



عظیمی

علوم محیطی سال هفتم، شماره سوم، بهار ۱۳۸۹  
ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES Vol.7, No.3, Spring 2010

117-134

## The Role of Cultural Heritage in Achieving Environmentally Sustainable Tourism – Implications for Iran

Nasserali Azimi<sup>1\*</sup>, Janet Blake<sup>2</sup>, Seyed Mohammad Mojabi<sup>3</sup>

1- Department of Knowledge Economy National Science Policy Research Institute

2- Faculty of Law and UNESCO Chair for Human Rights, Peace and Democracy, University of Shahid Beheshti, Tehran, Iran.

3- Urban Planning and Research center, Tehran Municipality.

### Abstract

A high priority has been placed in Iran in recent years on developing non-oil sources of income and tourism has been identified as one important area of the economy for development. The development of niche types of tourism such as ecotourism or cultural tourism – both the subject of this paper – is clearly in line with the public policy objective of developing non-oil sources of income. Environmental protection is an obligation on the government under Principle 50 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic. It is therefore appropriate to consider what role the country's vast cultural heritage resource can play in ensuring more environmentally sustainable forms of tourism development. Since even ecotourism developments can have negative environmental consequences by development of other forms of low intensity tourism (including cultural tourism) must be an important element in Iran's policy agenda in this area. The promotion of cultural tourism in Iran should aim therefore to build on the positive impacts while minimising the negative ones. Policies for development of cultural tourism should also take into account the principles and objectives of sustainable development which are set out here within the context of tourism projects. A further reason to look at the role of cultural heritage in this respect is its intricate relationship with the natural environment, as evidenced by the 1972 Convention on the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Environment of UNESCO. It should be remembered that heritage is a very broad concept that encompasses within its scope landscapes, archaeological sites and built environments as well as cultural practices and knowledge. All of these are relevant to the sustainable development and management of tourism. It also has a potential for contributing to sustainability in itself. This article will therefore consider the cultural heritage – as a tourism resource base – from all of these dimensions.

**Keywords:** Cultural heritage, Sustainable development, Cultural tourism, Environmental impacts.

### گردشگری با محیط زیستی پایدار – نقش میراث فرهنگی و تعمقی بر ایران

ناصر علی عظیمی<sup>۱\*</sup>، ژانت بلیک<sup>۲</sup>، سید محمد مجابی<sup>۳</sup>

۱- مرکز تحقیقات سیاست‌های علمی کشور

۲- دانشکده حقوق و کرسی حقوق بشر، صلح دموکراسی (یونسکو) دانشگاه شهید بهشتی

۳- مرکز مطالعات و برنامه ریزی شهر تهران

### چکیده

در سال‌های اخیر ایران اولویت بالایی را بر توسعه منابع غیرنفتی داده است و گردشگری به عنوان یک حوزه اقتصادی مهم برای این توسعه شناخته شده است. توسعه انواع ویژه گردشگری مانند اکوتوریسم و گردشگری فرهنگی هر دو از مباحث مورد بررسی این مقاله می‌باشد که در راستای اهداف و سیاست‌گذاری کلی توسعه منابع درآمدی غیرنفتی قرار دارد. حفاظت از محیط‌زیست براساس اصل ۵۰ قانون اساسی جمهوری اسلامی ایران وظیفه دولت می‌باشد. بنابراین، این ضرورت دارد تا نقشی را که منابع وسیع میراث فرهنگی کشور می‌تواند در توسعه گردشگری با محیط‌زیستی پایدار بازی کند، را بررسی نمایم. با توجه به اینکه حتی توسعه اکوتوریسم هم عواقب محیط‌زیستی منفی دارد توسعه سایر اشکال گردشگری کم شدت (شامل گردشگری فرهنگی) باید عامل مهمی در برنامه سیاست‌گذاری ایران در این حوزه باشد. ترغیب و تشویق گردشگری فرهنگی در ایران باید با هدف ایجاد تاثیرات مثبت و به حداقل رساندن تاثیرات منفی باشد. خط مشی‌های توسعه گردشگری فرهنگی باید اصول و اهداف توسعه پایدار را که اینجا در مفهوم پروژه‌های گردشگری هست، مورد توجه قرار دهد. دلیل دیگری که باید نقش گردشگری میراث فرهنگی مورد بررسی قرار گیرد رابطه پیچیده آن با محیط‌زیست طبیعی است که در کنوانسیون حفاظت از میراث فرهنگی و محیط‌زیست طبیعی جهانی یونسکو سال ۱۹۷۲ بیان شده است. این را باید بخاطر داشته باشیم که میراث مفهوم خیلی گسترده‌ای دارد که در برگیرنده مناظر طبیعی، سایت‌های باستان‌شناسی، و محیط‌زیست ساخته شده علاوه بر رفتارهای فرهنگی و علمی می‌باشد. تمام اینها به توسعه پایدار و مدیریت گردشگری ارتباط دارد. بنابراین، این مقاله میراث فرهنگی را به عنوان منبع گردشگری محور تلفی و تمام ابعاد آن را مورد بررسی قرار می‌دهد.

واژه‌های کلیدی: میراث فرهنگی، توسعه پایدار، گردشگری فرهنگی، تاثیرات

\* Corresponding author. E-mail Address: [na.azimi5@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:na.azimi5@yahoo.co.uk)

## Introduction

One of the main characteristics of tourism is its multidimensional nature. It is not simply a highly significant economic sector, one of the top categories of international trade, or a major social phenomenon; it is all these things at once, while also contributing to the protection of the environment, to the preservation of biological diversity, to the conservation of cultural heritage ... (F. Frangialli, Secretary-General of the World Tourism Organisation in July 2000).

In the Third and Fourth Development Plans for Iran (from 1999-2004 and 2005-2009, respectively), a high priority was placed on developing non-oil sources of income and tourism was highlighted as an area of the economy for development. The development of niche types of tourism such as ecotourism or cultural tourism – both the subject of this paper - is clearly in line with the public policy objective of developing non-oil sources of income. Since environmental protection is not only an obligation on the government under Principle 50 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic (revised in 1991) but is also an objective stated in the Fourth National Five-year Development Plan (2005-2009), it is appropriate to consider what role the country's vast cultural heritage resource can play in ensuring more environmentally sustainable forms of tourism development.

