ENVIRONMENT FRIENDLY ECO-TOURISM AND SUSTAINABILITY OF NATURAL RESOURCES

[1]HEYDAR LOFTY, [2]MARYAM ARABGARI

[1]Assistant professor of Garmsar Azad University, Iran
[2]Master Student in Geography and planning in tourism, Garmsar Azad University, Iran.
E-mail: [1]heydare.lotfi@gmail.com, [2]marabgary@yahoo.com

Abstract- Tourism had been done for various reasons since times ago. Tourism in Iran, with its concurrent meaning, was started since 1950s, as eco-tourism helps personal characteristics development and understanding of cultures. Also Islam mentions surfing in the nature, as a cerebration for knowledge-seekers. Eco-tourism, which was an entry into global lexicon since 1970s and has doubled its lead before tourism annually, is considered a branch of tourism and means taking purposeful and responsible trips into nature. Among various alternatives of tourism; eco-tourism with saving environment, requiring the development of societies and respecting cultural elements are the best ones to have the best compatibility with the concept of stability. Hill tourism, migration tourism, naturopathy, sea sports and hunting are considered as examples of eco-tourism, and elevated mountains, Urmia's lake, northern forests, rivers, spas and etc. for the natural sight-seeing spots of Iran. Conserving the biodiversity and participation in social welfare are aims of eco-tourism. Also helping local economy, environmental culture are the positive impacts, and destroying the environment and plant and animal spices are the negative impacts of eco-tourism. Well-organization, proper planning, local people's participation and education are the key facts for saving eco-tourism and its stability. The Environment Protection Agency has difficult duties for application of The Act No. 50 of the constitution in accordance with sustainable development program. The aim of this research is to have a brief review of eco-tourism, and lack of specific responsible and management weakness is the result of it.

Keywords- Tourism in nature, Eco-tourism, Eco-tourism stability, the environment and natural resources protection, local societies' sustainability.

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years natural tourism or eco-tourism has conceptually been noted in different legislation communities, public organizations and environmental and sustainable development unions, and also increasing in national gross income by foreign currencies' attraction. Eco-tourism, that is the combination of Ecology and Tourism, is in fact the result of challenges between fans of excessive use of nature and fans of reasonable and stabilized use of natural resources with thoughtful approach. As long as being in particular era of planet the earth – for being lessened in quantity and quality of natural resources, growing rate of population, challenges in meeting the essential needs of people with natural resources and limited access to natural resources – the attention of intellectuals and scientists' attention must be drawn upon eco-tourism, in order to keep balance between using natural resources and conserving them for the next generation. Eco-tourism is a type of tourism which basically is (directly or indirectly) linked to environment and is the main stimulus for visiting and/or using natural attractions and local cultures with no damage made to any of them.

These days, countries which have prioritized their economical development, see the tourism industry – and eco-tourism industry as a sub-branch - as an essence. Although in recent decades some development patterns have been introduced by development experts, but the rural sustainable development patterns have been in spotlight. Due to lack of proper management in Iran, the high potential of cultural and natural heritages has never been applied and used and consequently we are enlisted as the bottom members of World Tourism Organization's members. Regarding this matter one may consider that WTO had recognized 2002 as the Eco-tourism Year (*Esmaili nia, 2003*) and 2004 as Sport's Tourism (*Bazar-e Kar magazine, 2004*).

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND GOALS

This research is an evaluation and research of libraries using references of Tarbiat Moddaress University's Library, The Library of Agriculture Faculty in Tarbiat Moddaress University, The Official Website of Tarbiat Moddaress University and sources of Agricultural Jihad Ministry. The author has done the searching on the subjects and analyzing them regarding the topic as "Introducing economical benefits of eco-tourism in local people's finances, and determining the stable eco-tourism with conserving the environment than other forms of tourism". By enjoying the related professors' comments and ideas, the author provides "the positive and negative impacts of eco-tourism on environment, living and culture of local people and the governmental effects on this issue" as the sub-topic.

