

A Cultural Tourism Approach Towards Revitalizing Urban Streets (Case Study: Imam Khomeini Street, Tabriz)

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Abstract

This study aims to convert to tangible elements (i.e., physical structures of cultural tourism) the various cultural dimensions and past symbols of Tabriz (which are considered collectively as tourism goods) by partially revitalizing the historical Imam Khomeini Street which is considered to be an arena for social life and a suitable environment for visiting tourists. The SWOT method was implemented to analyze the existing situation regarding this case study upon examining the relevant cultural tourism concepts. The Delphi technique was used to provide a questionnaire the results of which were used as coefficients for selecting the most effective strengths (S), weaknesses (W), opportunities (O), and threats (T). The design strategies were also extracted from the SWOT technique and the most prioritized of these including SO1, WO3, ST2, and WT1 selected using the quantitative strategic planning matrix.

Keywords: Historical Texture, Cultural Tourism, Urban Street, Revitalizing, Tabriz.

1. Introduction

As a multiform and multidisciplinary activity, tourism is considered today as a sustainable industry and an effective component of globalization. Tourism can also play a crucial role in creating jobs (directly and indirectly), thus reducing unemployment, increasing income per capita, and earning foreign exchange as well as creating cultural tourism capabilities. Tourism is an effective parameter in cultural exchange which connects different people and peoples while strengthening social ties among the same and significantly expanding international relations. Richards (2009) argued that culture and tourism industries exhibited significant growth in the 20th century and that their being combined into cultural tourism towards the end of that century was among the most favorable developments for the countries involved and other regions in the world. Studies show that, as an average, a culture tourist spends approximately one third more than other tourists.

Cultural tourism is a particularly complicated concept and there are longstanding discussions among researchers as to the definition and the meaning thereof (Richards, 2005; Shackelford, 2001; Michalko, 2004). For this reason, many definitions have been presented for the term "cultural tourism". Mckkercher and Du Cros, (2002) argue that there are as many definitions for "cultural tourism" as there are methods for the same. Cultural tourism is a general term related to "leisure travel" and is formed due to one or more cultural aspects in a specific region (Dictionary of Travel, 1996). Cultural tourism is defined as a general life style affecting the recreational and entertainment activities of both the native inhabitants and the visiting tourists Smith, (2003).

However, it is also important to maintain a balance between the tourists' and host country's perspectives (M.-F. Lynch et al, 2011). Cultural tourism is displacement of people due to cultural motives including study tours, dramatic arts and cultural tours, traveling to participate in festivals and other cultural events, traveling to study folklore and art, and pilgrimage (WTO, 1985). Hughes (2002) also believes that there is no single definition of cultural tourism that is acceptable to everyone. The most suitable definition is that which can be best adapted to the work at hand and this requires a conceptual definition. Conceptually, cultural tourism is defined as people's moving towards cultural attractions away from their natural place of residence for the purpose of fulfilling their cultural needs through collecting new information and obtaining new experiences (ATLAS, 2009). According to Howard (2002), cultural tourism comprises the following dimensions: historical and contemporary (time), objective and practical (type), contextual and no contextual (travel), and limited or unlimited (territory). Richards (2001) believes that cultural tourism can be judged based on its covering heritage tourism (related to past artifacts) and human studies tourism (related to contemporary cultural products). Stebens (1996) believes cultural tourism is a kind of tourism with particular interest in exploring new in-depth cultural exchange and participation in the same, whether such exchange is aesthetic, intellectual, emotional, or psychological. In general, cultural tourism entails displacement of people due to purely cultural, such as going on study tours as well as dramatic arts and cultural tours, traveling to take part in festivals and other artistic events, and visiting sites and monuments (Michalko & Ratz, 2011).