Given that it is now recognized that even ecotourism developments can have negative environmental consequences by placing too much pressure on the resource base, i.e. the natural environment, the development of other forms of low intensity tourism must be an important element in Iran's policy agenda in this area. However, there is a further reason to look at the role of cultural heritage in this respect - its intricate relationship with the natural environment, as evidenced by the 1972 World Heritage Convention that deals with both types of heritage together, (UNESCO, 1972)<sup>1</sup> and its potential for contributing to sustainability in itself. This article will therefore consider the cultural heritage from both of these dimensions.

When looking at the development of tourism in any context, there are several potentially positive and negative impacts on the resource base and the local culture and society that must be taken into consideration. The promotion of cultural tourism in Iran should aim therefore to build on the positive impacts while minimising the negative ones. Policies for development of cultural tourism should also take into account the principles and objectives of sustainable development, although it is not always easy to establish full compatibility between tourism and sustainable development. (Sharpley, 1995) The question to address here is, first, what makes development policies and programmes sustainable and how can the country's cultural heritage and the tourism associated with it contribute towards this objective?

## Methods

### Achieving Development that is Sustainable

The notion of 'sustainable development' is one that works on several levels of which three – economic, environmental (ecological) and cultural – are of most relevance to this discussion. A full statement of the contributing elements of sustainable development was internationally accepted for the first time with the adoption of the 1992 'Rio Declaration' and its associated plan of implementation (UNCED, 1992 and b). This declaration combined economic, environmental, social, cultural and political objectives – now understood to be the dimensions of human development - and placed a heavy emphasis throughout on the notion of *integration* of these varied elements.<sup>2</sup>

Sustainable development is essentially a tool for reconciling the frequently competing interests between economic development and protection of the environment and so a central plank of the Rio Declaration is to reconcile the right of all countries to seek economic development with the need for environmental protection (and the concomitant right to a clean and healthy environment). This central idea is

expressed through the balancing elements contained in Principles 3 and 4 of the declaration.<sup>3</sup> The Rio Declaration contains both substantive and procedural elements. The main substantive elements of sustainable development are set out in Principles 2 to 8 of the Declaration<sup>4</sup> and the procedural elements are mainly to be found in Principles 10 and 17 (although some other later principles can also be understood to have some procedural character).<sup>5</sup>

An important aspect of the implementation of sustainable development – as can be seen throughout Agenda 21 – is that governments must integrate it as a norm into the, *process* of public decision- and policy-making. This can impact on government activities in a wide range of areas such as transport, health care, regional regeneration, environmental protection etc. In view of its multi-sectoral nature, tourism development is clearly an area in which this must be respected. Thus the implementation of sustainable development in the area of tourism requires the interaction of government organs and other bodies to a degree previously unknown and the establishment of some specialised institution for its achievement. Not only are there does its implementation involve major policy shifts and changes in planning and management strategies, it also implies a level of public participation in policy making that is unusual. There are also legislative and administrative implications that flow from its implementation.

### **Sustainable Tourism Development**

It is an unfortunate fact that the notions of both ecotourism and cultural tourism have been abused by the tourism industry, often inappropriately exploited as a marketing gimmick without a full commitment to (or understanding of) their true meaning (Page and Dowling, 2002). Of course, this has a positive side since it shows that there is increasing customer interest in such niche forms of tourism and this is a force that can be exploited for the good. For this reason, it is necessary for us here to examine cultural tourism first in terms of the broader concept of sustainable tourism

that can be measured against international standards of sustainability.

Agenda 21, for example, called for the promotion of environmentally sound and culturally sensitive tourism programmes as a strategy for the sustainable development of urban settlements.<sup>6</sup> In turn, the Habitat Agenda (UN-HABITAT, 1996) called for the conservation and rehabilitation of historical and cultural heritage in accordance with the sustainable use of natural and man-made resources. Significantly for the subject of this paper, all of these focus on the potential of sustainable tourism to contribute to the sustainable development of urban areas and the sustainable exploitation of cultural as well as natural resources. This, then, brings the focus clearly onto the cultural heritage fabric as an important resource for achieving sustainability of tourism development (Fyall and Garrod, 1996; Gossling, 2002). Boniface (2000) in her paper places emphasis on a particularly significant factor in relation to cultural tourism, particularly with reference to a country such as Iran with an uneven pattern of development (Mahmoudian-Bigdeli, 2005), that heritage tourism has an important potential for regeneration of peripheral areas. She proposes certain guidelines as to how this positive developmental outcome can be achieved and maximized.

The World Summit on Sustainable Development ('WSSD') in 2002 called on governments to engage in the ongoing work under the Convention on Biological Diversity (1992) on the sustainable use on biological diversity, *including on sustainable tourism, as a cross-cutting issue relevant to different ecosystems, sectors and thematic areas*. In this way, sustainable tourism development has been promoted by the WSSD<sup>7</sup> as a means of protecting biological diversity while also promoting urban development.<sup>8</sup> The main objective as stated here is to increase the benefits from tourism resources for the population in host communities while maintaining the cultural and environmental integrity of the host communities and enhancing the protection of ecologically sensitive areas and natural heritages.

This would include actions at all levels to:

- Enhance partnerships with both private and public sectors
- Enhance stakeholder cooperation in tourism development and heritage preservation, in order to improve the protection of the environment, natural resources and cultural heritage
- Provide technical assistance to developing countries and countries with economies in transition to support sustainable tourism business development
- Investment and tourism awareness programmes, to improve domestic tourism, and to stimulate entrepreneurial development
- Assist host communities to manage visits to their tourism attractions for their maximum benefit, while minimizing negative impacts on and risks for their traditions, culture and environment.

As noted above, three types of sustainability are significant for achieving sustainable tourism development. The first of these is *ecological sustainability* that requires that non-renewable resources (in which much of the cultural heritage may be included) are not used faster than they can be replaced and that renewable resources are not used faster than they can be replenished. The second is *social and cultural sustainability* that ensures development is compatible with the culture and values of local people and strengthens their sense of community identity. The third is *economic sustainability* that ensures development is economically efficient and resources should be managed in such a way that they can remain viable to support future generations. From the above, we can derive the principle that the management of all resources should be achieved in such a way as to fulfil economic, social and aesthetic needs while, at the same time, maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes and biological diversity.

