

Iran's Inbound Tourism Related Policies: Foreigners Are Not Welcome

A.G. Manghutay

Abstract

Despite having many attractions for tourism including archeology, ecology, culture, or adventure; Iran cannot attract deserving amount of inbound tourists. The hypothesis of this article is that Iran has policies each adversely affecting some or all of the above-said categories. Iran's foreign policies on issuing visa, nuclear energy program, and relations with the West; legal policies on convictions, remedies, values and rights of the non-Muslims; cultural policies on dress code, hotels, archeological assets and street festivals; economic policies on car production, forests and protected areas, foreign currency devaluation, and banking and insurance services; infrastructural policies on waste disposal systems, waste water treatment plants, dam construction, airways system, railways and roads are adversely affecting the inbound tourism.

Keywords: Tourism – Iran – National policy

Methodology of research

As a theoretical study this article examines the hypothesis that 'Iran's overall policies are mainly against the inbound tourism'.

Introduction

As regards the World Tourism Organization's forecasts (Azimi & Hajipour, 2008), Iran presently deserves to be yearly travelled by at least 10 million. But the actual amount is far less than expectation. For instance, after experiencing a height of 2.735 million in 2006 (Gladstone, Curley, & Shokri, 2012, p. 4), by 2009, the number of tourists arriving Iran has only grown to over 2.034 million. (UN, 2009) The data for the years after is not available. The real number of 'inbound tourists' must be far less because this number originates from the government sources in them all foreign citizens entering Iran, are deemed as tourists. (Zendehtdel, 2013, p. 301) Considering the government criterion, only one time departure and returning of the Afghani residents of Iran in a year would amount to increase in number of foreigner's arrival to Iran as much as two million. On the other hand, most of the arrivals enter Iran not for spending money but for enjoying from religious and governmental charities. So, despite the Iran's inbound tourism's growth due to emergence of the neighboring newly independent Republics of ex-Soviet Union (Faghri, 2007), Iran's share in nearly \$750 b world tourism income in 2005 was only about \$1.074b. [(Zolfaghari, 2007) & (UNESCAP, 2007, p. 21)]

During the last three decades, incidence of revolution entailing different political and security events and Iran-Iraq war (Mohammadi, Khalifah, & Hosseini, 2010) disconnecting former growing trend decreased the tourism development indicators and caused a severe drop in international tourist's arrival to Iran. (Aghaei & Momeni, 2011) At the present situation, not only the foreign individuals do not consent traveling to Iran, but also foreign investors do not involve in Iran's tourism related activities. (Aref, 2011, p. 197)

Allegedly Iran is one of the world's 10 most suitable countries for the tourism. (Zolfaghari, 2007) Regarding archeology it has remnants of 3500 years of civilization. Ecologically it is a four season country of above 1.6 m km² of area having mountain ranges, vast deserts, deep caves, seas, islands, forests, rivers, springs, waterfalls and wildlife. Hottest point of the world is located in Iran's *Dasht-e Kavir* Desert. Culturally it has diverse samples of the different ethnic groups i.e. Arabs, Kurds, Lurs, and Turks; the different languages of Arabic, Farsi, and Turkish; and the different religions of Islam, Zoroastrianism, Christianity, and Judaism. For adventure it has high summits for climbing, very vast deserts for roaming and numerous seas, lakes, wetlands, islands, rivers and very long roads. However, despite some opinion (Okhovat, 2010, p. 305) it is wrong to deem that as a defining feature of this country's society in which the religion is allied to the race. For instance, in this country there are Lurs who are not Muslim but Christian or Zoroastrian. As well, there are Muslims who are not Lur.

Despite some perceptions (Mohammadi, Khalifah, & Hosseini, 2010, p. 1171) in practice development of the inbound tourism is not the Iranian government's priority. (Gilaninia, et al., 2012, p. 84) This is, in spite of some opinion (Tajzadeh-Namin, 2012, p. 20), unless in case of foreign Shi'a pilgrims, about not only Western non-Muslims but also neighboring including Muslim tourists.

The sustainable tourism policy is not yet in question in Iran because despite some opinions (Okhovat, 2010, p. 304) there is no considerable overwhelming tourism encouragement policy. A new research is required to find the reasons behind this situation out, but surely one of them is this country's access to the abundant oil revenues. (Pishgahifard & Jahanian, 2011)

Foreign policies on issuing visa, nuclear energy program, and relations with the West

In terms of travel freedom ranking in 2006 Iran placed as 194th only before Afghanistan (Whyte, 2009), having visa free relationship with only 14 countries which seem to be Albania, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Bolivia (Karmon, 2009), Ecuador, Georgia (Kakachia, 2011), Malaysia, Nicaragua, North Korea, Sri Lanka, Syria, Turkey (Kirisici, 2005), United Arab Emirates, and Venezuela; none of them having many outbound tourists. It is seldom possible to find up-to-date data on situation of inbound tourism in Iran (Gladstone, Curley, & Shokri, 2012, p. 4) including the relevant indices (Mohebi, Rahim, Chin, & Awang, 2011, p. 413) for instance on present number of the above-said countries and their substitutions. So, the value of Iran in ease of travel index for inbound foreign visitors in 2012 was deemed as zero. (Lawson & Lemke, 2012) Surprisingly only three out of thirteen countries having common borders with Iran have visa-free relations with this country. This might be because of not only Iran's but also those remaining countries' unwillingness. In fact Iran is concerned of some of its neighbors, this is because for example it has over the past thirty years hosted the largest refugee population in the world including over 2.6 million Afghans following the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 and 1.2 million Iraqis following the 1980-1988 Iran-Iraq War and the 1990-1991 Gulf War (Baum & O'Gorman, 2010, p. 4), but it is not now capable of expelling the most of them.

