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Exploring Characteristics and Profile of Urban Ecotourism
(A Case Study from Tehran)

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Introduction

Nowadays, the tourism industry has been transformed to one of the largest and most profitable parts of the world economy. Urban ecotourism is a kind of tourism which appeals to the citizens interested in cultural, historical, religious and natural attractions and enjoy spending a part of their leisure time in this way. Therefore, this study is designed with an emphasis on natural tourism in the city of Tehran.

Urban ecotourism is of high potential for tourist attraction, so it has the potential for attracting financial benefits and creates job opportunities in many cities in Iran, including city of Tehran. Many cities of Iran enjoy having climatic diversity and have high potential in urban ecotourism attractions which unfortunately have not yet been explored. Various reasons address these deficiencies. The most significant and effective reason is a lack of knowledge about the characteristics of nature-loving tourists and their leisure pattern.

This paper via studying a high number of tourists, would determine their characteristics as well as their leisure pattern to provide a basis for proper decision making and planning for urban tourism.

Materials and methods

A questionnaire was used directly to gather the necessary data. In order to ascertain the admissibility and reliability of the questionnaire a Pilot Study was used. To carry out this test, prior to filling the questionnaire by the entire addressed population, questionnaire forms of a limited number of respondents (50 tourists) were selected and tested before finalizing the questionnaire of the entire population, so that the probable deficiencies of the questionnaire would be eliminated. Cronbach Alpha induction coefficient was computed to be 75%. The validity and reliability of the measurement approach was measured by a group of experts including six faculty members. After the required modifications were done, the final questionnaire was designed. The population of this research includes the entire tourists in three domains; urban parks, forest parks and river valleys about which an increase in the accuracy of the received responses, deepening the measurement approach and restricting the population were considered by the researchers.

Statistical data collection was done from the entire tourists of three domain; urban parks, forest parks and river valleys located in the city of Tehran, relative to the volume of the tourists in each domain.

3000 tourists were selected accidentally and a questionnaire was used to obtain their opinions. Among 3000 questionnaires, 2679 forms had adequate information and were worthy to study.

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The results were analyzed in three sections: professional and individual characteristics, time and place conditions of tourism and leisure pattern in tourism.

Results and discussion

In terms of age classification, there are clear differences between tourists who want to use River valleys and urban and forest parks which demands different planning for their accommodation. Perhaps this difference is related to physical fitness required for these habitats and places. When we study the aging division percentage of the tourists in each one of the spaces, this issue will become clearer because only 7% of the tourists are categorized in the group of river valleys, while for urban parks and forest parks this number is a little higher than 9% and 12% respectively.

Male tourists are 10% more than females in the three tourism spaces. This indicates more motivation of men relative to women in the usage of tourism spaces. In daily schedule of old men, there is frequently a time for tourism. In the condition of a shortage in resources in the comparison of old males with old females, this shows the necessity of serious considerations for the problems of people of all ages.

10.5% of the respondents were housewives. This indicates the necessity of paying special attention to planning for their enhancement of these facilities. Very low prosperity of illiterate people and considerable prosperity of people of higher education in all three groups led to the following conclusions: firstly, the necessity of more attention to eliminate problems of illiterate people and attract them to tourism centers. Secondly, the demand for planning in a way that provides educated people satisfaction.

Most of the respondents (74.8%) have a monthly income in the range of 500,000 toman (about 500 dollars). Their low income and information gained in concern with tourism and its related costs are not compatible with the demands of the existing theories in the world such as the hierarchy of Maslow. The respondents initially had a tendency to exit Tehran, and spend their leisure time in the selected river valleys, urban parks and forest parks.

The time distance between the place of residence and the tourism spaces is relatively appropriate according to the high traffic conditions of Tehran and surrounding cities.

One of the key issues for recreation and tourism is having leisure time and holiday. In Tehran this usually happens on the weekends and on special holidays which shows the necessity of correct planning for a wave of tourism that must be outlined by the authorities. On the other hand, the tendency to tourism in the first days of the week with an abundance of 1158 individuals is of fourth place priority, therefore we can conclude that there is not much tendency for tourism in this period and the centers have quiet days on these days. Planning for schools and offices tours in these days or planning for guiding tourists is preferable on these days.

Considering the results, the necessity of preparing the country's cultural fleet for using the natural tourism facilities during summers and falls becomes quite apparent. On the other hand, Iranian culture has been appealing from the past up to now, so using the green season that is a sign of new life as the favorite time for tourism seems to be quite logical. This is why autumns and winters are in low priority for tourism in Iran.

Considering the results related to the settling time in the domain of study, planning should be oriented towards short settlements so that the citizens can enhance these spaces in the best way in this short period of time. Thus the spaces related to the river valleys were under more consideration because the tourists spend more time in these habitats. The probable reasons are: the nature of the spaces, untouched beauties, distance from the noise and environmental pollutions of the metropolis, the recreational and cultural taste of Iranians, and less social and environmental restrictions of these centers.

It was also observed that women have more tendencies to family tourism than men. On the other hand, their tendency of passing their leisure time alone or accompanying friends as singles is less than men. In other words, women are more family oriented than men and show more social behavior explanation than men in this field. Considering Iranians cultural and historical background, it is not out of one's mind. Therefore in

Planning for making patterns for tourism, attention must be paid to the role of gender that can be a way of solving many problems.

By classification of age, gender, habitats distance to the specified locations, time period and duration of utilization, it was found that there are clear differences between the tourists of river valleys, urban and forest parks which shows the necessity of different planning for them. Therefore, considering the results obtained, this paper would present some recommendations for urban planning and tourism management optimization.

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Key Words

Urban Ecotourism, Tourist, Forest Parks, Urban Parks, River Valleys