

Archaeology and Cultural Tourism Development In Iran

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It is well known that the archaeological heritage of Iran is characterized by a wealth and diversity that make for an outstanding heritage. There is a wide variety of archaeological heritage ranging from ancient times to the different historical periods before and after Islam. Currently the nation's third largest industry, tourism is growing every year. Cultural tourism is one of the fastest growing aspects of tourism, with many archaeological sites becoming increasingly popular as tourist attractions. Cultural tourism is defined as "visits by persons from outside the host community motivated wholly or in part by interest in historical, artistic, scientific or lifestyle/heritage offerings of a community, region or group. It can also serve broader societal objectives of increasing awareness, understanding and appreciation of the past and of cultural identities. Cultural heritage tourism is an important contributor to the industry. Studies show that archaeological and historic places are major destinations for a growing number of travelers, both domestic and foreign. Heritage tourism is part of a larger trend known as cultural tourism. One of the hottest trends in the travel industry, cultural tourism is travel that encompasses Iranian sculture, history and environment. It is based on the idea that Iran is a rich country of distinct regions, ethnic backgrounds, cultural traditions and landscapes. This diverse history and unique social fabric can be experienced through such activities as visiting historic buildings, attending heritage festivals, listening to local music, touring archaeological sites, sampling ethnic cuisine, watching local crafts demonstrations, or viewing arts performances. The tourists who are searching for this type of unique, authentic experience are dubbed

cultural tourists. Typically cultural tourists have a higher income level and a higher level of education. They tend to take longer trips, stay in hotels and be interested in shopping. The cultural tourism phenomenon has recently received international attention, culminating in the providing a list of strategies, preparation of a Cultural Tourism Plan by any nations that will guide state-wide efforts. In Iran work is already underway to lay the foundation for sustainable cultural tourism development. The Iranian government has allocated funds for tourism development. The Division of Tourism oversee plan development in partnership with the Cultural Heritage Organisation, the Iranian Cultural Revolution Council, the Department of Natural Resources and other institutions, through both the national park system and the Archaeological and Historic Preservation Program. As the study progresses, the program will be looking to its many partners in the preservation community for help in gathering the information on cultural resources needed for a successful cultural tourism. In this paper I will briefly examine cultural heritage resource management, the state of tourism today and the bringing together of cultural preservation and tourism in the form of cultural tourism. I will conclude by presenting a series of challenges for those involved in ensuring that the quality of life in heritage areas can be enhanced through tourism development.

Keywords: Cultural Tourism; Tourism Development; Iranian Cultural (Archaeological) Heritage; Cultural Preservation and Tourism.

Iran is a country that is ideally suited for a discussion of sustainable cultural (Archaeological) tourism development. In Iran the great variety of topography and climate have contributed to the development of distinct landscapes and ecosystems. It also has a rich history, diverse culture and deep-rooted traditions as well as interesting buildings and man-made attractions. There are ethnic festivals and local celebrations of interest to visitors. In brief, Iran has an abundance of natural resources as well as cultural diversity with tremendous tourism potential. The government of Iran recognized many years ago the importance of conservation of its rich Archaeological and Natural legacy. This consciousness in concert with the growing world-wide Cultural and Environmental movement led the Iranian government to take precautionary steps to see that specific tourist and cultural and ecological areas were preserved and protected. This would then guarantee that future generations could continue to enjoy the past way of lives and abundant natural life that abounds in Iran.

The Iranian government has approached the preservation of its rich resources largely through the development of national parks. This type of sustainable tourism development helps promote the conservation of the natural and cultural heritage for the enjoyment of people and ensures ecological balance as tourism increases. Much of the maintenance and development of the parks is financed by fees charged tourists.

Tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing industries in the world. Whether tourism development is carefully planned and managed or just happens over time, the tourism industry needs to recognize that a natural and social environment can absorb only a maximum level of visitors, known as its carrying capacity, before it becomes saturated to the degree that the visitors and local community begin to experience

negative effects.

Tourism and Cultural Heritage Tourism

Cultural heritage tourism has a number of objectives that must be met within the context of sustainable development. They can be seen to include:

the conservation of cultural resources;

accurate interpretation of resources;

authentic visitor experiences;

the stimulation of the earned revenues of cultural resources (Jamieson 2000).

We can see therefore, that cultural heritage tourism is not only concerned with the identification, management and protection of heritage values but it must also be involved in understanding the impact of tourism on communities and regions, achieving economic & social benefits, providing financial resources for protection, as well as marketing & promotion. One of the significant challenges facing cultural heritage tourism is to ensure the successful involvement of a wide range of actors concerned with tourism development and planning.

