

The Evaluation of the Geo-Tourism for Urban Development: A Case study in Ajabshir City, Iran

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ABSTRACT: Tourism development based on natural and geo-tourism attractions have been among the study targets of urban regional planners during past decades. It is obvious that Feasibility studies as well as the evaluation of urban tourism potentials are being considered as first phase of tourism planning. The major objective of this study is to investigate the geo-tourism capabilities and limitations of Ajabshir city and to develop the best strategy toward improving and enhancing tourism management and development for the city in this region. For this purpose, SWOT strategy planning method was used based on identification of weaknesses and strengths points (internal factors) and opportunities and threats (external factors). Furthermore, Likert spectrum was used to rank the internal and external factors in order to come up with SO, WO, ST, WT strategies. The study suggests that the region has a high potential regarding tourist attraction. The internal factors of this study (point3.05) indicate that the strength points of the region are more than the weakness points. In addition, the matrix of the evaluation of the external factors (point2.72) shows that the opportunities of the region are more than its threats. It further argues that the macro strategies the tourism of the region and thus this city must be developed in such a way to make the best use of the local possible opportunities. This study further suggests that by taking advantage of Ajabshir's tourism potential in general and Geo tourism attractions in particular, along with adaption of an appropriate tourism strategies, the city could well utilizes these opportunities.

Keywords: Geo-tourism, urban development, Ajabshir city, SWOT

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

INTRODUCTION

Since the tourism industry is one of the most successful industries in the world, it has remarkable results and achievements, such as gaining great currency income, developing cultural - scientific relationship, creating employment both directly and indirectly and showing stability and security of the country (Nohegar et al, 2010). At present, geo-tourism is a new movement helping travelers to increase their knowledge about natural resources, the cultural identity of hosts and ways of preserving them (Torabi Farsani et al.,2011) Geo-tourism, which was introduced publicly in 2002 by the Travel Industry Association of America and the National Geographic Traveler Magazine, incorporates sustainability principles. In July 2008, five US government agencies joined the National Geographic Society to formally adopt the principles of geo-tourism (Moffet and Moody, 2008) Other existing charters include Norway, Honduras, Romania, the Cook Islands, California's Redwood Coast, Portugal's Douro Valley, Montreal, Greater Yellowstone, Baja California, Sierra

Nevada and Guatemala (ClaudeJoly, 2009; Dion et al., 2009; National Geographic, 2010; Sejvar et al., 2010). Honduras was the first country to make geo-tourism its national tourism strategy (National Geographic Society, 2005).

The special climatic features of Iran have bestowed each part of these state different natural scenic features, and if it is introduced to the world in a right way, Iran can be one of the poles in tourism especially in geo truism. (Mahdavi et al, 2010).

Iran is being considered as one of the attractive tourism destination. (Mahdavi et al, 2010).However; there exist some political as well as social factors that affect the industry. It has been argued that Iran's political instability could be considered as one of the drawbacks.(Tavallaeiet al.,2007) Furthermore, Reluctance with regard to tourism investment in the country and high risk of investment ,negative impression of international tourists with respect to Iran are being considered as other barriers of the industry. Ajabshir city is one of the tourism attractions because of climatic features and its variety, Height Mountains and low plains and special topographical and

geographical conditions with rich vegetation in the form of forests and ranching lands with various species, abundant water resources, rich wildlife and orchard lands along with the geo morphological factors. The studied region has a high capacity for ecotourism because of its location on the wet slopes of Sahand.

The goals of this study can be stated as following:

- Comprehensive evaluation of the capabilities and feasibility of developing geo-tourism of Ajabshir to develop this city.
- Determining the problems and barriers, goals and tourism policy and urban development in a way that makes the work in this field possible.

GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF AJABSHIR CITY

Ajabshir city with an area at 2647 Hectares is located along the Gala Chai on the western part of to sahand. This city has been categorized as the cold and semi-cold climatic regions and with regard to the climatic division by Demarton and Ambrezheh, the general climate of this city is semi-arid and is in the border of cold climate of Mediterranean. There are not so many cases of high temperature in this city and in comparison to most of the other cities of East Azarbaijan it has more moderate summer temperature and cold to extreme cold in winter. Topographically speaking Ajabshir city is located in Gala Chai's valley which encompasses many parallel small valleys as well as relatively dense drainages. Taking into consideration the formation and sediments eastern part of the city possesses a very dense drainage system (Ajabshir's comprehensive design, 2006).

