

## **Socio-cultural impacts of tourism in Shahmirzad town**

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### **Abstract**

The present study is an attempt to evaluate and analyze the socio-cultural impacts of tourism in Shahmirzad town from the perspective of its residents. This research is applied in terms of objectives and is considered to be a survey in terms of nature and methodology. In the present study, questionnaire is used as an instrument for data collection. The population of the study consisted of people aged above 18 years residing in Shahmirzad town. Simple random sampling was used to select 200 samples from the population. The hypothesis testing results showed that tourism is associated with both positive and negative Socio-cultural impacts in this town. The relationship between these variables turned out to be significant ( $p=99\%$ ). According to the respondents, the mean score of positive and negative social impacts of tourism as well as the mean score of positive and negative cultural impacts of tourism are about 27.17, 31.61, 16.81, and 16.21 respectively. According to the results, the negative social impacts of tourism and the negative cultural impacts of tourism account for the highest and lowest average scores respectively. The results show that men, as compared to women, have more negative attitudes towards cultural impacts of tourism. The results also showed that there is a negative correlation between the education level of respondents and their negative attitudes towards cultural impacts of tourism. There was no significant relationship between respondents' age, income and their attitude towards positive and negative social impacts as well as the positive and negative cultural impacts of tourism.

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***Keywords: Shahmirzad town, Tourism, Social impacts, Cultural impacts***

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### **Introduction**

In the contemporary era, tourism is recognized as one of the world's largest industries that are largely dependent on the global economy. This phenomenon is closely tied to the economic, socio-cultural, and environmental lives of humans and governments. In fact, tourism has always been highly regarded for its high potential in creating and enhancing the components of national, regional, urban and rural development. Tourism has received a lot of attention as a lucrative and cost-effective industry that develops cultural exchanges and social relationship among different nations since the 1980s. In this vein, growing urbanization and the attitudes of people towards geography and leisure time in recent decades have drawn the public attention towards tourism industry as the largest and most diverse industry, as well as an achievable goal in the process of sustainable development in urban areas. Countries, since tourism leads to modernization of cities, amusement places, etc. and provides tourist cities with incredible revenues (Mahalati, 1989: 10), such that many countries are struggling to further develop tourism and attract tourists, and recognize this dynamic industry as the main source of income, job creation, private sector growth, cultural and human exchanges, and infrastructural developments and environmental improvement (Barari et al., 2016).

As for tourism attractions, Iran enjoys very good climatic variation and has the potential to compete with the advanced tourism countries in the tourism industry in terms of antiquities, recreational facilities and natural beauty. As for ancient buildings and monuments, Iran is among the first 9 countries in the world and as for ecotourism attraction, this country is among the top 10 countries of the world, this indicates the country's potential for development of tourism industry (Zarei et al. 2012: 75). Nevertheless, there is evidence that the Iranian tourism industry is plagued with many challenges and weaknesses. The studies on the tourism industry of Iran indicate that Iran is ranked

86 among the 174 countries around the world and third among the countries of the Persian Gulf (after the UAE and Qatar) In terms of share of tourism sector in GDP. As for investment in the tourism industry, Iran is ranked 172nd among 174 countries of the world and ranked lowest among the Middle East countries. As for the value of the tourism industry, Iran was ranked 43rd out of 174 countries of the world in 2005 (Abbasi et al., 2012: 75). The sustainable development of tourism in a specific region requires special attention to residents and local communities. Ignorance of this factor can challenge the tourism development in the long term.

Shahmirzad is a town in Mahdishahr of Semnan. This town is located 6 km north of Mahdishahr (Sangaser). Shahmirzad is the second most populated town in Mahdishahr. Shahmirzad is called paradise of desert. At a meeting of the Council of Ministers held on May 23, 2007 in Semnan, this town was recognized as the preeminent international tourism town according to Article 8 of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts & Tourism Organization Incorporation Law. In addition to the historical monuments, the existence of special cultures and traditions in some parts of the region have added to the potentials of this town such that it is expected to be recognized as a major tourism hub in the north and center of the country in near future. The following questions are raised in relation to the tourism aspects of this town:

- What are the social impacts of tourism on Shahmirzad?
- What are the cultural impacts of tourism on Shahmirzad?