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1.1. Urban Street, a Place for Disseminating Culture

Today, tourism as an immense and renewable economic source is, in many countries, an effective and significant factor in promoting development. In Iran, however, tourism has not attained its true position and the country earns much less foreign exchange than the leading countries in this regard. Statistics prove that Iran's share from the increasing number of world tourists is a mere 0.33-0.34 percent (Khabar Online, 2014). In line with promoting tourism industry and disseminating original native culture and traditions which are considered as the most sustainable tourism goods, designing urban spaces can be considered as a practical solution to demonstrate and provide the grounds for cultural tourism activities since the most active presence on the part of tourists occurs in such spaces and these spaces act as arenas for social life. Urban streets have a more prominent role than other urban spaces and are of great importance as arteries of activity in this regard.

A nation can be described by historical symbols, signs, and themes the active role of which can be used in designing urban streets and presented in the form of cultural tourism for attracting tourists. Cultural tourism as a contemporary heritage culture is very important since, on the one hand, it strengthens the collective memory and identity of a society and, on the other hand, it can be considered as a source of wealth and economic activities (Herrero et al, 2004). The effects of cultural tourism might include more income and better education, employment, and opportunities, as well as improved local infrastructure and services (Brunt & Courtney, 1999).

Cultural tourists are very interested in the cultural capital of a site as a whole and would like to watch it thoroughly since they can thus obtain new experiences for enriching their own culture (Veld et al, 2006). Bradford et al. argue that a culture created as values and worldviews and accepted by people can play a major role in global affairs, particularly in cultural tourism. Culture affects the continuity and viability of nations (Bradford, 2000). Considering the above, we can apparently establish a direct relationship between suitably designed urban streets and their role as cultural tourism axes which serve as a proper pattern in the development of tourism. The main purpose of this study is to promote and improve the formal and functional system of Imam Khomeini Street in Tabriz through emphasizing on cultural tourism aspects in this city. This major purpose is followed within the following framework:

- Turning Imam Khomeini Street into a lively, dynamic urban space with social interaction facilities.
- Promoting the potentials of the old cultural texture in Tabriz towards developing tourism.
- Recreating the existing unique underlying values in Imam Khomeini Street.

2. Methodology

The purpose of this study is to test the applicability of Space Syntax, recognize its deficiencies, and suggest some supplementary methods for the design of urban spaces in a different context than England—the context of traditional urban space in Iran.

3. Case Sample

Tabriz is a very important city in Iran historically. The history of this city goes back to the pre-Islamic era. Due to its geographical situation and commercial significance, Tabriz has been, both in the past and at present, an important center in the history of Iran (Soltanzadeh, 1997). The historical background of this city has created many valuable architectural and urban spaces, but, unfortunately, little of these historical buildings is preserved (Naqsh-e Jahan Pars, 2007). The historical texture of Tabriz is among the most glorious of ancient urban textures in Iran, and part of it has been the subject of a great national project in Iran's Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization titled "the historical-cultural axis of Tabriz". Many sections of the city's historical texture were more or less preserved until the first decades of the present century. However, the changes introduced in urban life style at the turn of the century greatly affected physical urban spaces. This texture provides a valuable background for studying the potential strengths of the city in terms of tourism.

The studied area is situated in District 8 within the main urban structure of Tabriz, forming part of Imam Khomeini Street (formerly called Pahlavi Street) between Shahrdari Square and Shariati Junction (Figs.1). The reason for selecting this axis as the subject of this research was its pronounced role in Tabriz and the presence therein of important historical landmarks such as Alishah Citadel, Old Mahadmahin Gate, Tabriz City Hall, Tarbiat Pedestrian Way, Old Nobar Gate, and Tabriz Museum, as well as the special cultural, political, religious, and tourism role this section played at the national and transnational level (Figs. 2 and 3).

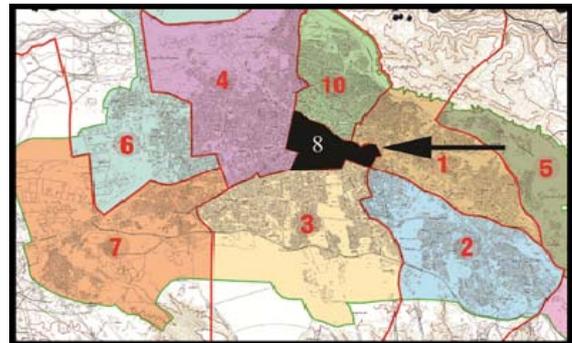


Fig. 1. The geographical location of the studied area
(Source: The Authors)

Although this part of Tabriz is highly significant historically and physically due to the fact that it holds the old rampart and two of the nine old city gates, and that part of the ancient Silk Road passes through it, no consistent design effort has so far been made to utilize these potentials towards exhibiting the cultural-tourism significance of this axis (Zoqi and Ninam, 1995).