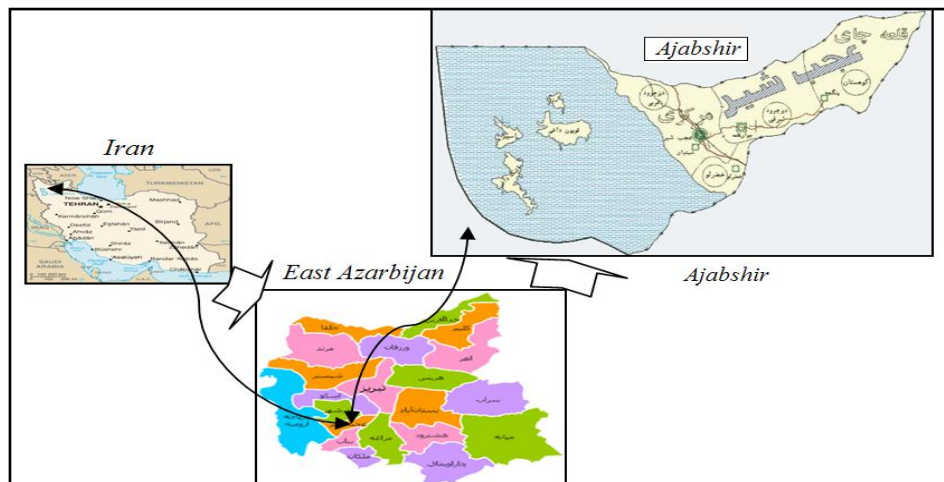


Fig1. Ajabshir City Spatial Position and the Study Area

MATERIAL AND METHODOLOGY

To obtain the mentioned goals, at first with regard to the sources and documentation data available and field study, the attractions, facilities and touristic services in Ajabshir city along with the present limitations in the region were studied. To determine the tourism demand index of the region, 150 questionnaires were filled out by visitors of the region during the peak visiting time (beginning of the spring to the end of summer). In the next stage, SWOT analytical method was used to analyze the data and propose a strategy to develop the tourism in the region. Later, to develop an analytical model, a list of strength, weakness, opportunities and threat points were identified by the performed studies on the internal and external environment in the region. Then by getting the opinion of people, tourists and exports, weight and value was given to each of the factors. At the end, by considering the internal and external strategies factors which are the bases in developing a strategy, the suitable strategy was proposed. Also Likert spectrum was used in this study to rank and prioritize the internal and external

environmental factors. At the end by combining these factors we came up with the following strategies:

- 1-combination of strengths and opportunities (SO)
- 2- Combination of strength and threats (ST)
- 3- Combination of weaknesses and threats (WT)
- 4- Combination of weaknesses and opportunities (WO)

These strategies are to take advantage of strength and opportunities to eradicate weakness and threats in order to develop the region. Developing the macro- strategies has been done in three stages, entering, comparison and decision making.

RESULTS

The first stage which is entering stage, the opinion of the tourism experts about the weakness, strength and threats and tourism opportunities of Ajabshir city, the coefficient (the degree of the importance of these factors in tourism industry) and the rank (the degree of the importance of these factors in tourism industry) were gathered by Delphi method after the conducted studies and calculations and finally the evaluation matrix of internal factors (table 1) and that of external factors

(table1) were extracted. The final result from the evaluation of the internal factors (the total final point 3.05) shows that the strength points of the tourism in

Ajabshir city is more than the weakness points and the macro – strategies must be developed in a way that these strength points can be used to remove the weaknesses.