In any country, such as Iran, that wishes to build up substantially its tourism industry (both domestic and international) ensuring the sustainability of the tourism model is vital for the protection and

preservation of the natural and cultural environment on which tourism depends (see: World Tourism Organization, 2001 and 2003). Some relevant goals of sustainable tourism include the following.

- Building awareness of the contribution that appropriate forms of tourism can make both to the environment and the economy.

- Improving the quality of life for the local community.

- Providing the visitor with a high quality experience.

Some further necessary conditions for ensuring the sustainability of tourism development projects are:

- Effective cooperation between government bodies (and other organisations) with responsibility for areas related to sustainable tourism (environment, cultural heritage and tourism, transport, economy etc.)

- Protection of and maintaining the quality of the resource base, i.e. the cultural and natural environment

- Reduction in the environmental impact of tourism

- Good inventorying and monitoring systems for tourism activities that affect the resource base.<sup>9</sup>

There is, however, the danger for developing economies of an over-dependency on tourism as an engine for development with little attention being given to other sectors of the economy. This is problematic since a variety of economic, social and political factors can have strong negative impacts on tourism demand and thus tourism development can be rendered essentially *non-sustainable* over a broad canvas (Sharpley, 1996). For this reason, sustainable development objectives are often of most relevance to local and small-scale tourism development projects.

The question as to how truly sustainable tourism development can be achieved and how the approach can be applied to the context of Iran will have implications *inter alia* for policy- and decision-making processes, institutional frameworks, planning and management, legislation and regulations.<sup>10</sup>

A fundamental premise of sustainable tourism is that the tourist sector should be planned and managed

so as to bring long-term economic benefits and contribute to poverty reduction while, at the same time, resource conservation and cultural preservation (du Cross, 2001; Newby, 1994). It remains a major challenge to the tourism industry to apply existing knowledge relating to sustainability more effectively to the planning and development of the tourism infrastructure. It is necessary to adapt monitoring, planning and management techniques to local requirements, guided by an understanding of the conditions, needs and development prospects of these (Blake, 2004).

Iran has been preparing a national plan to assure long-term sustainable tourism development, in compliance with governmental policies and strategies and the relevant Five-Year Development Plan. The Iran Touring and Tourism Organization (ITTO) is the governmental body mainly responsible for this work. A comprehensive study of past activities has been carried out, the ITTO Research Centre has been reorganized and working groups have been established in accordance with the requirements of the plan. An advisory committee comprising experts from universities, the ITTO and other related organizations has been set up. It is intended to carry out an awareness campaign in order to reach the same level of understanding in provincial areas.

## Discussion

### Cultural Heritage - a Tourism Resource

#### *Cultural Heritage – a Resource*

Heritage is a broad concept that covers both the natural as well as the cultural environment<sup>11</sup> and includes within its scope landscapes, historic places, sites and built environments as well as cultural practices and knowledge. There is a general duty on all governments to safeguard and preserve the natural and cultural heritage situated on their territory,<sup>12</sup> for example by ensuring that tourism development based on this resource-base has as little negative impact on it as possible (McKercher and du Cross, 2002); McKercher *et al.*, 2005). A primary goal of heritage

management is the raising of public awareness of its significance and the promotion of the need for its conservation, both to visitors and the host community (ICOMOS, 1996).<sup>13</sup> This is a duty that should be further extended to public and private bodies involved in the marketing and selling of cultural tourism destinations.

Governments and other policy-makers bear a responsibility to the historic environment that goes beyond simply preventing the destruction of cultural heritage and involves actively caring for it, maintaining it in good physical condition while also making it readily accessible for study, recreation and tourism. Cultural heritage should ideally be in active use as an integral part of the community and a material asset that makes a positive contribution to economic prosperity and quality of life.<sup>14</sup> Cultural heritage has a value for contemporary use which can further local development if properly handled; it can stimulate traditional local activities and develop new ones. It can, of course, also contribute towards the economic revival of regions and cities through the income generated by cultural tourism (Machicado, 2004)

However, it is important that the fabric of cultural heritage be managed in a sustainable manner and that, as far as possible, traditional uses for historic buildings be maintained. The cultural heritage fabric is very vulnerable to the negative effects of high density tourism and so any cultural tourism development must be carried out sensitively and with an awareness of the needs of the heritage (Kerr, 1994; Newby, 1994). Of course, on a pragmatic level, it makes sense for cultural tourism promoters to seek to preserve and maintain the resource-base of their tourism activities. One possible mechanism for preserving the cultural fabric of cultural tourism destinations is to employ the “polluter pays” principle<sup>15</sup> whereby tourism “taxes” or licences are used to fund preservation (Birmie and Boyle, 2002; Sands, 2002). This approach is based on the principle that the environmental costs of any product should be internalised into the price and so, in this case, that tourists who benefit recreationally from

the site or building(s) in question should pay for this privilege.

Cultural heritage also has a further characteristic that is of relevance to this paper. It can be in itself a lesson in sustainable production and consumption patterns, such as in the re-use of old building materials in the renovation of historic buildings and the use of traditional techniques and materials that have been proved over generations (European Commission, 1998). Cultural heritage management can thus also serve to show how to handle the built environment in a way that minimises the overall environmental impact. In order to put this into practice, it is necessary to employ a complex “environmental budget” to questions such as whether to demolish rather than preserve an historic building, thus adding a wholly new dimension to the well-proven intellectual and emotional arguments for preservation.

Furthermore, it is often the associated intangible values of a site or monument that make it interesting to tourists while the intangible heritage<sup>16</sup> can itself a subject of cultural tourism. One need only look at the advertisements for tourism to India or Malaysia to understand the centrality of intangible forms of heritage to those countries’ tourism industries. The Third Round Table of Ministers of Culture held by UNESCO in Istanbul in September 2002, emphasised the important role that intangible cultural heritage can play in fostering truly sustainable development as follows:

Laying the foundations of **true sustainable development** requires the emergence of an integrated vision of development based on the enhancement of values and practices involved in the intangible cultural heritage.