III. TOURISM AND ECO-TOURISM; HISTORY AND STATISTICS

In most of dictionaries 'Travel' has got the meaning context of moving to outer of society for

entertainment or business; not for doing daily Tourism or education. Iranian Census Bureau has defined Tourist (in 2002 by the definition from WTO) as: "an individual who travels to a city or country than his own, not more than one year and less than 24 hours, in order to do any activities as entertaining, leisure, sportive, visiting family members or friends, work mission, participation in conferences, seminars or summits, treatment, research or pilgrimage". Iran, apparently since after 1950, has made gradual steps in tourism. Maybe the reason of this gradual approach was the development of roads and transportation and finalizing the undone projects in railway, airports and ports since 1949 to 1978. The other helpful element of this development was providing moderate facilities for tourism industry in 1974. For establishing and developing the tourism industry in a country needs to have basic divine properties to be called in FACTORLE-ENDOWMENT selection. These properties could be named as: a) natural, historical, artistic and cultural property, b) human resources in skills and labor and c) financial properties and infrastructures (*Frayar, 2002*) – that Iran has got all the three-.

The status of each country's tourism indicates its economical boom. The WTO has announced tourism industry has played a significant rule in international industries, as there is a 4% growth annually in this industry and in 1988 it made over 210 to 233b dollars from 236 million tourists. The recent found facts have shown the most of this figure (almost 10%) of tourists have been the nature hikers; the figure that can be reached up to 20-30% according the global studies (*Bazar yabi magazine, quoted from Linbery 1997*). The number of direct and indirect occupations created by tourism in 1996 was 290 million jobs, and the net income from this industry was 3 trillion dollars; which is estimated to get over 407 trillion dollars up to 2005 by the careers provided in this industry. Meanwhile Iran, even with having the best attractions, has never been an attention point for tourists and has an active and domestic tourism.

Tourism census shows in 1999 there had been 32 million Iranian Visitors and 3 tourists in Iran. The number of tourists then was about 33%. Between 1990 and 2000 Iranian tourism had 5% of growth and in this figure, about 30% are in commercial tourism for business activities, 10% for natural views and scenes, 4% for conferences, 30% pilgrimage and 26% family and friend's visit (*Niazmand,2002*).

Studies done in 2000 show that Tourism Industry (by producing about 476 million dollars) had 12% share of international economy. In this year, the growth rate of tourism was about 4.7% and the number of tourists was about 699 million people and as studies show this number will be increased up to 1.15 Billion people by 2020 (*Balmaki 2003*). During 1950-56, as was announced by WTO, Western European and North American countries had 97% of international tourist, but this rate fell to 62% in 1992. Also there had been changes in the top 15 tourist attraction countries in world as China gained the 5th rate in world. Tourism industry by creating 200 million direct and indirect jobs – almost 10% of global employment - is the top job creating industry (naming, as Australia's top exported industry is).

According to WTO statistics, in 1997 Iran, rather than being in the top 10 list of tourist attraction, had only 9% of world's tourists. Even though these days 5% of Iranian territory has been transformed into Conserved Areas, but unfortunately Iran has not been named even in the top 80 Touristic countries.

IV. THE NEED OF ECO-TOURISM AND IN RELIGIOUS AND SOCIAL VIEW

It is highly needed to consider eco-tourism is basically different with ordinary tourism; as the damage made to environment is less and requires fewer infrastructures. The Islamic thoughts have always wanted Muslims to establish cultural communication and visit various lands. The Holy Qur'an, and the Holy Tradition of Prophet, both have highlighted the peaceful aspect of cultural communications and travels. In more than 20 versus of The Holy Scripture, travelling has been advised by the statement verbs and the prayers of passengers have been lessened and they are exempted of fast. Imam Ali (A.S), the first Imam of Shiite Muslims also had mentioned five major effects of travelling that as the top of them is improving knowledge of the passenger by being accompanied by thinkers and intellectuals and by visiting various places (*Balmaki 2003*). Islamic thoughts have insisted in saving the nature; as it is believed breaking a branch of a tree equals by breaking divine angels' feather, and watering a tree equals to saving a human's life.

Eco-tourism in socio-psychological point of view causes personality improvement, appearing talents and uprising the knowledge level of human beings and also helps the human species to get more united and overcome to self-orientation by recognizing the variety of cultures and local values of different nations (*Ashtari, 2004*). As much as The Modern Human attempts to provide the more convenience for their life and become more industrialized, it seems to increase their greed for travels. Not only is the public communication lessened by travelling, but also it develops this task and human being can't make themselves bound to walls and they need to experience more travel than before. Therefore you may see the number of Japanese, American and German tourists is getting more and more. One can buy the best painting or diamond and keep it in their home, there has been no one seen to be able to buy

Amazon Forest, Loot Desert and Sabalan Summit for their interior design. This is something needed to be experienced personally and can't be transmitted to others. As eco-tourism is a category of tourism, it equals facing some patient and powerful people with nature, which is a mercy for nature (*Yazdani, No. 3, 1999*).

