

A Comparative Analysis of Cultural Vitality of Iranian Metropolises Case Study: Tehran, Isfahan, and Mashhad

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Introduction

These days the importance of art and culture as necessary capitals for growth and development has been highly recognized and the need for the economy to find new areas of investment for generating income, creating jobs and etc. has made many developing and developed countries to strive to make full use of their resources available for reaching sustainable development. Regarding this, by investing on their cultural resources, different countries try to promote the economic, social, and political development. On the path to national development, addressing cities and taking advantage of the city's opportunities to achieve urban development is a critical need. Optimal utilization of cultural resources to develop cities requires careful planning. Cultural planning, as the interconnected chapter of the three disciplines of cultural economics, urban economics, and urban planning, is considered to be a required tool for utilizing cultural resources for development. In order to design an optimal development plan, we need to have a complete and exact understanding of the current situation. In this regard, evaluating our performance in utilizing the cultural resources is the first step for any cultural development plan. Among the many existing criteria for cultural development trends of regions, cultural vitality is the most comprehensive one, which uses a combination of three indicators including: 1) the presence of opportunities for cultural participation; 2) cultural participation; and 3) support for culture, and 54 variables. Cultural vitality reflects the situation of a community in the production, dissemination and support for art and culture as bases of cultural capital as well as cultural, economic, and social development. Cultural vitality can provide a detailed picture of the possibility for growth and exploitation of cultural resources because of the use of multiple variables. It also measures the study areas potential to exploit existing cultural potentials.

Material & Methods

The present study aims to determine cultural vitality in the metropolitan cities of Tehran, Isfahan, and Mashhad. Furthermore, a comparison is made regarding the indicators and their sub-indicators for the aforementioned metropolitan cities. According to this, the study is a practical and a descriptive-analytical research in terms of the purpose and method. The required data for evaluating cultural vitality and its three indicators were directly obtained from the relevant organizations and statistical calendars. Each of the three indicators of cultural vitality include several sub-indicators as following; Opportunities for cultural participation include: 1) nonprofit, public, and commercial arts-related organizations, 2) retail arts venues, 3) non-arts venues with arts and cultural programming, 4) festivals and parades, 5) arts-focused

media outlets, 6) art schools. Cultural participation includes: 1) audience participation, 2) discourse about arts and culture in the media. Finally, Support for culture comprises public expenditures in support for the arts in all sectors.

In line with the goal of this investigation, the data were standardized using statistical procedures including averages and standard deviation in order to obtain the same unit of different variables and data and to prevent data bias. Finally, using simple average of the variables, the main sub-indicators were calculated and, using the average of the main three sub-indicators, cultural vitality was measured for the three mentioned metropolitan cities through the years 1392-1395 (March 21, 2013 - March 21, 2016).

Discussion, Results & Conclusions

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Evaluating Cultural vitality in this study indicated that Isfahan ranked first among the three studied metropolitan cities, moving forward through improving its performance from 0.203 at the beginning of the period to 0.792 at the end. Tehran ranked as the second city among the three, making slight improvement in its cultural vitality score from -0.321 to -0.041, and Mashhad was the third metropolitan city in terms of cultural vitality with a score of -0.069 at the end of the period comparing to its original level of -0.530 at the beginning.

Furthermore, regarding the three major sub-indicators of cultural vitality, Isfahan has the first rank in terms of opportunities for cultural participation, Tehran has the second rank and Mashhad is the last one with negative scores during the period. Regarding cultural participation, however, Tehran ranked first with the highest score in comparison with the other two metropolises and was the only metropolis with positive values for this indicator. After Tehran, Isfahan and Mashhad ranked as the second and third ones. Finally, according to the support for culture, Isfahan was first among the three metropolises studied during the research period. Mashhad ranked second and Tehran had the lowest value in this indicator gaining negative scores during the period.

Keywords: Cultural Vitality, Presence of Opportunities for Cultural Participation, Cultural Participation, Support for Culture.

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