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Sustainable Development of Tourism in Semnan City, Using the SWOT Analysis Model

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is a complex activity that is related to different sectors of society and economy. Nowadays, the role and importance of this industry is main factor of every developed country, so they are trying to maximize utilization of the industry. This means that one of the important indicators of the development and efficient use of this important industry in the country is determined. The land of Iran is rich in natural attractions, so that each of them alone can attract many tourists. Semnan as one of the important provinces of Iran is located on the ancient Silk Road. In addition of its historical rank, it includes a series of exquisite natural beauties, holding scenery of deserts and mountains with their own unique attractions. Despite of having very significant potential across the province of Semnan, unfortunately it has not been able to take advantage of this industry perfectly. To overcome problems, our practical-aimed research is done via descriptive-analytical approach. In this article, we have tried to examine the historical tourist attractions in Semnan with approach towards sustainable tourism development. To achieve the purpose, we tried through discussing strategic analysis of opportunities, threats, strengths and weaknesses of Semnan tourism provide appropriate strategies for developing tourism in the city by using SWOT technique.

Keywords: Tourism; sustainable development; tourist attractions; Silk Road; SWOT.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The third dynamic and developing economic phenomenon is considered of tourism after oil and automobile industries. Tourism is one of the world's largest industries. For developing countries it is also one of the biggest income generators. But the huge infrastructural and resource demands of tourism can have severe impacts upon local communities and the environment if it is not properly managed.

Sustainable development is a comprehensive approach to improve life quality to implement economic, social and environmental welfare of human settlements [1] In this meaning sustainable development is a process, which facilitates social stability and justice and popular participation through organizing and adjusting the relation between human being, environment, and managing the exploitation of environment resources, access to ever-increasing and continuous production, secure life, nutritional security [2].

Sustainable development is a basic concept, which includes ideals and principles where perceiving them promises a bright future and neglecting them results in devastation of the environment. In this development, natural resources are protected as mankind heritage in a way to be able to meet the needs of the future generations as well as the present generation [3].

Development and international cooperation has introduced this industry after banking and second largest service sector in international trade. According to figures published by the World Trade Organization, investment in the tourism sector in 2010 has income of more than 1,400 billion dollars and equivalent figure was 6.10% of total international investment. Also, the number of worldwide tourists in 2010 was estimated to be approximately 940 million people that the growth was 7% and net income over 1550 billion dollars in the world. The number of tourists in 2020 is expected to reach about a billion and 600 million people [4]. Geographical distribution of revenue from tourism in the world is not the same. So, that 80% of income and jobs dedicated to the industry are from America and Europe, and only 5.2% of the remaining % 20 is devoted to the Middle East, which Iran's share of this amount is less than 1%.

Approach to sustainable development is one of the methods that currently are used in the planning of tourism infrastructure and other development types. Based on sustainable development, preservation of natural resources, cultural and tourism resources for sustainable use are beneficial to today society and in the future. One of the components forming of tourism can be outlined the development [5].

Semnan's geographically specific location (closeness to mountains and deserts) has attracted of very high rules in the field of tourism. As the history of natural and ancient civilizations of the city that is located on the historic Silk Road, has made Semnan the most important tourist attractions in Iran. In this study we examined the powers Tourism in Semnan and some tourist attractions have been analyzed. Then we will provide appropriate solutions for tourism planning proposals that should be presented and considered from fans of tourism and sustainable development [6].

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Sustainability in Tourism

Tourism industry plays an important role in economic growth and revealing the historical and cultural background. The industry is very important in economic and social development, so it known as “invisible exports” by economists [7].

The key word in our analysis of tourism is sustainability, a notion that at its most basic encapsulates the growing concern for the environment and natural resources, though sustainability has also had increasing resonance in social and economic issues.

The concept of sustainability well and truly infiltrated tourism studies and practice in the late 1980s. Literally, sustainable development refers to maintaining development over time. By the early 1990s, it was suggested that there were more than 70 definitions of sustainable development in circulation [8]. Development is often discussed in relation to ‘developing countries’, but is a concept which relates to all parts of the world at every level, from the individual to global transformations [9].

It is necessary initially to trace how such debates over environment, development and sustainability are reflected in the issues of contemporary tourism. The first important point to establish about sustainability is that it is a word that is defined, interpreted and imagined differently between individuals, organizations and social groups [10].

Development is the other key themes and is of special significance, in that much tourism literature invokes the activity of tourism as a potential means of ‘development’.

Development is something to which we all aspire and, certainly in the more developed world, ‘self-development’ has become something that is actively encouraged and an endeavor on which large amounts of money are spent, for example [11].

In the field of tourism, the term ‘sustainability’ can be and has been hijacked by many to give moral rectitude and ‘green’ credentials to tourist activities. And it is by no means just the tour operator and other profit-making companies standing to gain from the activity who have used the term for their own ends. Conservationists, government officials, politicians, local community organizations and tourists themselves all manipulate the term according to their own definition. Sustainable tourism focuses on environmental issues—re-labeled from ecotourism. Although pro-poor tourism advocates would agree with much that sustainable tourism stands for, the overall objective of sustainable tourism is not to reduce poverty, though this may happen as a result of sustainable tourism development [10].

2.2 SWOT Analysis

SWOT analysis is a useful tool for strategic planning in environmental management, and supplies the basic foundation for identifying the situation and designing future procedures which is necessary in strategic attitude [12].