Iran avoids every kind of relationship with one country and its nationals. In Iran, the whole Israel, deemed as 'occupied Palestine', is not allowed to have an embassy or interest-keeper. Its nationals, although just a few millions, are not allowed to enter Iran. Reportedly Iran even refuses entry to holders of passports with that country's visa (Gruszczak, 2012). Arguably that country is a popular tourist destination (Shakhlamchyan & Potaschova, 2012) but in which the political situation has had a negative influence on the number of inbound tourists since 2000. (Collins-Kreiner & Wall, 2007) That country according to a 2006 survey has had a visa-free relationship with 104 countries (Whyte, 2009), so Iran's refusal rarely would cause a problem.

Iran's embassies in some of the most important countries are closed. Due to attack by protestors on the British Embassy in Tehran in 2011 (Head, 2012), the Iranian and British embassies respectively in London and Tehran are now closed. (Katzman, Nerurkar, O'Rourke, Mason, & Ratner, 2012) To this, if interested the Britons may travel to Iran with more concerns and difficulties. Canada as well in September 2012 citing security concerns closed its embassy in Iran and Iran's embassy in Ottawa. (Mundy, 2013, p. 9) In 1979 the government backed students occupied the US embassy in Tehran, keeping most of its staff (nearly seventy) as hostages for 444 days. (Wise, 2011) Since then the Iranian and the American embassies respectively in Washington and Tehran are closed. So, at present, the Britons, Canadians and nationals of the USA i.e. the world's second-largest spender on tourism, and the third-largest in terms of outbound traveler volume after Germany and UK (Rodrigues, 2012), are to refer to Iran's embassies located outside their countries for visa. However, their application for visa may be rejected by the relevant authorities. (Kaffashi, 2009, p. 150) In this connection, reportedly Iran's visa as well is available and issued electronically for a number of applicants [(Salavati & Hashim, 2011) & (Albadvi & Soddad, 2012)], but its degree of availability particularly for applicants from above-said countries remains to be proved.

Iran has a frightening gesture for possible inbound tourists especially those from western countries. Due to defiance to the UN Security Council resolutions (Flici, 2009) on its nuclear energy plant, many sanctions extended by that Council against this country are currently enforcing (Jabalamehli & Rasoulnezhad, 2012). These along with many other sanctions deliberately imposed by the US and its allies are placing Iran somehow under the economic isolation. (Thompson, 2011) Sanctions affect the inbound tourism (OIC, 2010) multi-dimensionally.

Sanctions have intensely increased the consumer prices (Wise, 2011) but as the foreign currencies are at last revaluating in the same proportion, this would not affect inbound tourists unless for the money they keep in the local currency (Thompson, 2011). However, with the decrease in the number of tourists to a particular threshold, the remaining ones would feel lonely and insecure, so the tourists' number would experience a new cut.

Iranians during many decades have in many ways shown interest in the West. From some aspects they feel even thankful to the West, e.g. for the West's assistance in expulsion of the USSR from Iran's Azerbaijan (1945-1946) (Cossa, 1990). But during many centuries some kind of anti-Western mood [(Sherrill, 2012) & (Kligler, 2012)] has grown up in Iran, frightening the possible relevant tourists. These sentiments have been shown in the oil nationalization upheaval (Draine, 2012) against the UK in 1951, the 1979 Revolution, and taking the US embassy staff as hostages (Wise, 2011) in 1980. In line with these sentiments, whether for right or wrong, Iranian authorities have called the US as the "great Satan" and about its closest ally have declared that "Israel should be wiped off the map" (Teitelbaum & Segall, 2012). Such statements frighten not only Westerners but also many others in the international community. On the contrary, the US authorities have called Iran *inter alia* as the 'axis of evil' (Hinnebusch, 2012). There are similar sentiments about Russians and with less antagonism about Arabs particularly Iraqis and finally about Turks. These may as well frighten the possible relevant tourists. Russia's imposition of two disgraceful treaties to Iran, *Gulistan* (1813) and *Turkmanchai* (1828)

(Salehi, Alipour, & Yahyavi, 2010), causing Iran to lose control over a vast area of its territory in Caucasia from Georgia to Azerbaijan; its assistance in military movements against 1906 Constitutional revolution (Saeidi, 2005); its then invasion and occupation of the north of Iran and cruelties done through the Russian-officered Cossack brigade (Zirinsky, 1992); and its invasion of Azerbaijan [(Khorshidi, Fee, & Soltani, 2010) & (Thorpe, 1978)] following the WWII are not yet forgotten. About Arabs, their invasion to Iran in 7th century AD (Pourezat, 2012) and their six centuries of lasting presence renewed with the invasion of Iraq to Iran in 1980 lasting for eight years (Buckley, 2012) is remembered. About the Turks, these sentiments source from many invasions made to Iran by Ottoman emperors in 16th and 17th centuries (Mechkat, 2012) entailing severe cruelties.

But contemporarily, only anti-Western sentiments are highlighted. In other countries as well similar sentiments can be seen, e.g. the spiritual wounds of the WWII are not yet completely healed among the Europeans but with the lapse of time, the people tolerate each other.

