1688
8	Lack of adequate funding for conservation and scientific research and education in the region	0.0390	2	0.0779
Total		1.0000	----	3.2273

- Weighted Score for the opportunities and threats (External factor estimate matrix; EFEM)

Opportunities		Weight	Score	Weighted Score
1	Proper ecotourism package development involving local people in decision making and planning so that there is a larger involvement of the local people.	0.1027	5	0.5137
2	Diversification of ecotourism products which will help in retaining majority of the income generated with the local people which will help in job creation and direct benefit generation for local community	0.0514	2	0.1027
3	Conserving natural ecosystems and making effort to decrease negative impacts	0.0428	4	0.1712
4	Feasibility of implementing tourism plans in Tandooreh National Park, considering environmental requirements with emphasis on conserving native culture and prevention of the traditional context alteration.	0.0514	3	0.1541
5	High international interest for ecotourism, agro tourism, rural tourism, adventure tourism;	0.0394	4	0.1575
6	The climate, with soft summers and cold spring, favorable for the tourist activity during the year;	0.0462	2	0.0925
7	The possibility to attract tourists by exploiting the historical, cultural, spiritual and traditional inheritance;	0.0616	3	0.1849
8	The existence of the legislative framework which allows the conservation of the protected areas.	0.0497	2	0.0993
9	Existence of a considerable number of potential tourists like Iranian settled in Western countries and neighbor and Islamic countries which have historical, religious and cultural relations with Iran.	0.0308	1	0.0308
10	Geographical position of this country (Closeness to tourist generating countries).	0.0257	2	0.0514
11	Satisfaction of tourists after visiting Tandooreh National Park.	0.0771	5	0.3853
12	The basic infrastructure of utilities are satisfactory	0.0942	3	0.2825

- Weighted Score for the opportunities and threats (External factor estimate matrix; EFEM) (Cont.)

Threats		Weight	Score	Weighted Score
1	Potential negative cultural and environmental impacts with lack of favorable circumstances for foreign tourists, intensification of the economic crisis and instability of the national currency;	0.0719	3	0.2158
2	Transport infrastructure not to the community standards and emergency medical services are unsatisfactory.	0.0616	4	0.2466
3	Presentation of an unsuitable image of Iran in International societies to international tourists.	0.0942	2	0.1884
4	Tensions, restlessness and insecurity in Middle East and especially in neighboring countries like Afghanistan and Iraq, which causes the number of international tourists to decrease.	0.0993	4	0.3973
Total		1.0000	----	3.2740

4. Conclusion

In conclusion the SWOT analysis has shown that the well-established tourism destination with a variety of natural attractions and unique culture of local people having ancient culture are the strengths of Tandooreh National Park while lack of infrastructures and fundamental facilities are the major weaknesses. Proper ecotourism package development involving local people in decision making are found to be few of the main opportunities whereas tensions, restlessness and insecurity in neighboring countries are the main threats. In order to maximize the internal strengths and external opportunities and to minimize internal weaknesses and external threats on the TNP several strategies have been suggested for the sustainable ecotourism development and management. However there is a scope for the improvement of the SWOT analysis in identifying more options for strategic management of sustainable ecotourism.

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