V. IRANIAN NATURAL RESOURCES AND ECO-TOURISM

Iran's area is more than 1,648,000 square kilometers and has got 1,880 KM of southern coastline (for Persian Gulf and Oman Sea) and 630 KM northern coasts (for Caspian Sea). The geographical advantages of Iran have made this country a unique land in the world. The predominant climate of this country is warm and dry. Kavir Range and Loot Desert, including 37% of Iranian area, are the best examples of the attraction of this climate for European tourists. Forest regions of Iran, approximately 7% of Iran's area, are in northern and western parts. Geographical criteria, climate variety and environmental conditions have made Iran as one of the top-ten countries of the world for tourist attraction points (*Niazmand, 2002*).

These various climates are also because of many high summits, which are mostly higher than the ones in Europe or US. The other example of having an absolute climate in Iran (having four seasons at the same time) is having the world's biggest lake and Urmia Lake and over 50 domestic lakes. The dense northern forests of Iran are the ancient type of forest which are less in existence these days; the smooth sand of deserts, the wind rate and the top maximum temperature registered in the world; various range of livelihood depending on climate (like as migration) are the other facts found in Iranian eco-tourism. Placing Iran in the top most various climate countries in the world indicates this country's capability for any sort of eco-touristic investment.

Iran's eco-touristic attractions are as: various animal and plant species (12000 species of plants, 160 types of mammals, 500 types of birds, 270 types of fishes), the scenic views in mountains, deserts, forests, coasts and seas; historic and religious buildings in cities (in Yazd, Kerman, Isfahan, Tehran, Hamedan, Semnan…) and out of cities (Karaj River bank villages, Jajrood, Kelardasht, Kandovan ….); deserts close to cities (Kashan, Garmsar); River banks (Karoon River, Zayande-Rud River); Lakes close to cities (Neor Lake in Ardebil, Urmia Lake, Gahar Lake in Lorestan, Zerivar Lake in Kurdistan); Springs close to cities (Cheshme-Ali in Damghan); Waterfalls; Harra forests in Persian Gulf; national reserved parks (Golestan National park, Urmia Lake National park); reserved areas; mountains; and many other registered national natural resources are some points of Iranian Eco-tourism (*Rahbar, 2000*).

Iran also has the most unique deserts and ranges in world as Loot Desert is the only place with zero living, and Shahdad Range the hottest point registered on the earth. This country has four game reserved deserts 21 international lagoons that are internationally recognized and as far as all of them are located in one country, Iran has the most various climates (7 climates simultaneously) in the world (*Esmaili Nia, 2003*).

VI. ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS OF TOURISM

Apparently tourism makes positive and negative (direct and indirect) effects in an attraction point. The positive ones can be named as:

- Development of environmental culture; cultures union; and nations' and people's union.
- The development of touristic facilities due to increase in gross national income and entering of foreign currencies
- Job creation in fields like: Goods production and sales, transportation, reception and tourist guide
- Developing tourist attraction

Parallel to positive points of tourism, of course, there always have been negative points. These points are categorized as activities in contamination, destruction or alteration in human or natural environment. These points may affect humans, animals, plants, soil, air, water and their inter-relations causing major destructions to natural, cultural, historical and ancient attractions. Some of these negative points of eco-tourism can be named as:

- Destruction of environment due to hiking in ranges and grasslands.
- Setting fire in forests, uprooting the bushes, cutting the trees and destroying plants
- Littering in river banks, lakes, beaches and springs
- Aggregation of flies, mosquitoes and other hurtful animals
- Spread of hotels' wastes' smell, stinking near lakes or rivers
- Uncontrolled construction near the tourist attraction points
- Emerge of useless jobs and begging and molesting for tourists
- Transformation in farms and fields' use and turning into tourist attraction sites
- Air and noise pollution due to people's transportation
- Increase in road accidents (*Rahbar, 2000*).

There are three major threats for planet the earth: Nuclear war, Climate change and Extinction of bio-diversity; the nuclear war's possibility has been lessened as the world has got out of eastern-western

conflicts, climate changes have been emerged as drought and temperature increase and has drawn the needed attention for it. But among these issues, the menace of bio-diversity's extinction has always been less in spotlight than two other threats, even though its danger is not less than the others. The aspects of this extinction is so unimaginable which cannot be measured by human's conception.