However, some (Pishgahifard & Jahanian, 2011, p. 52) claim that the powers outside the region affect the possible foreign tourists' attitude towards visiting the Persian Gulf region's tourism attractions. It is not the purpose of this article to assess the correctness of claims like this. Even if this claim is true, it does not suppress the existence of internal reasons. On the other hand, although some internal reasons might have been arisen from overseas role makers' endeavors, but some overseas endeavors might have been caused by internal misconducts. Some others (Koozehchian, Ehsani, & Firouzjah, 2011, p. 219) put the blame on the public for having false presumptions towards the foreign tourists and inappropriate contact with them. But, firstly the people rarely have had a problem with the foreign tourists; secondly what they hear from the wholly state monopolized radio and television affects their main ideas about the foreigners including the tourists.

Legal policies on convictions, remedies, values and rights of the non-Muslims

Human rights issues and indigenous minority groups' challenges are relevant in attraction of inbound tourism. (O'Gorman, Baum, & McLellan, 2007, p. 315) Most of the world tourists are non-Muslim Westerners. They know that in Iran as like as other Muslim-dominated countries, followers of other faiths e.g. Zoroastrians, Jews and Christians are deemed as second-class citizens (Ghotbi, 2012). Iranian law about the murder and body amputation or wounding predicts two kinds of convictions, *qisas* (equal retaliation) and *diyya* (blood-money). (Alasti, 2007) As like as other Muslim-dominated societies (Konutgan, 2009), as understood from Article 207 of the Iranian Penal Code, no Muslim would be retaliated for murder of a non-Muslim. So, non-Muslims can only resort to *diyya*, but their *diyya* not determined by the law was left to the judge's discretionary opinion, on the condition of not exceeding a Muslim's *diyya* in a similar case. Despite the outdated opinions (Marshall, 2012) in 2001 the Iranian Legislature approved the equality of Muslims and non-Muslims *diyya* (Siddiqi, 2006), including only the constitutionally recognized above mentioned non-Muslims.

A female victim's *diyya* in most cases equals half a male's one (Fazaeli, 2006) with no difference between the children and adults; or between the non-Muslims i.e. the atheists or believers to an unrecognized or recognized faith. In 2008, the *Act Amending the Act for Compulsory Insurance of the Road Motor Vehicles against the Third Persons* was promulgated, having somewhat an equalizing effect on the males and females *diyya*. According to its Article 4 (2nd note) holders of the road motor vehicles are obliged to insure their vehicles against the *diyya* of at least one Muslim man, wholly payable to the victims regardless of their sex and faith, covering the payment of a full *diyya* even to the females even if they are atheists or believers of unrecognized faiths. However, this is only about motor vehicles of the road, excluding those of the air and sea; or other accidents; so in case a Muslim or non-Muslim woman was unintentionally stabbed to death, her relatives would receive the same half a *diyya* of a man.

Many claims (civil or criminal) are provable by testimony. Regarding the Articles 230-231 of the *Civil Procedure Act 2000*, most of them cannot be proved by the females' testimony or in proving them a female's testimony would worth half a testimony of a male. As every non-Muslim is particularly deemed as a non-believer, his/her testimony would by no means be acceptable. Therefore, where the crime committed against a tourist, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, is only provable by the testimony, and that crime, e.g. the rape, has not been witnessed by enough Muslim observers, or enough male Muslims, it would not be proved even if it has had a plenty of non-Muslim observers, e.g. accompanying tourists. With regard to Article 155 of the Penal Code which requires the *i'mān* (faithfulness) for the witness, many deem only the Shi'a Muslims as eligible for giving testimony.

Out of marriage relationship is not legally allowed (Azizi, Hajiazizi, & Hassankhani, 2012). Tourists are not exception. Committers of the fornication (Devers, 2010) including the cohabitation at least would have to sustain 100 lash strikes. According to some withdrawn Islamic jurisprudential views mutually consented relationship can be deemed as marriage, but these views have not yet been developed to become a law. The male committer would be killed if he was a non-Muslim and the other party a Muslim. Every kind of homosexuality is as well strictly forbidden. Notwithstanding, Iran as well has a number of people living with HIV. (Speakman, 2012) Capital punishment [for an example see (O'Gorman, Baum, & McLellan, 2007, p. 313)] is considered

inter alia for the adultery and some degrees of the homosexual relationships. (Baum & O'Gorman, 2010) For these and for many other crimes, Iran has relatively a high rate of annual executions which are made in public or in private. However, foreign Muslims can marry the Iranian Muslims which comprise 98% of the population (Ghotbi, 2012), but although non-Muslim females may marry the Muslims, non-Muslim males' marriage, whether permanently or temporarily, to Muslim women is prohibited. Officially there is no ban on marriage of the foreign non-Muslims to the Iranian non-Muslims.

Cultural policies on dress code, hotels, archeological assets, and street festivals

Many authors have sited the cultural barriers to inbound tourism. [For instance see (Aslani, Boushehri, Zarghami, & Bahrami, 2012, p. 525)] for example, a tightened dress code is defined for females, not allowing the Muslim or non-Muslim women to appear in public unveiled (Zahedi, 2007). According to which *inter alia* wearing tight clothes, trousers without coverage, above-the-knee trench coats, and scarves that fail to cover hair from both sides of the head are forbidden. (Menard, 2012) Obeying this code not in summer but in cold seasons may be interesting for the tourists. So, swimming, taking sun bath (Okhovat, 2010), and the like are not allowed unless in determined places for males and females separately. So, sea banks are mainly under occupation, e.g. 64% of which around the Caspian Sea by the government institutions (Mola, Shafaei, & Badaruddin, 2012, p. 6), making it e.g. from the *Gorgan* in the east to the *Astara* in the west of the Caspian Sea (about 700 km), rarely possible to find a few yards of free bank space to stand and watch the sea.