Hence, one of the ways in which governments can ensure that their development policies are sustainable is by safeguarding intangible cultural heritage and employing those elements of traditional knowledge, practices and innovations that contribute to achieving sustainability. This is particularly true of a country such as Iran that has a rich resource in terms of

intangible cultural heritage that can be exploited for tourism.<sup>17</sup> As a Party to UNESCO’s Intangible Heritage Convention (2003), Iran should consider proposing a national or sub-regional project to UNESCO on tourism in cultural sites that have strong associated intangible cultural heritage, such as Massouleh with its handicrafts or the *qanats* of the desert areas. Indeed, Iranian handicrafts provide an important infrastructural element in developing cultural tourism in Iran through creating jobs, especially for rural women, and their power to attract tourists. There are about 300 different types of Iranian handicraft including carpets, kilims, *jajim*, glassware, ceramics, pottery, miniatures, inlaid work, wooden work, engraving and embossing. (ICHHTO, 2005; IRCICA, 1999)

However, although tourism can be beneficial to the continued practice of intangible heritage (and its material expressions) by creating a market/audience for it, it can also lead to its ‘commodification’ and distortion. Given the importance of cultural heritage to niche cultural tourism and the impact that tourism (of any type) can have on the local culture and cultural traditions, intangible cultural heritage is an important issue to consider in relation to sustainable tourism. Furthermore, intangible cultural heritage can provide traditional customs, know-how and practices that contribute directly to the preservation of the resource base of tourism, be it the natural or the cultural heritage.<sup>18</sup> In this way, well-managed and well-planned cultural tourism has the potential not only to provide economic benefits but also to enhance the tourism resource-base itself (World Heritage Centre, 2007).

### **Cultural tourism**

The growing economic and social significance of the cultural heritage (World Commission, 1996) places new demands on environmental policy for the preservation and promotion of cultural heritage while cultural tourism can be seen as the expression of the dynamic interaction that exists between tourism and

cultural heritage. Tourism has the capability of employing the economic characteristics of the cultural heritage for the conservation of that heritage through generating funding, raising public awareness of the value of the heritage and influencing public policy.

Cultural tourism is an important factor in many local, national and regional economies and one that can play an important role in sustainable development if well managed (Barré, 2001).<sup>19</sup> It is, however, very much a question of how well cultural tourism is managed whether these benefits are realised or the physical character, integrity and significant characteristics of the cultural heritage resource-base are degraded through its development (Luxen, 2001). If well managed, cultural tourism should benefit local communities and provide an important means and motivation for them to care for and maintain their heritage and cultural practices. It can also have the positive effect of upgrading underused or deteriorating local resources and leading to the cultural revitalisation of historic towns and cities, thus improving local amenity for both visitors and the host community.

Cultural tourism is thus becoming an increasingly important factor for tourist destinations involved in developing their cultural capital to attract more international visitors. In the case of Iran, this is particularly true since the nature of the society and of the cultural resource base together mean that cultural tourism (mainly associated with cultural heritage) is more acceptable to the host culture than many other forms of tourism. Furthermore, in view of certain restrictions, 'cultural' tourists are one of the easiest groups for the country to attract.

However, the increasing social and economic importance of the cultural environment, namely historic buildings, sites, cultural landscapes, (Zouain, 2001; Alzua *et al.*, 1998) has led to increased demands being placed upon it and thus new policies need to be developed. Tourism is rapidly becoming a dominant cultural industry, one that packages and markets destinations as cultural products. Furthermore, tourists perceive tourism itself as a cultural experience. Tourism and the presence of tourists transform the

culture of the destination in both positive and negative ways and have a wide range of cultural consequences for the destination. Some elements of tradition and cultural production in a destination society will inevitably become commodified<sup>20</sup> as a part of the tourism experience. According to Jansen-Verbeke (1998) historic cities face the risk of what he calls 'tourismification,' i.e. when the character of the historic city starts to become determined by the tourists' own perceptions of it and demands. This is a danger of that Iran should bear in mind when encouraging both domestic and foreign tourism to cities such as Esfahan (whose Meydan-e Emam is also a World Heritage Site), Yazd and Mashhad. It can also play an important role in revitalising the local culture or serve to degrade or debase it.<sup>21</sup>

For these reasons, policy-makers must be made aware of the potential negative as well as positive impacts of tourism development in order to find ways of minimising the former and maximising the latter (Cowan, 2002). Such positive and negative impacts may be as shown in Table 1. Below. (Craik, 1995).

If the likely social and cultural impacts of tourism are considered and fully monitored from the start and throughout the process of tourism development, tourism has the potential to enhance the amenity of the destination and secure the support of the local population. Indeed, tourism that understands the needs and aspirations of local people and seems ready to integrate into the local community at the destination can make a positive contribution to the quality of life at the destination. However, it is vital that social and cultural issues must be defined as a part of the tourist resource and therefore incorporated into the development and processes of tourism management (UNESCO, 2000b).<sup>22</sup> An extreme example of negative consequences for local people from the development of an historic town as a cultural tourism attraction can be seen at Mdina on Malta where 200 local residents face up to 750,000 visitors annually and they feel exploited with no return in economic or socio-cultural terms (Boissevain, 1993).

Table 1. Potential positive and negative social, economic and cultural impacts of tourism.

Potential positive impacts of tourism	Potential negative impacts of tourism
Enhanced services and amenities in the area	Increased pressure on services and the possible reduction of amenity as a result
Increased expenditure for the conservation of sites visited	Site-use conflicts over cultural, environmental and economic issues
New employment opportunities	Conflict over preservation and access
Provision of local training	Raised cost of living and displacement of the traditional local residents;
The maintenance of local communities	Undermining local traditions and ways of life
Creating a market for local traditional products and industries	Commodification or distortion of traditional crafts, performances, products and other cultural manifestations
Broadening cultural experience through intercultural impact	Cultural drift
Greater awareness (on both sides) of the value of cultural diversity	Tensions between tourists and the host community

There are certain practical steps that can be taken and methods employed for meeting visitor needs at heritage sites using appropriate management strategies. First, attracting visitors by creating a distinctive profile for the site, select marketing, hosting exhibitions events and adding shops and other service facilities. Second, detracting or diverting visitor attention away from popular sites or in such a way as to reduce damage to these sites through the provision of special paths and the highlighting of certain areas of the site.<sup>23</sup> Third, educational and information activities through the introduction of interactive exhibits<sup>24</sup> designed to appeal to a wide audience using visual appeal, entertainment and new communication technologies.<sup>25</sup>

