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The Impact of Tourism Policy on Cultural Diplomacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Central Asia (1990-2017)

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

The article examines the impact of tourism policy on the cultural diplomacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Central Asia from 1990 to 2017 and explains the factors influencing tourism policy in the framework of Iranian cultural diplomacy. The research seeks to explore the question of how much tourism policy has strengthened and promoted the cultural diplomacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Central Asia.

Materials and Methods

A mixed qualitative and quantitative research method has been used to investigate on this issue, through the extraction of materials from original documents and the consultation of library resources explaining the impact of tourism policy on cultural diplomacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Central Asia as well as

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interviews with experts and the use of questionnaires and statistical analysis. A questionnaire composed of 19 questions has been used to survey on this issue. The opinions of 80 respondents from different groups of Iranian society who have responded to the questionnaire have been gathered and analysed. Out of these 80 people, 45 were men, 34 were women and one did not answer the question of gender. In terms of age, 13 were under 30, 44 were between 30 and 35, 17 were between 35 and 40, 4 were between 40 and 45, one was over 45, and one didn't respond. The frequency distribution of the variable of education among the respondents also demonstrates that there were 6 undergraduate students, 22 graduate students and 52 postgraduate students. 10 people did not give any response about their level of education.

Discussion and Results

In order to investigate on the normal distribution of data, the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test (KS Test) as well as T Test have been used to examine the hypothesis of the research. Research data demonstrates that most of the respondents have selected relatively the options of modest and very low impact of tourism policies on cultural diplomacy of the IR of Iran in Central Asia, expressing « very low » **impact for the** questions 9, 12, 13 and 19, and « relatively low » impact for the questions of 1, 6 and 8.

Most of the respondents have stated that the tourism policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran has built very low positive image of Iranian society in the Central Asian region. Most of the respondents have assessed as very low the success degree of tourism policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Central Asia. Respondents have stated that the interaction between the tourism policy and cultural diplomacy has been weak and that tourism policy has relatively not been able to take benefit of the capacity of cultural heritage and artistic music to attract the touristes of Central Asia to Iran.

In addition, respondents have stated the partial rate of success regarding the role of the Islamic Republic of Iran's tourism policy in facilitating the travel of the tourists from Central Asia to Iran, in familiarisation of tourists with the scientific and literary personalities of Iran, as well as with the natural and historical attractions of Iran, in enhancing mutual understanding and the respect to each other's culture in interaction with the touristes of Central Asia, in creating a sense of common identity, in promoting cultural convergence between Iran and Central Asian countries, in introducing Iranian national traditions to the Central Asian

tourists, in strengthening the impact of Iranian tourism structures on the capability and efficiency of Iranian cultural diplomacy in Cultural Asia.

Also, respondents have stated that the Islamic Republic of Iran's tourism policy in Central Asia has partially been capable to preserve the Iranian intangible cultural heritage with regard to the prevention of confiscation of Iranian academic, literary, and historical personalities by Central Asian countries.

Conclusions

The Research data analysis reveals that Iran's tourism policy has slightly strengthened the Iranian cultural diplomacy in Central Asia, so that the inhabitants of the Central Asian countries, despite their civilizational and cultural communalities with the Islamic Republic of Iran have low desire and interest to travel to Iran.

the weakness of interaction between the structure of policy making in tourism industry and the agents of cultural diplomacy, the relatively low capability to take benefit of the capacity of Iranian artistic music, cultural traditions, literature, as well as academic and cultural personalities in tourism industry, the lack of potentiality to build a positive image of Iranian society because of negative propaganda by western media against Iran, the weakness of tourism infrastructures, the political insinuations to intensify the cleavage of Shiite and Sunni schools of thought in Islam, the cultural and linguistic influence of some powers such as Russia and Turkey, and the dominance of political issues over cultural issues with regard to the Central Asian countries constitute some important reasons for the limited impact of the tourism policies on the Islamic Republic of Iran's cultural diplomacy in Central Asia.

Keywords: Tourism, Tourism policy, Cultural diplomacy, Islamic Republic of Iran, Central Asia

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