

An Analysis of Tourism Policy Making in Iran

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

There is no doubt today that tourism as a universal socioeconomic phenomenon is more than an industry and tourism development is a political process. Despite the fact that Iran has a special position in the world tourism map but the reality, however, is something different! Its real share is as low as 1/500 of the world markets. Tourism in Iran has a unique difference that one can consider it as a specification that based on its political economy and we attempt to analyze the causes, dimensions and its impacts on tourism. Although, the history knows Iran as one of the world's oldest civilizations, it is in eighteenth world's rank in terms of size, population and economy (World Bank, 2009), (UNDP, 2010) and has a unique place in world tourism map, but it faces major challenges in tourism development. Like many developing countries, Iran faces numerous challenges for tourism development; the political economy is the most effective one in this case. This paper attempts to explore Iran's tourism as a multi-dimensional phenomenon with particular focus on the political economy of Iran. Tourism policy making priorities based on a field study is the other part of the current paper.

Materials and Methods

In Iran tourism policies are rarely based on tourism nature and its current patterns and these policies are mostly affected by cultural, social and especially Iran's political economy. For understanding of the governmental policies in tourism referring to the government and society nature in Iran and their evolution structure can be a direction for comprehension of this subject. Since Iran's tourism policy making priorities are the one of the main goals of this research, so by emphasizing on some effective political variables on international tourist arrivals entering trends and using them in the research tools and preparation of the questionnaire the active specialists were asked. The statistical population of this field study consists of the experts of political scope like students and professors of international relations fields, political geography and tourism management, tour guides, managers of tourism agencies and also international tourist arrivals in Iran. 150 individuals were selected as sample statistical population based on personal estimation method and 10 questions were asked in closed method.

Discussion and Results

Tourism more than an industry as universal dynamic social phenomenon has own special complexities that shaped by special mechanism in different places and times therefore in every society requires own special planning. Present research believes that like other societies Iran should change its political economy perspective. It is clear that most of the tourism development plans will be limited to administrated documents in case of lack of macro changes in policy making related to present trend. The wide effects of social, cultural, ideological and political economy dominated on tourism in one hand and Iran's oil based economy in other hand have caused to blurring and finally ignorance of tourism industry as a main economic sector. In these atmospheres tourism was located in margin of the national plans. Present paper pays attention to its main cause: the political economy. Tourism policies in Iran are more consequential from the country's specific political economy than from patterns of planning. Increasing centralization and dependence of national economy on oil rents, growth of government body and informal economy, lack of social pluralism, extension of state ideology, and presenting an unreal image about Iran are negative impacts of current political economy. The emphasis on domestic criteria and the obligation of the inbounds to obey these rules have not had any other results than the reduction of markets. In this study it was tried to explore that dimension of tourism that provides a proper context for development of tourism by political approach. Accordingly this research proposes following policy making priorities for development of tourism in Iran based on results of questionnaires and experts viewpoints: -Improvement of International Polices: taking and continuing the détente policy in international levels, development and improvement of foreign relations as the primary priority of the respondents, -Membership in International Organization: membership in regional and international organizations such as UNWTO as the second priority, -Development of Democracy: political and democracy expansion and elimination of discrimination between inbounds as the third priority, -Improvement of the Administrative System: activation of embassies and foreign cultural offices, reduction of administrative barriers such as the cancellation of visa issuance limitations as the fourth priority.

Conclusions

According to the present research results the prerequisite of tourism development and improvement is changing political economy approach the results of this shift could indicate its positive effects in different economic, political and cultural aspects in tourism. In addition to the results of field research (table 2) this research proposes that the government as main policy maker should conduct following affairs: -Gradual replacement of the government role as supplier of tourism products to policy making and cancellation of special supporting polices of governmental and semi-governmental and state foundations. -Transformation ICHTO into an independent ministry and establishing special polices legislation for increasing foreign and private investment supports. -Reconstruction and restoration of old tourism facilities such as accommodation and transportation. -Development of international tourism by membership in World Trade Organization (WTO) and UNWTO. -Expansion of conceptual framework for tourism as an inevitable phenomena necessity in recent era and introduction of tourism socio-economic and environmental positive and negative effects and its role in local community's sublimation. The analysis indicates that (effect of Cohen Index= \emptyset^2) the highest priority to the choice is "Taking and continuing the détente policy in international levels" for tourism improvement. The final section of this paper consists of several recommendations for tourism development in Iran.

Keywords: Tourism Development, Prioritization, Policy Making, Iran.

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