It is crucial that any development of cultural tourism should avoid the traditional “sun, sea and sand” model of mass tourism that have been responsible for devastating much of the natural resource-base and cultural fabric of the southern Mediterranean coastline. A new model must be found that is predicated on the notion of sustainable

development and should respect the local society and avoid conflict between the use it makes of cultural heritage and the role it plays in the local community. As Pearce (1995) noted that, too often, the socio-cultural component of ecologically sustainable development is ignored in the sustainable tourism model. Here, he argued that educating both tourists and tourism professionals in host communities in the nature of their cultural interaction can help to reduce culture shock and move towards building a positive cultural exchange. Cohen (2003) revisited his previous research on the host community/tourist interaction, with a focus on that interaction in less developed and/or remote areas. He observed changes as a result of increasing access to communications (Internet, mobile telephony etc.) even to remote areas (as is the case in Iran).<sup>26</sup> This is a point that has relevance to some important cultural tourism sites in Iran which are located in rural and/or remote areas. Examples of these include Passargad (located in a farming community in Fars Province) and the villages of Massouleh in Gilan Province (North of Iran) and Abiyaneh (near Kashan).

Cohen (2003) also proposed a new consideration of the (host) 'community' itself not as a monolithic whole but rather as a series of networks and linkages whose interaction with tourists is necessarily more varied and flexible than previously perceived. These studies, conducted eight years apart, suggest that there is real potential for the tourist interaction with local residents to be a positive one that allows tourism to serve as a true vector of sustainable development in all its dimensions. However, it is vital that the socio-cultural dimension of sustainable development should be fully recognised and taken into account in tourism development and that appropriate planning and education be put in place to encourage this. The potential of cultural tourism to foster this dimension of sustainable development is clear and should be emphasized in tourism planning policies in Iran.

One essential strategy for achieving a sustainable tourism development is based on the assumption that local growth can be limited to the "tourist carrying capacity"

of the area. The carrying capacity is a multi-dimensional notion that involves social, economic, cultural and environmental factors and operates on different geographical levels – single attraction, locality, city and so on (Murphy, 2005). Cultural heritage is an important element for establishing the carrying capacity of cultural tourism destinations such as heritage cities and towns.

### ***Economic impacts of cultural tourism***

Statistics from UNEP (2000) clearly show the huge economic (as well as environmental) impacts of tourism, with an estimated 700 million international travellers in that year of whom 62% travelled for leisure and/or tourism purposes, yielding US\$ 478 billion international receipts and/or revenues. Tourism represents one of the top five export categories in 83% of the world's countries and is the main one for 38% of them. In France, the world's leading tourist destination, the industry accounts for over 7% of GDP – significantly, cultural types of tourism are an

important part of the French tourist sector (food, cultural heritage, film etc.) and this GDP percentage is within a developed economy. The size of Iran's tourism industry is estimated as having the potential to create jobs for 2.5 million people and to have a 3% share in the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Azimi and Hadjipour, 2008).

In general, tourists are big consumers of goods and services and their presence injects life into a variety of economic sectors, creating wealth and jobs for the local economy. In economic parlance, consumption is regarded as an engine factor for stimulating the economy and streaming new life into those economies that have been in recession. For this reason, consumption modifies the commercial structure of tourist towns and cities by encouraging the emergence of new establishments and pushing old ones to the sidelines.

Tourism requires amenities and an infrastructure that have to be built at some stage to answer this need. In order to do so, private entrepreneurs and promoters will have to pay taxes levied on building permits, on the licences for opening establishments and for conducting their economic activities. In this way, in addition to directly raising the income level of the local population through wages and the income from businesses, tourism also boosts the local authority revenues (Dwyer *et al.*, 2004). Therefore, in future, local authorities will have a major role to play in stimulating tourism-related activities from which their citizens will benefit.

Tourism development can, in this way, result in the economic revitalisation of historic towns (Jamieson, 1995). For example, the spin-off benefits for the economy are direct and encourage job creation. In addition to jobs in activities directly related to provision of services to tourists (hotels, restaurants, leisure and recreational activities, transport etc.), jobs are also created indirectly in businesses supplying goods and services to the sector (construction industry, catering businesses, repair companies etc.). Jobs are also induced in activities necessary to maintain the

population that lives from tourism. It is estimated that for every job directly created by tourism, there are 1.6 indirect jobs and 1.5 induced jobs created (Witt and Witt, 1990).

This increase in job vacancies locally increases the number of people who are able to work and thus helps various social groups, such as young people and women who may otherwise have serious problems finding work and gaining access to the labour market (Lundberg *et al.*, 1995). Tourism also helps to develop human capital of towns and cities.

However, this can also have its down-side when economic activity is excessively dependent upon this sector which is extremely sensitive to external events. Any major drop in tourist numbers or spending can cause acute crises in the production system of a locality that has become overly-dependent on tourism income. For these reasons, it is always vital to diversify sources of income and not to rely heavily on tourism income alone (Bull, 1996). A further effect of tourism is to create inflation when great hopes of wealth are kindled by a marked up-turn in demand, essentially concerning non-renewable resources such as land. Furthermore, hopes of tourist development can spark of speculation locally. Although it may appear to benefit the local population in the short-term, the inflationist spiral fuelled by speculation is detrimental to the whole population over the longer term and especially to the least advantaged groups in society. The cost of housing increases as does the cost of services catering to the local population.

In terms of the economic impacts of tourism on Third World economies, Theuns (2002) noted the spectacular demand differentiation in tourism in Third World countries since the 1970s. Given the evolution in views of development that have occurred since the 1970s, placing much more value on the socio-cultural aspects of development (see, Rao and Walton, 2004), as well as changes observed in international tourism demand, there are important consequences for analyzing the economic dimensions of Third World tourism and assessing their developmental impact.

These impacts include a reassessment of the role that cultural tourism has to play in achieving a more sustainable form of tourism-related development that takes account of *all* the dimensions of sustainable development.

