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Pilgrim Economic Role in Sustainable Municipal Revenues

(Case study: Mashhad metropolitan)

Travel around the world to discover the secret of creation (Holy Quran)

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Municipality of

Mashhad

Abstract:

In the third millennium, tourism is one of the great and high-income industries in the world and these days it is measured as an industry because of the significance impact of tourism on city economy.

In 2000, the declaration of the World Trade Organization shows that tourism is the third job generating and investment industry after oil and automobile in the International Trade. Moreover, in recent decades, many governments, economic officials and experts have noted this industry with more emphasis on its expansion than before, and they try to have larger share of world markets of this industry for their communities.

Due to numerous historical and cultural attractions in urban areas, they are regarded as important tourism objectives. The religious cities have important prospects for attracting tourists and pilgrims because within the pilgrimage and ancillary activities, the cultural tourism is able to attract many tourists. Meanwhile, Mashhad as the second religious metropolitan in the whole world and as one of the most important religious cities in terms of attracting tourists, due to the existence of the Imam Reza (AS) Holy Shrine and the rich cultural heritage, historical and natural landscapes, with more than 20 millions pilgrims and visitors per year, have many features for tourism development. This paper has investigated tourism as a beneficial economic activity, and then strategies are presented to make it as a source of sustainable income for Mashhad Municipality.

Keywords: Tourism- Religious Tourism- Pilgrim's economy- Mashhad Metropolitan- Municipality.

Introduction:

Tourism is a profitable economic activity which has had the highest growth in the recent decades.

According to the World Tourism Organization(WTO), by 2020 , tourism industry (with over 1.5 billion tourism)will be one of the first profitable industries in the world. In 2020, the number of tourists will reach 1.6 billion in the world and they will spend over two trillions dollars that it mostly belongs to the developed countries(UNWTO,2010).

Religious cities, based on their nature, have a significant outlook in order to attract pilgrims and tourists.

Religious tourism and its different sections plays an important role in world tourism , due to its specific functional and structural features .

About 26 percents of the world tourism belong to religious tourism (ICEP,1997).

Iran is one of the five countries in the world which have the most climate diversity. Iran has over one million historical places among the ten historical and cultural countries in the world.

Only% 0.1 of the world tourism market belongs to Iran .

According to UNWTO report in 2009 , despite the general reduction of world tourism, the arrival of international tourists in Iran has increased.

Mashhad is the second religious metropolitan in the world which annually attracts millions of tourists and pilgrims from around the world.

The arrival of about 20 millions pilgrims in Mashhad per year,indicates that the ratio of pilgrims (tourists) to the urban population is six (considering the population of Mashhad:2427116). According to the prediction of “Mashhad Comprehensive Plan” , it will reach 30millions tourists by 2016 .

As a matter of fact , Mashhad has extended and developed after Imam Reza (the 8 th Imam of shiite) martyrdom and burial in Sanabad village between the old towns of Noghan and Tabaran, based on its pilgrimage role.(Yaghoubi,1963).

Mashhad adjoined to the town of Noghan in the fourth century of Hijri-Qamari. Then ,at the end of fourth century,it became an important city(Estakhri,1960).

In the last century, after structural, economic, social and political evolutions, at the time of Pahlavi dynasty, many economic-recreational facilities were constructed in Mashhad and it gradually changed into a polarized city. After the Islamic Revolution , in 1979,religious-cultural tourism was established, based on the islamic government and Astan-Qods Razavi Organization.

Other interior factors (the capital of Khorasan province) and exterior factors (Iran –Iraq war,and also insecurity in the neighboring countries)have resulted a superior position for Mashhad in international level.

Imam Reza's Holy shrine is the most important attraction in Mashhad. Due to its religious-pilgrimage importance, it affects completely cultural-religious tourism in Mashhad.

In addition to its principal attractions, Mashhad has unique and various attractions with different functions.

These attractions are situated in tourism planning process and have positive economic,cultural and social impacts in the city,region,and Iran.

The positive consequences of tourism development include: Increase of job creation, Economic Sustainability, Increase of urban capacity.(Momeni et al,2009).