Due to undue interference and inappropriate design schemes presented by non-professionals, Imam Khomeini Street is in danger of being isolated from the cultural environment surrounding it. At present, low-level building activities are under way on both sides of this street. Moreover, as the street being increasingly used as a mere passing route, soon its cultural and historical identity shall be forgotten. It is true that the site can still attract certain



Fig. 2. Aerial view of the regions and spaces around the studied area
(Source: The Authors)

Tourists, but it is not receiving the attention it deserves. The BRT terminals established along this street have, of course, improved availability and commutation, but they have also turned the street into a passing route devoid of any pedestrian life and lingering in this urban space. This problem is aggravated due to lack of attention to the pedestrian network access and public spaces as well as

establishing or renewing such spaces. At present, this street is on the brink of losing its values because it can no longer connect the glorious historical and cultural elements that surround it. The only way of restoring functionality to Imam Khomeini Street for the purpose of attracting more tourists would be fundamental revitalizing of this street. (Fig. 4).

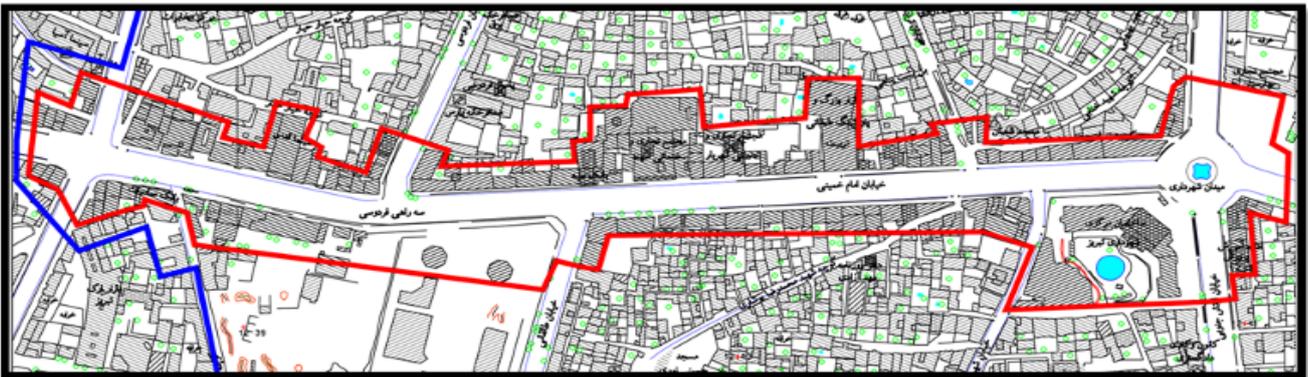


Fig. 3. Aerial view of the studied area (Source: The Authors)