SWOT analysis is a strategic planning method used to evaluate the Strengths, Weaknesses/Limitations, Opportunities, and Threats involved in a project or in a business venture. It involves specifying the objective of the business venture or project and identifying the internal and external factors that are favorable and unfavorable to achieve that objective.

Setting the objective should be done after the SWOT analysis has been performed. This would allow achievable goals or objectives to be set for the organization (Table 1).

Table 1. Assessment of Strengths & Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats using the SWOT

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
characteristics of the business, or project team that give it an advantage over others	(or Limitations): are characteristics that place the team at a disadvantage relative to others	<i>external</i> chances to improve performance (e.g. make greater profits) in the environment	<i>external</i> elements in the environment that could cause trouble for the business or project

3. OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of this paper provide reasonable and appropriate strategies for use in tourist areas, and recognition of the historic tourist town of Semnan and its role in the balance of regional special, Sustainable Tourism Development Plan in Semnan to address problems related to tourist accommodation and catering. We will apply SWOT analysis model to recognize these matters.

4. DATA BASE AND METHODOLOGY

This article is a descriptive – analytical that uses the library documents and is done statistical updated records. This research has been conducted in two stages; first, the issue has been discussed and explored and according to statistics the potential role of tourism in sustainable development and tourism attractions have been studied. Second, according to the research and develop guidelines for the use of these resources has been expressed using SWOT analysis. Field studies as well as documentary and library studies have been used to gather needed information and data. To collect data for analyzing, structured interviews and questionnaires have been used and discussed the relationships between variables in real terms and unchanged status. To achieve the research purposes, internal and external factors, which are affecting the tourism in Semnan, were identified by using four types of questionnaires based on Likert scale from involved respondents (teachers, experts, professionals and experts in tourism, tourists and natives). For first three groups of involved respondents, numbers of 18, 16 and 10 people were selected respectively. Due to the small size of these three groups, data was collected through census sampling. But to collect data from the fourth group, 385 people were selected by random sampling method.

5. STUDY AREA

Semnan Province is located in the central northern portion of Iran between circuits of 35°20'N 53°20'E and is one of the 31 provinces of Iran (Fig. 1 A-B). It is in the north of the country, and its center is Semnan and its cities are “Shahrud”, “Dahmeqan”, “Garmsar”, and “Shahmirzad”.

The province of Semnan covers an area of 97,491km and stretches along the “Alborz” mountain range and borders to “Dasht-e Kavir” desert in its southern parts. It has 35% of the highlands, 25% the plains and 40% of the remaining belongs to the desert, the 9.5% of the country’s land area is allocated to Semnan. So, in terms of area capacity is the sixth province of Iran and is estimated to be about four times the area of Tehran province [13].

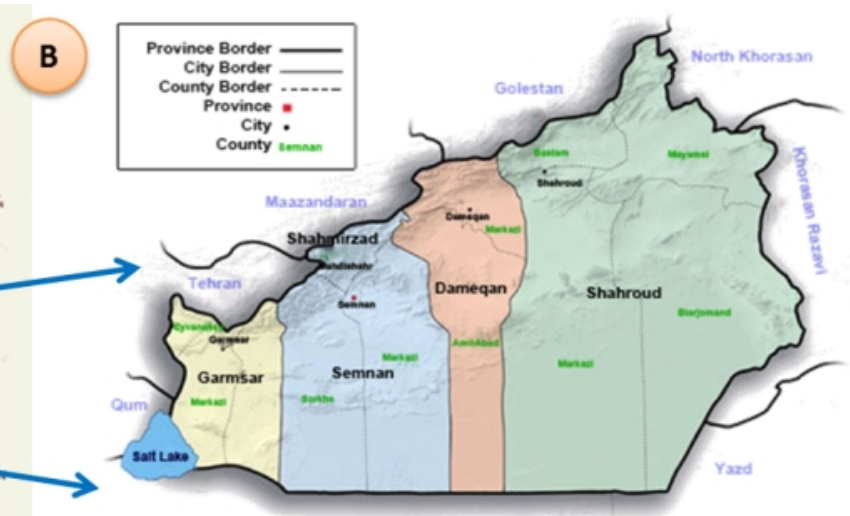


Fig. 1. A) Location of Semnan province in Iran

Fig. 1. B) Political divisions of Semnan province

The city of Semnan is situated at 1,138 meters above sea level just south of the foothills of the “Alborz” Mountains, bordering the “Kavir”, desert to the south of the city. [14]. Province’s population in 2007 was 589,742 which growth rate equal 1.64% in the decade period of 1997-2007. The province’s total population in 2007 has been estimated 302,436 males and 287,306 females and the sex ratio of 105.27% [13].

6. RESEARCH FINDINGS

6.1 Semnan Tourism Outlooks

Semnan with 9.5 million hectares area is equal of 5.6% of Iran’s area. It features various climates, abundant biological canvas, diversity of plant and animal (Figs. 2 to 5), (Tables 2, 3 and 4) [15]. This natural area features many attractions for tourists that are interested in nature and the natural environment, which call ecotourism. According to environmental experts and the zoning that can be done on four areas of environmental, it can be directly equivalent to 20% utilization of ecotourism and recreational programs for tourism [16]. But to accomplish this important preparation and implementation of ecotourism projects in the areas of environmental management plan is necessary appropriate investment for their preparation, recreational routes and etc. Environmental areas with their characteristic can open to many visitors and tourists throughout the year and at various ages and classes.

