Religious Perceptions and Hegemony on Tourism Development: the Case of the Islamic Republic of Iran

ALI KHAKSARI[1], TIMOTHY JEONGLYEOL LEE[2,3]* and CHOONG-KI LEE[3]

[1]Department of Planning, Faculty of Social Sciences, Allameh Tabatabai University, Tehran, Iran
[2]Tourism and Hospitality Management, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (APU), Beppu, 874-8577 Japan
[3]College of Hotel and Tourism, Kyung Hee University, 1 Hoegi-dong, Dongdaemun-gu, Seoul, 130-701 Korea

ABSTRACT

This paper highlights tourism development constraints with regard to religious perceptions in a religion-dominated country, Iran. The ruling class does not want to discount any of the fundamental social and cultural values in the process of preparing strategies for national tourism development plans. Countries such as Iran, concerned about potential negative influences of tourism development, de-emphasize potential positive economic impacts. In post-revolutionary Iran, tourism development and promotion follow unique, religiously-based strategies. The current five-year development plan is a first step towards a transition to the recognition of the importance of tourism for economic development and improved international relations. Copyright © 2014 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism can be an important impetus of economic growth for most countries; however, the extent to which tourism is promoted is influenced by factors such as religion and culture, and general attitude to foreign tourists. 'Religious perceptions' of tourism are the perceptions of a country's politico–religious elite, including government, political and religious leaders (Din, 1988; Marafat, 1995; Rowley, 1997; Martin and Mason, 2006). Cities in Saudi Arabia are visited as holy centers by both Sunni and Shiite pilgrims, but those in Iraq and Iran are only visited by Shiite pilgrims. It is widely recognized that the majority of Iranian Muslims wish to make pilgrimages to the city of Karballa, Iraq, to the holy Shrine of Imam Hussein (PH), when unable to visit the holy cities of Mecca and Medina. However, for eight years during the Iran–Iraq war, it was impossible for them to travel to holy cities in Iraq (Orbasli, 2007). This paper examines how religious perceptions affect the 'dos' and 'don'ts' of developing tourism, focusing on Iran. When tourism planners are working on strategies for tourism development in a religion-dominated country such as post-revolutionary Iran, they should be cognisant of the types of tourism development that are compatible with the dominant culture. Ap, Var and Din (1991, p. 321) argue that 'the official response to tourism development is usually a political manifestation of public attitude, especially with regard to the influence of the religious groups'.

The Government of Iran has grave concerns about the impacts of tourism development on the religious and social culture of society, whereas the general population has a different understanding and approach (Alavi and Yasin, 2000;

Beheshti, 2003; Zamani-Farahani and Musa, 2008). The purpose of this paper is to examine the topic from a different perspective: the state approach to monitoring industry promotion acknowledging that, with respect to some social issues, the perception of the government is not strongly in line with that of the general population. The paper also compares the tourism industry in Iran before and after the revolution.

Religious perceptions on tourism development in Islamic countries

In the Middle East, there are holy shrines and cities, religious buildings, festivals, and ceremonies that most practicing Muslims wish to visit. The most famous are the cities of Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia, Karballa, Najjaf and Samara in Iraq and Mashad and Qom in Iran. These cities are the most visited religious cities by Muslims across the world (Rowley, 1997; Armstrong, 2001; Aziz, 2001; Seddon and Khoja, 2003). Jafari (1983) points out: 'Christians visit the Vatican, Muslims make pilgrimage to Mecca, Jews visit Jerusalem' and such religious motivations present opportunities for governments to pursue tourism development. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is a strong example of the promotion of this type of tourism with more than three million Muslims from all over the world gathering in Mecca each year for the Hajj festival. However, the attitude towards promoting such religious pilgrimages as tourism varies markedly between Muslim countries. Din (1989, p. 547) argues that 'Muslim countries are generally not popular among international tourists'. Despite substantial similarities between Arab and other Islamic countries in terms of their general religious beliefs, there are major non-Arab Islamic countries, namely Iran, Malaysia and Turkey, in which, not only are the languages different, but also the social organizations, values and thinking. Such differences have considerable influence on tourism development (Khaksari, 2003).