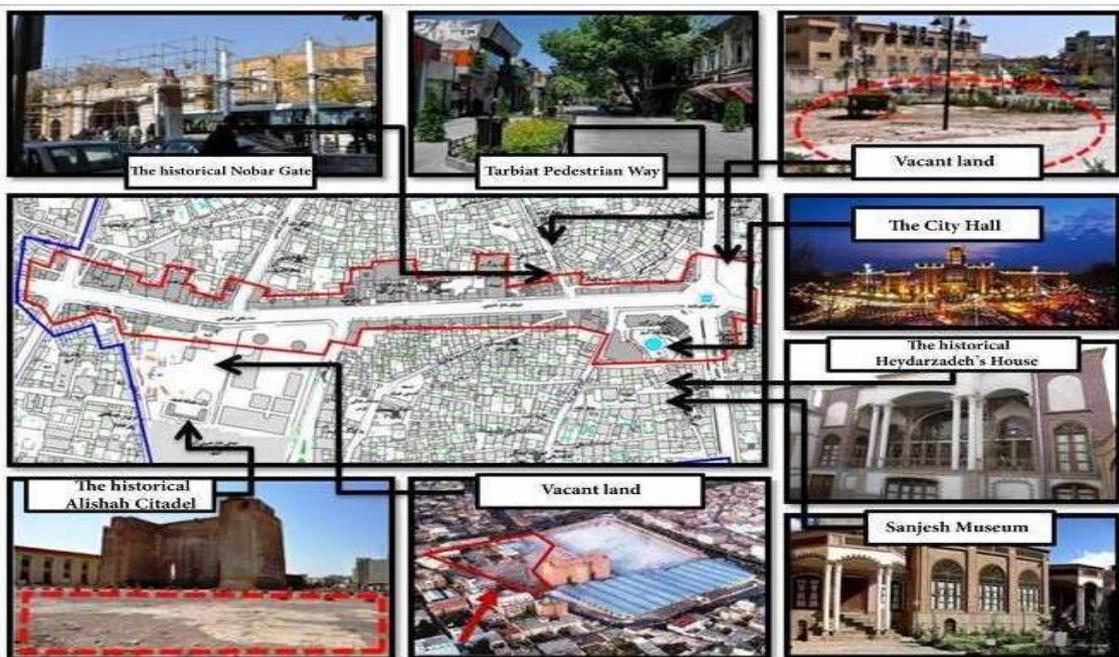


Fig. 4. The studied area layout and pictures taken from its surrounding sites and spaces
(Source: The Authors)

4. Results

The SWOT matrix is a very appropriate strategic planning and analysis technique used by designers today as a new instrument for analyzing the status and functionality of their designs (Nilsson, 2004). This model provides a systematic analysis for identifying internal and external systemic factors and selecting those strategies which can best adapt these factors for obtaining the required purpose. According to the SWOT model, a suitable strategy is that which can maximize strengths and opportunities and minimize weaknesses and threats. To this end, the internal and external factors are connected via a general framework (WT, ST, WO, and SO) and the strategic options selected from among them. The SWOT factors and the internal/external evaluation matrices are shown in Tables 1 and 2.

4.1. Internal Factors Evaluation (IFE) Matrix

During this stage, the most important strengths and weaknesses observed in Imam Khomeini Street were listed. Then, to examine the effectiveness of each factor

on the system and by considering the views expressed by the Delphi group members, a coefficient (between 0 and 1) was attributed to each factor so that the sum of these coefficients would be equal to unity. Moreover, to determine the significance of these factors, they were given scores (between 1 and 4). In forming the internal and external evaluation matrices, it is very important to determine the scores based on the status quo of the studied area as well as its governing environment, and the coefficients based on the significance of each factor within the studied area. The results obtained upon evaluating internal factors revealed that S2 (i.e., rich cultural features and unique local traditions in the studied area) with a score of 0.60 was the most important strength in the studied area. As for the weaknesses, W6 (i.e., lack of a clear systematic connection between historical and cultural elements and their discontinuity) with a similar score was recognized as the most important weakness in the area.

Table 1
The strengths and weaknesses evaluation table for the studied area

	Internal factors	Coefficients	Score	Final Score
Strengths	S1: The many ancient historical attractions along Imam Khomeini Street in Tabriz (Alishah Citadel, The Faculty of Architecture, historical houses, the City Hall, and the Iron Age Museum).	0.10	3	0.30
	S2: Rich cultural features and unique traditions in the studied area.	0.15	4	0.60
	S3: The general inclination in the area towards development and promotion of tourism.	0.05	1	0.05
	S4: Existence of non-functional land within the studied area which can be used for design purposes (adjacent to Alishah Citadel and the City Hall).	0.10	1	0.10
	S5: The considerable activity of the native people in the field of handicraft.	0.05	1	0.05
	S6: Existence of the oldest and the main urban-scale activity centers around Imam Khomeinin Street (The Great Bazaar, Tarbiat Pedestrian Way).	0.05	2	0.10
Weaknesses	W1: The unfavorable transportation system quality within the studied area.	0.10	2	0.20
	W2: Shortage of specialized and expert forces.	0.05	1	0.05
	W3: Shortage or low quality of welfare facilities for tourists along Imam Khomeinin Street.	0.15	3	0.45
	W4: Insufficient knowledge on the part of local residents in dealing with the tourists.	0.05	2	0.10
	W5: Non-professional management of tourism.	0.05	1	0.05
	W6: Lack of systematic and readable communication between historical and cultural elements and the discontinuity of the area.	0.15	4	0.60
	Total	1.00		2.65