Table1. The evaluation matrix of internal and external factors dominating the tourism in Ajabshir city

External	Ratio	Rank	Final score	External	Ratio	Rank	Final score
S1 : Giving attention to tourism Indus fry by learned people	0.12	3.5	0.42	O1 : In induction of cultural and tourism productions of the region	0.08	3.5	0.28
S2 : Belonging of the lands to the government	0.11	4	0.44	O2 : Improvement of the per famous of tourism development	0.1	3	0.3
S3 : The lowness of the service and tourism facilities cost in the region	0.08	4	0.32	O3 : The existence of the potential musters in tourism field	0.03	2	0.06
S4: The variety , numerous natural and cultural tourism attraction which have the capacity for development	0.11	3	0.33	O4 : Developing employment	0.13	3.5	0.455
S5 : Proper avail belies	0.06	3	0.18	O5: Cultural exchanges	0.06	3	0.18
S6: The participation of the local people and their resistance against the entering of the tourists.	0.07	3	0.21	O6 : Foreign exchange revenue for the country by attracting the foreign tourists	0.05	1.5	0.075
W1: The low familiarity of the region people with the tourism culture.	0.07	2	0.14	O7 : Taking advantage of tourism training centers of the nearby cities	0.06	2	0.12
W2: Lack of Specialized man force in tourism section.	0.08	3	0.24	O8 : The participation of people in preserving the environment	0.06	2	0.12
W3 : The shortage of service and accommodation units	0.05	3	0.15	O9 : The development of relation between the towns of villages of the region	0.06	2.5	0.15
W4 : Not protecting the tourism attraction and destroying them	0.08	2	0.16	T1 : The fewer active competitors in tourism field	0.04	2	0.08
W5 : Climatic limitations of the region	0.08	2	0.16	T2 : The weakness of the authority of the local officials	0.1	3	0.3
W6 : Lack of advertisement	0.05	3	0.15	T3: The unstable political condition of Iran in international level.	0.05	2	0.1
W7: Lack of familiarity of the people with electronic sciences	0.05	3	0.15	T4 : Negative mental image of foreign tourist toward	0.04	2	0.08
Total	1		3.05	T5: The vagueness and ambiguity in strategies to develop tourism.	0.03	2	0.06
				T6 : Not allocating the budget to develop tourism	0.12	3	0.36
				Total	1		2.72

The final conclusion from the evaluation matrix of external factors (total final point 2.72) is that the opportunities before the tourism industry of the region is more than the threats and as a results the macro – strategies for the tourism of the region must be devised in

a way that cam take the best advantages from the available opportunities .

Finally, there will be a SWOT matrix for the region under study in the form of table 3.

This is followed by the comparison stage regarding different strategies

Table3. SWOT matrix

Internal and external factors	Strengths (S)	Weaknesses (W)
Opportunities (O)	Aggressive strategies(SO)	Conservative strategies (WO)
Threats (T)	Competitive strategies (ST)	Defending strategies (WT)

(Qhadami et al, 2011)