Table 2. Combination of tourist attractions in Semnan

Type	Number of types	%
Natural	70	9.6
Cultural – Historical	362	49.6
Man-made	297	40.8
Total	729	100

Source: [15]

Table 3. Distribution of Semnan Tourism attraction, segregated to Cities; (Number=No.)

Classes	Performance level		Total		Natural		Historical – Cultural		Man-made	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Province	729	100	70	100	362	100	297	100		
Semnan	225	30.8	7	10	139	38.3	79	26.6		
Shahroud	215	29.4	27	39	84	23.2	104	35.1		
Dameghan	162	22.2	27	39	71	19.6	64	21.5		
Garmsar	127	17.6	9	12	68	18.9	50	16.8		

Source: [15]

Table 4. Distribution of tourist attractions in terms of functional domains; (Number=No.)

Classes	Performance level		Total		Native – province		Nation – Regional		International	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Total	729	100	666	91.3	50	6.8	13	1.9		
Natural	70	9.6	45	64.2	21	30	4	5.8		
Historical – Cultural	362	49.6	324	89.5	29	8.1	9	2.4		
Man-made	297	40.8	297	100						

Source: [15]

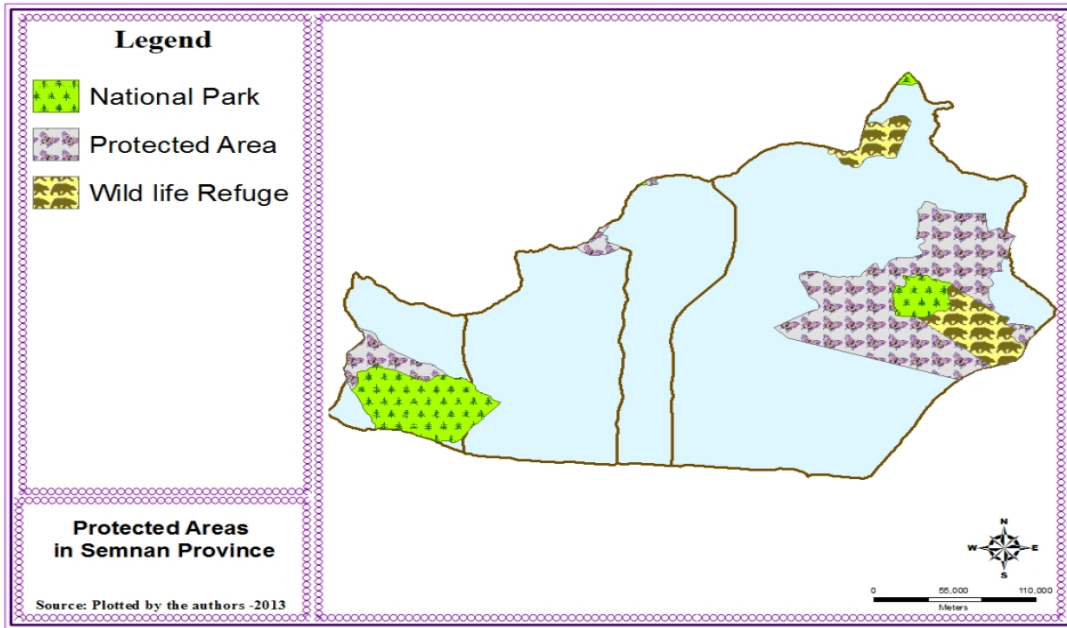


Fig. 2. Protected areas in Semnan [15]