VII. PROBLEMS IN ECO-TOURISM

There are three major categories of elements in eco-tourism industry:

- Providers: like as Agencies and other individuals providing eco-touristic offers
- Demanders: like as eco-tourists in various financial levels
- Monitors: like as governmental organizations in charge of legislation and monitoring the balanced use of natural resources

Of course there is no need to mention the fundamental of eco-tourism is to have natural resources and environmental access, to have planned on them and make use of them. Organizing an eco-tourism in a country or region requires the above mentioned planning and the duties of The Monitors to be met well (as the top the Monitors' category is the government). The three top executive organizations linked to eco-tourism in Iran (The Environment Protection Agency, Iranian and International Tourism Org., Forests, Range and Watershed management Org.) are not synched and this mismanagement is due to lack of scientific planning, goals clarification and applicable solutions for a common goal. The duties, that these organizations lack, are:

- Determining the position of eco-tourism in major planning with determined and scientific goal for a stabilized eco-tourism
- Developing ecological morals with education, higher education, mass media, exhibitions, NGOs and…
- Determining applicable solution to be done for state and private sectors to achieve the goals of eco-tourism
- Finding current capabilities of eco-tourism, information gathering for natural attractions and eco-tourism and prioritizing them into International, National and Local.
- Analyzing the environmental effects and behavior codes for touristic purposes.

When talking about tourism, generally the financial concept, currency attraction and job creation are brought to minds. But more important you may say the major problem of tourism gets back to individual's concepts of a tourist that is not clarified, and this industry never faces any progress unless we make this clarification. The advocates and the opponents of tourism development have one thing in common: that tourism has cultural loss and social ill. The advocates claim we need to develop the tourism despite these troubles in order to get more currencies and have more jobs created, and the opponents say we have not got to the point to make money out of any sort of income (like tourism). These fanatic approaches to tourism has made our country resisting before entrance of tourists in the gates and has hardened the visa issuance process for tourist, and the worst matter is looking down on tourist instead of encouraging. But in recent years, due to short of these hardships we have encountered with the growth in number of foreign tourists. This issue indicates the high potential of tourist attraction of Iran, and also the need of urgent clarification for minds to develop tourism more and more.

The other problem is lack of attention to four basic rules of tourism industry: Structure, Education, Culture and Hygiene; and at the top lack of hygiene appropriate for tourism. Considering this issue makes us think twice for more tourist attraction; as solving this problem cannot cost very much and by meeting this need, the number of tourist could be raised. Our country has been center of attention for most of tourists and solving these problems is the requirement of tourism development. In India, Japan, Spain and Greece (countries which have the most eco-tourist income) with a great deal of experience have found the point that paying more attention to a tourist's basic needs is the key element in developing the eco-tourism industry. These needs were met by establishing clean public restrooms close to historical and natural sites and facilitating accommodation in well-furnished and inexpensive motels and showed to others that basic needs of people is more important than any other things. The basic needs of a tourist entering your country are to have easy access to feeding, accommodation, restrooms and health clinics. But unfortunately a brief look at Iranian public restrooms next to gas stations shows many differences between Iranian culture/hospitality and the respect for others in public accommodations. The status of these public restrooms in gas stations and restaurant goes drastically poor in Nowruz holidays (New Year's Holidays). As much as we pave the roads by construction, we can't attract overseas tourists who their basic needs of settlement, restrooms and restaurants are not met. For solving this problem it could be a good idea to develop Tourist Settlement Sites (developed by Iranian and International Tourism Organization) in touristic sites and places. This above-mentioned problem has got roots in history for hundred or hundreds of years as it is said in old journey itineraries. For the first step we need to prioritize good hotels and accommodations to public restrooms in order to provide god-quality stay with reasonable prices (*Reza Zadeh, 2007*).

By studying the trait of tourism development, the lack of these factors is highly noticed:

- Allocating more shares of foreign currency revenues in tourism compared to other non-oil export revenues
- Organizing an industrial approach to tourism
- Detecting and determining and classification of interior presentation (multiple tourist attraction in national level) and exterior demands (types of tourists as domestic, international, cultural, nature, scientific and commercial)
- Strategic and quantitative precise planning for designing a Supply and Demand
- Detecting and prioritizing eco-tourism marketing
- Attracting financially privileged foreign tourists
- Trusting in domestic and international tourism studies
- Proper estimation for infrastructures before the demand
- Clarifying the ambiguity found in management hierarchy, requirements of management, and having executive assurance to develop the industry
- Sufficient sources of fuel for people's travels (tourism is the last choice of families to do)
- Legal facilities, enough human resources, and local interaction