In addition, a man and a woman unless furnishing proof of having a legally approved marriage or consanguineous relationship are not allowed to share a hotel room. Drinking alcohol and gambling are deemed as crime (Badar, 2011). Drinking alcohol only if in private is disregarded for the religious minorities, whether the Iranian or the foreigner. Drinking and eating in public as well is a crime in fasting hours in the lunar month of Ramadan for all. The children, sick, elderly and travelers may eat and drink in private, but, one, particularly a foreign tourist, can hardly find a fast food shop or restaurant offering food in private at these hours. (Fried, 2007) Serving non-*halal* (not allowed by the Islam) foods by the restaurants is forbidden. So, they have not to serve pork, crab and the like. (Okhovat, 2010, p. 304)

Foreign tourists may require internet and satellite programs, but internet in Iran is one of the slowest in the world (Tavakol, 2012), vastly filtered (Bryant, 2012) for various purposes. Foreign satellite programs although legally banned and severely combated (Bryant, 2012) with the public authorities, are practically in hand. Allegedly '*parasite waves*' are very heavily aired to combat the satellite programs watching. So, some have warned about their horrible effects on the human health, deeming them as one of the main sources for forecasted '*cancer tsunami*'. Waves are so intense that even the local TV or radio channels are not without extra accessories accessible.

Most of the inbound tourists come to visit the Iran's historical and archeological sites. But, despite what has been indicated [see (O'Gorman, Baum, & McLellan, 2007, p. 306)] generally not much care is being taken from the historical assets, whether belonging to before or after Islam, e.g. in Isfahan every year in some occasions drums are banged in the *Naqsh-e jahan* Square (belonging to 400 years ago and listed in UNESCO world heritage sites); for many years, the corresponding staff to show the diapasonic effect between two minarets of the *Menar Jonban* (the swinging minaret) (belonging to 700 years ago) used to shake one of them by force every half an hour; the *Siosepol* bridge (belonging to 400 years ago) has been damaged by the malfunctions in the subway construction activities; and amid to very poor care-taking in remnants of the *Atashgah* (a temple belonging to 2700 years ago) in which no precious piece can be seen. The above mentioned sites are mainly built by the Iranians or the Mughal invaders and despite wrong opinions [see (O'Gorman, Baum, & McLellan, 2007, p. 306)] the Arab invaders have never built any site of historic or religious significance in this country. The ancient routes such as the Silk Road, the Spice Caravan Route, the Great Northern Caravan Route and the Royal Road are all disappeared.

This situation is about not only archeological but also ecological assets, for instance reportedly the tourist activities in the Persian Gulf, not sufficiently controlled by the relevant authorities, have caused habitat damages (Gladstone, Curley, & Shokri, 2012). The *Kandovan* rocky village in the East Azerbaijan as well is reportedly getting ruined under the pressure of mainly the local tourists. (Ghasemzadeh, 2013, p. 3294)

For tourists interested in festivals, despite some opinions (Zendehdel, 2013, p. 301) there is only one out door national festival in Iran which is called *Sizdahbedar* or the '13th out' in which most of the people spend whole or part of the 13th *Farvardin* (2nd April) in open areas particularly in natural resorts. There are religious occasions which are partly celebrated outdoors such as *Ashura* and *Tasua*, but they belong to the Shi'a Muslims.

Economic policies on car production, forests and protected areas, foreign currency devaluation, and banking and insurance services

Inbound tourists enter a country in which air pollutions, heavy traffics, car park shortages, and very high road accidents comprise only a part of the local car industry expansion results. Iran in some days is internationally

recorded as having the most air polluted cities. (Pourahmad, Baghvand, Shahraki, & Givchchi, 2007) Huge number of cars manufactured by mainly state-owned or state-controlled (Ferretti & Parmentola, 2012) plants *inter alia* place urban conglomerate Tehran (Karrari, Mehrpour, & Abdollahi, 2012) and some other main cities every year in many days in cold-air inversion (Heidari, 2011) i.e. a fog containing very unhealthy levels of air pollutants including heavy metals (Zare, et al., 2012). Car production industry is the main source of national income (Saadeghvaziri, Khaef, Motaqi, & Moshabaki, 2012) and employment, following the exploitation of minerals such as oil, gas, steel, copper and stones. But, this has led to some deficiencies in other fields; e.g. construction, operation or expansion of the subway systems are not sufficiently considered; e.g. unbelievably construction process of the subway lines in Isfahan has entered into its 10th year, causing some and preparing the ground for other ruining (Assari, Mahesh, & Assari, 2012) (expected from the subway's vibration to the historical architectures) (Assari & Assari, 2012); but the project seems to be left stalling, nothing being made for shooting the troubles aside, making it sooner operable. Besides, always there are financial disputes between the government and the subway authorities in Tehran (Rahnama, Javid, Shamsirband, & Hossien-pour, 2012), limiting the expansion of subway lines, despite yearly expansion of the highways in hundreds of kilometers. Only a few main cities are or nearing to be availed of the subway system, each covering a limited number of destinations (Roshan, Shahraki, Sauri, & Borna, 2010). Locally produced cars are relatively affordable and foreign made cars importation is as well allowed. (Aghdaie & Yousefi, 2011) At present (March 2014) price of the petrol is with the rationing card (Alipour, Karbassi, Abbaspour, Saffarzadeh, & Moharamnejad, 2011) 7000 and without the card 10000 IRRs, 1 USD equaling to 27770 and 34250 IRRs in official and unofficial markets respectively. Gasoline for diesel engine trucks and buses is sold in extremely subsidized rate of 1500 IRRs. Burning the subsidized fuels, the cars with their air conditioners set on heat up and pollute (Mansouri & Ebrahimpour, 2011) the air in this country of the six monthly summers in its central and southern provinces. This in conjunction with the emissions of Sulfur Oxide (SO_x) (Assari & Assari, 2012) plus Carbon Dioxide (CO₂) resulting from burning the *mazout* (heavy fuel oil) in some power plants and oil refineries brings about an intolerable air condition.