Table 4. Strengths weaknesses, opportunities, and threats Matrix

Internal factors	Strength points	Weakness points
External factors	<p>S1: The attention of learned to tourism</p> <p>S2: Belonging of the lands to the government</p> <p>S3: The lowness of the cost of tourism services and facilities in the region.</p> <p>S4: The variety in developable tourism cultural and natural attractions.</p> <p>S5: proper access.</p> <p>S6: The participation of local people and their interest in entering of tourists.</p>	<p>W1: Low familiarity of local people with the tourism culture.</p> <p>W2: Lack of specialist man force in tourism sector.</p> <p>W3: Shortage in service and accommodation units.</p> <p>W4: Lack of protection from the tourism attractions and destroying them.</p> <p>W5: The climate limitations of the region.</p> <p>W6: lack of advertisement.</p> <p>W7: Not being familiar with electronic sciences by local people.</p>
Opportunities	Strategies SO	Strategy WO
<p>O1: The introduction of cultural tourism products of the region.</p> <p>O2: The improvement of the performance of tourism development.</p> <p>O3: The existence of potential investors in the region.</p> <p>O4: developing employment.</p> <p>O5: cultural exchanges.</p> <p>O6: The foreign currency revenue for the country by attracting foreign tourists.</p> <p>O7 : Taking advantages of the educational and training centers of the nearby cities</p> <p>O8: The participation of the people in preserving the environment.</p> <p>O9: The development of relation among the towns and villages of the region.</p>	<p>1. Taking the advantage of the attention of the learned people to tourism industry</p> <p>2. The development of tourism cultural and natural sources and attractions , introduction of cultural products and developing employment by us tug the various attractions of the region and their low expenses (s3 s4 o2 o5)</p> <p>3. Using the farces and learned people to develop props of people to preserve the environment and as a result developing more relationship between city and villages of the region and at last increasing their cultural exchanges with the tourists (s1 o5 o8)</p> <p>4. Using the participation of the local people and their interest in entering of the tourists to develop employment and inducing to cultural product of the region. (s6 o1 o4 o8)</p> <p>5. The existence of the proper access makes the development of better and more relationship between the town and villages of the region. (s5 o9).</p>	<p>1.The enforcement of specialist man force in this field by taking advantage of tourism training centers of the nearby cities to improve the development performance (w2 o2 o7)</p> <p>2.Building and improving the condition of service and accommodation units through potential investors (w4 o3)</p> <p>3.The protection of attractions by the help of the people and officials (w4 o8)</p> <p>4.Providing extensive advertisement to help people (w6 o8)</p> <p>5.Familiarizing the local people with tourism culture by the training and educational centers of the nearby cities and town at expense at the investors (w1 o7)</p> <p>6. The introduction of the cultural products of the local people to encourage them to participate (o1 w1)</p>
Threats	Strategist ST	Strategy WT
<p>T1: The fan number of the active competitors in tourism field.</p> <p>T2: The weakness in the authority of the local official.</p> <p>T3 : Unstable political Iran in international level</p> <p>T4 : Negative mental image of the foreign tourists toward Iran</p> <p>T5: Mack of transparency and ambiguity in tourism development approaches.</p>	<p>1. The emphasis of the Islamic countries on the foreign tourism market (s3 s4 t5 t4)</p> <p>2. The development of different kinds of tourism attractions in the region to clarify the tourism development approach.</p> <p>3. More emphasis on internal tourism market (s3 s4 t3 t4)</p> <p>4. Encouraging the learned people to invest in tourism (s1 t1)</p>	<p>1. with regard to all the internal limitations of the region and the external foreign threats, till the removal of these factors and exe cut day the proper plans by sufficient bud get, and encouragement of the investors to invest in mountainous area with a desirable climate, the foreign countries must be omitted from the market and the focus must be on the maternal tourism to reduce it to shorter than one day. (w4 w1 t2 t3)</p>

The major objective of next phase is the determination of strategy with implication capability. This in turn indicates the application of external and internal factor matrix. Taking into account the corresponding figures regarding the evaluation internal factors (3.05) and external factors (2.72) for tourism activity in the study area Ajabshir would accommodate in cell 6. That is the most appropriate strategy in which would correspond with those strategies which aim to maintain the current and prevailed conditions and status.

The chosen strategies in internal and external matrix are the same so strategies or the competitive – aggressive strategies which are developed in the matrix of threats, opportunities, and strength and weakness points SWOT. So the output developed strategies for the tourism of Ajabshir city are:

- Using man force and learned people to from groups of people to preserve the environment and as a result the development of more relationship between the cities of the villages with the tourists. (S₁ O₅ O₈)
- Using the participation of local people and their interest to entering of tourist to develop employment and in trod using the cultural produces of the region (S₆ O₁ O₄ O₈)
- Taking advantage of the attention of the learned people to tourism development performance. (S₁ O₂)
- The existence of way and road and the proper access make the better and ,more development of relationship among towns and villages of the region possible (S₅ O₉)
- Developing of tourism natural and cultural attractions and sources and their low costs. (S₃ S₄ O₂ O₅)