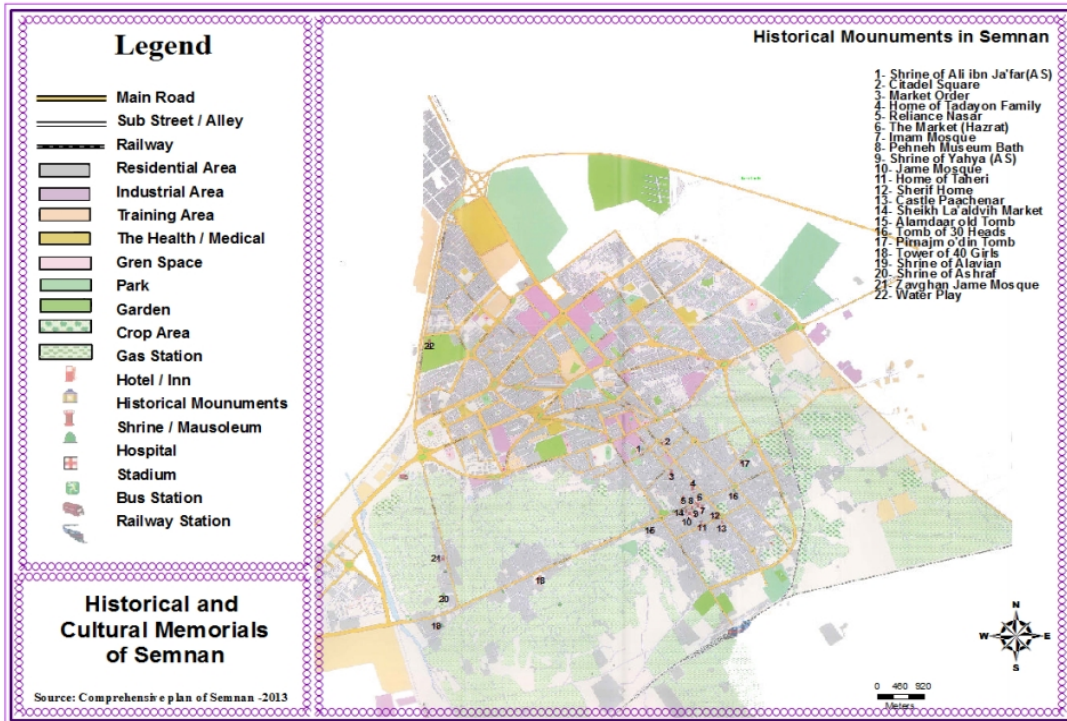


Fig. 3. Historical and cultural memorials in Semnan [15]

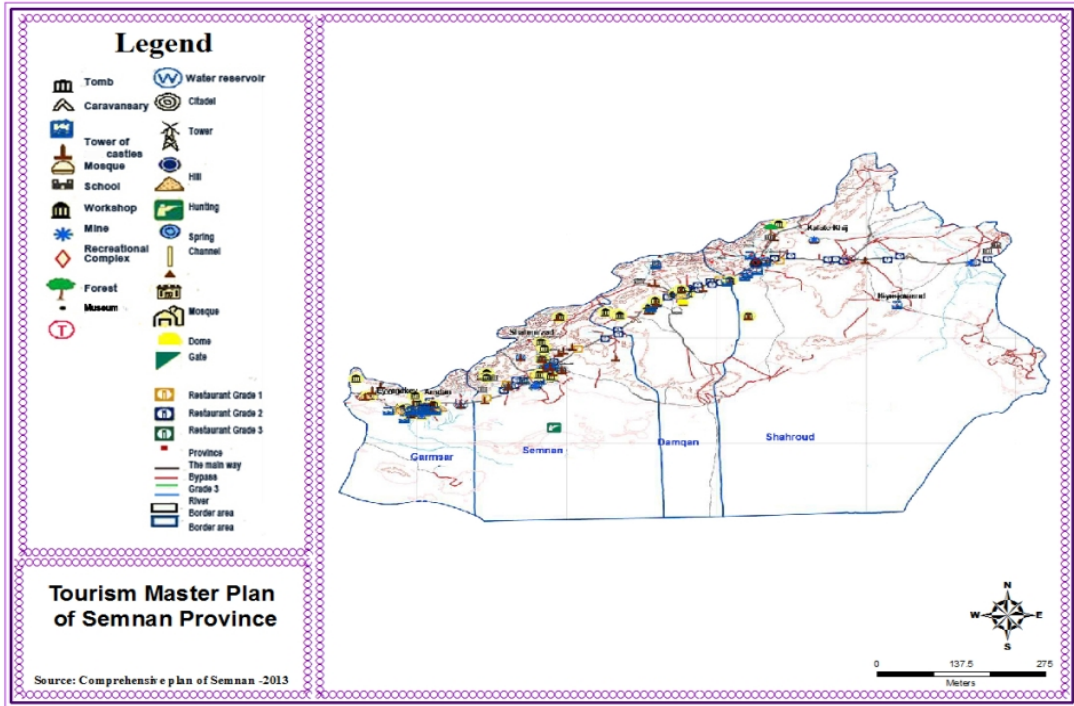


Fig. 4. Tourism master plan of Semnan [15]

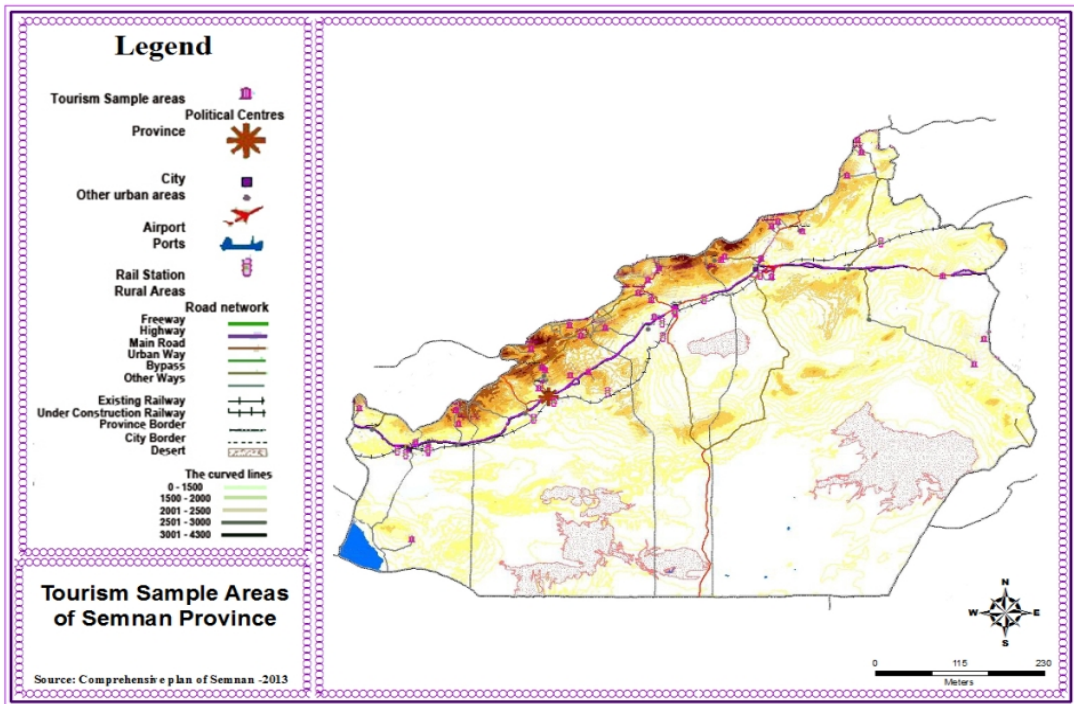


Fig. 5. Tourism sample areas of Semnan [15]

