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Study on Tourism Development Free Trade Area (Case Study Qeshm)

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Abstract
Today, the tourism industry is regarded as the most inclusive service industry worldwide that serves as a substantial source of economic prosperity (job creation, foreign exchange earnings, poverty mitigation, etc.) and elevated exchanges and social interaction. For this, areas with a high potential in tourism should take proper strategies to hold the economic and socio-cultural benefits of this industry. Free trade zones in Iran, particularly Kish, Qeshm, and Chabahar, can primarily consider the tourism industry and attract tourists to achieve economic goals, as declared in the law governs the establishment of free zones and also in the economic, social and cultural program of the country. Herein, this work attempts to identify appropriate strategies for tourism development in Qeshm Free Trade Zone to develop the tourism industry and economic-cultural sectors. For this, the strengths and weaknesses (internal factors) and opportunities and threats (foreign factors) were identified using the SWOT technique and the opinions of experts and specialists. The multi-criteria decision model ANP (an analytic network process) was used to prioritize and rank internal and external factors and determine the ultimate value of a collection of internal and external factors, aiming to prioritize and adopt the best strategy in the form of SO, WO, ST, and WT solutions. And the final value of each of these solutions was respectively 0.28, 0.39, 0.23, and 0.49. Initial results indicated the supremacy of the offensive strategy with the highest value (0.49) that is considered as the predominant strategy. The foremost strengths and opportunities in the region include investment in the private sector, security for tourists, the distribution and variety of tourist attraction sources, and the participation of indigenous people in the Qeshm region.

Keywords: Tourism capabilities, tourism development, Qeshm, SWOT-ANP

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Introduction

In the modern age, factors including the globalization of capitalism, population mobility, and the development of communication technology have contributed to the growth and development of tourism as one of the largest productive industries. Today, the tourism industry has converted into one of the central components of socio-economic transformation (Mohammad, 2013, 183). The tourism industry has substantially developed worldwide, and many countries have largely improved their situation and position using this approach (Nourbakhsh and Akbarpour Sareskanroud, 2010, 21). As a prosperous phenomenon, tourism is constantly progressing onward. It expands its value and attracts most people across the world. Tourism is currently one of the most influential industries in the world (Firuzjaiyan et al., 2014, 144). As a tool for economic development, the tourism industry, primarily, makes considerable profits from foreign exchange and job opportunities (Kala and Maikhuri, 2011, 87) and raises national incomes (Lotfi, Pourali, Karami, Tarnas, & Tandeh, 2015, 26). Development of the tourism industry is a complicated process that includes the international and national developmental factors of the groups involved in government policy, planning, and legislation (Telfer and Sharpley, 2008, 80). Hence, countries are attempting to help to benefit from (and enhance the satisfaction of) the positive aspects of this industry by rendering and valuing tourist attraction sites in potential areas (Rosentraub and Joo, 2009, 766). From statistics, a dollar from direct tourism revenue will rise in value by 1.3 compared to the industry (Bin et al., 2008, 84). From 1950 to 2007, the number of international tourists has been grown from 25 million to 903 million, and revenue from this sector has been reached $865 billion. By 2020, the number of tourists is projected to reach 1.6 billion (Moreno Et al., 2009, 1550; World Tourism Organization, 2006). Also, we are witnessing the distribution of tourists in various countries (Calero & Turner, 2020, 6). Some countries, holding many facilities, have served to receive tourists in every way. Such countries (e.g. France, the USA, Spain, Italy, Germany, Japan, China, etc.) have been very prosperous in this sector

with all-round propaganda (Daylamani, 1999, 274). Having potential tourism capabilities, Iran can attract 20 million tourists annually and hence gain revenue of $10 billion. But now, just less than 1.7 million people visit the country, which brings in 85 thousand dollars. Today, free trade zones (FTZs) with capabilities to expand exports, create jobs, and attract foreign and domestic investment can play an important role in the development of Iran's economy (Fatemi & Fatemi, 2020, 4). Also, the economic, political, and social structure and laws governing them can be a proper platform to develop the tourism industry (Moscardo, 2005, 28).

