An Investigation into Eco-tourism Potential of the Alamut Region of Iran using SWOT Analysis Model

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Abstract. The present research examines the potentials and limitations of tourism in the Alamut region, offering suggestions and strategies for the promotion of tourism in this region. Research methodology adopted in this study is based on analytical-descriptive approach. To formulate and establish a sound research theoretical framework as well as to review the research literature, a questionnaire tooling method was used and the results were analyzed using the SWOT technique. While introducing the tourist attraction in the province, the influential factors in the region categorized into the four headings of: strengths; weaknesses; opportunities and threats were included in our considerations and strategies or guidelines for a sustained tourism development in the region provided. The research findings, taking into consideration the present status of the Alamut region, indicate that despite the fact that the region houses a great number of ancient sites and monuments and enjoys a high level of bio-diversity resources, making it the ideal candidate to be transformed into an exemplary tourist attraction pole, it is faced with major obstacles to reach this goal. In order to remove some of the problems of the region, strategic factors were analyzed and priorities delineated. The findings indicated that a focused attention and description of the values of the region is alleviated through the holdings of seminars or meeting and conferences as well as paving the way to give cultural knowledge and understanding to prevent inflicting widespread damages to the environment; to establish hotels; to provide welfare facilities and introduce natural resources as well as historical sites and their ancient heritage.

Keywords: Ecotourism, SWOT, Strategic factors, Alamut, weighted score.

Introduction

Today the subject of tourism and eco-tourism, due to the high income-generating feature, has encouraged many countries to allocate a sizeable amount of investment to this sector (TREMBLAY, 2006). Eco-tourism being only one part of the whole structure in the industry of tourism is regarded as a relatively recent venue (NYAUPANE & THAPA, 2004).   This form of tourism is basically tuned to the leisure activities made possible in the open nature at large from the visiting of the natural attractions of the host communities, studding their myriad wonders and impacts and drawing enjoyment from the diversified presenta-tions of the nature, be coupled with collateral cultural and spiritual benefits which is made possible if it is based on a streamlined and targeted host destination (JIANG, 2008).

That which is of vital importance in the considerations of eco-tourism is the subject of sustainability (HONEY, 2008). In this approach, the development of tourism with the utilization of the existing resources is

such that while responding to the economic and socio-cultural needs of the tourists as well as due consideration of their legal and conventional rights and prevailed on expectations, the unity, consolidation, cultural identity, environmental health, economic balance and welfare of the host communities are secured (ALVANI, 1993). Therefore, a pre-planned, deliberated tourism system, with the least flaws possible, will lead toward a healthy and suitable use of the environment and diverse peripheral, cultural, historical resources and the like in the region (EDGELL *et al.*, 2008).

For this purpose, an action is to be taken to devise and draw up comprehensive plans and programmers for the said specified areas and whiten the framework of these working plans move toward strategic elimination and mitigation of the problems in the area. The removal on eradication of such problems for the good pends as sound reformation of the management and budgeting system in the economic, social and infrastructural fields related to the tourism enterprise and activities.

Iran, being among the first five countries in the world benefitting from territorial diversity, is one of the first ten countries in world with regards to historical and cultural attractions and is one of the first three countries enjoying a range of diversified handicrafts and a cache of biological diversity on earth. Compared to other branches of tourism, Iran enjoys a relatively advantageous position in the filed of eco-tourism (ZANGIABADI *et al.*, 2006; TAVANGAR, 2010). Iran also ranks second in the south region of Asia in attracting the greatest number of tourists and the revenues in this section are only second to attract India (EBRAHIMZADEH & AGHASIZADE, 2009).