Semnan can be divided into sixteen sectors from the old days of "Avesta". During the Medes and "Achaemenian" periods, it accounted for being one of the largest provinces of the empire.

During the Islamic era, Semnan was part of the historical region of "Gomess" or "Komesh", and the Silk Road paved its way from the midst of this region. Due to being located in the path of east-west "Mashhad-Tehran" and millions of pilgrims passing from this path, has an important role in attracting tourists and pilgrims. Despite the attractions and natural landscapes along the "Alborz" and Central Desert, the wildlife protected areas, rare plant and animal species in the province, varied climates and effects left by the ancient civilizations of Iran and the Silk Road passed through the province of Semnan one of the areas likely to attract Iranian and foreign tourists that can be true if the program was hoping to boost tourism in this region.

Cultural tourism means travelling with the purpose of learning about other cultures or about aspects of cultures. The Cultural Historical Heritage Organization of Iran lists 470 sites of historical and cultural heritage such as palaces, "Forts", "Castles", "Caravanserais", "Ab-anbars" (Cistern), and "Baadgirs" (Windward), in Semnan. In addition to these there are various religious and holy places as well (Fig. 3).

6.2 Introducing Some Historical and Cultural Tourist Attractions of Semnan

In the view of Semnan provinces of the country has a special place. 27% of the four areas and ecotourism in the province are located in Semnan, which this is the first in the country and this value is about 25% area of the province. Various climates, environmental Canvases great diversity of plant and animal characteristics, the nature of this province. This natural area features many attractions for tourists interested in nature and the natural environment is ecotourism.

6.2.1 Gate of Semnan citadel

One of the valuable monuments of Semnan, the gates of the citadel is the remains of "Qajar" art (Fig. 6-A). This was constructed during the reign of "Naseredin Shah", in the years 1300-1305 A.H. (1882-1887). The gate-way has been made of brick and stands to an elevation of over 7m. The ceiling of the chambers resembles a barrel, but the main rooms have ceilings covered with shallow domes. The master-piece of this structure is the door way, worked with pieces of seven-color tiles depicting a scene from the myth of "Rostam" and the white monster. The doors of the gate-way are of thick planks of wood studded with iron spikes [17].

6.2.2 Imam mosque in Semnan

The mosque is located in the city center of Semnan (Fig. 6-B).

6.2.3 "Jame" mosque in Semnan

This mosque was constructed in the 1st century A.H. on the site of the ruins of an ancient fire-temple (Fig. 6-C). Evidences can be noted here from the Mongol and the "Timurid" periods.

6.2.4 “Pehne” and “Hazrat” bath

This bath is located between Jame' Mosque and “Imamzadeh-Yahya” in Semnan (Fig. 6-D). The structure comprises of three sections, named as the cloak-room, a hot house or “Garm-Khaneh” and the reservoir of a hot bath or “Khazaneh”. The doorway of this bath has been beautifully adorned with tile works, and on the upper portion is a poetical inscription in the “nasta'liq” script. This bath has been endowed to the Jame' mosque.

6.2.5 Semnan bazar (old shopping centre)

This bazaar (Fig. 6-E) was constructed in the early “Qajar” period, and comprises of two sections, named as the northern and western sectors. The northern segment is vast, having numerous rows and alleys. Besides which there are three public bathes, five mosques, four local inns or caravansaries (in a ruined state) and a large area in which religious ceremonies are performed (called “Naasaar”). This vicinity (“Naasaar”) comprises of a large hall and 25 shops. The huge water reservoir of Semnan and a small mosque are also located here. In the years 1969-1971, two beautiful gate-ways were adjoined to the northern and southern rows of this bazaar. The southern bazaar or “Hazrat” bazaar, stands at the end of the former. This bazaar has 50 shops, to the north of which is a gate-way.

6.2.6 Semnan warm spa

The spa (Fig. 6-F) named “Ab-e-Garm” is in northwest Local Semnan. In this area there is plenty of mineral water that has become over time a number of pools.

6.2.7 Semnan water reservoirs (“Ab-Anbar”)

A “ābanbār” (Fig. 6-G) is a traditional reservoir or cistern of drinking water in Persian antiquity. The Persian phrase literally translates as “water reservoir”. Water storages in the area are collecting drinking water.

6.2.8 Forest and the desert region of Semnan

The forests areas of the province (Fig. 6-H) are the natural forests located in the northern fringes which are the continuation of the mountainous forests of the “Alborz” Mountains, the juniper forests on the southern skirts of the “Alborz” range with tall and dense trees, the desert forests situated in the vicinity of “Chah” Jam and “KharTooran” with tamarisk trees.