Therefore, considering the position of tourism in Iran's FTZs, especially Qeshm, can largely assist to plan and make decisions corresponding to the capabilities of these regions to develop and achieve the desired goals. Although basic natures and the origin of these areas are based on economic components, investment in infrastructure and potential use of the region to develop tourism is of particular importance (Ghaderi et al., 2011, 102).

Since Qeshm Island is deprived and there is a high rate of youth unemployment in this region, it is crucial to benefit all facilities and capabilities to eliminate such privations, create employment and earn profit in various ways. For this, and as established thoroughly by the experience of other regions in the world, the development of tourism as a multi-sectoral project that cooperates with multiple areas such as economy, agriculture, culture, environment, and services can lead to socio-economic growth and progress. Such a plan can be an influential tool for the development of this island. This study attempts to ascertain and identify appropriate strategies for tourism development in Qeshm FTZ, aiming to expand tourism and economic-cultural growth of the region using a combination of network analysis models and SWOT. The study also aims to investigate the status of tourism development in Qeshm Island and offer solutions for sustainable tourism development in this province to develop the economy and tourism industry in the region in the prospect.

Research Background

Local or regional tourism destinations have been identified as the most important destination type on which to focus developmental initiatives including planning and marketing (Assaf, Li, Song, & Tsionas, 2019, 385). The basis of such a regional tourism development strategy is the

realization that each region has its own strengths and weaknesses in terms of its position in the minds of travelers (Teixeira & Ferreira, 2019, 19). The strategy recognizes the varied needs, level of maturity and vision of each region and need for support within the context of the existing regional administrative units, as is the practice in successful destinations (Dredge & Jenkins, 2007, 24). This is significant as such units already have established structures that would be necessary for the success of tourism development initiatives (Idrus, 2020,19). However, there is need for synergistic partnership between the central government and regional (country) governments in pursuit of sustainable tourism (Monterrubio, Andriotis, & Stylidis, 2020,37).

After three decades since the creation of FTZs, the underlying concept has not yet fully developed (and/or recognized) and is still under growth and expansion. Hence, these regions come with no long history in the last decade and have not contributed prominently to international trade. Therefore, there are no widespread theoretical studies in FTZs. In the following, we summarize some research into FTZs in recent years.

Shakeri and Salimi (2006) prioritized factors influencing investment attraction in Chabahar FTZ using the AHP method. They found that the central concern in this region is the lack of proper executive organizations and efficient management. Ebrahimzadeh (2011) studied the potential of Chabahar FTZ on the development of tourism in this region using the regression model. The results indicated that marine transport, advertising and marketing, medical tourism facilities, and recreational and cultural facilities have the highest negative impact on the region, with coefficients of 0.078, 0.081, 0.078, and 0.076, respectively. Also, factors related to infrastructural structures such as gas and telephone and management have the least impact on this frustration, with coefficients of 0.034, 0.06, and 0.061, respectively.

Bargi et al., (2012) investigated the planning for sustainable tourism development in the Persian Gulf and ascertained that the study area has a high capacity to attract tourists, and thereby, highlighted the necessity to take measures to advance the goals of interest. Dashti et

al. (2012) attempted to propose a land-use planning model for tourism development in the Persian Gulf with an emphasis on Qeshm Island. They classified 20 tourism criteria into three main physical, biological, and socio-economic-cultural categories using the Delphi method. According to multi-criteria decision models and using GIS tools, areas fitting for tourism development in Qeshm Island were identified. Rustaei et al. (2014) studied land zoning for urban development of the central district of Aras FTZ using the AHP model. They worked with six indicators, including distance from the fault, Aras's riparian zone, flood channel area, land type, erosion, and slope). The results revealed that the most optimal location for urban development is placed in the south, southwest, and west of the region, according to the distance from natural crisis factors, which occupies 4762 hectares of the region.