(Source: The Authors)

4.2. External Factors Evaluation (EFE) Matrix

The results obtained from evaluating external factors showed that O2 (i.e., the possibility of highlighting the existing cultural centers as behavioral and social interaction bases) with a score of 0.60 was the most significant opportunity in the area. As for the threats, T1 (i.e., diminishing traditions and customs as well as local culture in Tabriz) was recognized as the greatest threat with a score of 0.80.

To obtain the final score for each factor, its coefficient was multiplied by its score. Ultimately, the sum of these final scores was calculated to obtain the final internal score (the final score must lie between 1 and 4, inclusive). If the final score in the internal and external factors tables range from 1 to 1.9, then the system is internally weak.

On the other hand, if the final score is from 2 to 2.99, then the system is in an average position. And if the final scores is between 3 and 4, then the studied area would be in an excellent position. The sum of final scores for the internal and external factors were obtained as from Tables 1 and 2 as 2.65 and 2.75 respectively.

This showed that the studied area had not successfully utilized the existing strengths, or that it had failed to take advantage of opportunities or avoiding factors that led to weaknesses and threats. The obtained scores showed that the system was in an intermediate state and that its status could be improved to the desirable level through adopting applied strategies.

Table 2
The opportunities and threats evaluation table for the studied area

	Internal factors	Coefficients	Score	Final score
Strengths	O1: Increasing inclination for participating in tourism projects and programs.	0.10	2	0.20
	O2: The possibility of highlighting the existing cultural centers as behavioral bases and social interaction.	0.20	4	0.60
	O3: The possibility of modernizing and injecting new cultural and tourism occupancies compatible with Imam Khomeinin Street.	0.15	3	0.45
	O4: Existence of service and travel agencies in the city for promoting tourism.	0.05	1	0.05
Weaknesses	T1: Diminishing of traditional customs and local culture in Tabriz.	0.20	4	0.80
	T2: Increased chaos and insecurity in displacing tourists.	0.10	3	0.30
	T3: Contrast between tourists and the local population	0.05	1	0.05
	T4: Probability of cultural occupancies turning into commercial and business occupancies.	0.05	2	0.10
	T5: Possibility of reduced security due to lack of round the clock occupancies.	0.10	2	0.20
	Total	1.00		2.75

(Source: The Authors)

4.3. SWOT Strategies

The SWOT matrix technique provides the possibility of compiling four different strategies or selections (aggressive, roundabout, diversification, and defensive) through combining the internal and external factors matrices (Table 3). During execution, some of the strategies might overlap or be run simultaneously and in coordination with one another. Depending on the system status, four groups of strategies can be distinguished with different interaction degrees, as explained below.

- Aggressive Strategies (SO): All systems aspire to maximize their strengths and opportunities. Under such circumstances, they try to make the most of external opportunities by using their strengths.
- Roundabout Strategies (WO): These strategies attempt to reduce weaknesses to make the most of the

existing opportunities. An organization might detect opportunities in its external environment without being able to use these opportunities due to its internal weaknesses. Under such circumstances, the WO strategy can provide the possibility of utilizing opportunities.

- Diversification Strategies (ST): These strategies use the strengths in the system against the existing threats, and aim to maximize strengths and minimize threats.
- Defensive Strategies (WT): These strategies aim to reduce system weaknesses for reducing and neutralizing threats.