Alamut as one of the regions in the Qazvin province, enjoys an exceptionally unique status among its counterparts in the province. Qazvin is one of oldest civilization in Iran which was the capital of the Safavids dynasty for about 100 years. Alamut too as an area characterized for its various tourism attractions (the high diversity of flora and fauna, extensive historical and cultural sites

as well as climate variability) possesses great potentials for tourism and conservation as well as research values but viable programming to make use of these favorable conditions is still in its toddler stages. No serious or significant steps have, as yet, been taken to benefit from the natural attractions of this region and it is vitally crucial to undertake a more precise study with regards to making use of these attractions and also the construction of appropriate infrastructures for the development of this novice industry. Thus, the present study tries to introduce the potentials and viabilities of tourism in the Alamut region as well as the difficulties and obstacles in the way of tourism ventures in the region. To this end, the study makes use of the SWOT method of analysis - an acronym for the words: strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (WHEELEN *et al.*, 2004), to provide an objective point of view based on the existing facts and realities for the purpose of identification of intervening factors in the development of Alamut tourism as well as finding the strengths; weaknesses; opportunities and threats thus engage in the development of strategies to promote tourism in the region and adopt appropriate managerial decisions to enhance and upgrade the attraction of tourism.

Study area

Alamut region is located in the northern east part of Qazvin province on a longitude of 50 ° 02 '54 "to 50 ° 52' 55" to the east and a latitude 36 ° 17 '11 "to 36° 41' 01" the north (Fig. 1). Alamut is spread over an area of 170461 hectares, housing 203 villages within a totally mountainous territory. The highest and lowest summits in this area are 4175m and 658m above sea-level respectively (ABTAHI, 2001). On the basis of the statistics and recordings released by the "Baghe Kelayeh" synoptic weather station, the annual average rainfall in the area is 404 mm. The dry period starts from almost late May and extends to early October. Most of atmospheric falls are in the form of rain and in the form of snow above the height of 3000 meters. The absolute minimum and

maximum temperature are -19°C and 42°C respectively. The greater Alamut area has been divided into the two regions of Roudbar Alamut (East Alamut) and Rudbar city (West Alamut) in the last geographical divisions each with three rural districts.
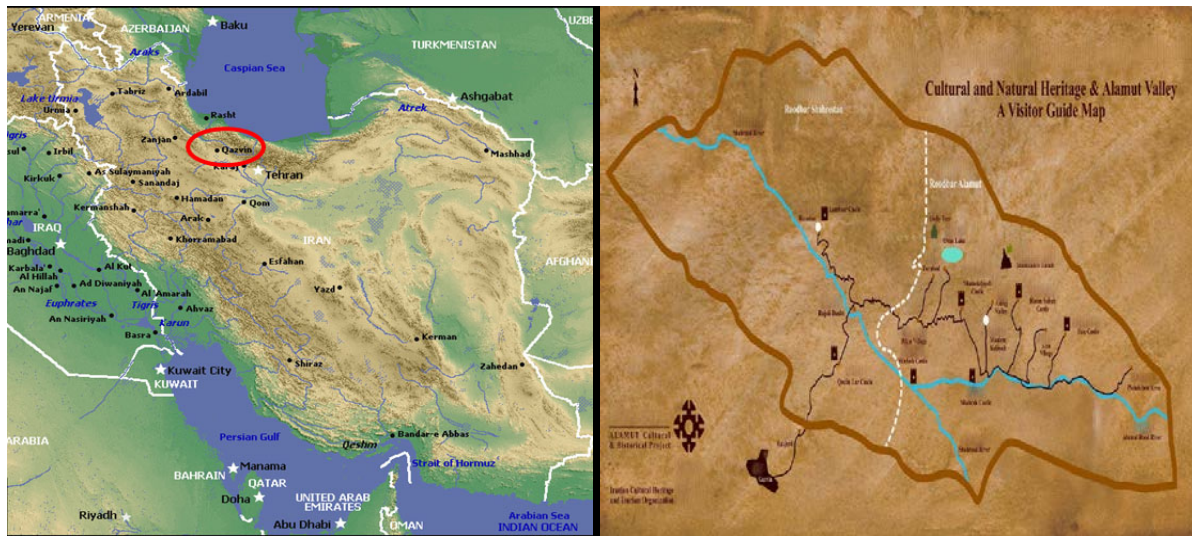

Fig. 1. Ecotourist map of Alamut (Qazvin province) in Iran.