Theoretical Foundations

When import-based development strategies were relatively failed, many developing countries slipped toward export-oriented strategies. Thereafter, more affordable and surplus labor in developing countries and high wages in industrialized countries commenced foreign companies to perform their user-generated activities in developing countries. On the other hand, such developing countries embraced this trend to overcome the problem of unemployment in their homelands. Simultaneously, growing trade restrictions led several multi-national companies to invest in these areas to maintain and expand their markets. Therefore, earning foreign exchange, transferring technology, creating forward and backward connections in some cases, establishing export processing zones, and developing a specific region were deemed stronger than generating employment and earning foreign exchange. Finally, the existence of the fundamental infrastructure in these areas, customs exemptions, financial incentives, and the lack of bureaucracy with them have been other factors in the creation of such areas (Ebrahimzadeh, 2011, 9). Free zones are amongst the autonomous regions in terms of management and administration of affairs from the decision-making stage to implementation and supervision that manages local affairs in specific geographical areas with given authorities and job descriptions. The free zone is a restricted geographical area enclosed within the national customs, including port, sea, island, or part of the country, where

industrial and commercial activities and the entry and exit of goods is not subjected to restrictions by a given law and customs regulations (Hafeznia et al., 2009, 22). The term "free port" comes with a distinct concept from a commercial point of view. It is a port that can be utilized to import and store goods or convert them into other goods and re-export them under a special situation, without any duties. Free zones were established and expanded after the United Nations in the second half of the 1960s adopted the export development strategy as the predominant operating system for rapid industrialization in developing countries.

Research Methodology

To assess advancements in the tourism industry in Qeshm Island, influential internal and external factors were identified according to the opinion of specialists and experts, and interviews with visitors, tourists, and native residents. The results were analyzed to adopt an optimal and powerful strategy to promote sustainable development and diminish adverse effects. For these, according to the documentary sources and information accessible (Hormozgan province spatial planning, Qeshm civil development plan, etc.), topographic maps with a scale of 1: 50,000, lithological maps with a scale of 1: 100,000 and also, satellite images and data related to field studies at Qeshm Island were prepared, and the restrictions in the region were studied. Then, the ANP-SWOT analytical method was used to analyze the data and propose a strategy and approach appropriate to the circumstances and conditions of the study area and prioritize the executive strategies. A list of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats was identified by examining the influential internal and external environment in the region. Then, factors were weighted by discussing with the relevant experts and specialists. Finally, the network structure of factors was established and set in the Super Decision software by adjusting the internal and external strategic factors that are the basis in formulating the strategy, aiming to determine the priority and adopt the best strategies.

Location of the study area

Qeshm Island is located a few kilometers off the southern coast of Iran (Persian Gulf), opposite the port cities of Bandar Abbas and Bandar Khamir. The island, which hosts a 300-square-kilometre (116-square-mile) free zone jurisdiction, is 135 km long, and lies strategically in the Strait of Hormuz, just 60 kilometres (37 miles) from the Omani port of Khasab, and about 180 kilometres (112 miles) from the UAE Port Rashid. The island, at its widest point, located near the center of the island, spans 40 kilometres (25 miles). Similarly, at it narrowest point, the island spans 9.4 kilometres (5.8 miles). The island has a surface area of 1,491 square kilometres (576 square miles) and is 2.5 times the size of Bahrain. Qeshm, located at the easternmost point of the island, is 22 kilometres (14 miles) from Bandar Abbas while the closest point of the island is but two kilometres (1 mile) from the mainland. This island was called Abarkavan during the Sassanid era. and was divided into three central parts, Shahab section, Hormoz section and seven villages. According to the latest divisions of the country, today Qeshm city has 64 cities and villages. The main activity in these islands is fishing. Recently, the pristine nature and the clear coast of these islands have been noticed by tourists. In terms of geographical location, Qeshm is from the north to Bandar Abbas, the center of Khamir and part of Bandar Lengeh, from the northeast to Hormoz Island, from the east to Lark Island, from the south to Hengam Island and from the southwest to Tonb and Abu Musa islands. Is limited. The distance from Qeshm Island (from Qeshm port) to Bandar Abbas (20 km). The area of the island is 1491 square kilometers (Sarvar and Khaliji, 2013).

