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The Role of Urban Policy in Selecting Top Tourist Regions (Case Study: Mahshahr City)

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Abstract
Sustainable development is one of the key objectives of the tourism industry in any country, and this industry is influenced by economics, politics, and geography, with its development also impacting each region. Sustainable development in tourist areas accelerates the national development process through policies that preserve resources and the environment in each region. The aim of this research is to examine the role of urban policy in selecting top tourist regions and evaluating the criteria and capabilities of tourist destinations in the city of Mahshahr. The analytic hierarchy Process (AHP) model and a likert scale questionnaire were used in this research. Firstly, the questionnaires were distributed and their data were analyzed. After obtaining the compatibility of the criteria, the weights of each criterion and option were determined and then analyzed. The findings of this study indicate that among the factors of gravity, value, distance, and selected demand for tourism in the study area, the demand criterion has been assigned the highest weight (0.54) and the attraction criterion has been assigned the lowest weight (0.06) in tourism. Furthermore, the final ranking of selected tourist areas in Mahshahr has shown that bandar imam Khomeini and Aram Park Lake, with scores of 0/354 and 0/29 respectively, are ranked first and second in priority, while the historical city of Esk is ranked seventh in a lower position. Therefore, making informed decisions based on tourism criteria has a significant impact on economic activities, and the demand criterion has a more significant impact on regional tourism development.

Key words: **Urban Policy, National Development, Tourist, Sustainability, Mahshahr City**

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

Geotourism, as a subfield of nature-based tourism, possesses significant potential for land development and the sustainability of natural resources. The development of the tourism industry and the income generated from it have created a competitive environment among countries. In many parts of the world, the tourism and travel industry has become a vital source of revenue, prompting efforts to leverage the geoclimatic capabilities of various regions to achieve sustainable development. Sustainable tourism development is a key objective of the tourism industry, aimed at empowering local communities economically and socially, as individuals seek to visit these remarkable natural attractions. The introduction of environmental landscapes facilitates the development of this industry in the studied region. Consequently, the relationship between tourism science and environmental sciences has led to the emergence of special tourism areas, attracting numerous visitors. Therefore, prime tourism areas positively impact the economic lives of local residents and help establish their identity. The aim of this research is to examine the role of urban policy in selecting prime tourism areas and to evaluate the criteria and capabilities of tourist sites in Mahshahr City. The hypothesis of this research posits that there is a significant correlation between tourism criteria and options, with a demand coefficient for visiting historical sites being a primary focus for prime tourism areas. This research is essential as the tourism industry in our country has evolved into a dynamic and comprehensive sector, achieving remarkable successes, and efforts have been made to generate revenue for sustainable tourism.

Data and Methodology

This research employs a descriptive-analytical method, utilizing documentary and survey data collection techniques, and is applied in nature. The Analytic Hierarchy Process (AHP) model, Expert Choice software, and a Likert scale questionnaire were used in this study. Initially, 40 questionnaires were distributed among tourism specialists and professors, and the data were collected and analyzed. After achieving consistency among the criteria, the weight of each criterion and option was determined, followed by analysis and visualization. One of the best multi-criteria decision-making techniques is the Analytic Hierarchy Process, first introduced by Thomas L. Saaty in the 1970s. This model identifies criteria and options, evaluates the consistency of the criteria, and if consistent, calculates the weights of the options within a structured framework. In this method, subjective judgments are assigned numerical values, allowing for the identification of variables with the highest value. To implement this method, the importance coefficients of the criteria and options were determined, and scores were calculated to achieve consistency.

Results and Discussion

In the governance of any region and the formulation of tourism strategies, identifying key factors influencing sustainable tourism development is essential. This research examines the criteria and sub-criteria of tourism, targeting the sustainable tourism development of Mahshahr City. If the desired outcomes are not achieved, the tourism criteria and sub-criteria of the studied region can be revised to enhance tourism. Development and investment in tourism must be

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accompanied by cultural and social considerations, emphasizing the health and well-being of local residents while avoiding environmental pollution and the degradation of natural and human environments. This research aims to determine the best decision-making for tourism areas in Mahshahr City, with the prioritization of tourist sites being part of the urban management process in the studied region. Given that the most critical aspects of tourism planning are based on accessibility, attractions, etc., these criteria can be considered in economic, social, and environmental contexts to make informed decisions. Therefore, today, multi-criteria decision-making models are employed to clarify location issues and prioritize them, allowing for the involvement of multiple decision-makers with various objectives and criteria. In this study, the AHP model was utilized with different objectives and criteria to prioritize the tourist attractions of Mahshahr City. Ultimately, the weights obtained from pairwise comparisons were combined, and their final weights were calculated.

Conclusion

The results of the research indicate that the consistency ratio among the criteria of attraction, value, accessibility, and demand for the studied tourism area shows that the demand criterion has the highest weight (0.54), while the attraction criterion has the lowest weight (0.06). Analyzing the tourism options in relation to the demand criterion reveals that Khour Coastal Park has the highest weight (0.43), while the historical city of Isk has the lowest weight (0.027) among all selected options. Regarding the accessibility criterion, Imam Khomeini Port has the highest weight (0.37), and Khour Coastal Park has the lowest weight (0.027). In terms of the value criterion, Imam Khomeini Port again has the highest weight (0.37), while Khour Coastal Park has the lowest weight (0.25). Concerning the attraction value criterion, Eram Park Lake has the highest weight (0.38), and Khour Coastal Park has the lowest weight (0.04) among all selected options. The final ranking of selected tourist areas in Mahshahr indicates that Imam Khomeini Port and Eram Park Lake are prioritized first and second, respectively, with scores of 0.354 and 0.29, while the historical city of Isk is ranked lower in seventh place.

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