Each heritage area should be viewed as a destination with a large number of interdependent activities and concerns. This provides the community, as well as the many stakeholders involved in planning and management, with a more interdisciplinary and comprehensive form of tourism development. There are a number of obstacles to achieving sustainable heritage tourism destinations (Silberberg 1995, see also McIntosh and Goeldner 1990). Some major obstacles include the lack of financial resources, poor forms of governance, inappropriate project management processes, ineffective enforcement of regulations, corruption and lack of support for heritage conservation.

In this paper I will briefly examine (archaeological) cultural heritage

resource management, the state of tourism today and the bringing together of cultural preservation and tourism in the form of cultural tourism. I will conclude by presenting a series of challenges for those involved in ensuring that the quality of life in heritage areas can be enhanced through tourism development.

Economic development of Iran has been quite extensive, taking up huge areas of lands for agriculture and construction projects and encompassing a large number of improvement projects of infrastructure and tourist areas. These land use methods have left both material culture remains and an archaeologically identifiable impact on the environment, thus increasing the need to develop strong cultural resource preservation strategies. In Iran as many other countries, it is quite evident that economic interests can and do conflict with the protection of archaeological resources. Construction projects although much needed in Iran, have involved destruction of major archaeological sites. Although one cannot argue with the need for these projects as economically advantageous the absence of mechanisms to evaluate and mitigate negative impacts on cultural and archaeological resources is regrettable. In extreme circumstances the lack of governmental involvement and international cooperation has resulted in vandalism and looting of archaeological resources. Public understanding, support and involvement are essential in the conservation of any national heritage because:

Threats can arise from a weak socioeconomic base, attitudes of policymakers, administrators, professionals, and the public at large, and the absence of good policies and programs. The study of effective preservation tactics has been a common theme in archaeology. In many countries archaeological resource preservation has taken on many different meaning.

Archaeology and Tourism Development

The links that the cultural (archaeological) heritage maintains with tourism and, conversely, the links that the tourist sector is seeking to establish with the kind of attraction represented by an archaeology that dates back sometimes thousands of years, are manifold. There is mutual dependence between tourism and the archaeological heritage. The latter needs tourism which can justify restoration, maintenance or renovation work. In exchange, tourism needs the archaeological heritage to enrich and diversify its product and offer something that is unique to the region. There are many ways in which tourism intervenes and utilizes the archaeological heritage in Iran. Those which have been reported in the various studies can be placed in three main categories: specific adaptation projects allowing ruins to be utilized, buildings put to a new use to host tourist activities, such as accommodation, restaurants or shops (Jamieson 2000), and the use of historical monuments as backdrops for the organization of various festivals. The first kind of adaptation is equipping monuments so that they can be used for the above purposes. This applies to the majority of the most prominent monuments such as the ancient Caravansaries.

There is another kind of development which is crucial for cultural tourism but which is remarkable by its absence in Iran. There are information panels with maps, sketches or explanations for independent tourists wishing to visit without a guide. There is a similar absence of sign-posted roads indicating the way to a particular monument. The absence of these aids, which do not actually require substantial investment, does cultural tourism a disservice. Walking around some archaeological sites to visit all their components is a real nightmare for the tourist who wishes to do without the services of a guide. The most popular archaeological and architectural sites would also gain by being

fitted out with clean toilets and at least basic refreshment facilities. Certain countries, the studies have strongly stressed the paradox that exists between a remarkable wealth of monuments and the scarcity, or even total lack, of facilities that would allow these monuments to be incorporated into the growing or already established tourist product (Jamieson 2000. see also Bramwell and Lann 1993). In Iran, this point has been well illustrated by the case of many of archaeological sites. Despite their cultural wealth, their adjacent cities do not meet average international tourism standards. In many old cities there are few hotel establishments with extremely limited capacity and amenities. They also do not have a single restaurant for the visitor. In addition, the cities have not a single theatre or other facility that would allow shows or other entertainment to be put on for foreign visitors. Promotion of the valuable cultural resources of the old cities by means of their architecture and town planning requires (1) development and investment to train guides; (2) to produce appropriate advertising material; (3) to raise public awareness of the benefits that tourism can bring to the city; (4) and to support and encourage the craft industry and private investment (Fyall and Garrod 1996). In addition, the lack of facilities and the lack of supervision of visits threaten the very future of the heritage which is to be promoted. This is the case, for example, in the Khusistan Province Southern Iran, where the archaeological sites at Tang-e-Sarvak, faces considerable damage.