There are certain specific economic factors related to cultural tourism that are of relevance here. For example, the up-keep of the cultural heritage associated with cultural tourism revitalises traditional crafts and ensures that they are passed onto future generations as a source of skills and business. It should also be mentioned that tourism can extend to municipalities beyond historic towns and cities and can stimulate the regional economy by boosting demand for food and industrial goods, thus stimulating the agricultural and industrial sectors. Some statistics relating to the economics of tourism associated with cultural heritage in Switzerland and Germany are a useful indication of the potential importance of cultural tourism to the tourism sector as a whole.<sup>27</sup>

A 1995 study conducted in Switzerland estimated that the cultural and historic value of historic buildings (both private and public) in that country was 117 billion Swiss Francs (without the land value added). It was further estimated that an annual investment of 1.3% of its total value – i.e. 1.5 billion Swiss Francs – was required to maintain this heritage. In 1993, 15% of all renovation work in Switzerland concerned historic buildings and thus has an economic importance for the building industry as well as a sustaining effect on the economy as a whole. Tourism employed over 250,000 Swiss in 1990 with a further 135,000 employed in related sectors. Gross income from tourism in 1992 was ca. 21.8 billion SF, representing approximately 6.2% of GNP, with many tourist spots featuring historic monuments and historic sites and towns playing a decisive factor (at over 20%) in tourists' choices of destination.

In Germany, cultural heritage as a whole is an important economic factor with the dissemination and protection of cultural heritage generated an annual domestic income of 50.2 billion in the late 1980's.

Thus, taken as a whole, the culture sector is comparable in importance to other sectors of the economy such as energy or food. The annual market in skilled tradespersons for the renovation and restoration of historic buildings was estimated in Germany to be 10.12 billion DM in 1995 dealing with 900,000 listed monuments. Furthermore, businesses are now taking account of the existence of historic monuments in deciding their locations. As a result, the protection of cultural heritage has become an attractive and profitable branch of the economy. It is clear that the importance of cultural tourism associated with cultural heritage sites in Europe has done much to raise public awareness and appreciation of the value and importance of this sector.

However, although the economic impact of tourism is significant, it does not always compensate for the costs of protection and preservation (Kerr, 1994). For example, 69.7% of participants to an international colloquy in 1991 stating that reported revenue from cultural tourism did not cover maintenance costs (UNESCO, 1991). On the other hand, the German example shows the reach of the economic and other benefits accruing from a lively cultural heritage sector that attracts tourism and other business interests and these may well go beyond the simple calculation of earnings versus maintenance costs. Moreover, a purely financial assessment of the value of cultural tourism leaves out the improvement in local amenity that often accompanies the development of services for such tourism.

## Conclusion

It is clear that Iran has a significant cultural heritage resource-base that lends itself to the development of cultural tourism in the country. This has the potential to provide important economic benefits both to the country and to the local communities associated with areas rich in cultural heritage and other cultural attractions. It also has the potential to increase the amenity of historic towns and cultural sites and to

improve the living standards of local people in these areas. However, when seeking to develop cultural tourism in Iran there are certain important issues to be considered that include the following.

- a) The need to take account of the impacts of developing cultural tourism on the fabric of the cultural heritage and on local communities in historic towns and the localities surrounding heritage sites.
- b) The wider economic importance of developing Iran's non-oil and the economic impact of tourism development, both domestic and international tourism.
- c) The need to create economically, culturally and ecologically sustainable tourism development.
- d) Infrastructural issues of tourism development, including the need for an integrated system of planning and policy-making at government level.
- e) The ways in which tourism development related to sites of cultural importance and historic towns/cities can be provide mutual benefits for the cultural heritage and the tourism economy but may also be potentially destructive or damaging to the cultural heritage resource.

It is possible to make certain specific proposals for the future development of cultural tourism in Iran that will aid in the development of cultural tourism in the country in a sustainable manner. These include such measures as the enhancement and promotion of the cultural heritage, including innovative ways of presenting sites and monuments; the safeguarding and promotion of intangible heritage and, in the management and protection of sites of cultural significance, taking into account also the intangible values associated with those sites and traditional/local customs and know-how; balancing access to sites of cultural importance with the need to preserve and safeguard the tangible and intangible heritage; ensuring the conservation of the historic fabric of cities; and encouraging the involvement of local people in the management and preservation of sites of cultural significance.<sup>28</sup> Further important approaches

would be to study the economic aspects of cultural tourism development and the means of creating (economically, culturally and environmentally) sustainable tourism and the establishment of systems for effective monitoring of the economic, cultural and ecological sustainability of tourism development projects and strategies.

### Nots

- 1- This was the first international treaty to bring together these two aspects of the environment.
- 2- The Preamble to the Rio Declaration recognizes that, “development is a comprehensive economic, social, cultural and political process, which aims at the constant improvement of the well-being of the entire population and of all individuals on the basis of their active, free and meaningful participation in development and in the fair distribution of benefits resulting therefrom”.
- 3- These read as follows. Principle 3: “The right to development must be fulfilled so as to equitably meet developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations” and Principle 4: “In order to achieve sustainable development, environmental protection shall constitute an integral part of the development process and cannot be considered in isolation from it”.
- 4- These are understood to be: integration of the environment with the economy; equity, i.e. meeting the basic needs of the poor now and equity across generations; future generations should have the possibility of achieving similar or better living standards; environmental protection and avoidance of any disruption to biological diversity or the regenerative capacity of nature; and sustainable utilisation and conservation of natural resources
- 5- These involve ensuring the full participation of stakeholders in the decision-making process, providing access to information concerning environmental matters, ensuring environmental impact assessment is carried out and access to justice in environmental matters.
- 6- In Chapter 28 on Human Settlements.
- 7- At para.43.
- 8- Background documents and international events relevant to this area include: International Year of Eco-tourism (2002), the United Nations Year for Cultural Heritage (2002), the World Eco-tourism Summit (2002) and its *Quebec Declaration*, and the *Global Code of Ethics* for Tourism as adopted by the World Tourism Organization.
- 9 -The UN Summit on Sustainable Development, Johannesburg, Sept. 2002 calls in paragraph 41 of its Final Declaration on governments to “Promote sustainable tourism development and eco-tourism ... in order to increase the benefits from tourism resources for the population in the host communities while maintaining the cultural and environmental integrity of the host communities and enhancing the protection of ecologically sensitive areas and natural heritage.”
- 10- Agenda 21, the action plan of the UN Conference on Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 1992 sets out the goal in terms of national implementation of sustainable development as to “improve or restructure the decision-making process so that consideration of socio-economic and environmental issues is fully integrated and a broader range of public participation is assured.” At Chapter 8, para.8.3.
- 11- As in UNESCO’s 1972 Convention for the Protection of the Cultural and Natural Heritage.
- 12- By virtue of the State’s role as a trustee or custodian of this heritage (which is a national patrimony).
- 13- The ICOMOS Cultural Tourism Charter states: “Reasonable and well-managed physical, intellectual and/or emotive access to heritage and