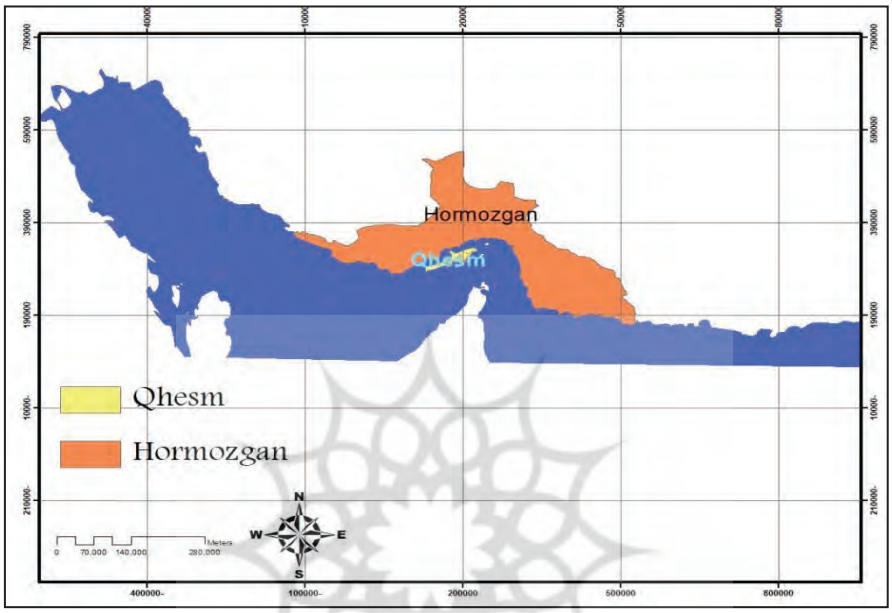

Figure (1): Location and Scope of Study

3. Results

Tourism with its features can act as a central component in free zones for creating employment, earning foreign exchange, and regional development. Hence, investment in this sector is growing in all countries having tourist attractions, including Iran. Strictly speaking, free zones are a relatively modern phenomenon for countries to achieve goals such as developing the national economy, attracting foreign investment, using regional comparative advantages, creating job opportunities, increasing revenues from service activities, knowing about the global economy, regional development, and converting the backward sectors into poles of development and exploiting them. Tourism development in these areas is intertwined with a set of economic, socio-cultural, and environmental factors. It can lead to economic prosperity, poverty reduction, employment growth, sustainable development, and communications between international and different cultures, increasing social welfare, and

flourish regional talents. Despite FTZs in Iran have especially considered, progresses in activities and the realization of goals in the country has not been satisfactory over the past years. To achieve predetermined goals, Qeshm FTZ has been a foremost strategy for tourism development and the use of potential natural and human resources of the region for employment, currency, and regional growth. However, after several years since the establishment of the free zone, short- and medium-term goals determined for this region in the field of tourism development have not been realized. As reasons for this omission, that is the weakness of Qeshm FTZ in the tourism sector, the lack of efficient management, and, simultaneously, the employment of authorities with no related skills in the tourism industry can be highlighted. The inability of managers to understand the dynamic industry and the expansion of tourism has prevented a proper conclusion of the matters in this sector and the implementation of required programs to make it dynamic about regional capabilities. The lack of knowledge with domestic and foreign tourists with the potentials of the region is another principal obstacle and restriction with the region's tourism. This designates the weakness in advertising and recognizing the potentials and capacities to attract tourists to this region, despite this factor considerably affects attracting tourists in the Qeshm FTZ.

Findings

In the first stage, which is the entrance stage, after surveys and surveys conducted by the Delphi method, the opinions of experts (experts in tourism, urban planning and urban planning) on the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities of environmental factors, coefficient and rank They are collected so that in the next steps, the total final score of the calculated factors in Super Decision software is assigned to the specified criteria. At this stage, the internal factors evaluation matrix (Table 1) and external factors (Table 2) were extracted.

