

# Planning for Sustainable Tourism Development in Maragheh City Based on SWOT Technique\*

Naser Ghahreman<sup>a</sup>- Seyyed Mohammad Seyyed Mirzaie<sup>b\*\*</sup> - Mostafa Azkia<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Ph.D. Candidate of Economic Development, Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran.

<sup>b</sup> Professor of Department of Sociology, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran (Corresponding Author).

<sup>c</sup> Professor of Department of Sociology, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran.

Received 10 June 2021;

Revised 29 January 2023;

Accepted 21 March 2023;

Available Online 21 June 2023

## ABSTRACT

Because Maragheh City has good tourism potential, perfect planning can be done to achieve sustainable tourism by identifying tourism advantages and limitations. Due to its high job-creation potential, sustainable tourism can alleviate the unemployment rate among young people. For this purpose, the classic Delphi method was used to examine strengths and weaknesses, opportunities, and threats existing in tourism of Maragheh City based on comments given by city tourism experts (N=30). According to the results of a SWOT analysis using a matrix table of analyzing priority, importance, and consensus indices, precious historical and ancient monuments in Maragheh and its strong potential for tourism investment are the most substantial strengths of this area, while cultural traditions and rituals are considered as the least important factors in developing tourism of Maragheh region. Moreover, the element of improper element of environmental infrastructures and the lack of a large number of tourists are the most significant weaknesses, while the location of the county in the route of Western Azerbaijan and Kurdistan from the west to the center direction of the country and vice versa is the least important weakness in tourism development. In addition, this city's rich background and history are the best tourist attraction opportunity. According to strategies proposed for tourism in Maragheh County, competitive/offensive strategy (SO) can be more emphasized because the natural position of the county and development of ecotourism and Geotourism, and numerous registered historical monuments and monuments in the county indicate that this strategy can be more considered. However, this natural position and or potential available in sports infrastructures for holding matches point that diversification strategy (ST) can also be taken into account.

**Keywords:** Delphi, Sustainable Tourism, Development, SWOT, Maragheh.

\* This paper is derived from the Ph.D. thesis written by the first author under the title of "Planning for Sustainable Tourism Development in Maragheh City based on SWOT Technique" guided by the second and third authors in 2020.

\*\* E\_mail: n.gahramon@yahoo.com

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is an old component existing in the life of humans in the past becoming an underlying topic, by the passage of time now, the tourism industry in the world has become one of the significant income sources and considerable economic activities in human communities. Planners and policymakers define tourism as a basic pillar of sustainable development. The high capability and capacity of tourism can lead to significant economic and social changes. In other words, the tourism industry is one of the most critical and the world's most critical industries, improving socioeconomic conditions. Hence, this industry has received great attention from economic experts and planners to develop different communities. In other words, the concept of sustainable development means respecting nature. Accordingly, respect for nature is a kind of life discovery contrary to mastery over nature. This respect is the best response based on the rules existing in nature, and the most suitable method for human-nature cohabitation. The most important explanation for tourism development raises from its potential ability to develop especially in developing countries. While tourism is one of the significant economic sectors and platforms for an economic boom and revenue sources for cities and villages in most developed countries, tourism is considered an underlying factor for economic development and income generation in developing countries. Tourism is now the basic pillar in the national development document of most countries, but also as an economic sector, tourism is an important source of employment, income, and foreign transactions, and a potential tool for distributing the wealth of rich countries worldwide. However, it should be noted that specific features of tourism make it a social-economic activity, while the complicated relations between tourism and other changes in the political economy of the world may weaken its role in the development process (Aghajani and Azkia 2015, 9).

Today, tourism has expanded around the world. The reason may be related to developed high-tech industries and capitalism. Different capital, culture, and information flows have passed through borders within the framework of the modern management system. In addition to these flows, some factors, including higher income, public welfare, improved leisure time, and communications have highlighted that tourism making it to play a role in the development of cities as the role played by the industrial revolution in social evolutions. Under such circumstances, tourism brings mobility and dynamism to people and creates the concept of communication with other cultures in different places as a geographical-social phenomenon in the global system (Khosravi 2005, 20).