#### **Introduction of Shahmirzad town**

Shahmirzad is located in a mountainous area, 25 kilometers north of Semnan, on the slopes of northern Alborz Mountains in a beautiful valley (Lat: 52 degrees, 21 minutes east, Long: 35 degrees and 46 minutes north). Covering an area of 26 square kilometers, this town borders with Mahdishahr and Semnan from south, and with Poshtkuh Rural District and Chashm from north. Standing 20 km away from the center of a desert province, this town is known as the lost paradise of Iran. Semnan province borders with Alborz slopes and lush forests of Mazandaran from north and leads to central desert of Iran from south. Therefore, the lost paradise and its pristine nature in the desert province of Semnan is easily accessible to anyone. It merely takes passengers a 20-minute road trip along the beautiful green mountains

to reach the town and its pristine and beautiful nature. Semnan province is one of the warmest provinces in the country, and its name actually associates with desert climates. The pristine nature and forest 20 minutes away from the center of Semnan would definitely catch the sight of every tourist.

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The town enjoys a beautiful nature and lush vegetation, and its average annual temperature is 11 ° C, varying between 16 ° C below zero and 34 ° C above zero in the coldest and warmest months of the year respectively. The difference between the height of Semnan and Shahmirzad from the sea level is more than 1000 meters, this temperature difference within a distance of 20 is actually a wonder of the nature in the province of Semnan, that's why Shahmirzad is known as the Paradise in desert. Shahmirzad is home to more than 12 thousand people and its population is expected to reach more than 50,000 during summer and Nowruz. This town is linked to Sari and to Do-Ab village in Mazandaran province by a 170 kilometer and a 55 kilometer link road respectively.

#### **Review of literature**

Numerous domestic and foreign studies have been conducted on economic and cultural impacts of tourism. However, to the best of the author's knowledge, Shahmirzad has not been directly addressed in any study. Therefore, some research related to the subject of this study will be addressed below:

Zarabi and Islam (2011) conducted a study entitled "Measuring the economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts of tourism development (case study of Meshkin Shahr) and concluded that tourism development in Meshkinshahr has brought about some adverse environmental impacts. The results also show that tourism development can have significant effect on economic, social and cultural development of Meshkinshahr.

Zibaei and Dadras (2010) conducted a study entitled "Investigation of the effect of Tourism Projects on the Economic, Social and Cultural Conditions of different Regions of Guilan Province" and concluded that, considering the existing tourist, cultural and social attraction potentials, implementation of tourism projects in the region can lead to a shift of attitudes towards tourist attractive villages, and provide the ground for enjoying the natural sceneries and historical landscapes

to retrieve the energy lost in laborious urban life and prevent further migration from villages to cities.

Meshkini and Heidari (2011) conducted a study entitled " evaluation of tourism development in Zanjan city using the swot model (case study: Zanjanrud District)". The findings of this research show that the tourism potentials of Zanjan, in case of comprehensive planning, can turn into an effective and powerful endogenous development factor and ultimately play an effective role in optimizing the current economic, social and cultural state of the city and organizing the tourism industry in Zanjan.

"The causal relationship between tourism and economic growth (case study: Iran, OECD countries)," Tayebi et al. (2008) concluded that the relationship between tourism and economic growth in Iran is a bilateral causal relationship, and there is a long-term equilibrium between the variables.

In a research entitled "The role of tourism in the socio-economic development of rural areas of Chaharmahal Bakhtiari province (case study of Saman district)", Ghaffari and Turki (2009) found that there is a significant relationship between increasing number of tourists, tourism boom and improvements in socioeconomic indicators.

