



University Of Isfahan

Urban - Regional Studies and Research Journal

Vol 5 – No. 17 - Summer 2013

ISSN (online): 2252-0848

ISSN (Print): 2008-5354

<http://uijs.ui.ac.ir/urs>

# Suitable Strategies for the Development of Sahoolan Watery Cave Geotourism

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Received: October 08, 2011 / Accepted: April 10, 2012, 15-18 P

## Extended abstract

### 1-Introduction

Today, tourism is one of the largest and most beneficial industries in the world and in many countries it is used as a development strategy. Geotourism or geological tourism is emerging as a new global phenomenon. It is a form of natural area tourism that specifically focuses on geology and landscape. Because of appropriate planning and recognizing advantages and limitations, this kind of tourism can play an important role in the national development and diversification of local economy. There is a wide variety of caves in Iran, including calcareous (karst), salt, ancient and human-made caves which Sahoolan is one of the most important of

them. Though Sahoolan has a great range of potentials for geotourism development, geotourism is just emerging and taking its first developmental steps. So these questions arise: What are the potentialities and limitations of Geotourism development in this region? Which strategies are required for developing this type of tourism and following national and regional development?

### 2. Theoretical Bases

Geotourism is a new phenomenon in tourism industry. It is defined as tourism activity pertaining to geology and geomorphology, and the natural resources of landscape, landforms, fossil beds, rocks and minerals, with an emphasis on appreciating the processes that are creating and have created such features. Geotourism's first definition appeared after 1990s. An early definition of geotourism was made by Thomas Hose. He specifically focused on geology and geomorphologic sites. The goal of geotourism is to maintain the character of place. It is not just travelling to undisturbed natural areas or to centers of human activity

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but travelling to destinations where nature and humans come together to produce a working landscape. The focus is to encourage visitation to an area by visitors who value the same working landscapes valued by the residents. Ideally, geotourism can be beneficial for both the tourist and the host because it can provide the tourist with an “authentic” experience while holistically sustaining the destination’s unique qualities. There are five characteristics that are considered to be essential for a product to be regarded as geotourism:

- Geologically Based
- Sustainable
- Geologically Informative
- Locally Beneficial
- Tourist Satisfaction

Caves are one of the most important attractions of geotourism. Cave tourism is likely to be preferred, especially by those who have great interest in enjoying the picturesque and wondrous scenery of caves and their surrounding environment, and who are interested in the conservation of geological landscapes or features. In addition, cave tourism is likely to be enjoyed by those who have a desire to gain new knowledge related to geology, geography, mineralogy and anthropology.

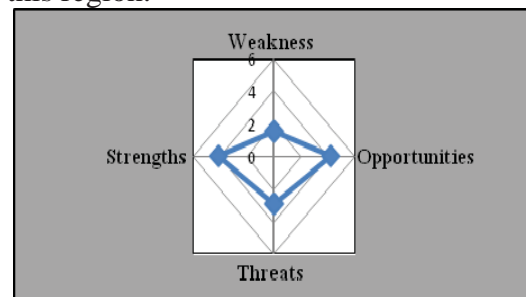
### 3- Discussion

In this study, after preparing indicators list and refining and classifying them, collection of this indices are separated in the four thematic categories which includes economic, social, environmental and institutional factors. Then, the data are analyzed in terms of weight, relative weight and weight score. After that, for determining the status of four indices the final score is offered. Finally, current situation with aggregating of four indices in terms of internal and external factors are conceived. Comparison of internal and external factors

shows that there are 17 strength against 17 weakness and 18 opportunities against 11 threats against the development of Sahoolan watery cave. Totally there are 35 strengths and opportunities as advantages and 28 weakness and threats as limitations and obstacles against Sahoolan geotourism development. Analysis of the interior factors shows that the highest strengths for development of Sahoolan geotourism associate with economic factor. Institutional factors constitute the highest point of weakness for Sahoolan Geotourism development. Analysis of external factors, which include opportunities and threats, suggests that while the region enjoy opportunities in all dimensions of economic, social, cultural, environmental and institutional for geotourism development but serious threats include social-cultural and institutional threaten Geotourism in this region.

### 4. Conclusion

Investigating internal and external factors by using SWOT model shows that the study area with the sum of 17 strengths and with weight points of 4.16 and 18 opportunities with weight points of 4.22 against 17 weakness with weight points of 1.54 and sum of 11 threats with weight points of 2.92 has many potentials and capabilities for geotourism development in northwest of Iran but current weakness and threats are the main obstacles of geotourism development in this region.



## 5- Suggestions

After analysis of the internal and external factors and composition of them, the most important strategic factors for Sahoolan geotourism development have been offered. These factors have been used as the basis and groundwork for determining Sahoolan Geotourism development strategies. So in order to decrease threats and weaknesses and take advantage of opportunities and strengths, the following four strategies have been suggested:

- SO Strategies: These strategies focus on internal strengths and external opportunities.

- ST Strategies: These strategies focus on internal strengths and external threats.

-WO Strategies: These strategies focus on external opportunities in order to decrease weaknesses.

-WT Strategies: These strategies are based on internal weaknesses and external threats and basically, they are defensive in nature.

**Key Words:** Tourism, Geotourism, Sahoolan Cave, SWOT Model.

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