With regard to the archaeological heritage the recommendations concern improving the visibility of monuments and sites. For this to happen, it is necessary to improve road access to sites and above all to put in place a systematic series of road signs enabling independent tourists and visitors to reach and visit the monuments. Excavation and restoration work must be rounded off by an attempt to promote the

monuments and to boost their attraction. Adapting some of archaeological sites to tourist use must not overshadow the need to protect them (deCros and McKercher 1999). Sites must be strictly protected against any tourist or constructions being located nearby which could, because of its proximity, adversely affect the size or visibility of the site. Such protection may take the form of institutional monitoring of all private or public projects that entail converting old residences into modern facilities. Above all, with a forecast growth in tourist numbers, a master plan will be needed for each of the historic and archaeological sites, establishing the conditions for their use by tourists. This plan should establish strict and precise regulatory protection for the area around the sites, car parking regulations and the access for group visits. It should also allocate guard duties and specify security patrols. It should specify the use of the land adjacent to the site, the location of excavation or restoration work, and what service buildings (ticket offices, security office, shops, cafeterias, toilets) and other facilities (information panels, signs, wastepaper bins) are necessary. The coordination of historic sites with tourism requires thorough studies to devise the best way of preparing them to function in conjunction with tourism. The use of ancient buildings for artistic events or for organizing festivals is a beneficial use of ruins, allowing them to be brought back to life.

Deterioration of Archaeological Sites

The archaeological heritage is suffering obvious damage as well as a lack of resources to restore or renovate it, when that heritage is put to uncontrolled tourist use, there is a great risk of increased damage (see deCros and McKercher 1999; Jacobs and Gale 1994). The kind of use that can lead to deterioration ranges from just ordinary visits. The first

type of deterioration is illustrated by the case of Takht-e-Jamshid a 5th B.C. Achaemenid palaces. The monuments there, while benefiting tourism, tend to suffer damage caused by the pressure of the heavy tourist numbers. As well as direct vehicle access spoiling the site, graffiti, cracking and the increase in humidity levels inside the palaces are some of the management problems posed by the huge numbers coming to the monuments. The historic sites are not sufficiently protected against invasive urbanization. In the Hamadan the area around the ancient mound where new building is prohibited seems insufficient to safeguard the site. The formula of organizing festivals on the site of the ruins also involves serious risk of damage; the large numbers of visitors, who are mostly from the country in question, threaten the conservation of the ruins. There is an absence of specific facilities and guidelines to tailor the use of the areas of these sites for the different festival activities, depending on their fragility, and to deal with the influx of people attending them (Berry 1994). This has meant that these vulnerable sites have been forced to suffer very heavy use (Berriane 1999). Turning part of this heritage over to tourist use can help bring in valuable funds, but such tourist use sometimes leads to irreversible damage to heritage sites. For this reason, the project to safeguard the mud brick architecture of Chogha Zanbil a world heritage site has chosen to ignore the tourist dimension, even though initially the cultural and tourist aspects had been given very careful consideration.

A National Archaeological Park

It is absolutely essential that this project be accompanied by measures to protect the archaeological sites and monuments, which are under threat from the development both of the modern built environment and the natural hazards. The customary protection and intervention

procedures based on prohibitions and stiff penalties are difficult to apply over a long period of time and are thus not very effective. What needs to be done is to develop strategies that appeal to the local people for their cooperation and consent. Protection of the archaeological and natural heritage will need to be combined with the development of modern housing and economic activities. The creation of a regional natural and archaeological park would be the appropriate solution. Such a park, covering an area with a rich but fragile heritage, could provide protection and sustainable development for that heritage. The project must gather and analyse all the information available on the natural and human environment. On the basis of this information, it must consider the development prospects for the region. It must propose an action plan to set up an archaeological, tourist and archaeological park. It must delineate the limits of the park and its sensitive areas. Although a possible feasibility study has yet to be carried out, the following general action plan can be outlined: (WTO 1992 and see also Berriane 1999)

(1) The development of tourist information, accommodation and service structures as well as development to public services. (2) Studies concerning the protection and restoration of the local heritage. Incorporation into school syllabi of cultural material related to the history of the region. (3) The training of guides selected from the local population. (4) To set up the project it would be desirable to take immediate and initial steps to having the region accepted as a World Heritage Site.

The Role of Museums

The role played by museums it is possible to go in search of the other through their heritage and their authentic daily life, thanks to the concentration of valuable objects to be found in museums. That is

especially the case in museums specializing in popular arts and traditions. Yet national museums are able to combine different themes and show scenes from daily life alongside historical and archaeological themes. Each of museums in Iran has a number of fairly specialized museums focusing in part on popular arts and traditions (Foanota 1994).