*Correspondence to: Timothy Jeonglyeol Lee, PhD, Tourism and Hospitality Management, Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University (APU), Beppu, 874-8577 Japan.
E-mail: timlee7@apu.ac.jp

One major difference is religious leaders' perceptions concerning the possible negative socio-cultural impacts of tourism, particularly those imposed by international tourists. It is recognized in Iran that the more fundamentalist the ruling class is, the more constraints are applied to tourism development, and any economic benefit is not seen as important (Pramanik, 2003). When considering tourism development, Muslim countries are probably among the most sensitive, at least from the political point of view (Beheshti, 2003; Dabour, 2003; Asarh Weekly Newspaper, 2006). However, differences can be seen such as in the cases of Iran and Turkey. Although both are Muslim, tourism promotion varies due to the divergent attitudes of the ruling parties in the two countries towards tourism. The political regime in post-revolutionary Iran has centered on Islamic fundamentalism, whereas the political regime of contemporary Turkey is based on secularism, very similar to that practised in the prerevolutionary monarchy in Iran (Lotfi, 1999; Aziz, 2001; Tugal, 2002).

One must not underestimate the role of the religious jurist (*Valayat-e-faghih*) in Iran. The Shiite leadership oversees every aspect of the community. As Esposito and Ramazani (2001, p. 124) argue: 'Unlike the Sunni Muslims, the Shiite looks to their religious leaders for political and social as well as religious guidance'. The political regime in post-revolutionary Iran is an excellent example of a Shiite regime that endeavors to canalize almost all social agendas through the high ranking ayatollahs (Behdad, 1989). Many researchers (Din, 1989; Rinschede, 1992; Poirier, 1995; Beheshti, 2003; Henderson, 2003; Jafarnejad, 2003; Zamani-Farahani and Musa, 2008) have touched on the role of cultural, social and political aspects of tourism in Muslim countries. Din (1989, p. 554) states: 'Tourism has been blamed for sexual permissiveness, flagrant indulgence in alcohol, gambling, drugs, pornography, voyeurism, and so on'. On the other hand, Dogan (1989) focuses on socio-cultural characteristics and political position to determine policies and strategies to cope with negative effects of tourism. He points out (p. 232): 'Communities and subcommunities affected by tourism will try to maximize the positive impacts of tourism and minimize the negative impacts of it in terms of maintaining their values, interests and cultures'.

Some excessively negative images of Muslim countries, mainly created by some Western mass media, have also contributed to certain misrepresentations (Zamani-Farahani and Musa, 2008). The hidden conflicts between the general opinion of society and the government of Iran, derived from differences in value judgements and priorities, affect tourism development in this Muslim country. Despite the people's positive feelings toward tourism in the country, they do not have a chance to express themselves and ask the government to ease some of the constraints and restricted laws to promote tourism in their communities (Alavi and Yasin, 2000; Dabour, 2003). In such a case, the community's opposition to the lack of development might not be clearly recognized by the government, yet the possibility of general public dissatisfaction exists. It should be emphasized that the attitudes of the politico–religious elites in the form of value-judgment and/or liberalization of a particular type of development is not necessarily considered a serious obstacle. Moreover, these realities should not be underestimated. The importance of such realities forces planners to take them into account in their proposals, comments and the implementation of plans (Din, 1989; Lotfi, 1999; Aziz, 2001; Khaksari, 2003).