The types of attractions of Mashhad based on function

Function	Attractions
Religious-cultural and historical	Imam Reza's Holy shrine,Khajeh-Rabee tomb,Pir-e-Palandooz tomb
Religious- Cultural	Imam zadeh Yahya tomb, Khajeh-Morad, Khajeh-Abasalt,...
Cultural –historical	Mashhad Praying site,town of Tous,Ferdowsi tomb,Naderi Museum.
Historical-Recreational	Golestan Dam , Malekabad Garden and Museum,...
Historical-natural	Wildlife Exhibition, Natural History Museum,Natural Sciences Museum,...
Cultural-recreational	Kouheston Park (amusement park),Jungle Park,Kouh sangi Park, Mellat Park
Natural-recreational	Torghabeh,Shandiz,Abardeh,Kang ,Zoshk,Torogh Dam
Commercial	Bazar Reza (Market),International Bazaar , Sepad Market, Zist-e-Khavar Market
Other(Sport , Hospital)	Cheshmeh Gorab,Samen Complex,....

(Momeni et al ,2009)

Considering the aforementioned issues, We realize that in Mashhad metropolitan, the municipal authorities should not only think about the qualitative and quantitative provision and promotion of services to the citizens, but also provide necessary spaces, equipments,and services for the pilgrims and tourist.

Thus,it is essential to study the problem and difficulties of this industry and the reasons of its undevelopment in Mashhad.

On the other hand, the proper executive strategies and also the usage of existing potentials (as a sustainable income source for the municipality) should be applied in order to provide the necessary field for tourism industry development in Mashhad

Objective of the Research:

- 1) Municipal authorities' access to the accurate and defendable calculations and computations for provision of profitable plans and programs through tourism industry in Mashhad.
- 2) Considering the necessary budgets for service supply to the pilgrims, in preparation of all the budgets of municipality in the coming years.
- 3) Submission of logical and acceptable explanations for receiving the national and provincial budgets in order to prepare some of the spent costs for services supply and equipping the essential facilities for the pilgrims.
- 4) Defining the share of revenue from the activities of different parts of tourism (Transportation , accommodation centers, trade markets, recreational places ,...) in order to review the rate of received taxes from the related neighborhoods.

The Concept of Tourism

- ✓ Tourism Industry: the most peaceful movement in human relationship which has a direct impact on advancement of science,culture and economy in different societies.
It is the most effective factor which plays a key role in making understanding and agreement among nations and making global peace sustainable.
- ✓ Today ,tourism is one of the best devices for cultural exchange and communication, travelling and touring in different countries and is also one of the most successful methods of spending leisure time .
- ✓ Tourist: A word which means the person who tours around the world.
- ✓ In international definition, it means the person who travels to another country for recreation, visiting the attractions and historical places , medical treatment , business (trade) , sport activities , and pilgrimage.
On condition that he or she stays in that country over 24 hours and less than 6 months and the distant is not less than 70 Kilometers.(Afchangi,2006).
- ✓ Travel means that someone goes out of his or her city to another place and peregrinates a distance .
- ✓ Travel (journey) reveals goodness and badness inside human . At journey (travel), the unknown things inside the human's mind about countries, nature, people, will become known.(Mahallati,2001).
- ✓ Travel (journey) causes mind (thought) health and helps healthfulness and also flourishes the traveler's (tourist) personality.(Lankwar,2003)

Tourism Background In the world and Iran

A) In the world :

In many countries, municipalities are the most important administrative system in tourism development, due to their functional and operative nature (organizing and managing the city).

The importance of urban tourism in the developed countries is so much that the mayors of different cities compete in creating the new tourist attractions and introduction of their cities. Based on accurate management and participation, the cities have implemented serious efforts to attract more tourists. These efforts include:

- Renovation of the derelict spaces with the aim of revival of old (historical) aspects of the society.

For instance, renovation of the old industrial buildings for attracting and reception of the tourists.