Alamut region has a variety of vegetation due to the diversity of its topographical and climate conditions. A study of the rich flora of the region indicates the high bio-diversity existence of 782 species of plants belonging to 86 families and 452 genera (CHARKHCHIAN *et al.*, 2009). Out of 1420 plant species identified in the Qazvin province, about 60 percent are distributed in the Alamut region (CHARKHCHIAN, 2000). A number of 7576 plant species have been identified in Iran. Alamut region with an area of 170461 hectares, houses 10 percent of the flora of the whole country. Therefore, the Alamut region as an indicative case for the study of its vegetation is representative (CHARKHCHIAN *et al.*, 2009).

Due to its historical heritage, vast expanse and diversified ecosystem, there are 23 species of mammals, 47 species of birds and more than 20 species of reptiles and amphibians in the Alamut region, giving it the potential for tourism in general and drawing more attention for conservation efforts and research values. It can even be claimed that the region enjoys a particularly unique character as compared to its counterpart regions in the province (KARIMI GHASR, 2001). On the basis of the IUCN classification, three species of birds are in danger of extinction and one species is vulnerable to go the same way. The results gained by the IUCN classification system appears the same trend for the mammals of the region. The exists numerous natural caves in the Alamut region, some of which have been natural habitats to the human species throughout history such as Delvkan, Andaj, Akvjan and Sefid Abb cave to be between 250 to 290 million years old (KARIMI GHASR, 2001).

Valley cave is located at an altitude of 1620 meters belonging to the Permian period in the late part of the first geological period. The outstanding characteristic of the Alamut region in the old days is the existence of its various castles and fortresses. Hassan Sabah's Fortress (the ruling centre of Alamut Despot); Navizar; Meymoon; Lomisar (deputy governor and winter quarter of rulers in Razmian); Shirkooh; Ghestin Laar castles are some of the more important ones. Avan lake which is a beautiful natural pond giving this historical cultural region a great value, is located in the Rudbar Alamut region with an attitude of 1780 m above sea-level. It is 500 meters in length and also width. It has an area of more than 70000 square meters and an average depth of 5.70

meters. The only source of inflow of water into lake is the springs at bottom of the lake. 270 permanent springs and 106 seasonal springs have been spotted in the Roudbar Alamut region. The area conserved in which shooting and hunting are prohibited in the Alamut region is approximately 111118 hectares. The area replete with diversity of animal life begs for conservation measure taken (KARIMI GHASR, 2001).

Material and methods

With due consideration of the nature of the subject matter and its components under study, an analytical-descriptive approach is adopted. For the collection of data, procedures such as documental surveys, library reviews, field studies and a questionnaire were implemented. The information obtained was used to examine the attractions, possibilities and the general paradigm of tourism in the region. To determine the sample size for the distribution of questionnaires among the eco-tourists visiting the Alamut region, Cochran statistical formula was used:

$$n = \frac{(Z_\alpha)^2\, P(1-P)}{(d)^2},$$

where: n = Sample number; Zα = Normalized variable (the confidence quotient is derived from the table); P = The numerator divided from division of the correct choices to incorrect ones (Respondents are allowed to select an option); d = Sampling error.

164 numbers (n) were obtained. Results were analyzed by using the SWOT model.

SWOT technique or matrix is a factor for the determination and understanding of threats and opportunities in an external environment and recognition of internal threats and opportunities for the assessment of the existing situation to guide and control the system (MORADI MASIHI, 2002; WHEELEN & HUNGER, 2004). With the information gathered and the results obtained from the tourist polling surveys as the host community and evaluating the relative parts accordingly, the SWOT matrix was completed and suitable strategies and

guidelines were recommended for the development of tourism activities in the Alamut region.