Due to having a weak and incomplete railroad network, about 95% of the freight is exchanged between the regions by the roads, leaving only 5% for the rail transportation (Shafabakhsh, Sadeghi, & Kashi, 2012). Also, only a very small number of the travelers are transferred by the trains or airplanes. So the number of operating trucks, trailers and vans are much too much. These plus a mindboggling number of private cars and motorcycles, buses, minibuses and taxis place Iran on top of the international road accidents ranking (Mahmoudvand, Edalati, & Shokoohi, 2013).

Relying on the cars, the cities are expanding inside the forests e.g. the *Kelardasht* a few decades ago a forest area (Yousefi, Jalilvand, Pourmajidian, & Espahbodi, 2010), is now converted into a complex of farmlands (Shargh, Shamsaai, & Karimi, 2008), and residential and industrial areas (Jamalzadeh, Oryan, & Ghomi, 2008). Within a few more decades this trend may leave nothing to be toured environmentally. In fact, the northern forest areas around the Caspian Sea are in practice converted into an entertainment resort for the *Tehrani*s, who generally amounting to a plenty of 30 million, in their many days of holidays keep wondering in them with or without their cars. There is no balance between this much of tourism activities and that natural environment's area. As a result, the coastal landscapes and habitats are respectively degrading or damaging, the biodiversity is being threatened, and the overall environmental quality is declining. (Mola, Shafaei, & Badaruddin, 2012, pp. 3-5) These all can be deemed as a result of the unplanned environmental tourism development. (Asadi & Daryaei, 2012, p. 11680) The protected areas such as national parks located in the North or elsewhere in Iran, if in public access; do not have a better situation. (Moharramnejad, Rahnamai, & Dorbeiki, 2013, pp. 153, 156, 158) Some decisions worsen the situation e.g. a new plant of the SAIPA car production was inaugurated in that area i.e. in *Sari, Mazandaran* in 2011.

In addition, despite the public responsibility for taking a great care of the forests, as national patrimony, deforestation is constantly occurring; e.g. in order to recover a part of the budget deficit resulted from the oil price decline some northern forests trees at least once were sold to be cut off. Due to thinned number of the trees in forests, within the last decade destructive floods have almost every year struck some parts of the *Mazandaran* province (Ahmadi & Nusrath, 2010), recently expanding to the *Gilan* province and with a force greater than before to the *Golestan* province. (Panahi, Alijani, & Mohammadi, 2010) The number of trees is as well decreasing because the rivers polluted with chemicals are passing through the forests.

Expansion of the cities has another reason too. At least during the last decade (2001-2011) in Iran despite the high inflation rate the foreign currencies' exchange rate was almost kept (Dadkhah, 2003) stand still in about 95000 rials (IRRs) (Heydari, Sharifi, Masjedi, Ramezankhani, & Joossens, 2009) per each USD. Since then that policy has to some extent loosened, but still the foreign currencies are devalued. As a result, foreigners entering Iran suffered a loss exchanging their currency into IRRs. It as well made the import to much more beneficial than the export from this country. (Baky-Haskuee, 2011) Therefore, import of the foreign goods to the most possible extent substituted the local production, un-employing the producers made them to immigrate even

from the remote and rural areas to the cities, despite wrong opinions [see (Kavousy, 2009, p. 134)], leaving only one third of the population in the villages. It is stated that in some urban areas up to 50% of the population under 25 which constitute 75% of the total population do not have gainful employment. (O'Gorman, Baum, & McLellan, 2007, p. 312) So, the cities enlarged demanding more imports and utilities. New dams and power plants for capital cities were built and more imports were made. A circle of deterioration emerged, causing outbound (Azimi & Hajipour, 2008) rather than inbound tourism (Ardahaey, 2011) to flourish.

However, for their financial needs inbound tourists may require international banking services. In this connection, despite an opinion [see (O'Gorman, Baum, & McLellan, 2007, p. 306)] all banks in Iran are not nationally owned anymore; quasi-state, cooperative and private sectors as well are operating in this field; but the international credit card facilities (Mostafaeipour, 2011) are not available. Few foreign banks are imperfectly operating in Iran's main land. (Shademan-Pajouh, 2009) Foreign currency accounts are *inter alia* available for the foreigners; debit-able only in the bank's main branches of the important cities.