Table 1- Evaluation matrix of internal factors governing Qeshm Free Zone (IFAS)

strength	weakness
S1 Provide security for the presence of tourists in the area	W1 Imbalance in physical, environmental
S2 Determination of Qeshm Free Zone officials for tourism development	W2 Depreciation of tourism facilities
S3 Dispersal of tourist attractions in the region	W3 Low level of public knowledge about tourists
S4 Cultural development and customs of the people of the region	W4 Lack of advertising and culture in the field of tourism in the region

Source: Author Findings

Table 2: External Factor Evaluation Matrix (EFAS)

opportunity	Threat
O1 Existence of investment in the field of tourism by the private sector	T1 Demolition of traditional island construction
O2 Deployment on international flight routes	T2 Erosion and environmental pollution
O3 Prosperity of economic activities (handicrafts, fishing, construction, etc.)	T3 Tensions and political crises in the region
O4 Motivate more people to travel to the southern islands	T4 Presence of strong competitors on the Persian Gulf

Source: Author Findings

In the second stage, the combined model ANP-SWOT is the analysis of the problem into a network structure that includes the goal, criteria, sub-criteria and strategies and finally creates the network structure of the research (Figure 2).

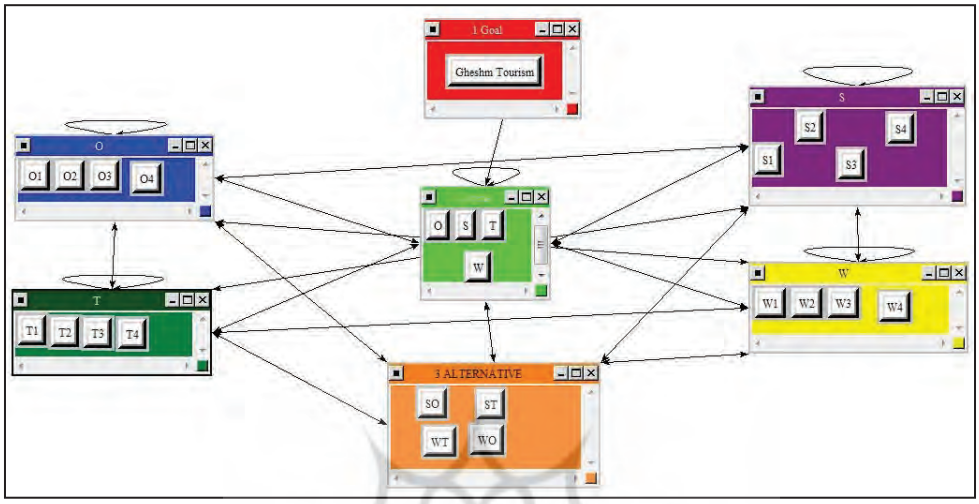

Figure (2): Network structure (ANP-SWOT) of Qeshm Free Zone tourism evaluation

Then, by clarifying the problem and analyzing it (in order to determine the best strategy), pairwise comparisons were made between the four main criteria of the SWOT model in each set of factors under the criteria separately in Super Decision software. The results can be seen in the following tables. The relative weight of each sub-criterion was determined by the method of special value (final value), the final weights of each criterion (Table 3).

Table 3- Comparison of pairs and networks of internal and external factors in Super Decision software

criteria	sub criteria	normal	Limited	criteria	sub criteria	normal	Limited
Strengths	S1	0،04774	0،00329	Threats	T1	0،1152	0،0079
	S2	0،35964	0،01559		T2	0،1897	0،0118
	S3	0،16662	0،00797		T3	0،3117	0،0182
	S4	0،10837	0،00568		T4	0،1614	0،0103
Final Value	S	0،16906	0،01084	Final Value	T	0،165	0،0111
weakness	W1	0،10913	0،00246	Opportunities	O1	0،1096	0،003
	W2	0،10321	0،00241		O2	0،1037	0،0029
	W3	0،24724	0،00375		O3	0،2478	0،0043
	W4	0،1073	0،00244		O4	0،1078	0،003
Final Value	W	0،1096	0،003	Final Value	O	0،1614	0،0103

In a general view of all calculations related to this stage, comparisons and determination of the final weights of all factors in the four levels of research structure and also the effectiveness of each of the criteria and sub-criteria in the four strategies (by Super Decision software) Was calculated (Table 4).