- Considering and preserving the cultural heritage as a rich income (revenue) source.
- Consideration of architecture and public landscape in the city with the aim of attracting the domestic and foreign tourists (Non-conversion of abandoned building into garbage disposal place).
- Consideration of public cleanness in the city and equipping its infrastructures, including construction of numerous rest rooms in the city (such as the efforts of the Municipality of Mashhad).
- The usage of traffic signs, based on international standards and the domestic tourists' needs.
- Holding Purchase Festivals, investment , and considering the curative tourism (such as Malaysia).
- Holding the specific recreational tours, climbing, mountaineering, historical sites (such as China).

B) In Iran:

Tourism industry has various positive and negative impacts on cultural , social , natural and economic environment of Iran. Since foreign tourism development has been weak and the tourists who visit Iran often have similar culture, its social and cultural impacts have been very little.

The huge amount of domestic tourists has had significant improper impacts on the cultural and natural places in Iran.

It led to destruction and reduction of the values of tourism attractions in different ways.

Therefore , tourism management should define the opportunities in the country and also include them in the "Tourism Comprehensive Plan" of Iran in order to prepare investment fields.

The most important opportunities are as follows:

- Imam Reza's Holy Shrine which is a suitable opportunity to attract Muslims who can be the missionaries of religious tourism of Iran in other countries. Currently , about 300 millions Shiites and one billion Muslims live in the world. Of which about 70 millions are Iranians.
- The existence of desert in plateau of Iran , investment in these regions results in job creation and prevents the migration of inhabitants of these regions into the cities.

- Sport tourism: Iran has mountains, suitable biking routes , kiting places, ski runs , water sports , car racing ,....
- Curative tourism: Iran has very skillful physicians for medical surgeries. It has also modern hospitals which can be useful in entering foreign exchange.
- History tourism: For the tourist who are interested in Iranian history and historical sites .
- Preparation and implementation of the “Eco-tourism Development Comprehensive Plan “ , with emphasis on the ecological preservation of the ecosystems and absorbing the participation of local inhabitants in ecological preservation (concerning climate diversity in Iran), can be useful in development of recreational and tourism activities in natural areas while preserving environmental standards and returning the revenue of ecotourism to local societies (communities) and natural resources preservation programs.
- Commercial tourism: Considering these fact that tourism is the most sustainable job (business) against financial crisis in the world , if the real commercial (trade) potentials of Iran become active , we will obtain lots of revenue through hotel management, transportation , banking and other businesses related to tourism.

Economic and Social Impacts of Tourism:

Economic Impacts:

Economist states that tourism industry is an income-generator and job - creating industry. They consider and study this industry specifically. For this purpose, with emphasis on different aspects of tourism , the economists believe that its role in economic dynamism is very important and they try to find the new paths of development by understanding the economic aspects of tourism.

Tourism can not exist without interaction between guest and host. In this interaction, money is exchanged, thus tourism can not be considered merely a cultural work and non – economic.

Generally, economic tourism results in different aspects of obtaining foreign exchange and also transition of part of purchase power of some countries to the country which attracts tourism , increase of mobility in production and distribution , job creation , and increase of cash flow.

Therefore , in economic calculations of tourism , two coefficients are mentioned .

The first coefficient is revenue (income) increase coefficient and the second is job (employment) increase coefficient.

Revenue (income) increase coefficient in tourism results in wealth increase and job (employment) increase coefficient results in new jobs through tourism (Pourya,1996).

Tourism has a direct relation with the economic impacts. The integration of this economic activity with other economic parameters is so close to each other that economic growth causes tourism growth and economic decline causes tourism decline.(pedrian,1996).

Strengthening the relationship between tourism and other economic sections is very important.

Strengthening this relationship reduces the import of the items that support tourism. It also increases local employment (indirect job creation) and the revenue (Ebrahimi , 1998) .

In general , Tourism can be studied in three levels :

- A) National level : with the aim of definition of strategies and macro objectives.
- B) Regional level : with the aim of usage of coordinated policies and implemented by the governors and related offices.
- C) Local level: implemented by the municipalities and municipal managers. Therefore , based on this , there are three different groups in tourism:
 - First Group: the tourists who want to maximize their mental benefits (profits) and outcomes of the journey (trip).
 - Second Group: the agencies that supply the related goods (products) and services. They usually try to maximize their benefits (profits).
 - Third Group : Government or the host municipality which tends to maximize the first and second profits (benefits) resulting from tourism expenses in their region .