Overview of the tourism industry of Iran

Iran is located in south-western Asia and covers a land area of more than $1,648,000 \, \text{km}^2$ with a population of 74 million. The country possesses one of the world's oldest continuous major civilizations, with historical and urban settlements dating back to earlier than 5000 BC (Zendeh-Deh, 2001). Iran has competitive advantage in the global tourism industry with natural, religious, cultural and historical attractions, which has not been successfully utilized for tourism promotion. Throughout history, Iran has been of geostrategic importance owing to its central location in Eurasia (Alavi and Yasin, 2000, p. 1), where millions of Muslims live. From the south, it has access to the Persian Gulf and from the north the Caspian Sea, both of which are main sources of water and can be used for transporting people from neighboring countries to Iran and even to transit them to other countries. It is at the juncture of cultural, intellectual, and political manifestations of the East and the West. There are thousands of historical places in Iran, many yet to be discovered. Today eight historical sites are listed on the World Heritage list, with 53 more tentatively listed. All can be used in tourism development (Zamani-Farahani and Musa, 2008).

Historic and cultural cities include Isfahan, Shiraz, Tabriz, Kerman, Yazd, Kermanshah and Tehran. Resort centers such as Ramsar, Bandar Anzali and Kelardasht constantly attract domestic and international tourists. Particularly important as major destinations for both domestic and international pilgrims are the holy cities of Mashed and Qom, particularly for Shiites from neighboring countries and the Persian Gulf states. To make Iran more diverse, there is the Persian Gulf, with ports such as Bandar Abbass, Bushehr, Abadan and Chabahar, and Kish and Qeshm Islands, which offer sandy beaches, natural and man-made attractions and provide leisure opportunities to tourists (Iranian Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization (ICHTO), 2004; Asarh Weekly Newspaper, 2006). Iran is among the top 10 countries in terms of cultural and historical tourism attractions, according to Bonakdar (Vice President of the Iran Tour Guides Society) (Iran Daily Newspaper, 2005). However, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), in terms of tourist world market share in 2005, Iran among 174 countries was ranked 35th in absolute size and 84th in the relative contribution of tourism to the national economy (WTTC (World Travel and Tourism Council), 2006). This is a poor position for Iran, considering its tourism potential. Figure 1 illustrates the considerable fluctuation in tourist arrivals during the prerevolutionary and post-revolutionary periods.

The tourist industry in Iran has the potential to generate hard currency to a greater extent than that currently gained from the exportation of petroleum (Lotfi, 1999). Although Iran has similarities in terms of natural and historical attractions as Turkey with similar national population size, the number of tourists' arrival in Turkey is far higher than that in Iran.
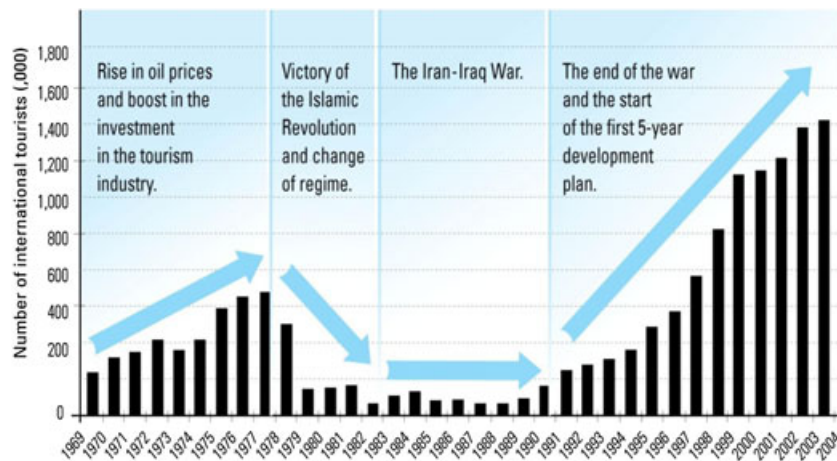
Source: World Travel & Tourism Council (2006)

Figure 1. The trends of international tourist arrivals in Iran.