Eight steps to build this matrix were considered. Preparation of 1) a list of the major opportunities that exist in the external environment; 2) a list of major threats in the environment; 3) a list of internal strengths; 4) a list of major internal weakness; 5) the internal weaknesses and the existing opportunities were compared and strategies result registered in WO; 6) strengths of internal and external opportunities were compared and the result registered in SO; 7) comparative strengths of internal and external threats were done and strategies result registered in ST; 8) comparison of internal weaknesses with external threats and the result registered in WT strategy group.

For the evaluation of strategic internal and external factors IFE and EFE matrices were used. IFE matrix is indicative of internal strengths and weaknesses and EFE matrix is representative of external threats and opportunities. Matrix was formed to evaluate each separate factor. To each factor was assigned a weighting score between zero (insignificant) to one (very important). As a result, the total point in each matrix is equal to one. Then, the present situation of each agent was determined with a number between 1 and 5 (poor = 1; lower than the average= 2; median = 3; above average = 4; good = 5) and weighted score was calculated for each factor. Rate of each row of internal and external factor playing an effect in the region was multiplied by the weight of the normalized factor and placed in a new column as a weighted score. After completion of both the IFE and EFE matrices, the table strategy is completed. This table compares the internal and external factors, and devises strategies to eliminate weaknesses and threats, and strategies to promote strengths and opportunities are developed. Finally, to set priorities for implementing these strategies, the data are entered into the matrix QSPM. Stages to from the QSPM matrix are as follows. In the first column in this matrix, the list of the external factors, strategic

factors including all threats and opportunities as well as internal factors, strategic factors including all weaknesses and strengths are recorded. In the second column the weighted score of each strategic factor is copied directly from the IFE and EFE matrices. The following columns contain a variety of strategies resulted from the SWOT matrices incudes the quadruple strategies of WO, ST, WT and SO. Each of the corresponding columns related to the strategies is divided to sub-categories (namely that of AS and TAS). Under the column of AS, attraction score is given; it such that each strategy is compared and measured with the relative strategy in question to see whether this factor does have an effect in the corresponding strategy? The attractiveness scores are distributed as such: 1 = not attractive; 2= relatively attractive; 3 = possible acceptable attractiveness; 4 = highly attractive.

The scores for the second column (weighted or balanced score) are multiplied by the rated attractiveness and the total points of interest or attractiveness are interested in the TAS column which represents the relative attractiveness of each factor on the strategy. The total point of TAS are calculated at the bottom row of each strategy column and the different options of strategy for each organization shall be determined through its numerical value and thus the basis for a comparison provided.

Results

A review of the questionnaires completed by tourists visiting the area showed that 56 percent of the visitors were men and 44 percent of them were women. 58 percent of visitors were married. 51 percent of them were between the ages of 20 to 40 years. Based on the polls conducted more than 80 percent of people are only familiar with the tourism concept very little. 15 percent of the people asked had no knowledge of the tourism concept which is indicative of weak information giving at advertisement on this industry in our country. This weakness may be regarded as one of the loopholes in the region. 48 percent of tourists are of belief that the

promotion of ecotourism industry in the Alamut region can greatly contribute to employment and economic prosperity of the region in general.

38 percent of the tourists believe the high impact of eco-tourism on the environmental culture. Tourists believe that the Alamut region enjoys a great potential to attract tourism. This is one of the strengths of the region in their view. 90 percent of the people visiting the area rate information giving and advertisement as medium to very weak. 68 percent of the visitors to the region have an acceptance of the local culture. 63 percent of them have a moderate tendency to gain any familiarity of the culture and local, ethnic customs of the indigenous people. These are no common beliefs or understanding among tourists and visitors as the role and the responsibility of General Department of Environmental Protection of the province concerning the development of eco-tourism in Alamut region. This clearly shows lack of knowledge of the people about the role duties on responsibilities of such a department. More than 80 percent of tourists to the region evaluate the high potential of the region in the attraction of tourist. Also, 80 percent of the visitors to the region, evaluate as very weak the current facilities in the region quantitatively and qualitatively. 48 percent of tourists to the region are dissatisfied with the facilities in the region, they emphasize the need to upgrade and promote the quality of the facilities as a major requirement for the promotion of eco-tourism of the Alamut region.