Table 3
Aggressive, diversification, turnaround, and defensive strategies for Seyedqandan Overpass

TURNAROUND STRATEGIES	WO1 : Presenting private sector investors with different incentives for cultural tourism projects WO2: Reduced bureaucracy for speeding up cultural tourism projects WO3 : Strengthening environmental equipment for the tourists around the historical and cultural centers along Imam Khomeinin Street
AGGRESSIVE STRATEGIES	SO1 :Emphasizing on cultural, traditional, and historical attractions and creating spaces for providing services to tourists. SO2 :Increased participation on the part of the local population in tourism-related programs to induce a positive outlook towards tourism. SO3 : Cooperation between the tourism organization and the municipality and hotelier restaurant owners’ guild for holding cultural festivals during other seasons (when there are few tourists)
DEFENSIVE STRATEGIES	WT1 : Establishment and equipment of a consistent pedestrian and bicycle network based on cultural tourism sites WT2 : Employing specialized workforce as tourism managers in the relevant organizations WT3 : Compiling educational programs on tourism
DIVERSIFICATION STRATEGIES	ST1 :Supporting popular tourism cooperatives. ST2 :Diversifying cultural tourism attractions through extending native and local cultural centers in the form of festivals ST3 :Holding regular sessions for people to minimize the negative effects of tourism on the local culture.

(Source: The Authors)

4.4. Quantitative Strategies Planning Matrix

This matrix evaluates the feasibility of the proposed solutions against the social, economic, management-organizational, environmental, and status quo conditions that prevail in the studied area, and subsequently determines the relative attractiveness of the strategies used in the decision making stage.

To this end, first the internal and external factors and their corresponding weighted scores are transferred to the strategic planning table. Then, the acceptable strategies proposed in each group are listed in the topmost row of the strategic planning matrix. At this stage, the Delphi group is asked to show the numerical values designating the attractiveness of each strategy. To determine attractiveness scores, the internal and external factors that affect empowerment must be examined. An attractiveness

score between 1 and 4 is attributed to each factor. This score represents the effectiveness of the current strategies in reacting to the above factors (4=excellent; 3=average and higher; 2=average; and 1=weak). If a factor plays no significant role in the success of any strategy, then it is not scored.

To obtain the sum of these scores, the attractiveness of each weight obtained in the first stage is multiplied by its corresponding attractiveness score in the second stage. Thus, the sum of attractiveness scores is obtained for each factor of each strategy. The attractiveness sum indicates the positive features and attraction of each factor in a set of strategies. The strategy with the maximum score in the matrix is subsequently given executive priority.

Table 4
Aggressive strategies evaluation table

STRATEGIES		SO1		SO2		SO3	
FACTORS	COEFFICIENTS	ATTRACTION SCORE	TOTAL SCORES	ATTRACTION SCORE	TOTAL SCORES	ATTRACTION SCORE	TOTAL SCORES
O1	0.10	0	0.00	3	0.30	3	0.30
O2	0.20	4	0.80	2	0.40	2	0.40
O3	0.15	3	0.45	1	0.15	0	0.00
O4	0.05	2	0.10	0	0.00	1	0.05
S1	0.10	3	0.30	2	0.20	3	0.30
S2	0.15	4	0.60	3	0.45	3	0.45
S3	0.05	0	0.00	4	0.20	0	0.00
S4	0.10	2	0.20	0	0.00	1	0.10
S5	0.05	1	0.05	2	0.10	0	0.00
S6	0.05	2	0.10	0	0.00	1	0.05
SUM/TOTAL			2.60	1.80		1.65	

(Source: The Authors)

Table 5
Turnaround strategies evaluation table.