The major portion of Semnan province is in the desert area. The “Kahak” Desert, south of “Garmsar” and the “Haj Ali Qoli” Desert, south of “Damqan” can be quoted as good examples worth visiting.

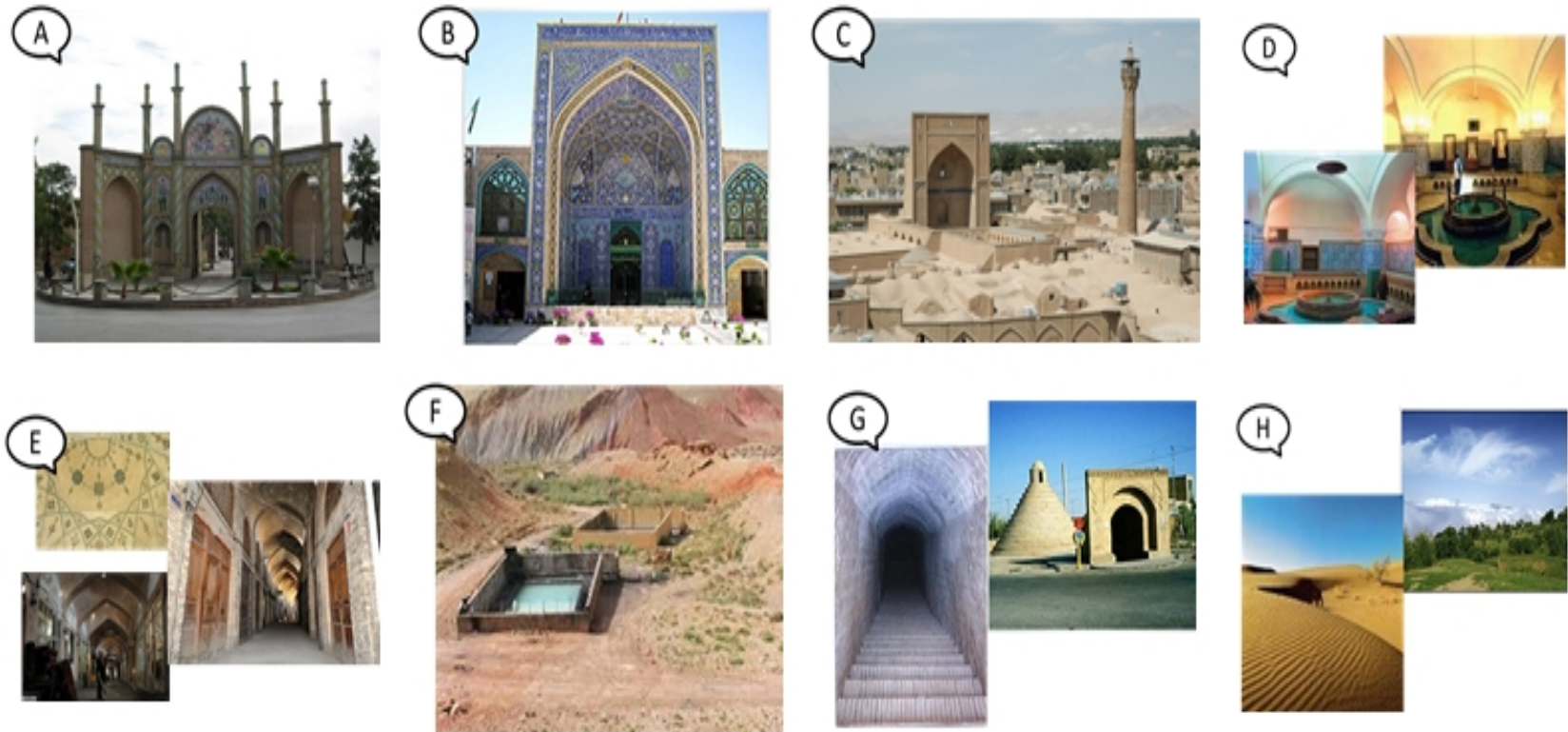


Fig. 6. A-H: Some historical and cultural tourist attractions of Semnan

6.3 Semnan Tourism Development Outlooks

The outlook should be: “Sustainable use of resources and increase the province’s share of tourism market based on provincial, regional, national and international, requirements with emphasis on the dynamics and the effects of tourism development”. With regard to region’s tourist potential and actual capabilities, and having great potential tourist attractions in Semnan as a fifth province of the extent and the ecotourism, as well as historical and cultural heritage, Semnan is considered one of the important ecotourism areas in Iran. According to studies were identified that Semnan has a total of 729 notable tourist attractions. Meanwhile 70 natural attractions (9.6%), 362 (49.6%) cultural and the rest is man-made attractions. The total amounts of 225 attractions are mentioned in Semnan city that 139 cases (61.7%) belong to the cultural and historical attractions, 7 (3.2%) natural attraction, and finally 79 (35.1%) man-made attractions. This fact indicates that the area geographically can be introduced as a tourism hub.

As in Tables 5 and 6 and Fig. 7 shows despite of the very significant potential in across the province of Semnan, unfortunately it has not been able to take advantage of this industry perfectly. According to the above mentioned tables, the numbers of entered tourists are not sufficient for such a historical city for sustainable tourism development in Semnan.