The results of the Analysis of internal factors affecting and their role on Alamut ecotourism

As shown in Table 1, 10 points of strength and 11 points of internal weaknesses have been identified in this area. The organization and categorization of the internal factors in the two sub-categories of points of strengths and weaknesses move to evaluate the method of management and response of the system to these factors and with due consideration of the importance of

the Alamut region in general. The above factors were analyzed and their proportional influence index or coefficients were separately determined in Table 1. From the viewpoints of those tourists polled, the major points of strengths of the Alamut region from an eco-tourism perspective were the historical sites and attractions as well as the Avan Lake which were ranked first with a weighted score of 0.268. The weakest point in their evaluations was recorded as non-reconstruction of the cultural and historical sites or monuments and an evident lake of welfare facilities suitable for tourism which hit a low score of 0.132.

Table 1. Internal Factors Evaluation Matrix (IFE)
(strengths and weaknesses) in Alamut

Strengths	Weight	Score	Weighted Score
S1: There are ancient and religious monuments in Alamut	0.067	4	0.268
S2: "Avan" Lake area in order to attract ecotourism	0.067	4	0.268
S3: High biological diversity in the region	0.068	3	0.204
S4: Topography of the area(658 to 4175 meters)	0.05	4	0.2
S5: Historical castle of Alamut	0.067	2	0.134
S6: There are hot springs in the area for therapeutic use	0.067	2	0.134
S7: The presence of rare animal and plant species	0.034	3	0.102
S8: Shahrood river is the economic importance	0.05	2	0.1
S9: Select the region as a hunting ban	0.033	3	0.099
S10: Salt resources in the region	0.016	1	0.016
Weaknesses			
W1: Ignorance of the reconstruction of ancient monuments	0.066	2	0. 132
W2: The lack of hotels and other tourist facilities	0.066	2	0. 132
W3: Reduction of density of vegetation in the area	0.05	2	0.1
W4: Failure to perform required activities to introduce the national and international level	0.05	2	0.1
W5: Lack of adequate funding for conservation and scientific research and education in the region	0.034	2	0.068
W6: Neglect to clean and beautify Avan lake and other rivers	0.033	2	0.066
W7: Change user the surrounding area	0.05	1	0.05
W8: Environmental pollution caused by tourists because of lack of culture required	0.05	1	0.05
W9: Lack of understanding and adequate information on the ecological characteristics	0.05	1	0.05
W10: Lack of scientific and technical relations with the global network of protected areas, including UNESCO	0.016	1	0.016
W11: Disregard of the plaster as the natural wealth	0.016	1	0.016
Total	1		2.305

Analysis of external factors affecting Alamut ecotourism

According to Table 2, 10 opportunities against 7 external threats have been detected in this region. For organization of external factors in categories in terms of opportunities and threats, given the importance of these factors were ranked and was calculated for each level of their influence on the functions of Alamut then shown in Table 2. Pay attention to the result of this table the most important oppor-tunities in this area about tourism develop-ment include the economic importance of the region with a weighted score of 0.201 as the first opportunity and exposure in the central region of the country and reduce the distance of this region by Mazandaran-

Qazvin highway construction with a weighted score of 0.198 are ranks next in importance. On the other hand environmental pollution caused by road construction with a weighted score of 0.414 and regional ecosystems collide and its destruction due to highway construction with a weighted score of 0.33 are the main threats.