In a study entitled "Investigation of the attitude of the host community towards tourism and its implications in a living historical context" Adeli (2012) studied the public attitudes in Fahadan region. The results showed that tourism is in a favorable and stable social condition. The region's dependence on tourism, forecasted improvements in neighborhood conditions, especially in security and environmental aspects, the public awareness and sensitivity of cultural and identity issues are among the factors that affect people's assessment of tourism.

Shafiei and Mohammadi (2014) conducted a study entitled "investigation of the Impact of Tourism Development on the Host community: Case Study: Chadegan City". The results show the positive and negative economic, socio-cultural and environmental in the region, the lack of direct involvement of the local community in planning and decision making processes associated with development of the tourism industry and the leakage of economic benefits.

In a study entitled "the impact of Tourism on Urban Sustainable Development from the perspective of Residents. Case study: Qeshm Island " Fati et al. (2014), concluded that, despite the fact that tourism can lead to creation of jobs, increase revenues and bring about quantitative and qualitative improvement in the handicraft industry, it usually leads to rises in prices, bourgeoisie, land use change, increasing construction and the loss of valuable fabrics in the city and hence, cause the physical instability of urban areas. Socially, tourism improves the status of education and health, increases the interaction of citizens and security, and consequently bring about relative social stability, but as for the environment aspect, tourism is associated with many negative consequences such as environmental pollution, increased traffic jams, changes in useful land uses in urban environment, which contradict the goals of sustainable urban development. Therefore, systematic planning and measures taken to make optimal use of tourists, can be used to improve the economic, social, environmental and physical conditions of urban areas.

Tourism impacts:

A. The positive impacts of tourism

Tourism development has many positive social and cultural impacts, which are as follows:

1. providing the ground for familiarity with the lifestyle of other nations;
2. Enhancing the welfare and quality of public life;
3. Broadening people's viewpoint of the world;
4. Enhancing the cultural experiences of people;
5. Providing the ground for transition of Cultural values to the world;
6. Protection of the historical and cultural heritage of the country;
7. Revival of National traditions;
8. Providing the ground for public use of recreational and cultural facilities;
9. Development of public spaces; and –development of mutual respect among people with different Cultures (Zahedi, 2006: 49).

The tourism industry is also associated with many economic impacts such as development of employment opportunities, stable and proper foreign exchange earnings (Makian and Naderi Bani, 2003, 2005). Increasing employment opportunities, diversification of economic activities, reducing unemployment creation fo jobs for low-income people, raising the standard of living, improving the existing

infrastructure and facilities (Zahedi, 2006: 43) are among the most important positive economic impacts of tourism development.

Other socio-cultural impacts of tourism include:

1. Development of employment opportunities
2. Rehabilitation of poor or non-industrial areas
3. Regeneration of local arts and techniques and traditional cultural activities
4. Improving the social and cultural life of the local communities
5. Renovation of the local architecture traditions (Mayson, 1995).

Some of the most beneficial impacts of tourism on the host community include:

1. Increasing pride, strengthening values, local traditions and indigenous culture
2. Increasing the tourists contact with citizens and development of intercultural communication
3. Restoration of local arts and crafts
4. Improving the social and cultural life of the local communities
5. Better preservation and protection of cultural and historical monuments (Fanni et al., 2014: 49).

B) Negative impacts of tourism:

According to Cartier (1996), the negative social impact of tourism include:

1. Damage to indigenous culture due to repeated encounters with tourists with different cultures
2. Damage to monuments and historical monuments as a result of frequent visits
3. Production of low-quality handicrafts and the commercialization of culture and handicrafts
4. Increase in crime, vandalism, prostitution and Promiscuity
5. Conflicts among residents (Haly and Elt, 2005: 649)

The negative environmental of tourism include air pollution, soil contamination, water pollution, traffic congestion problems, rubbish debris, damage to historic buildings, destruction of natural plants, destruction of wildlife, and so on (Altinay and Husain, 2005: 277).