International insurance services as well are not available in Iran. For the inbound tourists and the other foreigners visiting Iran, no particular insurance scheme (Izadi, Ayoobian, Nasiri, Joneidi, Fazel, & Hosseinpourfard, 2012) is available but they can enjoy the ordinary local insurance services. However, due to many discrepancies, local health insurance schemes are not satisfactory (Rouhani & Mohammadpour, 2012). Iran has developed some capabilities e.g. exceptionally allowing some kinds of the third party assisted conception as a leading country in the Middle East significantly attracts the infertile couples (Inhorn, 2011, p. 87). But there is a risk of a patient not to be treated well in Iran, for instance although only about 15% of the child deliveries internationally are with the cesarean, in this country the rate is above 40%. (Yazdizadeh, Nedjat, Kazem, Rashidian, Changizi, & Majdzadeh, 2011, p. 160)

Despite some opinions [see (O'Gorman, Baum, & McLellan, 2007, p. 308)] Iran is a GATT signatory (Karasik, 1996) but not a member to the World Trade Organization (WTO) and as a result to the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). So, it is not obliged to fulfill the GATS required duties about allowing foreign banks or insurance companies to operate in its territory. (Velde & Nair, 2005) This disengagement from global economy is about not only financial but also any other sector (O'Gorman, Baum, & McLellan, 2007, p. 309) including the tourism related one's such as hotel industry, tours and touring, transportation, preserving archeological heritage, and so on.

Infrastructural policies on waste disposal systems, waste water treatment plants, dam construction, airways system, railways and roads

Tourists look for clean, healthy and pleasant environments. But, effective environmental monitoring and management is largely neglected in Iran (Mola, Shafaei, & Badaruddin, 2012, p. 3). For instance, the waste disposal systems and the waste water treatment plants in Iran under public authorities, have many deficiencies. The Persian Gulf besides exposure to various additional contaminants resulting from the marine transports, accidents, and wars in recent years is constantly polluted through the river inputs from adjacent countries including Iran. (Agah, Hashtroudi, & Baeyens, 2012) Caspian Sea is the destination for large amounts of the degradable wastes, estimated in 1999 by the World Bank to be one million cubic meters per year, (Abbasian, Ashayeri, Meigooni, & Hosseinmarzeh, 2012) including sewage water (Mohammadi, Sary, & Khodadadi, 2012), and agricultural waste or nutrients that stimulate growth of organic matter. (Zaker, 2007) Pollutants of the all ten rivers entering it threaten the *Anzali* wetland in the North. (Naseh, Karbassi, Ghazaban, & Baghvand, 2012) The *Shadegan* Wetland in the South besides the sewage water is filled with the polluting hydrocarbons from burning oil wells. (Zare-Maivan, 2012) Industrial pollution is of a considerable importance, (Hekmatpanah, Nasri, & Soleimani, 2012) e.g. discharging the urban and the industrial town waste water has been stated as the reason for high pollution of the *Kor* River to the mercury. (Kargar, et al., 2012) The same is about the *Zayanderud* River (Assari, Mahesh, & Assari, 2012). In some cases, allegedly the waste water treatment plants appear to be one of the major sources of drinking water pollutants, (Jafari, Pourkabirah, & Salehzadeh, 2009) and reportedly there are farming areas being irrigated with the waste water containing heavy metals such as Zn, Pb, Cr and Ni. [(Amiri, Maralian, & Aghabarati, 2008) & (Bigdeli & Seilsepour, 2008)]

Besides all these, locally produced oil has made disposable polythene bags and bottles abundantly and cheaply available, so wherever the people are dwelling whether roads sides, forests, rivers, and mountains, the left bottles and bags are seen. Despite some opinion to the contrary (Aref & Gill, 2009, p. 70) one of the barriers to the tourism in rural areas is the booths which mushroom in every natural resort; discharging their waste and garbage into the rivers or leaving them off the roads. As a result, the wind scatters the plastic bags around the road sides, adding the repulsion. Seemingly, nothing is planned for overcoming this problem.

Dam construction is turning out to be disastrous for Iran. Resting place of the Cyrus the great plus remnants of his dynasty in *Pasargadae* (belonging to 550 BC) near Shiraz is going to submerge (Hejazi, 2008) with full operation of the *Sivand* dam. Allegedly, there are few benefits, if any, for dam building; but the losses are enormous (Zafarnejad, 2009) e.g. water sources of the *Urmia* lake [one of the largest natural habitats of the

Artemia (Farajzadeh & Matzarakis, 2009, p. 546)] are being filtered by about 40 dams; the *Karun* River in Ahwaz and the *Zayanderud* River pouring to the *Gavkhouni* Lagoon in Isfahan are in most of the seasons dry or virtually dry. The same has happened to the *Jazmurian* wetland in Kerman; the *ChoghaKhor* wetland in *Chaharmahal va Bakhtiari*; the *Hamun* Lake in *Sistan va Baluchestan*; and the Lakes *Maharloo*, *Bakhtegan* and *Parishan* in Fars [(Tehrani, Samani, & Montaseri, 2008); (Rezvantalab & Amrollahi, 2011) & (Mohammadi & Rahmannejad, 2010)]. No other Lake or River is unaffected.

Within almost two decades hundreds of dams with the water authorities decision have been made, mainly disregarding the ecological standards such as preserving the underground water resources, and farmers allocated water rights with the precedence of millenniums. Receded underground waters besides creating difficulties for the farmers and ruining the *qanat* networks of ancient precedence has resulted in vast deforestation and desertification (Zafarnejad, 2009).