Table 2. External factors evaluation matrix (EFE)
(opportunities and threats) in Alamut

Opportunities	Weight	Score	Weighted Score
O1: Important economic region in the country as the region's tourism	0.067	3	0.201
O2: Located in the central part of the country	0.066	3	0.198
O3: Reduction of 200 km from Qazvin–Mazandaran by highway construction	0.066	3	0.198
O4: Easy access to area the opportunities for ecotourism	0.05	2	0.1
O5: There are fruit orchards in the slope domain in order to erosion control	0.05	2	0.1
O6: Transfer Alamut river water to Qazvin	0.033	3	0.099
O7: Employment in the area by highway construction	0.033	2	0.066
O8: Feasibility ecological studies in the region	0.033	1	0.033
O9: Expand the use of water springs in order to provide drinking water for the region	0.033	1	0.033
O10: Introduced the region as a priority research area for students and researchers interested in	0.018	1	0.018
Threats			
T1: Environmental pollution caused by road construction	0. 138	3	0.414
T2: Highway Construction Qazvin–Mazandaran	0.11	3	0.33
T3: Flood flow in the region due to the reduced density of vegetation	0.068	3	0.204
T4: Poaching in the hunting ban	0.05	3	0.15
T5: Excessive livestock grazing in the pastures	0.05	3	0.15
T6: Agricultural waste pouring into the area of internal waters	0.068	2	0.136
T7: Failure to introduce the region as one of the four areas of environmental protection	0.067	1	0.067
Total	1		2.497

Analysis of strategic factors

In this model, using the analysis of internal and external factors and their combinations, the most important strategic factors in Alamut tourism are presented in Table 3. In fact, by analysis of strategic factors planners that strategic decisions are taken, they can limit strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities to the less number of factors. Strategy Objective (SO) is taking advantage of the capabilities and maximum use of opportunities. Establishment of welfare hotels and places for ecotourism in the region, introducing Evan lake as a

national natural monument are among the strategies that have executive priority. Increase the existing capacity and reduce threats done by design ST strategy. The most important strategies are meetings and conferences at local and national levels to express the value, raising public culture through education to prevent the destruction of the environment and obligation on assessment of development effects of executive projects on environment of Alamut. WO strategy aim is to reduce weaknesses and enhance opportunities. Increased research funding for scientific

Table 3. Matrix of tourism development strategy of Alamut (Numbers in parentheses are based on the guidelines for each of the executive order).

Internal Factors / External factors	Strengths	Weaknesses
Internal Factors (above) **External factors** (below)	1.There are ancient and religious monument 2. Avan Lake area in order to attract ecotourism 3. High biological diversity in the region 4. Topography of the area 5. Historical castle of Alamut 6. There are hot springs in the area for therapeutic use 7. The presence of rare animal and plant species 8. Shahrood river is the economic importance 9. Select the region as a hunting ban 10. Salt resources in the region	1. Ignorance of the of reconstruction ancient monuments 2. The lack of hotels and other tourist facilities for tourism 3. Reduction of density of vegetation in the area 4. Failure to perform required activities to introduce the national and international level 5. Lack of adequate funding for conservation and scientific research and education in the region 6. Neglect to clean and beautify Avan lake and other rivers 7. Change user the surrounding area 8. Environmental pollution caused by tourists because of lack of culture required 9. Lack of understanding and adequate information on the ecological characteristics 10. Lack of scientific and technical relations with the global network of protected areas, including UNESCO 11. Disregard of the plaster as the natural wealth
Opportunities 1. Important economic region in the country as the region's tourism 2. Located in the central part of the country 3. Reduction of 200 km from Qazvin – Mazandaran by highway construction 4. Easy access to area the opportunities for ecotourism 5. There are fruit orchards in the slope domain in order to erosion control 6. Transfer Alamut river water to Qazvin 7. Employment in the area by highway construction 8. Feasibility ecological studies 9. Expand the use of water springs in order to provide drinking water 10. Introduced the region as a priority research area for students and researchers interested in	SO: Establishment of welfare places and hotels for ecotourism in the region(3) SO2: Introducing Evan Lake as the impact of nature (4) SO3: Income as an ecotourism area to protect the rare species(7) SO4:Increasing demand for research funding and funding by the Department of Environmental Protection(8) SO5: The use of regional potentials for conservation of endangered species(11) SO6: Efforts to reach the castle of Alamut in the UNESCO as one of the Monuments(14)	WO1: Increased research funding for scientific studies and research in the area (20) WO2: Introducing region to the UNESCO to obtain financial facilities (21) WO3: Spread the density of trees to prevent erosion (22) WO4: Creation of opportunities for peacekeepers to patrol the area (23) WO5: Change user area with the permission of the Environment (24) WO6: The use of plaster in the region as an economic resource (25)
Threats Environmental pollution caused by road construction Highway Construction Qazvin – Mazandaran Flood flow in the region due to the reduced to the density of vegetation Poaching in the hunting ban Excessive livestock grazing in the pastures Agricultural waste pouring into the area of internal waters Failure to introduce the region as one of the four areas of environmental protection	ST1: Meetings and conferences to express the value of Alamut in local and national levels (1) ST2: Raising public culture by train to prevent the destruction of the environment (2) ST3: assessment of development effects of executive projects on environment of Alamut (5) ST4: Promote tourism tours to the region to visit the area and create prosperity (6) ST5: Manage the use of agricultural pesticides and herbicide and the use of organic farming and sustainable in the region (10) ST6: Law Enforcement for the illegal hunters and impose heavy financial penalties for noncompliance (12) ST7: Prevent to damage of salt resources if road construction in its path (13)	WT1: Introduction to natural and economic values through the media to increase public awareness (9) WT2: Prevent the reduction of biodiversity during construction and operation of highways (15) WT3: Prevent environmental pollution during construction and operation of highways (16) WT4: Aware of the staffing in the region as a guide (17) WT5: Identification of flood areas to create barriers and strengthen the density of vegetation (18) WT6: Serious and persistent surveillance on user changes of surrounding land (19)