Cartier (1996) also believes that negative social impact of tourism include: Demonstration Effect, commodification of culture, migration, excessive dependence on tourism, crime, prostitution, and the proliferation of diseases such as AIDS and consequently the

prevalence of drug abuse, changes in the values of the host community and changes in language.

**Demonstration Effect:** In the previous studies of on the socio-cultural impact of tourism on vulnerable societies, the special attention has been paid to the Demonstration Effect. This phenomenon is usually described as the effect on host societies, with respect to value systems, behavioral standards and attitudes towards individuals, property, culture and spaces (Dowling, Timothy, and Sing 2003: 254). The Demonstration refers to the process by which traditional societies, especially those which are particularly susceptible to outside influence such as youths, will voluntarily seek to adopt certain behaviors (and accumulate material goods) on the basis that possession of them will lead to the achievement of the leisured, hedonistic lifestyle demonstrated by the tourists. The acceptance of such values would undoubtedly create changes in societies whose previous cultural system emphasized on religion, cooperation, family, and society. Imitation of tourists' fashions leads to cultural incompatibilities between different groups of societies (Karroubi, 2016: 8-7).

#### **Cultural adaptation**

Cultural adaptation takes place between two cultures that are interconnected, and leads to exchange of traditions and customs and values between the two cultures. Cultural adaptation can have positive or negative impacts. This phenomenon can lead to recognition of other cultural elements, better understanding of other people and to some extent affect lifestyles. Sometimes both cultures become similar, but sometimes cultural adaptation leads to cultural conflicts. For example, local people may replace their traditional customs with a cheap imitation of tourists clothing, while tourists themselves may imitate the clothing of indigenous residents (Karroubi et al., 2016: 10 -9).

#### **Research hypotheses**

1. Tourism has many social impacts and implications in Shahmirzad.
2. Tourism has many cultural impacts and implications in Shahmirzad
3. There is a correlation between the individual characteristics of the respondents (gender, age, education and income) and their attitude to social impacts and implications of tourism.



4. There is a correlation between the individual characteristics of respondents (gender, age, education and income) and their attitude to cultural impacts and implications of tourism.

Methodology: the present descriptive - quantitative study is actually an applied research in terms of objectives, a cross-sectional study In terms of time, and a survey in terms of methodology. The statistical population of this study include the inhabitants of Shahmirzad town who aged above 18 years. Simple random sampling was used to select a sample of 200 individuals. Validity of the questionnaire was assessed according to the expert judgments and the necessary modifications were made to confirm the validity of the questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha was used to measure the reliability of questionnaires. The calculated reliability for the various dimensions is presented in the table below. The results show that the tourism dimension have a good reliability

<b>dimensions</b>	<b>Number of questions</b>	<b>Alpha coefficient</b>
Positive social impact of tourism	8	0.72
Negative social impact of tourism	9	0.83
positive cultural impact of tourism	5	0.89
Negative cultural impact of tourism	6	0.97
<b>Alpha coefficient of all items</b>	29	0.85

Source: Research findings

### **Social impact of tourism**

Social impact of tourism refer to the changes that take place in the life of the host community residents and the tourists. These changes mostly take place due to direct contact of the host community residents and tourists. In the present study, positive social are measured by indicators such as the familiarity of indigenous peoples with the lifestyle of other peoples, increasing social solidarity with the presence of tourists, and preventing the migration of indigenous people to other cities and the negative social impacts are measured by indicators such as overcrowding, increased Crime rate, destruction of historical and ancient places, diminished indigenous and regional values with the presence of tourists, increased insecurity and so on.