It is a few years that some kind of dust few times a year covers all over the western and central parts of Iran and parts of the other countries e.g. Qatar, Kuwait and Iraq; lasting each time from 3 to 16 days (Gandomkar, 2013, p. 37) sometimes disordering the cities by reducing the sight (Mohammadnejad, Badrifar, Majedi, Farahmand, & Ramazani, 2010). It is deemed to be very harmful to the lungs. Despite opinions attributing its emergence to the Iraq's deserts and dried wetlands (Mansouri & Ebrahimpour, 2011, p. 27) many believe that the extravagance in constructing dams in the *Khuzestan* province has brought about the present situation. As a delta of the *Karun* and the *Arvandrud* Rivers, *Khuzestan* was naturally covered with the watery lands. Dams dry up the wetlands (*hoors*) and the strong winds disperse their dust everywhere.

One of the tourism attractions of this country is nomads such as *Shahsavans* in Azerbaijan and *Qashqa'is* and *Bakhtiari*s in central and southern Iran. But, despite some opinions (Sheykhi, 2008, p. 113) changes made in ecology through dam building, road making and industrial activities along with various unnecessary socio-economic interference of the state in their life day by day changes their life in a way that they are existent less in the reality and more in the television. [(Gharakhlou, 2006, p. 2) & (Tapper, 2012, p. 29)]

For the tourist to see all these and for the others there are only a few flights often between Tehran and the main provinces central cities with the frequency of few times a week. (Roghianian & Foroughi, 2010) There are no routes to secondary or tertiary destinations, budget airlines or budget flights. Overseas flights are generally done to and fro Tehran, mainly through state owned Iran-Air (O'Gorman, Baum, & McLellan, 2007, p. 310) or in a limited number on reciprocal treatment bases through a few other airliners e.g. Emirates, Qatar, and Turkish. Few private airliners such as the Mahan, and the Kish-Air, mainly having flights for close destinations, operate second hand Russian or Eastern European airplanes. Almost all Iranian planes are outdated. (Morakabati, 2010). So, Iran's relatively more cases of plain crash [(Mirzatolooie & Bazzazi, 2012); (Ardalan, Masoomi, Ghaffari, Miadfar, Sarvar, & Soroush, 2009) & (Burin, 2011)], during the last decade have made passengers to possibly avoid travelling by plane. Corresponding authorities unable to renew Iran-Air planes fleet, due to many political issues do not allow foreign airliners to have any share in the internal aviation or greater share in the external one.

On the ground as well, Iranian airlines services are out of standards, e.g. delays are ordinary; in 2010 a flight delayed for about 36 hours but the authorities not letting the passengers to leave the embarkation hall, refrained from taking them to a hotel. All domestic and international airports are under state management. (Roghianian & Foroughi, 2010, p. 68) Notwithstanding, there are many shortcomings, for changing the track from the *Mehrabad* to the IKA Airport, both located in Tehran, no subway or reliable shuttle bus service is available. Passengers travel by private taxis on their own risk because their names get in nowhere booked.

For those interested in travelling by the train, a very weak railroad infrastructure (Shafabakhsh, Sadeghi, & Kashi, 2012) joints only 20 out of the 31 provinces' centers to the capital. Provinces *Kurdistan*, *Hamadan*, *Lorestan*, *Kermanshah*, *Ilam*, *Chaharmahal va Bakhtiari*, *Kohkilooye va Boyerahmad*, *Gilan*, *West Azerbaijan*, *Ardebil*, and *South Khorasan* are not accessible by the railroads. While 80% of the arrivals to Iran are from the neighboring countries (O'Gorman, Baum, & McLellan, 2007, p. 306), only two out of the eight neighboring countries having common land borders with Iran, i.e. Turkey and Pakistan have railroad connection with this country.

Tourists have to mainly rely on road vehicles for travelling in Iran. There are more than the required roads in this country. Despite some opinion (Aref & Gill, 2009, p. 70), the road construction is not unless exceptionally any more even for rural areas needed. The cheaply procured asphalt and the car industry promotion oriented policies encourage the authorities to make many new roads or widen many roads to the environment's overall detriment. As concerning examples, the roads to half-way of the *Sabalán* Summit in *Ardabil* and the *Damavand* Summit in Tehran, both already a mountainous sandy route excluded only for climbers, have recently been paved, placing the area spoil-ably at the reach of public.

Road making plans have partly ruined many forests, mountains, deserts and lakes including the *Parishaan* Lake, the *Urmia* Lake (Zeinoddini, Tofighi, & Vafae, 2009), and the *Dasht-e Kavir* desert (Laghai, Moharamnejad, & Bahmanpour, 2012). The *Abr* mountain forest in *Shahrud* queues the same destiny. As a result,

despite wrong comments [see (Sheykhi, 2008, p. 113)] the *Urmia* lake is no more deemed as a tourist resort.