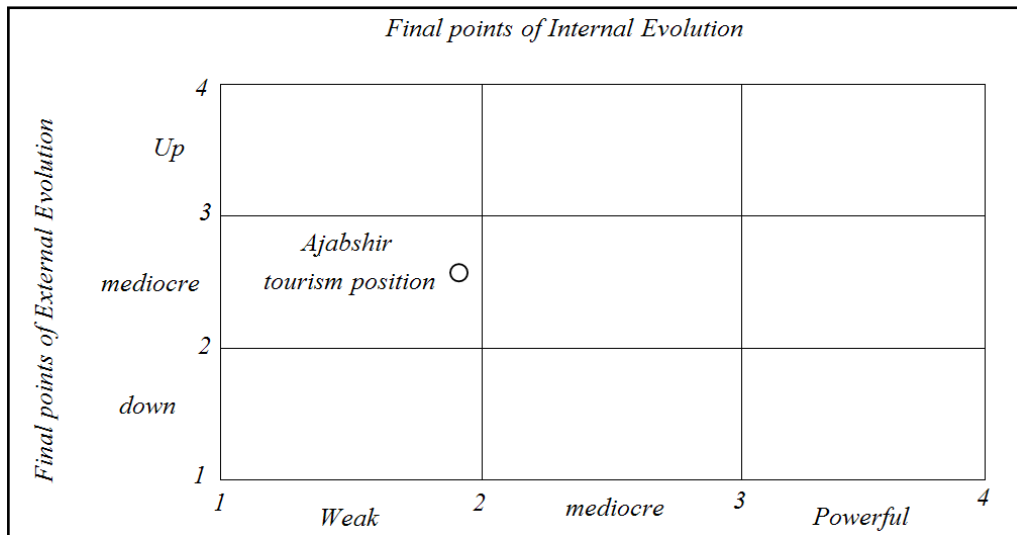


Fig2. The diagram of internal and external matrix of the tourism of Ajabshir city

CONCLUSION

Development of the tourism industry can provide cities, regions with the opportunity for city development. Planning and development are important concepts in the tourism (and geo-tourism) industry and one that has several sides. The Evaluation of the geo-tourism and striking a balance between the requirements of these and viable urban development planning for local tourism and geo-tourism is an important task. A regional vision for tourism and geo-tourism development planning must identify, encourage and promote a range of unique tourist and recreational experiences which can be sustained environmentally, socially and economically while meeting the needs of both visitors and the local community. This paper aims to investigate geo tourism potentials and its impact upon the city's development through utilization of both internal and external factors influential on Ajabshir's tourism potentials .This study relies on the experts' viewpoints .It is based on field technique as well as SWOT method. This paper suggests that the predominant strategy regarding geo tourism potential of the region possesses invading nature (SO). Since, total scores with respect to internal factors is 3.05 as opposed to 2.72 which corresponds with external factors. Moreover, Strengths override the weaknesses similarly, opportunities surpass the threats .Thus, we could propose tourism strategy regarding Ajabshir's tourism potentials based on SWOT as follows:

In its case study this paper considers the strengths and weaknesses of Ajabshir tourism planning and in less extended geo-tourism and makes recommendations as to the best way to develop Ajabshir's potential in the field of tourism and geo-tourism The obtained results from the effective internal and external factors on Ajabshir tourism by SWOT techniques are shown:

- The officials in charge can help to the development of tourism industry in the region by thinking, planning and allocating the required budget.
- The obtain weight point average was 2.72 which shows the opportunities before the tourism in the region are more than the threats and macro-strategies must be

devised in a way that make it possible to use the available opportunities in the best way.

In the strategic factor analysis summary table, the most important factors in attracting tourists are as following:

- the best available opportunities are the introduction tourism and cultural products of the region, the improvement of tourism development performance, the existence of the potential investors in tourism field, developing employment, cultural exchanges , foreign currency revenue for the country by attracting foreign tourists , taking advantage of the tourism training centers of the nearby cities, the participation of the local people to preserve the environment and the development of relationship between the towns and the villages of the region.
- the most important straight points in the region are the attention of learned people to tourism, belonging of the lands to the government, the lowness of tourism services and facilities in the region, the variety in the developable natural and cultural tourism attraction, easy access to region, the participation of the local people and their interest in entering of tourists to the region.

At the end it can be stated that in case of proper management, Ajabshir city can be introduced as one of the remarkable poles of tourism to the world and at the same abundant benefits can be directed in Iran and word the country both from industrial and tourism point of view. Such an approach will ultimately lead to urban development in Ajabshiri city.

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