Table 5. The number of entered tourists in Semnan (2004-2011)

Entered Tourists	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Local (passing)	17518	28414	1900434	270743	260450	12717000	9253000	8155781
International	468	2207	2300	1800	1452	2763	830	39395
Total	17986	30621	1902734	272543	261902	12719763	9252830	8195176

Source: [15]

Table 6. Statistics of annual tourists in Semnan 2010

Description	Existing statistics (2010)	Necessary explanation
Domestic tourists to Semnan	9,253,000 Persons	Entered to Province & City of Semnan
Foreign tourist to Semnan	820 Persons	Passengers, visitors and residents in residential centers
Residents Tourists	32,981 P	
Visits to museums and monuments	2,150,000 P	
Monitoring of residential centers Accommodations	135	
Monitoring restaurants	400	
Monitoring of Guest Houses	274	
Monitoring of Tourist Info Centers	137	
The number of Notes	39	
The number of warnings	47	
The number of encouraging	7	
Total closure	2	
Festivals	8	
Mourning days	6	

Source: [15]

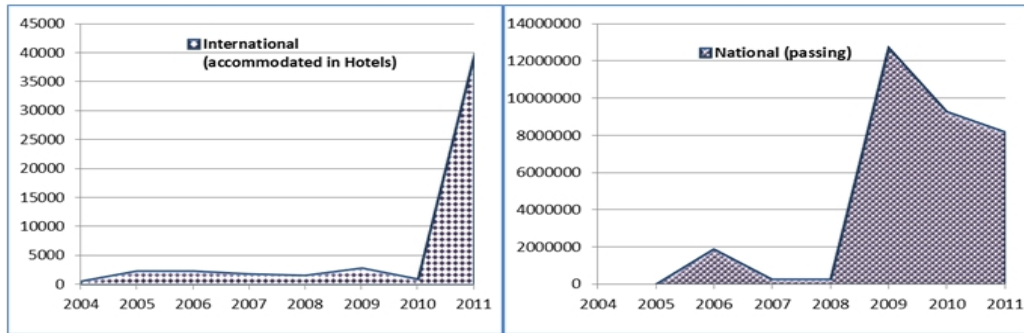


Fig. 7. The number of entered tourists in Semnan (2004-2011)

7. DISCUSSION

7.1 Analysis of Tourism Development in Semnan Based on SWOT Analytical Model

So far, what is certain, the axis of development of the province (as followed by the overall development of the country) is formed by pattern of surrounding-center development. The lack of regional and provincial planning in the country, and centralized financial budgeting, the proposed policy to develop tourism matters, beyond the framework of national macroeconomic policies with the practical realities, would be incompatible. So, what exactly are the problems of tourism at the national level will be true with minor changes in national and regional scales.

In this paper, we identified the strengths and weaknesses of the region in terms of tourism parameters. It means recognizing the factors that would act as desirable and restrain issues in the planning. Thus, for ranking of different factors we have chosen 11 strength, 11 weaknesses, 8 opportunities and 8 threats by using the AHP technique. Then, we applied a weighting coefficient to each factors according to our finding from questionnaires, which is explained in the section 4. The sum of the weighting coefficients is equal to one. Processing the data leads us to provide a list of the model's parameters as shown in the Tables 7 to 11, which are included all the weightings for different factors.

Table 7. Assessment of strengths of the Semnan based on SWOT

S1= ability to attract tourists and offering a variety of products to various tourism markets using innovative and effective marketing programs
S2= locating in the route of historic and old silk road
S3= the pathway and passing transit road, causing traffic to millions of passengers a year
S4= the height difference between northern and southern regions and climatic diversity in the field of tourism development
S5= abundance of sunny days, which provides enough time for nature tourism
S6= the diversity of plants distribution, composition of forests, bush lands, desert and grass lands
S7= existence of abundant water resources as springs and "Ghanats" (Subterranean) in different areas
S8= Natural complications and caves etc.
S10= spirit of hospitality and matching possibility of the cultural conditions for attracting tourists
S11= long-standing traditions and social customs among natives

Source: The Authors

Table 8. Assessment of weaknesses of the Semnan based on SWOT

W1= lack of reception facilities and standard residential centers
W2= large distances and lack of access to support services in the southern parts of natural tourism resources
W3= insufficient information and advertising system in the province
W4= low level of expertise employed in the tourism sector and the shortage of skilled personnel in this sector and the low quality of services
W5= weak and incomplete participation of the private sector
W6= low quality and lack of proper distribution of advertising items produced in the province at the places they need to
W7= lack of statistics and information about historical and architectural monuments and buildings
W8= limited and low attention in the media, press, educational institutions and even ministries and departments responsible for world and Iranian tourism
W9= lack of information about ecotourism
W10= unsuitable path ways in ecotourism areas
W11= Insufficient tourism and travel offices, particularly on the air transport

Source: *ibid*

Table 9. Assessment of opportunities of Semnan based on SWOT

O1= World renowned protected areas and biosphere reserves in the province
O2= Historical reputation of the Silk Road and caravanserais
O3= "Alborz" chain mountains in the north and the desert in the south of the province
O4= Existing road way to the north of Semnan, and diversity of topography and climate and plant
O5= The four environmental areas to be the country's largest ecotourism center
O6= Location of the province among tourism market of the major provinces such as Tehran, "Khorasan", "Mazandaran" and Isfahan
O7= Being in the pathway of fiber optic network and ability to developing the e-tourism
O8= Cultural and social interactions with the northern provinces of Iran