Strategies		WO1		WO2		WO3	
FACTORS	COEFFICIENTS	ATTRACTION SCORE	TOTAL SCORES	ATTRACTION SCORE	TOTAL SCORES	ATTRACTION SCORE	TOTAL SCORES
O1	0.10	4	0.40	4	0.40	0	0.00
O2	0.20	0	0.00	0	0.00	3	0.45
O3	0.15	2	0.30	1	0.15	2	0.20
O4	0.05	3	0.15	2	0.10	0	0.00
W1	0.10	0	0.00	0	0.00	2	0.20
W2	0.05	4	0.20	3	0.15	1	0.05
W3	0.15	2	0.30	0	0.00	4	0.60
W4	0.05	1	0.05	1	0.05	0	0.00
W5	0.05	3	0.15	4	0.20	0	0.00
W6	0.15	0	0.00	2	0.30	3	0.45
SUM/TOTAL			1.55		1.75		2.75

(Source: The Authors)

Table 6
Diversification strategies evaluation table.

STRATEGIES		ST1		ST2		ST3	
FACTORS	COEFFICIENTS	ATTRACTION SCORE	TOTAL SCORES	ATTRACTION SCORE	TOTAL SCORES	ATTRACTION SCORE	TOTAL SCORES
T1	0.15	3	0.45	4	0.60	4	0.60
T2	0.10	0	0.00	1	0.10	0	0.00
T3	0.05	4	0.20	0	0.00	3	0.15
T4	0.05	2	0.10	3	0.15	2	0.10
T5	0.10	1	0.10	3	0.30	0	0.00
S1	0.10	1	0.10	4	0.40	2	0.20
S2	0.15	1	0.15	4	0.60	3	0.45
S3	0.05	4	0.20	0	0.00	4	0.20
S4	0.10	0	0.00	3	0.30	0	0.00
S5	0.05	3	0.15	2	0.10	3	0.15
S6	0.05	2	0.10	2	0.10	0	0.00
SUM/TOTAL			1.55		2.65		1.85

(Source: The Authors)

Table 7
Defensive strategies evaluation table

STRATEGIES		WT1		WT2		WT3	
FACTORS	COEFFICIENTS	ATTRACTION SCORE	TOTAL SCORES	ATTRACTION SCORE	TOTAL SCORES	ATTRACTION SCORE	TOTAL SCORES
T1	0.15	2	0.30	4	0.60	3	0.45
T2	0.10	4	0.40	1	0.10	2	0.20
T3	0.05	0	0.00	2	0.10	4	0.20
T4	0.05	3	0.15	3	0.15	1	0.05
T5	0.10	2	0.20	0	0.00	1	0.10
W1	0.10	4	0.40	0	0.00	0	0.00
W2	0.05	0	0.00	4	0.20	3	0.15
W3	0.15	2	0.30	1	0.15	1	0.15
W4	0.05	0	0.00	2	0.10	4	0.20
W5	0.05	3	0.15	3	0.15	3	0.15
W6	0.15	4	0.60	0	0.00	0	0.00
SUM/TOTAL			2.50		1.55		1.65

(Source: The Authors)

In the aggressive strategies group (Table 4), the SO1 strategy with a final score of 2.60 (based on the relative weights and attractiveness scores of each component) has been attributed maximum attractiveness. Regarding roundabout strategies (Table 5), the WO3 strategy (i.e., strengthening environmental equipment required by tourists around historical and cultural centers along imam Khomeini Street) with a score of 2.75 was selected. ST2 in the diversification strategies group (Table 6) with a

score of 2.65 (maximum score), and WT3 (i.e., establishing a consistent cultural tourism-oriented commutation network for tourists) in the defensive strategies group (Table 7) with a score of 2.50 obtained the highest priorities. To improve design standards, it is necessary to adopt effective and executable Strategies (English partnership, 2007). Therefore, priority must obviously be given to the more important strategies.

5. Conclusion

Today, policy makers and planners pay particular attention to the tourism industry as an economic, cultural, and political development strategy. The positive economic and cultural effects of tourism are seriously considered by states and nations alike. Some countries have, through proper utilization of the tourism industry, achieved their ultimate goals in this regard. In contrast, some other countries including Iran have failed to make proper use of their tourism potentials. These countries can rely on tourism to move towards self-sufficiency in various economic and cultural aspects. This category can also be regarded for revitalizing urban spaces to promote tourism. As mentioned above, design and recreation of such spaces with due attention to tourism aspects is essential and many solutions have been proposed by designers in this regard. In this study, the cultural tourism approach was considered.

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