According to published statistics in 2017, the contribution of the tourism economy of Iran with

a value-added of 30.7 billion dollars equals 7.3% of the total gross domestic product (GDP) of Iran. According to statistics presented by the Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Tourism, Maragheh County can be a suitable place and platform for tourism since it has more than 300 ancient and historical monuments registered in the list of national monuments before and after Islam, as well as natural monuments and mineral waters. This county can attract tourists by introducing its historical monuments and nature. Hence, an assessment of subject dimensions and the role of tourism and ecotourism in development can contribute to proposing appropriate solutions to increase tourist attraction. Due to the different orchards located in this county, Maragheh has become a region for agriculture and horticulture, and different jobs for the conversion of agricultural products directly or indirectly exist in this city. In this county, apples, and grapes are the most common fruits, and other fruits are also produced in Maragheh. According to the Ministry of Agriculture Jihad, with annual 320,000 tons, this county has the highest share of production of crops, around 50 cold storages for products storage, and 10 factories for drying and packing grapes and other products exist in this county that provides production capacity of 40,000 tons per year (statistics established by Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade). In addition to farmers and gardeners, 2000 people directly work in these entities. Moreover, numerous members earn money indirectly by producing crops. However, when crops are lost due to cold weather or any other reason, financial circulation is highly decreased since many jobs in the city depend on agricultural exchanges. Under such conditions, a recession occurs in the city with a dramatic decline in income of jobs related and unrelated to agriculture. Moreover, official authorities have declared an unemployment rate of 18% in Maragheh County (Maragheh County Cooperative and Social Welfare Department), and adding agriculture-unemployed people to permanently unemployed people cause many problems in the city; hence, tourism potential can be used to generate income and sustainable employment in the city. In this lieu, no specific study has been done in this city, so this study aims to address the relationship between the number of tourists, and the development of tourism infrastructures of the county in the first step then identifies and highlights tourism and ecotourism, even tourism potentials to achieve some solutions for tourist attraction to take measures for employment and income-generation. Therefore, this study looks for solutions to attract tourists.

The main objectives of this study are as follows:

- Evaluating the tourism potentials of Maragheh City
- Identifying problems, issues, and capacities existing in the tourism space of Maragheh City and presenting solutions for the development of a sustainable tourism industry for job creation.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

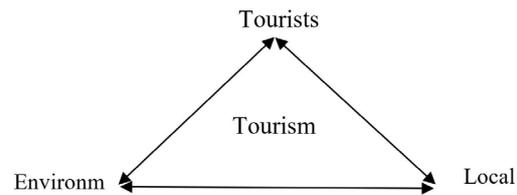
Tourism is rooted in movement and displacement, and motion is an inseparable part of human life. Hence, the history of tourism may go back to human life history with just a difference in its shapes and goals in different times and places. The tourism industry in Iran began in the past 50 years onwards to identify the civilization and pride of this ancient land in different fields. An organization called Tourism Affairs was created in the Ministry of Interior for the first time in 1935. After 1941, Tourism Affairs Organization was replaced with the Supreme Council of Tourism. This council was held once a week in the Ministry of Interior, and its administrative issues were done by the political department of the Ministry of Interior. In 1954, foreign tourist attractions received attention regarding their economic aspect and making good relationships between governments, so the Organization of Tourism Affairs was again established in the Ministry of Interior. In 1963, the Tourists Attraction Organization was established to make policies and take effective measures for developing the tourism industry, and in 1975, this organization was merged with the Ministry of Information and started its mission under the title of Ministry of Information and Tourism (Khajehnabei, Zand Moghadam, and Korkeh Abadi 2021).

Now, sustainable development is the main approach used in tourism planning and other types of development. According to the sustainable development method, tourism sources must be kept for future generations, while being useful and useable for current society. Therefore, tourism planning requires fundamental planning on which, sustainable tourism development is based (Taghvaei and Safar Abadi 2011).