Table 4 - Calculating the weight of effective criteria in adopting four strategies

strategies / Final Value	Normalized By Cluster	Limiting	
Aggressive (SO)	0،49011	0،36017	Dominant strategy
Conservative (ST)	0،39744	0،29857	
Competitive (WO)	0،23754	0،19229	
Defensive (WT)	0،28527	0،22401	

Finally, the results are used in the development process and strategy. Which will lead to the formation of the SWOT matrix for the study area in the form of Table 5.

Table 5- SWOT matrix

Internal-external factors	Strengths (S)	Weaknesses (W)
Opportunities (O)	Aggressive Strategies (SO)	Review Strategies (WO)
Threats (T)	Diversity Strategies (ST)	Defensive Strategies (WT)

One of the best methods in the integrated SWOT-ANP method to measure the effectiveness of each of the sub-criteria in terms of alignment with the strategies and executive strategies adopted is the use of rose diagram. Therefore, in this regard, the obtained value of each factor and their impact on the adoption of the superior strategy can be analyzed graphically, and through this in the final decisions of planners and experts, the impact of the desired factors can be To study and evaluate Qeshm in order to make the best use of opportunities, strengthen strengths, reduce or eliminate weaknesses and threats in tourism.

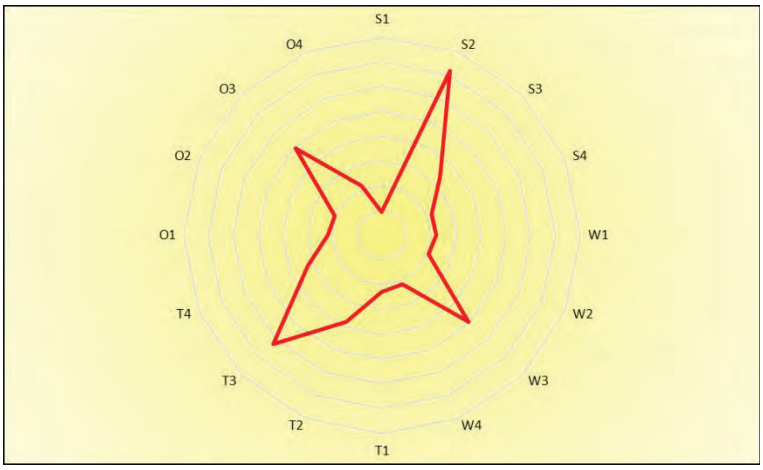

Figure (3): Analytical diagram rose diagram

4. Discussion

This study aims to identify appropriate strategies for tourism development in Qeshm FTZ to develop tourism and economic-cultural growth of the region using a combination of network analysis models and SWOT. The foremost feature of this work is to merge multi-criteria decision models. For this, developing and improving the efficiency of these models and tools to offer appropriate solutions to managers and planners is imperative. In particular, in this study, the combination of network analysis model with SWOT analytical model and accurate and reliable prioritization of internal and external factors of the SWOT matrix can provide acceptable and real results from related problems. In this combined approach, the central framework of decision-making factors is formed, and internal and external factors influencing decision-making are analyzed in the form of a SWOT model. Then, the results are included in the network analysis model to analyze the result of the SWOT model and establish mutual relations between the elements, aiming to propose the final strategies for managers and specialists according to all criteria, sub-criteria, and alternatives of the problem. Hence, the predicted strategies that can be effective in promoting the economic status and tourism growth in the region are as follows:

1. Investment in the private sector and granting security for tourists has made tourists and investors to involve in the Qeshm region. This

offers advantageous circumstances for the development of economic and tourism activities on the island and Qeshm FTZ (S1S2O1O4);
2. The distribution and diversity of tourist attractions as well as the highly customed and cultured people in the region are leading parameters for travelers and tourists to visit Qeshm Island;
3. The participation of local people and the decision of the administrators to develop tourism in Qeshm Island has converted the Qeshm TZ into the FTZ region in the field of tourism (S2O4);
4. Strengthening and building a platform for private sector investment, consideration of regional executives, and investing to avoid various types of erosion and environmental pollution in Qeshm Island (S2T2); and
5. Offering any kind of cultural products and required training to address political tensions and crises through informing based on the educational methods by educated people and the media, etc., in order to strengthen people's participation and expand relations, and cultural customs and granting more security for tourists and Qeshm FZ (S1S4T3).

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