However, the ruling class in Iran remains concerned about the potential negative social and cultural impacts of tourism development and underestimates the possible positive economic impacts. This notion is preserved in the country's strictly religiously-based policy-making process. During the last three decades the country has experienced major changes, which affect national tourism, and tourism planners are expected to take into account all possible impacts (Khaksari, 2003, p. 56) when compiling and proposing development plans in the post-revolutionary Islamic regime. In the Islamic Republic of Iran, there are many formal and informal religious filters in the form of councils, commissions and influential individuals (usually the clergy) to approve laws and regulations for tourism promotion (Amuzegar, 2005; Khaksari, 2006). Consequently, due to the existing religious, cultural and social sensitivity, tourism promotion strategies in Iran must be strongly in accord with Islamic text and Quranic exegeses. However, it is not easy to address the disjunction between Islamic law and the practical experiences in a country. This is what Moaddel (2002, p. 359) refers to as disparate paradigms and historical concerns.

Iran is probably the best country to examine to fulfill the purpose of this study. Regarding the prioritization of tourism development and the role of this economic sector on the business framework, the country has experienced two strongly different ruling regimes, the monarchy and the Islamic Republic (Esposito and Ramazani, 2001). According to Martin and Mason (2006, p. 241), leisure in Iran during the 20th century can be divided into three periods: (i) the early years of the century, when patterns of economic, social and leisure were still largely traditional and preindustrial in character; (ii) the Pahlavi period (1921–1979), when there was a major attempt to modernize the Iranian economy and society, with an emphasis on economic growth and a positive orientation by the authorities to many Western priorities and practices; and (iii) the period since the Islamic revolution (after 1979), dominated by a government of religious leaders, with strong views concerning the potentially corrupting influence of Western values and behavior. As for tourism activities, in the Shah's rule (1941–1979), the state was not bound by many constraints. In contrast, during the Islamic

Republic, there are large numbers of stated and non-stated constraints on the way people spend leisure time and are involved in tourist activities (Beheshti, 2003; Martin and Mason, 2006, p. 248). These constraints affect international tourists, and this is a major issue in the development of tourism strategies in the country.

Chronological analysis of the tourism development of Iran: potential, constraints and plans

The service and skills development in Iran's tourism industry have largely experienced three distinct periods. The first was before 1979 when the country was in contact with the world's highest level of expertise, and the service and skills development progressed to a highly professional standard. The second period, from 1979 to 1988, saw an end to this development due to the major socio-political changes in the country and the start of the Iran–Iraq war, and finally the third period, from 1988 onward, is a period of rethinking and reconsidering tourism as a possible contributing sector for the country's economy. In general, almost all parameters of the tourism industry in Iran declined during the second period, and although special attention has been paid to them again in the third period, no significant improvement and development have yet been made.

Economic boom in the 1970s. The energy crisis in the 1970s spread worldwide, but caused an economic boom in the Iranian economy. The price of oil soared about three to four times, sending a positive shock to the country's economy. The tourism industry in Iran started to take off for two main reasons: (i) an increase in per capita income (this was particularly important for the development of domestic tourism and outbound tourism) and (ii) increasing investment on tourism infrastructure in the country. Increase in the national gross domestic product caused major investments in tourism infrastructure, for example, hotel, road and airport constructions. The prerevolutionary government was actively dedicated to tourism promotion, and tourism development was in accordance with the economic boom of this decade. Many of

the infrastructures of the tourism industry seen today in the country were constructed during this period (Shahsavari, 2003; Martin and Mason, 2006).

The Islamic revolution in 1979. With the Islamic revolution in 1979, followed by the war in 1980, all tourism activities in Iran stagnated for eight years, and no actions were taken for the development of this industry. However, even after this period, the new ruling class of the Islamist regime insisted on fundamental values in Islamic ideologies when developing the tourism industry. Therefore, plans and strategies for the development of tourism had to be in accordance with Islamic values and principles as interpreted from the verses of the Holy Koran, other religious texts or Hadith (discourses pronounced by the Prophet Mohammad (PH) or the 12 Imams believed by the Shiites). Although many other Muslim countries consider Islamic values and principles in setting up strategies for tourism development, the ideas of post-revolutionary Iran were more fundamentalist. This approach is unprecedented and considered to be a unique way of considering the tourism industry within the context of Shiite Islamic orthodoxy. Post-revolutionary Iran has not placed the same emphasis on economic benefits (Behdad, 1989).