The objectives (goals) of these groups are often consistently favorable. This favorability is the main condition of tourism prosperity in a place.

If these objectives (goals) are not coordinated with each other , there will be little hope for tourism prosperity in the future.

Social Impacts:

Tourism is the most common and precise device for social relations in the world and is a bridge for advancement , multilateral understanding , friendship and cooperation , and participation which has various effects such as peoples understanding and knowledge about lifestyle , beliefs, culture and traditions of other regions .

These were the positive impacts which can be used. Bad cultural impacts, disease outbreak , etc are the negative impacts which can be overcome through correct management (Eliot , 2001).

The sociologists states that the increasing presence of international tourism in the third world countries , is one of the main factors in acculturation.

When people interact with each other, they become more familiar with their cultural heritage .

As a result , if tourism development policy can be well – organized and planned properly , it can be a way for familiarization of Iranians with other nation’s lifestyle.

If this industry is not well – managed and well – organized we will face cultural, social , and economic problems.

Tourism Economy in Mashhad:

The tourism structure is a set of facilities, rules , service factors (elements), transportation , and tourism organizations which along with the attractions as supply factors , comprises the tourism system of a location and meet the tourists' need in the destination .(Wan gi, 2004).

The tourism structure characteristics are affected by importance , validity , nature , diversity , role , and function of its local attractions and also by social , cultural and economic characteristics of local residents and tourists .

Tourism function that the city receives in the supply section of tourism system in different fields (economic . social , environmental ,...) which its cost – benefit should be evaluated in order to reach sustainable development.

Mashhad is one of the most important pilgrimage and tourist centers in Iran and Islam World .

Annually ,about 20 millions pilgrims and tourists visit Mashhad during summer vacations an the New Year holidays or specific religious days. They come to Mashhad to visit Imam Reza's Holy shrine and different recreational and historical centers in Mashhad .

Situation and cultural – scientific facilities of Mashhad have caused establishment of scientific , religious , social , economic , and art Associations and also holding different national and international seminars and conferences and exhibitions in Mashhad .

These tourists and pilgrims form a type of tourism economy in Mashhad in urban space , and tourism activities accumulation.

Due to the extensive pilgrims and tourists arrival in Mashhad , tourism economy has a specific sustainability in the field of economic factors. The important indicators such as the number of pilgrims and tourists, the number of hotels ,accommodation places, various tourism attractions in this city have resulted in the high importance of tourism economy in Mashhad .

Due to the dominant role of tourism economy in Mashhad , typology of this economy indicates special cooperation and solidarity between different sections of urban economy , in the field of service supply to the tourists and pilgrims.

Mashhad economic function has developed toward provision of necessary services for tourists and pilgrims , and the coming horizons are very important. Economic actions of tourism are mostly implemented in the section of Mashhad urban space in which the tourists can receive different necessary services .

Tourism economy accumulation in an area of the city (For example Imam Reza street) and predominance of urban economy in other districts of the city causes specific economic duality which its separateness is important.

Some of income – generating methods from tourists and pilgrims need credit and high – expenses (costs) , due to the lack of natural and environmental fields .

As a result , the municipalities should review and study the plans completely ,then consider all the aspects and conform with cultural , social , and economic structure of Mashhad.

They should select income-generating methods for Mashhad.

However , tourism economy includes lots of economic interaction that are connected to each other and form a process of demand and supply which results in market knowledge and reveals an economic understanding of tourism (Weaver , 2000).

Tourism is an extensive economic activity which includes hundreds of economic corporations that some of them are huge .

But most part of it is small Airline companies , different transportation lines, travel agencies, hotels, restaurants , conference centers are some of these corporations (World Tourism Organization , 2001)

Urban economy has national and trans-regional function , this role is researchable in trans – national economy .

The changes and evolutions, in national and international level, affect basic economy and economic frequency coefficient. Investment in Basic Economic, increases the ability of development process in the mentioned section.

For example , in 2006 , a field work was implemented to calculate the revenue of pilgrims arrival in Mashhad .