Source: *ibid*

Table 10. Assessment of threats of Semnan based on SWOT

T1= competition between two important focal of tourism in the province's transit center (Tehran, Mashhad) for tourism development in Semnan province
T2= destroyed pastures and forest plantations by ranch of tribes destroys the natural landscapes views
T3= salinity and low quality water, particularly in its input
T4= lack of sufficient budget allocation by the state of tourism department
T5= The rapid expansion of attention to the tourism economy in the region and attract tourists from competitors in the country with other aggressive marketing programs of tourism
T6= Tourism market is threatened by the neighboring provinces
T7= the intense competition with the province to attract tourists despite strong historical and cultural centers around the province
T8= permitting immigration and urbanization, causing native customs and cultural traditions to be forgotten

Source: *ibid*

Since number of the factors is too high, we determined importance of each of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and then grades 1 to 4 were selected for final assessment of tourism in Semnan, as shown in Table 11.

Table 11. Assessment tourism in Semnan based on SWOT

S1= ability to attract tourists and offering a variety of products to various tourism markets using innovative and effective marketing programs
S2= locating in the route of historic and old silk road
S3= the pathway and passing transit road, causing traffic to millions of passengers a year
S4= the height difference between northern and southern regions and climatic diversity in the field of tourism development
W1= lack of reception facilities and standard residential centers
W2= large distances and lack of access to support services in the southern parts of natural tourism resources
W3= insufficient information and advertising system in the province
W4= low level of expertise employed in the tourism sector and the shortage of skilled personnel in this sector and the low quality of services
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T3= salinity and low quality water, particularly in its input
T4= lack of sufficient budget allocation by the state of tourism department

Source: ibid

Study in this paper according to the SWOT model, indicates that the existence of deserts in Semnan, and being located in the modern transportation transit route as well as ancient 'Silk Road' route, are major strengths in the development of the tourism industry in Semnan. On the other hand, the main weaknesses are includes: remaining attractions unknown to tourists in Semnan, inappropriate and inadequate accommodation and recreational facilities, lack of adequate publicity to familiarize attractions in Semnan to tourists, also lack of planning and public investment in this area and etc. Also, lack of credit and high cost of restoration of old monuments, extent of the province and scattering of its tourist attractions, shortage of water resources and lack of suitable airport are the main threats. Furthermore, the opportunities in developing tourism in Semnan are "Alborz" Chain Mountains in the north and the desert in the south of the province, the four environmental areas to be the country's largest ecotourism center, historical reputation of the Silk Road and caravanserais and etc.

Among the items that can be used in advancing the goals of sustainable development of tourism in Semnan are as follows: Improve preservation of historical monuments and buildings among people; Improvement of local traditions and indigenous socio-cultural relations with other communities; Organize local indigenous arts; Introducing more handicrafts; Revive the local social and cultural symbols such as the introduction of local music, games and more; Strengthen the ability of culture tourism and tourists; Ecotourism and sustainable development in local communities; Economic based action of protection and restoration of nature resources via natural tourism income; Preparation and operation of ecotourism projects in the comprehensive plan of management for each of the four areas of environmental with the goal of sustainable utilization and conservation of biodiversity and ecotourism industry.

Suggestions to Developing Sustainable Tourism in Semnan Based on SWOT:

In order to improve the province's tourism industry, following issues are suggested based on the mentioned model:

That is necessary to provide the maps in large panels including information regarding status and position in the city squares, entering and exiting roads, gas stations and other suitable places as well, to make people familiar with routes. This matter, in addition to prevent wasting time of travellers to recognize favorite centers, it will also reduce the traffic jam in tourism areas especially in the tourist seasons. Also, this would affect positively on the opinions and views of tourists to the region and the city.

Other suggestions based on our finding are include:

- Paying attention to the natural tourism, as an important element in tourism development; e.g. establishing sport facilities, Tele-cabin in the mountainous areas, ski resort, and etc.
- Reforming tourism management policies so that it guarantees the constructive interaction between various organizations with reference to both preservation and restoration of resources plus their sustainable utilization also should be considered;
- Creation of tourism information systems and its feedback system in a way to create interactive and dynamic information system;
- Priority concern to activate available resources to develop tourism facilities;
- Improving network communication and Internet access to the tourism sites;
- Specific regards to the health status in tourism development;
- Investment increase, particularly through attracting private sector investment in the process of economic development;
- Providing facilities to develop products for tourists that will lead to the development of production; e.g. fortifying vast kind of handy crafts, including Iranian carpets, pottery, woodcarving and etc.

8. CONCLUSION

Semnan province, in terms of geographic location is located in a narrow strip of geographical zone, which has exceptionally very good biodiversity compared to other provinces in the country. This is because it located in desert ecosystem of the southern area and the forest ecosystem of the northern Caspian Sea. Therefore, Semnan can be called the land of several continents. This situation which only created in that province in the country, the score is very desirable that it should be optimally exploited. Having 27% special areas in the province's environment, can potentially provide the way for investment and employment. Obviously, with minimal investment, environmental acceptability of ecotourism in the region is possible. According to the findings, which indicate the rate of valuation of listed factors in the province, Semnan tourism in terms of historical, cultural, geography and natural tourism is very rich.

Results showed that among the strengths; the desert, among the weaknesses; unknown tourist attractions in Semnan to tourists, among the opportunity; being close to the capital, and among the weaknesses; lack of financial support and high cost of repairing historical monuments had high priority.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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