### **Cultural impacts of Tourism**

The cultural impacts refer to the changes that occur in the arts, habits, customs and architecture of the people living in the host community. In the present study, positive cultural impacts are measured by indicators such as cultural exchanges between indigenous people with tourists, preservation of the historical and cultural heritage of the

region, increased sense of belonging and attachment to indigenous culture, revival of handicrafts and indigenous arts, and negative cultural impacts are measured by indicators Such as degradation of the authenticity of indigenous culture patterns with development of tourism, degradation of the indigenous pride and prejudice in case the culture of the region is ridiculed by tourists, emulation of tourists customs and traditions....

**Research findings**

Personal characteristics: The results showed that 46% of the respondents were female and 54% were male. The mean and median of respondents’ age is 36 and 34 years, respectively. The mean income of the families is one million and eight hundred and eighty six thousand Tomans and the median of their income is one million and six hundred thousand Tomans. 12.5% of the respondents are illiterate, 9% of the respondents have elementary education, 11.5% of them have a secondary school degree, 24% of them have a diploma, 34.5% have an Associate degree and BA degrees, and 8.5% of them have an MA and PhD degree (field study).

Social and cultural implications (positive and negative) of Tourism from the perspective of respondents

As the table below shows, the positive and negative social implications of tourism have an average of 27.17 and 31.61 respectively, and the positive and negative cultural implications of tourism have an average of 16.81, and 16.21. Among the components, the highest mean score is devoted to the negative social implications of tourism and the lowest mean score is devoted to the negative cultural implications.

**Table 1 – Description of the main research indicators**

The main variables	mean	median	Variance	SD	minimum	Maximum
Positive social implications	27/17	27	22/40	4/73	11	37
Negative social implications	31/61	31	33/57	5/79	11	44
Positive cultural implications	16/81	17	10/04	3/16	9	24
Negative cultural implications	16/21	16	15/85	3/98	3	27

Source: Research findings

**Description of data**

**Hypotheses:**

1. Tourism has many social impacts and implications in Shahmirzad.
  2. Tourism has many cultural impacts and implications in Shahmirzad
- Independent t test was used to test the above hypotheses. The results of this test are reported in the following table. According to the

findings presented in the following table  $p < 0.001$ ,  $t = 76.57, 80.98, 57.58, 80.98$ ). The Null hypothesis (there is no significant difference between the groups in terms of positive social implications, negative social implications positive cultural implications and negative cultural implications of tourism) was rejected and the research hypotheses were approved with a confidence of 99%. So, it can be argued that tourism in Shahmirzad has negative and positive social and cultural implications.

**Table 2. Independent T-test results**

The main research variables	t-statistic	Degree of freedom	Significance level	Mean differences
Positive social implications	98/80	198	...	17/27
Negative social implications	57/76	198	...	31/61
Positive cultural implications	74/85	198	...	16/81
Negative cultural implications	57/58	198	...	16/12

Source: Research findings

Hypothesis: There is a difference between the gender of the respondents and their attitude towards the socio-cultural impact of tourism.

Independent T test was used to analyze this hypothesis. As can be seen, the value of T ( $\bar{x}/s$ ), degree of freedom (198) and significance level ( $\alpha$ ) show a significant difference between the attitudes of men and women towards the negative cultural impacts of tourism. Considering the higher mean score of men compared to women, it can be argued that men, as compared to women, have more significantly negative attitudes towards cultural implications of tourism. The two groups showed no significant difference in terms of positive and negative social implications of tourism and positive cultural implications of tourism.

**Table 3. Testing differences between means of male and female groups in terms of social and cultural implications of tourism**

implications	gender	Number of respondents	mean	SD	T-value	Degree of freedom	Significance level
Positive social implications	female	91	27.3	4.6	0.57	197	0.56
	Male	108	27	4.8			
Negative social implications	female	92	31	6.5	-1.29	195	0.19
	Male	105	32.1	5.1			
Positive cultural implications	female	92	17	3.2	0.83	197	0.404
	Male	107	16.6	3.1			
Negative cultural implications	female	92	15.5	4.1	-2.03	198	0.43
	Male	108	16.7	3.8			

Source: Research findings

Hypothesis: There is a difference between the age, income and education level of respondents as well as their attitudes toward the socio-cultural implications of tourism

Age: As the results show, there is no significant relationship between age of respondents and their attitude towards positive and negative social implications, as well as the positive and negative cultural implications of tourism.