- cultural development is both a right and a privilege. It brings with it a duty of respect for heritage values, interests and equity of the present-day host community...”
- 14- For example, UNESCO’s 1972 Convention at Art. 5(a) calls on Parties “to adopt a general policy which aims to give the cultural and natural heritage a function in the life of the community and to integrate the protection of that heritage into comprehensive planning programmes”.
- 15- Endorsed in Principle 16 of the Rio Declaration.
- 16- Intangible cultural heritage shall be understood here as it is defined in Article 2(1) of the 2003 UNESCO International Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage: “the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills – as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith – that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage...”
- 17- Iran became a Party to the UNESCO Convention on the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2006 and has now succeeded in having the Nowrooz festival inscribed (as a shared heritage) on the Convention’s Representative List.
- 18- It should be noted that this resource base may be understood in cultural, economic or environmental terms.
- 19- The growing importance of cultural tourism is amply illustrated by two polls conducted for *Travel and Leisure* magazine in 1982 and 1992, respectively. In these polls, 50% of those responding in 1992 found cultural, historical or archaeological sites important as opposed to 27% in 1982 and 48% in 1982 found cultural attractions important in comparison with 88% in 1992.
- 20- Although commodification is not necessarily a bad thing, policy-makers must beware of the potential damage to and distortion of local cultural traditions as a result.
- 21- Forms that commodification can take include the development of a local souvenir industry based on traditional cultural products, the way in which traditional festivals or performances are transformed to suit the needs of the industry and the creation and packaging of heritage sites and attractions.
- 22- UNESCO’s *Revised Plan of Action* (2000) notes at point 5 that: “Recognising that, in the situation of heritage cities, sustainable tourism development is closely related to the sustainable development of heritage cities, and therefore it becomes a priority for local authorities to formulate and implement proper cultural tourism policy in partnership with the private sector, and with the participation of citizens.”
- 23- A good example of the latter is the site management system in place at the archaeological site of ancient Troy (modern Truva) in western Turkey.
- 24- However, the simple provision of signs in several languages (such as English and Japanese) at popular sites is an even more basic and necessary move to improve site presentation.
- 25- Examples of such exhibits are to be found at the Jorvik Viking Centre in York and the National maritime Museum in London (both UK).
- 26- In Iran in 2006, there were estimated to be 11,000,000 Internet users in Iran, by 2008 there were 23,000,000 and by 2010 there are an estimated 30,000,000+ users. For more on these statistics, see: [www.undp.org/iran](http://www.undp.org/iran) and the Iranian Statistical Center.
- 27- Reports submitted by the Swiss and German delegations to the IVth European Conference of Ministers responsible for the Cultural Heritage, Helsinki, 30-31 May 1996. Council of Europe

documents PC-4 (1996) 16 and MPC-4 (1996) 10.  
28- In keeping with the new approach expressed in the revised (1998 and 2000) *Operational Guidelines* to the UNESCO's Convention on the Protection of the Cultural and Natural Heritage (16 Nov.1972).

## References

- Alzua, A., O.'Leary, J.T. and A.M. Morrison (1998). "Cultural and heritage tourism: identifying niches for international travellers". *J.Tourism Studs*, 9(2): 2-12.
- Azimi, N. and A.H. Hadjipour (2008). Planning for Developing Tourism and Ecotourism Industry for Economic Development: Case Study of Iran Planning". *Environmental Sciences*, 6:53-64.
- Barré, H. (2001). "Cultural tourism, a factor for sustainable development," paper delivered to International Seminar on Cultural Tourism: Perspectives for Sustainable Development and Management of World Heritage Sites, 9-11 September 2001, Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic.
- Birnie, P. and A. Boyle (2002). *International Environmental Law*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Blake, J. (2004). "Sustainable development in international law and its application to ecotourism development." *Environmental Sciences*, 4:2-12.
- Boissevain, J. (1993). "Some problems with cultural tourism in Malta." Paper presented to the International Conference on Sustainable Tourism in Islands and Small States, Foundation for International Studies, Malta, 18-20 November.
- Boniface, P. (1998). 'Tourism culture.' *Annals of Tourism Research*, 25(3): 746-749.
- Boniface, P. (2000). "Behind the scenes: tourism, and heritage, in the periphery to the French Mediterranean coast." *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 6(2): 129-144.
- Bull, A. (1996). *The Economics of Travel and Tourism*. New York: Wiley.
- Cohen, E. (2003). "Contemporary tourism and the host community in less developed areas." *Tourism Recreation Research*, 28 (1): 1-9.
- Cowen, T. (2002). *Creative Destruction: How Globalization Is Changing the World's Cultures*. Princeton University Press.
- Craik, J. (1995). "Are there cultural limits to tourism?" *J.Sust.Tourism*, 3 (2): 87-97.
- Du Cros, H. (2001). 'A new model to assist in planning for sustainable cultural heritage tourism.' *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 3: 165-170.
- Dwyer, L., P. Forsyth and R. Spurr (2004) *Evaluating Tourism's Economic Effects: New and Old Approaches*, *Tourism Management*, 25(3):307-317.
- European Commission (1998). *Culture, the cultural industries and employment*, Commission staff working paper, SEC (98) 837, Brussels, 14 May 1998. Available online at: [http://europa.eu.int/comm/avpolicy/legis/forum/intro\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/avpolicy/legis/forum/intro_en.htm).
- Fyall, A. and B. Garrod (1996). 'Sustainable heritage tourism: Achievable goal or elusive ideal?' in M. Robinson, N. Evans and P. Callaghan (eds.) *Managing Cultural resources for Tourism*. UK: British Educational Publishers .