Discussion

According to this study, Iranian policies have been formed in a way not to attract foreigners. No right for foreigners for touring Iran is internally established; at the easiest words 'they are unwelcome'. Principally even the scientific and the similar needs; e.g. the internationally required researches on diseases and so on are not minded; e.g. within the last few decades rarely an archeological research have been made by foreigners in Iran, no international research has been conducted about the micro-dusts problem which in addition to Iran affects the neighboring countries, and no foreign investigation has been made about the vast deforestation and desertification which affects the whole region. Seldom has a documentary film been produced about the overall situation in this country. This situation does not seem to be sustainable. Accepting and attracting foreigners to Iran remains open only for exceptional cases. As it is exceptional it would be enforced in the narrowest way; narrowed scrupulously by policies of foreign, legal, cultural, economic and infrastructural aspect. No exemption would be considered. These policies are very costly for Iran and detracting main group of inbound tourists admit only a small part of them.

Naturally the main exception which opens the way for foreign tourists to Iran is the country's economic need for foreign exchange e.g. the international sanctions on Iran's oil exports imposed since 1st July 2013 inevitably have had a positive impact on inward flow of tourists. Other economic needs are not very important; e.g. Iran is now in a great need for jobs to overcome the present vast countrywide unemployment issue, but this is not for the government important enough to persuade loosening policies for attracting the foreign tourists; may be the importance of such problems is not duly understood. As another example the importance of foreign tourists in rise of non-state revenues through the export of private sector goods and services e.g. handicrafts and as a result its impact in poverty alleviation is disregarded. Also, its scientific, educational, research, and trade facilitating impacts have been ignored, so the impact which it can have on overcoming the international isolation. However, even the forex needs rarely abrogate the policies but loosen their enforcement; the need greater the enforcement looser. With increase in the country's revenues whether because of the sanctions removal or any other reason, the policies would be enforced as rigidly as usual; e.g. export of gas and other raw materials such as the copper, steel and stones although rendering the national development unsustainable, returns the national revenue to the former situation.

The foreign policies loosen very easily; the actors change, new characters while smiling play a new friendly role and the negative propaganda calms down; as it is presently underway. In case of necessity even the legal policies prepare to be changed through substitution of established interpretations with the other already existent but withdrawn ones; e.g. permissibility of Muslim males shake hand with the non-Muslim females. Turns alike at least domestically have precedence; e.g. playing chess which deemed religiously forbidden from many centuries ago became allowed based on a new interpretation.

There may be other exceptions, e.g. making friendship for a while with the Central and Latin American countries opened the way for them to enter Iran easier; but those countries are not sources of outward tourism. Chinese as well are being treated favorably but they as well are not a prepared nation for this purpose.

In fact, the situation is in a way that mainly foreigners do not want to come to Iran, and from among those who want to come, visa application of some of them is rejected. So problems on issuing visa are of the least importance. Above mentioned policies bring about unwillingness through two canals, i.e. scaring the foreigners or removing their appetite for travelling Iran. Above said foreign and legal policies are mainly of scaring effect, whereas the cultural, economic and infrastructural policies lead to appetite loss. From among the second category, some are the most important because they target the main subjects of the tourism; e.g. the way of dealing the archeological assets, dam building, forests and protected areas, road making, waste water treatment plants, and waste disposal systems. There would be no tourist when due to unreasonable policies there remains no tourism attraction. But the remaining part of this category places after the first category in importance; because they are about the tourists welfare and there may be alternatives for them; e.g. lack of flights can be remedied by availability of the buses. So, the policies mentioned in the first category receive the second grade in importance; these do not directly target the tourism's subject but they have the capacity of producing fear. Although ranked second in importance but these are policies which signal the possible tourists that they are 'unwelcome' or 'the most unwelcome' to this country.

Conclusion

This paper certainly proved the hypothesis that 'Iran's overall policies are mainly against the inbound tourism'. Suppose somebody decides travelling to Iran. He most probably would have to seek for Iran's visa because Iran has visa free relationship with only a few countries. For applying visa if he is from the US, the UK or Canada, he must refer to an Iran's embassy in a third country. If he is an Israeli or has an Israeli visa in his passport, he better forget about making application. After the issuance of visa, as the Iran-Air's fleet is out-dated, he would

look for other possibly available airliners. At the entrance, he/she should get covered according to the defined dress code. Hereinafter he should not anymore drink or eat the things forbidden for the Muslims, he in some cities would breathe the air and drink the water which may contain pollutants and the harmful dust. He would be under the effect of heavy parasite waves. To see the urban sights he would bear a heavy traffic and the resultant heat and pollution. He rarely can enjoy riding on overcrowded subways. If a non-Muslim, he would take a great care in treating the female Muslims. He sells his hard currency in a devaluated rate and uses the international credit cards with difficulty. Referring to the archeological sites he would see regrettable scenes of historical portraits and reliefs deletions and ruins. He must take care not to become ill or hit by abundant numbers of automobiles and motorcycles carelessly roaming everywhere including the sidewalks and the parks, otherwise as he cannot enjoy the foreign insurance services he might bear whole the charges by him-self and the outcome of many days of stay in the hospital might not be quite satisfactory. However, to send an email for informing his relatives, he may make a futile struggle of many hours with the internet. In case he goes to see the rivers or the lakes such as the Zayanderud or the Urmia he may just find their dried dusty or salty basins in which the children are playing football. In case of his reference to the criminal courts, he in some cases may find the outcome or the trial procedure discriminatory. For travelling between the cities, he would unless rarely suffice to the buses and at the destination he may do not find more than a polluted sea or a vanishing forest. He must always take care of not attracting suspicion; otherwise he might be stopped, checked or even detained.

As a result, unless in case of necessity, it would be quite rational for him to say to himself, is not it better not to do such a travel at all? Answering yes to this question has brought about the present situation in Iran.

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