Education: As the results show, there is a reverse (negative) correlation between education level and attitudes of respondents toward negative cultural impact of tourism. In other words, the negative attitude towards cultural impact of tourism is less significant among individuals with higher education level. There is no relationship between education level and belief in positive and negative social impact, as well as the positive and negative cultural impact of tourism.

Income: As the results show, there is no significant relationship between income and respondents' attitudes towards positive and negative social implications, as well as the positive and negative cultural implications of tourism.

**Table 4 – testing the Relationship between Age, Education level, Income and the Social and Cultural implications of Tourism**

	income	education	age	implications
The correlation coefficient	-0.8	0.68	-0.16	
Significance level	0.8	0.34	0.82	Positive social implications
Number	199	199	199	
The correlation coefficient	-0.12	0.059	0.039	
Significance level	0.9	0.41	0.59	Negative social implications
Number	197	197	197	
The correlation coefficient	-0.02	0.09	-0.08	
Significance level	0.78	0.17	0.21	Positive cultural implications
Number	199	0.19	199	
The correlation coefficient	-0.06	*-0.15	0.06	
Significance level	0.39	0.02	0.38	Negative cultural implications
Number	200	200	200	

Source: Research findings

## Conclusion

The present study was an attempt to investigate the socio-cultural impact of tourism in the Shahmirzad town from the viewpoint of residents. The results showed that tourism in Shahmirzad has positive and negative social and cultural implications for the residents. This result is significant with 99% confidence. The majority of respondents believe that tourism has negative social implications and the minority of respondents believe that tourism has negative cultural implications. This result is consistent with the findings of Zahedi (2006). Zahedi found out that tourism development is associated with positive and negative social and cultural impacts, including the enrichment of cultural experiences of people, protection of the country's historical and cultural heritage, the revival of national traditions, development of

public spaces, and so on. This finding is also consistent with Cartier (1996). According to Cartier negative social impact of tourism include damage to indigenous culture through repeated encounters with tourists with different cultures, damage to buildings and historical monuments due to frequent visits, increased crime, vandalism and theft And the increase in prostitution and Promiscuity and ....

The results showed that there is a significant difference between the attitudes of men and women towards the negative cultural implications of tourism. Negative attitudes towards cultural implications of tourism are more frequently seen among men, as compared to women. The results also showed that there is an inverse relationship between the education level of respondents and their attitude towards negative cultural impact of tourism. That is, negative attitudes towards the cultural impact of tourism are less significant among respondents with higher level of education. No significant relationship was observed between respondents' age, education and attitudes towards the positive and negative social implications, as well as the positive and negative cultural implications of tourism.

**Suggestions for further studies**

- Preparation and approval of a comprehensive tourism plan for the region and organization and management of tourism within the framework of the approved plan is necessary. During the plan preparation and approval phase, the public organizations in charge of tourism affairs are required to play an active role in monitoring and management of tourism.
- Identification and introduction of tourism attractions in Shahmirzad
- Introduction of Shahmirzad town and its attractions through mass media can significantly help tourists, especially the foreign ones, to build a positive attitude towards this town.
- paying special attention to security matters in tourism so that tourists can enjoy their time without any concern about their security or the safety of their cash, travel cards and credit cards. In addition to providing tourists with a sense of confidence, such a condition will have positive and lasting implications for the host community and will definitely contribute to reputation of the region.

- obviating shortages of public residential facilities, including hotels, Motels, and camps, under the supervision of an accountable public organization, using appropriate patterns and models based on tourism standards and in congruity with the nature of the region.
- Planning in order to raise awareness about the importance of tourism in Shahmirzad town
- providing the ground for further participation of private sector in the field of tourism investment in Shahmirzad town

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