studies and research in the area and introducing region to the UNESCO to obtain financial facilities are the most important of the this strategy. Finally, WT strategy aim is to reduce weaknesses and threats. Introduction to natural and economic values through the media to increase public awareness, prevent the reduction of biodiversity during construction and operation of highways and prevent environmental pollution during construction and operation of highways to reduce the weaknesses and threats are more important than other strategies.

In this study in order to avoid duplication of research data total points of TAS columns from QSPM matrix is given in Table 4. Finally, among the four strategies

(SO; WO; ST; WT) recommended 26 strategies to the priorities for developing ecotourism in the region of Alamut. In the strategies table (Table 3), the number is listed. According to the results of Table 4, meetings and conferences to express the value of Alamut in local and national levels are the first priority of the executive; raising public culture by train to prevent the destruction of the environment is the second priority and the establishment of welfare places and hotels for ecotourism in the region is the third priority. In order to promote the region to attract tourists can pay to them. Among the strategies, the first 10 strategies are more applied and it is better at first is considered.

Table 4. Sum of the scores TAS from the matrix QSPM
to determine the priority of the executive of these strategies

	SO6	SO5	SO4	SO3	SO2	SO1
	3.991	4.625	5.793	8.822	7.028	8.845
ST7	**ST6**	**ST5**	**ST4**	**ST1**	**ST2**	**ST1**
4.09	4.271	4.968	6.757	6.837	7.914	8.08
	WO6	WO5	WO4	WO3	WO2	WO1
	1.925	2.394	2.427	2.527	2.726	2.895
	WT6	WT5	WT4	WT3	WT2	WT1
	3.574	3.702	3.935	3.946	3.966	5.462

Discussion

Most visitors are from the younger age group. Motivation for their journey to the revolving nature is divided in two age groups: Group that seeks adventure and has sports activities are less than 40 years of age. Another group is traveling to enjoy nature, recreation, entertainment and visiting wildlife. They are at the age of 35 to 54 years (BRANDON, 1996). Visitors are more men than women; this could indicate that because of the mountainous area of this region, more men than women tend to visit this region. Due to the higher percentage of married visitors, families must have a priority in planning the development of ecotourism in the region.