The major mandates that impose constraints on tourism development plans, policies and strategies in post-revolutionary Iran are as follows: (i) gender segregation at beaches; (ii) mandatory Islamic Hejab (Islamic veil) for ladies. All women entering the country, regardless of their religion, are obliged to wear the Hejab; and (iii) alcoholic drinks are not allowed to be consumed or sold to any tourists including at hotels and other accommodations. These rules substantially affect the way the tourism industry can progress in Iran. These mandates lead to a situation in which no alternative choices are available (Rahnamaii, 1995). It could even be recognized as a 'do-nothing' approach to tourism. It is, however, particularly important to note that there are many tourists who want to explore new places in the world and are ready to obey the law of the land they visit. The major questions then are as follows: (i) Should Iran ignore all the expected positive economic benefits of developing the tourism industry to keep away any potential threats? (ii) Should Iran anticipate the economic advantages of the industry and disregard possible socio-cultural disadvantages? and (iii) Is there a way of gaining economic benefit without suffering major negative consequences?

The politico–religious government in the Islamic Republic of Iran places an extremely high priority on avoiding and preventing negative socio-cultural impacts. This position is not equally held by many Iranian tourism experts and even officials. Abd-e-Khodaii (2003, p. 15), the head of the Iranian Travel and Tourism Organization, in an official speech, stated: 'Tourism is considered an income-creating industry ,which also plays an important role in the relationships among different nations around the world'. He further emphsized that, '. . . . . . tourism is not a threat to our religious values and civilization'. He suggests three strategies for tourism development in Iran: (i) promoting domestic tourism aimed at improving the national economy by promoting national morale, self-esteem and the beauty of the country at the national level; (ii) focusing on regional tourism development

aimed at attracting tourists from neighboring nations; and (iii) worldwide tourism development derived from the necessity of global co-existence and the inevitability of international social, cultural, economic, and political relations.

This and other official manifesto regarding tourism development in Iran, focus on the necessity and importance of tourism promotion for its economic benefits as well as its social, cultural and political consequences for the country. However, when it comes to policy-making, other political issues arise, which markedly, and usually unfavorably, influence the whole situation (Behdad, 1989; Alavi and Yasin, 2000). Therefore, under existing circumstances in Iran, two important aspects need to be taken into consideration: (i) the influential practical power of politico–religious elites cannot be ignored; and (ii) the exigency of mutual understanding and coordination by means of realistic reformist dialog between the academics, as experts, and the concerned influential clergies must occur. Such dialog can create a collaborative compromise for progressive tourism development in the country.

War and its effects on the tourism industry. A war is a human disaster, which negatively affects almost every sector in the countries involved. Its negative economic consequences are tangible. All economic sectors are negatively affected, including the tourism industry. War and tourism are not compatible. As Din (1989, p. 548) argues, referring to his personal communication with a non-Muslim colleague in 1981: 'Perpetual conflicts and war, perhaps more so than in regions outside the Muslim world, tend to conjure an image of war-prone societies which are not safe for visitors'. Therefore war, at any scale, is surely a major obstacle to tourism development. Iran experienced a major eight-year war (1980–1987), the Iran–Iraq war. The tourism industry was virtually destroyed directly and indirectly as a result of the war. The demand for traveling to Iran declined substantially, and the number of domestic tourists decreased (Zamani-Farahani and Musa, 2008).

The five-year development plans. An overview of the 54-year history of development planning in Iran indicates serious shortcomings in the way policies have been implemented (Amuzegar, 2005). There were six development plans approved before the Revolution of 1979 and four development plans during the Islamic regime. These two periods demonstrate extremes in approach. The first period was characterized as a low-religiously-sensitive approach to compiling development plans. The second, in contrast, adopts an Islamic fundamentalist perspective for the creation of development plans. The distinction can particularly be observed in the strategies for the development of tourism. The first post-revolutionary five-year development plan (1989–1993) included strategies for economic development concentrating on renewing international relationships and reconstruction of the country. One of the sectors that attracted the policy-makers' attention was the tourism industry. Although this attention was not substantial, the new government considered this industry in its main plan because of its presumed economic advantages as well as a way of expanding international relations. Similarly, in the second development plan (1994–1998) tourism was not

seriously considered as a major income-earning industry mainly due to the constraints discussed earlier. Therefore, the country needed a unique plan for tourism development, which was at that time without precedence (Zendeh-Deh, 2001; Management and Planning Organization of I. R. Iran, 2003, 2005).