Sustainable tourism is the result of an attempt for achieving sustainable development in all dimensions. The main purpose of explaining the sustainable tourism concept is to present basic and logical methods for using all natural and human resources preventing the non-scientific application of these resources. Sustainable tourism development includes three aspects:

1. Preserving the environment
2. Preserving cultural resources and heritage
3. Respecting resources (Azkia and Emani 2015, 329).

In other words, it can be stated that the approach considered in sustainable tourism addresses tourism in different aspects making a triangular nexus between a tourist-friendly society, tourists, and the tourism industry to modify the pressures on three sides of the triangle creating a balance between them in long term (Roknodin Eftekhari, Mahdavi, and Poortaheri 2011, 5).



**Fig. 1. Relationship between Tourist, Host, and Environment (Sustainable Tourism Triangle)**

Therefore, tourism development is called sustainable when it is not destructive and preserves various resources for future generations. Sustainable tourism indeed must be able to exist permanently and unlimitedly in an environment, not being harmful to the environment in terms of human and physical activities, and not hurting social and economic activities.

Different views exist about tourism and its development. In a supportive view, tourism is taken as a generative industry that contributes to the economic growth and development of countries. This viewpoint has many supporters when economic issues are highly critical for most countries and tourism is considered a factor to attract and increase foreign exchange power. This point of view pays more attention to the economic aspects of tourism and planners of this field consider its vital role in overcoming the economic problems of communities. The supportive view develops some issues, such as the development of installations and infrastructures that are highly important for a tourist attraction to solve or alleviate the economic problems of the society (Yasoori, Ramezanpour, and Qani PourTafreshi 2012, 58).

On the contrary, supporters of the regulatory view believe that when governments do not play a regulatory role in tourism development then it will deviate from the principles of sustainable development, which preserves various resources of the country. If tourism development is not considered a sustainable process for quick-return economic goals in some countries, it will destroy natural resources causing negative effects on value-added creation (Khajehnabei, Zand Moghadam, and Korkeh Abadi 2021).

The viewpoint of compatibility implicitly accepts the government's involvement in tourism activities. According to the compatibility point of view, governments try to adopt proper tourism policies for their countries to create compatibility and match between public interest and tourism development making it consistent with the benefits of the country in different scopes.

Knowledge-based viewpoint, after tourism development was considered a professional topic in 1990, an approach was created that faced some

executive problems so that many developing communities consider it an excuse for the presence of imperialism. This viewpoint emphasizes the establishment of academic centers for tourism and the development of tourism research; hence, an independent scientific discipline called tourism appeared to develop the tourism industry (Aghajani and Azkia 2015).

### 3. BACKGROUND

Many Iranian and foreign studies have been conducted on tourism considering general and case studies examining this topic based on different economic, cultural, social, and other dimensions. Numerous Iranian studies have been conducted that some of which are mentioned herein:

Mafi and Saghaei (2009) conducted a study entitled "MS-SWOT model application in tourism management analysis of Mashhad Metropolis." In this research, urban tourism management can serve as a scale weight in balancing to achieve urban sustainable tourism, so any kind of urban management inefficiency in the tourism field of the current era cause many implications. The reason is that this category has sophisticated dimensions; hence, suitable solutions must be found to evaluate tourism approach conditions and consequences.

Kazemi et al. (2013) carried out a study on the strategy existing in the tourism development of Lorestan province by using SWOT analysis through a qualitative process among tourists and tourism job owners. Lorestan province deals with some weaknesses and threats in using available tourism potentials despite the presence of unspoiled tourism areas, ancient histories, unique cultural heritage, excellent positions, and perfect opportunities, such as motivation for travel, presence of professional experts, and suitable climate of this province.