Increased productivity and upgrading of facilities and attractions for tourism, optimal use of resources and reduction in

accident rates in environment are productivity results from the assessment by SWOT method. View of this model, an appropriate strategy can provide to maximize strengths, opportunities, weaknesses and threats to a minimum. For this purpose, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats were linked to the four general ST, WO, SO and WT and strategy options selected between them (BABU & SUBRAMONIAM, 2009). By completing the SWOT matrix, developing various strategies will be done for conduction system in the future (GOLKAR, 2006). According to research of RAKHSHANI NASAB & ZERABI (2010), failure to understand the real value of natural resources, lack of understand attractive places for the tourism, lack of facilities and shortage of skilled managers in ecotourism

are including the main challenges for ecotourism in Iran. Alamut region despite having the capacity to become an example of regional tourism is in front of the main obstacles in the way of achieving this goal. For example, management issues, lack of accommodation and tourist facilities, and weak advertising. EBRAHIMZADE & AGHASIZADE (2009) by analyzing factors affecting the development of tourism in the Chabahar coastal areas in Iran by using of SWOT model analysis found similar to our results.

Height difference and high slope region are highly effective on environmental and human factors (KARRIMI GHASR, 2001). If disturb the ecological balance of mountain ecosystems due to the limited ability to repair, their potential reversibility to the initial conditions will very difficult. Protection of these ecosystems is not mean to their exploit, but the rational use commensurate with their capacities and capabilities are stability guarantee and ecological stability. According to research of JIANG (2008), between different types of tourism, ecotourism attracts tourists that travel to the region to see the landscapes with minimum investments than other types are possible. According to studies in line to optimal utilization of the land and establishing certain support to preserve natural lands with valuable biological resources. The most basic way is land preparation program and implementation of projects development on the environment that are fundamental solution to prevent environmental horrible consequences. Existing habitat of Alamut due to the diverse habitat conditions, the presence of diverse and valuable species that sometimes they are also vulnerable to threat and risk and cultural and historical heritage is the first priority to protect.

Pay attention to dissatisfaction of tourists from facilities of this area, thus the creation of accommodation and suits leisure not only adds capabilities in this area to attract tourists but also for tourists and indigenous people is very important in terms of job creation and recreational. The other hand, satisfaction of tourists will attract the participation (EPLER, 2002). Tourists attracting to visit places of interest and national monuments and ancient need to much invest for preparation of sites visited, construction of access roads, multi-star hotels, suitable vehicles, etc.

Alamut region is composed of many villages. With the development of rural tourism, can be minimized environmental and cultural damage, provide visitor satisfaction and help to region's economic growth. BAHRAMI (2010) reported that this fact indicates that arrival of tourists to rural areas make connections between indigenous people and the tourists have a significant impact on growth and promote social and cultural, higher education, and increase participation levels. The rural tourism as a tool for generating employment and economic development throughout the region can be reduced poverty and increased income. On the other hand the use of public information databases, information networks, distributes posters about the attractions of Alamut. The use of experts in the field of tourism and using local guides can be very effective. What is certain, ancient culture, valuable cultural and natural resources of this region can have many roles in attracting tourists. This development requires the cooperation of industry, government agencies such as the cultural heritage and tourism organization, the population is indigenous and foreign investors.

Conclusions

Pay attention to the failure and problems expressed tourism development in the region of Alamut, to achieve growth and prosperity of this industry in the region, improve the functions of tourism in regional tourism development and business income and more interests in tourism sector, we can raise public culture in this background by participation in decision making and tourism program and using of local guides. By comprehensive management plan for the region be invested to identify potential areas, building amenities and sanitary and the multi-residential services for nature tourists with the residential camps for

different purposes (recreation, sport, etc…). Try to introduce Alamut tourism attractions in level of national and international by the internet with international languages to attract tourists from other countries, articles published in scientific journals and press and holding conferences and seminars. Pay attention to biodiversity and the ecological status important of Alamut is necessary budget which is allocated to improve the level of protection, reduce the negative effects and protection of natural ecosystems area.

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