Conclusions and Suggestions

In conclusion, this document clearly builds a case that cultural tourism development in essence means seeking growth and provides a quality product to the visitor, and embraces local involvement. It strongly suggests responsible tourism management must protect the resources while adding to an area's overall tourism product. In the process of cultural tourism management, the broad goals of economic, social, and cultural values must be maintained (Berriane 1999). At this stage of the analysis, the main lessons to be drawn from the overall picture of tourism and culture in Iran are the following: Despite the advances achieved by certain destinations in Iran, this country has fallen a long way behind the other developed countries in regard to tourism. However this country is strongly committed to developing tourism. The potential is considerable, the institutions have a sound structure, and the services and infrastructure are currently being put in place. One of the major limitations of the region in regard to the attraction of tourists is the political and revolutionary cultural values of the country. Yet this limitation pits the country against the giants of mass tourism such as Europe and the Mediterranean areas. It is imperative that Iran shows that it is distinct from the other destinations. It would be difficult for this destination to attempt to base its tourist products on the needs that the European tourist could more easily satisfy elsewhere. Indeed, one can hardly see Iran to be a place in the European tourist market in

terms of resort tourism or so on; instead, to be competitive, Iran ought therefore to define specific tourist products based on attractions that are only to be found in this country and its cultural entity. In this search for specific products, culture represents a major asset for Iran compared to Western tourism. The authority in Iran tries to base tourism on the country's cultural riches, and the developments described above have certainly promoted utilization of the cultural element. Yet this is above all a very classic use of culture, which gives pride of place to rushed visits of museums, archaeological sites and historic cities. The drawback of this classic promotion of culture is that it involves short stays and there is the risk of saturation from repeated visits to the same sites. Thus, the main lesson that can be drawn from the various studies carried out in this program is precisely the need to show imagination in developing new cultural products. Taking this point also to account that cultural tourism remains one of the best means of teaching people about and giving them access to culture. It thereby allows cultural education to be made available to the greatest number of people and helps to provide a pleasant and comfortable means of getting to know the culture and identity of another people (Jameson 1994). It is thus in the interests of the players in the areas of tourism and culture to work jointly. Coordination between tourism and culture must not rely exclusively on the action of the public authorities. Professionals in the sector regional and professional associations and local bodies can also take initiatives, both individually and collectively. The role of the State should be limited to raising awareness among the players concerned. This kind of tourism, even cultural tourism, can lead to excesses and can risk damaging a heritage that is difficult to restore (Fyall and Garrod 1996). It is therefore a question of surrounding this promotion of culture with all the necessary forms of protection to avoid causing

irreparable damage and to meet the need for sustainability for any program in the area.

Reducing Problems through Effective Management

Management strategies to reduce problem areas are emerging. Solutions can be long-term, expensive, and disruptive to the tourism industry. Management approaches of a practical nature, however, are worth considering in a sustainable tourism development program. In order to achieve this, it would be wise to bear in mind the spirit of the World Charter for Sustainable Tourism, Article 1 of which states as follows: Tourism Development shall be based on criteria of sustainability, which means that it must be ecologically bearable in the long term as well as economically viable, and ethically and socially equitable for local communities. This charter suggests new roles for the public and private sector in sustainable tourism development. Sustainable development calls for a change in the traditional roles that participants play in the development process (ICOMOS 1998). In one sense, the new and expanded roles of the private sector and the community are matched by the reduced role of government. This is especially true in day-to-day implementation and operation activities. Yet privatization in sustainable tourism development does not mean that government takes a back seat to the other players. Nor does it mean that government must not deal with the development process. On the contrary, one of the key roles that government plays in sustainable development is by bringing people together and tacking effective role to help guide planning and management decisions, the government gains more control by being a more effective manager. Another strategy is to apply new and innovative technology in achieving sustainable tourism. For example, technology that provides better use of the resources. To

be effective, the technology needs to demonstrate that its use will also help increase economic benefits. In addition, development educational and awareness programs to inform the public and visitors about the importance of protected areas, about conservation principles, and the need to respect cultural areas (Jameson 1994).

In summary the following suggestions would be appropriate: (see Ellia 1993; Fyall and Garrod 1996)

(1) encouraging people to have a clear sense of their own past and ways of preserving it.

(2) promoting legislation control.

(3) assigning research involving national identity among those interested in preserving and utilizing archaeological heritage.

(4) use of museum to display tangible and intangible heritage to the public.

(5) developing a nationally-based preservation policy that includes an inventory and database of archaeological heritage.

(6) the increasing popularity of tourist visitors to archaeological sites could be a viable option: One example is the in situ or open air museum exhibit where the public can view artifacts, deposits, living surface, rock art, architecture and other features in their original setting

(7) cultural tourism whether it is focused on in situ exhibit, museum or historical reconstructions, provides a way for development activities which could be used in positive way for the archaeological heritage. Without any form of Archaeological (Cultural) Heritage Management most of the world's archaeological sites and monuments would have rapidly disappeared under human and environmental degradation

(8) the preservation of archaeological heritage should be of paramount importance to all nations. Preserving contiguous elements of nature and society together holds many long-term benefits:

- (a) contributing to local pride
- (b) appreciation of all archaeological heritage
- (c) helping to archive a comprehensive archaeological heritage program (such as cultural tourism program) that benefits the country's economy.

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