Sum of pilgrims costs for accommodation, food , recreation , souvenir , medicine , and transportation was calculated .

The total sum of the revenue (income) from each tourist was 538705 Rials.

Assuming the arrival of 12 million pilgrims (tourist) per year , the total sum is about 6464.5 billions Rials in 5.43 days (Afchangi , 2006).

The revenue of different sections from pilgrims

Market and Bazaar	220853 Rials
Hotels (accommodation)	145134
Urban transportation (inter city)	34328
Urban transportation (outside the city)	45044
Medicine	18331
Recreations	34044
other	40866
Total Sum	538705

Obstacles of Tourism Industry

Although Iran is one of the liable countries in the world (in the field of tourism), for many reasons , the growth of this section has not been considerable and significant, comparing with other countries .

The major reasons are :

1) Weakness of Macro – management in tourism industry :

Macro-management is one of the most important factors in this new industry .

Management plays the key role , but in executive affairs , service and investment , it must only act as a legislator, supervisor and supporter of private section and also it must transfer service supply to the private section .

Considering the shortness of governmental management lifetime and non – implementation of long – term planning , and lack of competition among the managers and inadequacy of suitable management , this industry will not obtain profit and might ruin nature , environment , and historical and art .

2) Negligence in human resources development :

Most of the powers and forces, used in this industry , are scientifically irrelevant and they have entered this industry with commercial (trade) and income – generating view .

It leads to increase of costs (expenses) and undevelopment of tourism in Iran.

3) Weakness in dissemination of information and advertisement:

An important factor in foreign tourist attraction is good advertisement , dissemination of information , and introduction of tourism attractions . Unfortunately , the relevant organizations and entities has acted very weakly in this field.

Thus , due to lack of information about Iran , foreign tourists usually do not choose Iran as a tourism destination .

Some new countries such as United Arab Emirates have used vast advertisement to attract the tourists to their country and it annually obtains income from this industry .

To achieve this objective, it is necessary to produce TV programs and documentary films about tourism attractions of Iran and broadcast them in international television networks.

Conclusion

Today , tourism is a dynamic (potential) economic activity which is considerable in many countries .

The experiences of other countries indicate that in the countries which are successful in tourism industry , this industry has had a major role in generating a sustainable income source.

These countries have an active section named “Tourism Development Organization.

Iran has very suitable religious, historical, cultural, and natural situations, but it has not acted properly in this field.

The national strategies and programs are prepared and then located in the head of society pyramid . They are notified to the related organizations and a special budget is allocated . In Iran , tourism industry is regarded and noticed without preparation of a national program in which the objectives , duties , and roles of the organizations are specified.

It causes uncertainty in “Tourism Comprehensive Plan “although the related programs of every section must be coordinated and implemented for development and improvement (long – term) .

The major public organizations which are responsible for urban service supply and provision of facilities for the tourists include :

Municipality , Astan – e – Qods , Governor Office , Tourism and Cultural Heritage , Organization ,

Considering the management policies in Iran , municipality is a public NGO which is responsible for construction , development , and urban management. It has an important role in service supply and provision of facilities for tourists , (Municipalities should not interfere in policy – making and planning , but it can participate actively in designing, preparation , and management of tourism sites . Municipality can strengthen its management in order to control, supervise and manage the related affairs for the quality of activities and tourist satisfaction.

It can also transfer the plans to the private section .

Mashhad tourism function has changed into cultural - religious form and also other forms of tourism in recent decades. Urban space growth and development has followed this process (change) and it has tended to natural –recreational attractions . (Momeni , et al , 2009) .

According to the existing statistics of 2006 ,domestic tourist have brought 23000 billion Rials income and foreign tourists 258 million dollars income into the city of Mashhad .(Momeni et al 2009).

What is essential for access to the plans and proposals, is a comprehensive outlook (observation) and study of the methods , views , and patterns in this field.

The plans can be executable properly if they are adjusted according to the existing facts and accurate understanding of the current situation of tourists and pilgrims.