- Gossling, S. (2002). 'Human-environment relations with tourism,' *Annals of Tourism Research*, 29(2): 539-556.
- ICOMOS (1999). *Cultural Tourism Charter – Managing Tourism at Places of Heritage Significance*. Paris: ICOMOS.
- ICHHTO (2005). *Proceedings of the First Congress on Cultural and Natural Heritage*. Iran: Tehran.
- ITDC (2006). *Journals of Iran Tourism Development Company*.
- Jamieson, W. (1995). 'The use of indicators in monitoring: the economic impact of cultural tourism initiatives,' *ICOMOS Canada* 4(3): no page numbers.
- Jansen-Verbeke, M. (1998). 'Tourismification and historical cities'. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 25(3) 739-741.
- Kerr, A. (1994). 'Strange bedfellows: An uneasy alliance between cultural conservation and tourism.' *ICOMOS Canada* 3(3): no page numbers.
- Liu, Z. (2003). *Tourism development: a critique*. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 11(6): 459-475.
- Lundberg, D.H., M.H. Stavenga and H. Krishnamoorthy (1995). *Tourism Economics*, New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Luxen, J.L. (2001). "The development and management of world heritage sites," paper delivered to International Seminar on Cultural Tourism: Perspectives for Sustainable Development and Management of World Heritage Sites, 9-11 September 2001, Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic.
- Machicado, J. (2004). *Culture as an Engine for Economic Growth, Employment and Development*, OAS Working document, available online at: <http://www.oas.org/udse/english/documentos/tema1estudio.doc>.
- Mahmoudian-Bigdeli, M. *et al.* (2005). *Challenges of Sustainable Development in Iran – Report of Conference on Policies and Management Planning of Growth and Development in Iran*: Tehran: Institute for Research on Management and Planning. [Persian]
- Murphy, P.E. and G.G. Price (2005). *Tourism and sustainable development*, in W.F. Theobald (ed.). *Global Tourism*. New York: Butterworth-Heinemann.
- McKercher, B. and H. du Cros (2002). *Cultural Tourism: The Partnership between Tourism and Cultural Heritage Management*. New York: Haworth Press.
- McKercher, B., P.S.Y. Ho and H. du Cros (2005). 'Relationship between tourism and cultural heritage management: evidence from Hong Kong,' *Tourism Management*, 26: 539-548.
- Newby, P.T. (1994). "Tourism – support or threat to heritage?" in G.J. Ashworth and P.J. Larkham *Building a New Heritage – Tourism, Culture and Identity in the New Europe*. London: Routledge.
- Pearce, P.L. (1995) "From culture shock to culture exchange: ideas towards sustainable socio-cultural tourism," *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 2(3): 143-155.
- Page, S.J. and R.K. Dowling (2002). *Ecotourism*. London: Pearson Education Ltd.
- Rao, V. and M. Walton (eds.) *Culture and Public*

- Action*, (Stanford University Press, 2004)
- Sands, P. (2002). *Principles of International Environmental Law* Cambridge. Cambridge University Press.
- Sharpley, R. (1995). "Tourism and sustainable development: exploring the theoretical divide." *J. Sust. Tourism* 3(2): 1-15.
- Theuns, H.L. (2002). "Tourism and development: economic dimensions." *Tourism Recreation Research*, 27(1): 69-81.
- UNESCO (2000). Revised Plan of Action for International Co-operation on Tourism Management in Heritage Cities. Paris.
- UNCED (1992a). Final Declaration adopted at the UN Conference of Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 1992.
- UNCED (1992b). Agenda 21 adopted at the UN Conference of Environment and Development, Rio de Janeiro, 1992.
- UNDP (2004). *Cultural Liberty in Today's Diverse World*, Human Development Report UK: Oxford. Available online at: <http://hdr.undp.org/reports/global/2004>.
- UNEP (2002). Impacts of Tourism. online at: <http://www.uneptie.org/pc/sust-tourism/impacts.htm> (accessed August 2009).
- UNESCO (1972). Convention on the World Cultural and Natural Heritage. (Paris, 16 November 1972)
- UNESCO (1991). International Colloquy of World Heritage Towns held by UNESCO in Quebec, Canada.
- UNESCO (1998). Operational Guidelines to UNESCO's Convention on the Protection of the Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972). Paris.
- UNESCO (2000a). Operational Guidelines to UNESCO's Convention on the Protection of the Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972). Paris.
- UNESCO (2000b). Revised Plan of Action for International Co-operation on Tourism Management in Heritage Cities. Paris.
- UNESCO (2002). Intangible Cultural Heritage - a Mirror of Cultural Diversity, Final Communiqué from the Third Round Table of Ministers of Culture held by UNESCO in Istanbul in September 2002
- UN-HABITAT (1996). Habitat II: The Second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Istanbul, 1996).
- UN Summit on Sustainable Development (2002). *Final Declaration* adopted at Johannesburg, Sept. 2002.
- Witt, S.F. and C.A. Witt (1990). *Modelling and Forecasting Demand in Tourism*. London: Routledge.
- World Commission on Culture and Development (1996). *Our Creative Diversity*. Paris: Unesco Publishing.
- World Eco-tourism Summit (2002). Quebec Declaration adopted in Quebec, 2002.
- World Heritage Centre (UNESCO) (2007). "WHS and ecotourism lessons learned, opportunities and future challenges: the importance of world heritage sites for communities and tourists". Global Ecotourism Conference, 14-16 May 2007, Oslo, Norway.
- World Tourism Organization (2001). *A Practical*

Guide to the Development and Use of Indicators in Sustainable Tourism. Madrid: World Tourism Organization.

World Tourism Organization (2002). Global Code of Ethics for Tourism. Madrid: World Tourism Organization.

World Tourism Organization (2003). Sustainable Development of Ecotourism – A Compilation of Good Practices. Madrid: World Tourism Organization.

Zouain, G. (2001). “The role of heritage in the economy,” paper delivered to International Seminar on Cultural Tourism: Perspectives for Sustainable Development and Management of World Heritage Sites, 9-11 September 2001, Damascus, Syrian Arab Republic.