'The post-Khomeini leadership has remained "revolutionary" in its aims to transform Iran, other Islamic societies and relations among them. Emphasis on the "regional" cooperation and concentration on efforts to overcome developmental challenges sets the post-Khomeini government apart from that of its predecessor' (Behdad, 1989). Regarding the tourism industry, this includes an orthodox and pure Islamic model of development. That is, the promotion of tourism with an overwhelming emphasis on controlling social, cultural and political influences on the host community, in which the criteria for the judgment are the text of the Holy Koran, (including the direct meaning or the exegeses), and also the fiats given by the supreme clergies, usually the spiritual leader and other high ranking ayatollahs (Khaksari, 2006). In this model, tourists are actively obliged to respect and obey all socio-cultural and political values and mandates when entering the country without any consideration being given to the religions and origins of the tourists. This forces planners, officials and managers to prioritize development plans based on the historical, cultural, educational and natural tourism attractions rather than on recreational and leisure ones. Fortunately, Iran is rich in this regard. Nevertheless, with all the constraints faced by the planners, the promotion of domestic and regional tourism seemed most feasible. Consequently, the strategies stress these types of development (Hajipour, 2003; Khaksari, 2003).

Subsequent presidents in the country have tried to have development plans in which tourism was a part, albeit a small part. During the Rafsanjani presidency (1989–1997) and the following Khatami's administration (1997–2005), one of the major tasks of the government was to move away from being an oil-based economy to being an oil-led industrialization with a mixture of public and private sector involvement in the economy (Martin and Mason, 2006). Due to lack of attention under the first two post-revolutionary five-year economic, social and cultural development plans, the status of the tourism industry was undermined. The efforts of the ICHTO to protect cultural heritage were confined to measuring physical preservation of cultural and historical monuments to prevent their total destruction and registering them under the national heritage list. The third development plan (2001–2005) was also compiled with limited consideration given to the development of the tourism industry. Any mention chiefly discussed trivial aspects. For instance, Article 164 of the Bill for the third plan concentrates on buying and selling foreign currencies (Planning and Budget Organization of I. R. Iran, 2000: 131–132). In other instances, tourism promotions have been restricted by religious-cultural issues such as building mosques, promoting religious and cultural activities and preserving national heritage.

The fourth development plan (2005–2009) is recognized as a transition in tourism development. Article 183 of the plan focuses on the tourism industry. According to this article, the government must undertake measures to increase the capability of the country's tourism industry in terms of creating employment opportunities and generating wealth as well as promoting cultural interactions and national efforts to introduce, preserve and revitalize using cultural heritage (Management and Planning Organization of I. R. Iran, 2003, pp. 124–126). The following is a list of selected tourism-related measures noted in the fourth development plan: (i) providing executive plans to attract tourists, particularly from Islamic countries, on the basis of natural and historical advantages of the country; (ii) promoting the role of non-governmental sectors and increasing the competitiveness of the industry by modifying related regulations and providing necessary facilities; (iii) discovering and introducing Iran's tourist attractions, and assembling and storing relevant information; (iv) recognizing and documenting historic monuments in geographical form; (v) creating and developing specialized and research-oriented museums, run by relevant organizations; (vi) compiling comprehensive plans for the recognition, revitalization and exploitation of the historical and cultural fabrics of cities and villages; (vi) designing, compiling and providing computer and internet services for both local and international tourists; and (vii) issuing permits for establishing specialized private museums and passing their management to the non-governmental sector at the discernment of the Cultural Heritage Organization of Iran.