Suggestions

Generally, for tourism management and development in Mashhad, Providing an accurate centralized plan in tourism , re – assessment of the implemented programs , usage of educated managers in this field and vast vision in tourism is necessary .

It can have many positive impacts on social, political, and economic conditions, in different national and regional levels .

Therefore, revision in tourism development policies, and correction and provision of the relevant regulations and rules and also evaluation of previous and current methods is inevitable. To achieve this goal , the following strategies are suggested:

A) In Management section:

1) Promotion of tourists and pilgrims affairs management to the tourism organization in order to achieve an integrated urban management and strengthening its sub – sections and support from city council for approval of the organizations constitution , also solving legislative problems of municipality for tourism section development and income – generation.

2) Identifying the pilgrims needs and problems exactly , planning and preparation of the necessary things for organizing the infrastructures in order to help increase the pilgrims stay time and the resulting revenue.

3) Development of cultural activities , pilgrimage services in religious and pilgrimage sites (locations) and also preparation of the field for implementation of the necessary infrastructure projects, in the form of annual budgets .

4) Control and supervision on the pilgrims camp through organizing the houses as a revenue source.

5) Construction of cheap accommodation units for tourist. A number of pilgrims and tourists can not afford hotels (%70) , due to the high prices of hotels .

If these urban units are constructed , they can be used as a hidden income source in the peak days in order to solve pilgrims problems .

6) Arrangement of the meeting with Astan Qods Razavi Organization in order to use their participation properly for provision of financial resources and investment in implementation of the income – generation (participatory) projects.

7) Provision of necessary facilities for investment in private section such as payment of long-term loans with low interest , cession of suitable land with public (state) price , facilitating the issuance of building permission , and omission of the unnecessary official formalities in order to prepare the essential facilities of tourism industry and securing the investment in this industry, issuance of permission for the necessary machineries in private section, considering the tariff (customs) discounts and specific taxes.

8) Strengthening the travel tours and regulating the pilgrims arrival and distributing them in the city in order to reduce the traffic. Municipality should inform the organizations precisely in this field.

9) Initiation of special taxis for tourists . (Such as Japan).

10) The intention of some of the travelers to Mashhad is usage of health facilities and medical services (purchase of medicine , medical devices, cure).

Thus , Municipality can use this opportunity and use land for building hospitals and modern medical centers in order to promote curative tourism industry.

B) In ((usage for tourism)) section .

- Considering the increasing growth of urbanization ,urban physical development , inadequacy of land and increase of its added value in issuance of permission for usage in tourism section , Municipality should :
- Consider the regulations and rules of the following plans:
“Mashhad Comprehensive Plan “ , “Mashhad Detailed plan “ , “Renovation and Renewal of the old district of Holy Shrine surroundings “.
- Include tourism uses and consider them in all levels of gender and age.
- Change the function of the designed spaces in order to use them in different seasons.
- Consider specific rules and regulations in order to preserve historical sites as a valuable heritage for attracting the tourists.
- Establish a Data Bank and a software about the pilgrims of Mashhad and specifying the situation of Municipality of Mashhad in tourism industry .
- Consider “Tourism Comprehensive Plan “ in urban detailed and comprehensive plans.
- Consider and notice the natural landscapes (Sceneries) around Mashhad.
- Privatization of the implementation management and usage of the recreational spaces to which is supervised by Municipality of Mashhad.

C) In Information section:

Dissemination of Information includes the entire activities which are done with the aim of indirect transfer of ideas and messages for sale of goods or services in two ways :

A) Informing the citizens (the public) about the positive impacts of the social and economic projects and plans.

B) Informing the tourists and municipalities for which charges must be paid.

The most important methods for more effectiveness (impacts) and less expenses which are pivotal policies in this discussion, include :

- 1- Designing the information signboards, using various colors and lightning and installing them in suitable places or spectacular centers.
- 2- Preparation of training (educational) and booklets or brochures.
- 3- Preparation of Guidebooks which include a comprehensive and complete explanation of the activities of Municipality of Mashhad about service supply to the pilgrims.
- 4- Increase of productivity of the necessary services for tourists through staff training in tourism section along with the implementation of training programs and attracting the skillful workforces .

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