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

As a conclusion we can say Iran has got various and comprehensive capabilities and opportunities for tourism, but for utilizing these items (as it was argued before) we can provide some suggestions:

- Establishing a committee for natural tourism and providing logical offers for its development; a committee made of officials in geography, development programs, economists, biologists, natural resources experts and sociologists from Natural Resources Organization, The Environment Protection Agency, Cultural Heritage Department, Nomads and Agricultural Affairs Department, Presidential Deputy of Planning and Ministry of the Interior.
- Providing Environment Strategy in accordance to tourism by National Committee of Sustainable Development and National Committee of Tourism
- Avoiding hunting and tree-cutting permissions in eco-touristic preserved areas in order to maintain the attraction sites with laws limiting the named activities and prosecutes the misdemeanor
- Introducing eco-touristic sites and informing people for these attractions via mass media
- Participation of local communities in touristic zones in planning, conserving and developing the sites
- Taking the advantage of touristic zones and developing them, categorizing the reserved areas in their grass cover order
- Determining the behavior codes for tourists, meeting local, domestic, national and international standards, respecting the local cultures and traditions and commitment towards the damages done to the natural resources
- Providing sufficient fuel shares for regular tourists and tour agencies
- Establishing proper facilities and restrooms in touristic sites and the roads and monitoring them

REFERENCES

[1] A. Orouji, 2007, Barriers to Tourism development, www.ichto.com

[2] N. Esmaili Nia, 2003, Seven Climates in One Boundary, Tourism and Aviation Magazine, Vol. 55

[3] 3. A. Ashtari Mehrjerdi, 2003, Eco-Tourism and Sustainability, The Scientific Magazine of Jihad, pp. 74-78, Vol. 262

[4] A. Bahrami, 2003, The Rule of Tourism in Sustainable livelihood and Conserving Natural Resources, The Scientific Magazine of Jihad, pp. 33, Vol.156

[5] F. Jamal Zadeh et al. , 2003, Solutions for Eco-Tourism, Etela'at magazine, Vol. 10

[6] M. Khayati (Translator) 2003, Tourism and Effects on Rural Life in Thailand, The Scientific Magazine of Jihad, pp. 34, Vol. 257

[7] F. Sani Fani, 2002, Studying Eco-Tourism in Mazandaran Province's Reserved Areas, Tarbiat Moddaress University, Tehran, pp. 1,5,7

[8] F. Faryar, 2002, Rural Tourism, Transportation Industry Magazine, Vol. 216

[9] F. Faryood, 2001, An overview to Eco-Tourism in some countries,

[10] M. Mojabi, 2004, The Environment in the Fourth Plan of Development, interview with Ghalame Sabze Iran at http://irangreenpen.org/ news/ 0016280.shtml

[11] Iranian Census Bureau, 2002, Annual Census Article 2001, Tehran

[12] Tourism and Job Creation, Nov. 20th, 2004, Bazar-e Kar Magazine, Vol. 189

[13] H. Nassir Zadeh, 2003, An interview with ISNA news agency

[14] M. Niazmand, A review on Eco-tourism and Sustainable Development, Transportation Industry Magazine, Vol. 216

[15] M. Vafaee, Eco-tourism and sustainable development, Khabar Magazine, May 7th.2003

[16] A. Homayoun, 2000, Eco-Tourism in Underdeveloped countries: A barrier to development, World of Aviation and Tourism Magazine, pp. 27-28 Vols. 36,37 – pp. 23-24 Vol. 38

[17] A. Yazdani , 2000, An Introduction to Natural Tourism and Eco-Tourism, Tabiat Magazine, p. 49 Vol. 3

[18] Agriculture innovation center. 2004. Agro-tourism

[19] Brofield, R. 2002. agricultural tourism as income based risk management fore green house and nursery producer, the state University New Jersey Rutger cooperative extension.

[20] Campbell, L.M. 1999. Ecotourism in rural developing communities, university 0f western Ontario, Canada www.elsiver.com/locate/atoures

[21] Merg.M.1997.,what is ecotourism ? www.http//untammedpth.coecotourism /what is ecotorism?/

[22] Merg.M. 2001. defining ecotourism www.http//untammedpth.coecotourism/defening.html

[23] The International Ecotourism Society .TIES . 2002.Ecotourism: In collaboration with Principles, Practices and Policies for Sustainability

[24] Ward, K.N. 1997. ecotourism reality or rhetoric, chapter 2- ecotourism: the concept.

★★★

.