Although the fourth development plan is a remarkable step forward in terms of tourism, there is still a long way to go to reach Iran's full potential capacity for tourism development. The major shortcoming of this plan is a lack of attention given to those types of tourism promotion in which the country has considerable potential, particularly recreational and eco-tourism. The emphasis on historical, religious and cultural aspects of tourism development in Islamic Iran is an outcome of the socio-political perceptions informed by a revolutionary Islamic outlook. To reposition tourism as a core industry, a realistic understanding of both the positive and negative impacts is necessary. In the process, despite the differences, the experiences of other Muslim countries, for example, Malaysia, Tunisia, and Egypt, are invaluable.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

During the last 35 years, Iran's tourism industry has undergone a series of fluctuations due to changes in the ruling class. This paper explores these fluctuations by examining the prerevolutionary and post-revolutionary politico–religious perceptions of the governments in respect of the way tourism has been prioritized. The Iranian tourism industry has experienced two distinct periods, a pro-tourism approach – up to April 1979 – and a totally religious-oriented perception – after 1988. The country underwent major events during these periods, but no single event had such a major impact on tourism policies than the politico–religious perceptions of the ruling class particularly in the post-revolutionary period. The post-revolutionary Islamic government either did not pay attention to development policies at all or only paid lip-service to them. Lotfi (1999) argues, 'The subject of obstacles and inadequacies in our (Iranian) tourist industry can be

studied from different points of view. The first reason for our sluggishness in attracting tourists is our failure to understand the issue's importance. We are neither taking the industry nor the revenues it promises seriously enough'.

With reference to the philosophy of Islamic thought and consideration of national and Islamic values in post-revolutionary Iran, tourism planners alongside other related professionals have been obliged to take account of these aspects in unique ways. This uniqueness, translated into strict Islamic value-judgment tourism policies, has affected the type and extent of Iranian tourism development and its position in the country's economy. The bottom-line, nevertheless, is that there has been and will continue to be a controversial paradox regarding full capacity tourism promotion in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The influential politico–religious elite have not yet seen a way to ease some of these constraints, as practised in other Muslim countries. The power of religious elites to influence policies of tourism promotion should not be underestimated. In such circumstances, no matter how hard tourism planners and professionals try to accomplish it, it is extremely hard to secure the potential benefits of the tourism industry because the politically sensitive and defensive religious leaders are unwilling to implement plans and policies that have any potential negative impact on society.

Nevertheless, a relatively acceptable balance between the two should be regarded as possible. Such a balance could possibly be achieved by a mutual understanding developing between the politico–religious elite and industry professionals. This means that religious beliefs and philosophical thoughts should not only be seen as obstacles. A brief review of the post-war development plans indicates that, although in the earlier plans, almost no attention was given to tourism development policies, the most recent one – the fourth development plan – is a reasonable transition. However, even this transition does not seem to exploit the touristic potential of Iran. The unique situation in post-revolutionary Iran poses a serious challenge to tourism planners. These planners in the Islamic Republic of Iran have been obliged to make a major contribution to the development of a new way of evaluating tourism, which creates the lowest possible negative socio-cultural impacts. The greatest challenge in tourism development in Muslim countries is undoubtedly how to ensure a reasonable balance between gaining the economic advantages of tourism development while avoiding possible negative socio-cultural outcomes. Although most Muslim countries around the world have acknowledged the importance of the tourism industry in their economic development strategies, it seems there is yet no ideal practical model on which to rely. The ultimate aim might be to create a moderate politico–religious environment in the country in which the tourism sector will develop while the national and Islamic values are equally respected.

This study has assessed the tourism development in Iran in the last century and evaluated how it has evolved with the different political climates of the country. The paper relies on descriptive secondary data and does not provide field work findings to support the main discussion of the paper. The study can be further developed with a questionnaire or interview survey, or with a substantial case study that provides evidence for the main points of the paper. Additional value could be made with a comparative study with other Muslim countries in the Middle East.

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