Mehdizadeh et al. (2013) conducted a study entitled "the study of sport tourism status in the City of Mashhad Based on SWOT Analysis." This study comprised 105 professors, physical education experts, tourism experts, and tourism tour leaders as the sample. The results of this study indicate that from the viewpoint of participants, the quality of accommodation in hotels was the most important strength, lack of qualified personnel in different positions was the most important weakness, traded and vast market in Mashhad was the most important opportunity, and lack of financial sports sponsor as the most important threat was in the field of sports tourism in Mashhad. In the case of prioritization of indices, economic index and marketing are the most effective indexes in the field of sports tourism of Mashhad.

Some of the foreign studies conducted on the considered topic have been reviewed herein:

Rahman Nurkovic carried out a study at the University

of Bosnia and Herzegovina from 1992 to 1995 to examine the influence of tourism on the regional development of Bosnia and Herzegovina regarding tourism resources distribution. According to the whole tourism trend in the world, tourism influences the whole economy of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The results of this study indicated the tourism resources in Bosnia and Herzegovina region have not been used completely due to the weak development of the traffic network and the lack of modern hotels.

Margherita Pedrana (2013), a professor at the University of Rome, carried out a study under the title of "local economic development policies and Tourism with an Approach to Sustainability and Culture." The results of this study found a direct relationship between tourism and local economic development. Accordingly, the tourism industry has become an important industry in Italy and this case requires holistic governmental support.

Jaswal (2014) conducted a study under the title of "Role of the tourism industry in India's development" to examine the Indians' attitudes and behaviors towards foreign guests and more respect for them when they come to this country, and to address the role of tourism in the economic growth of India. This paper was done through a secondary analysis in which, tourism had a positive influence on the development of India. Moreover, this study aims to find solutions for attracting more tourists in India because the government's policy supports these solutions to increase revenue earned from the tourism industry, and promotional campaigns must be pursued in tourism regions to attract more tourists. Air travel phases in the airport must be simplified, meanwhile, the environmental destruction due to tourism and wildlife must be considered when tourism is promoted. Eco-friendly tourism must be promoted because wildlife imposes stress on animals changing their behavioral patterns. The noise and chaos created by tourists would negatively affect their behavioral patterns.

Scheyvens (1999) conducted a case study at Massey University, New Zealand under the title of "Ecotourism and the Empowerment of local communities." This study addressed this topic regarding economic, psychological, social, and political empowerment presenting the empowerment process as an optimal process to analyze the social, economic, psychological, and political effects of ecotourism on the local communities. It means tourism aims to protect ecotourism improving and developing it. In this way, the participation of local communities can preserve nature and create sustainable employment and income.

According to the background of Iranian and foreign studies conducted on tourism development, all studies aim to find some indices to improve the status and infrastructures of tourism, and the purpose of all places especially cities is to attract tourists to

create sustainable jobs and income for citizens. The present study also pursues the same goal of achieving sustainable jobs and income by evaluating tourism potential.

#### 4. STUDIED AREA

Maragheh has an area of 2186 km<sup>2</sup> that covers 4.8% of the who area of Eastern Azerbaijan Province. Maragheh is located in 130 km distance from Tabriz City in the southern part of the province that has border with Tabriz from the north, Western Azerbaijan from the south, Bonanb, Ajabshir, and Malekan from the west, and Bostan Abad, Hashtrud, and Charoymagh from the east. Geographically, Maragheh consists of two separate areas. The central and southern part of the county is plain, while the southern part which includes the southern slopes of Sahand highlands is mountainous and rugged. Leylanchai, Mordeghchay,

and Soofichay rivers are the most important sources of agricultural water in the county, which originate from the Sahand Mountains and flow towards the Urmia Lake. Maragheh city is located in the south of Tabriz County on the shore of Safirud River, which originates from Sahand Mountain and reaches Maragheh then flows towards wets and pours into the Urmia Lake. The word “Maragheh” is the shortened form of “Ghariyeh Al-Maragheh” which means pastures that Iranians called Afrazeh Rud in the past (Sephehvand 2002, 52).

Maragheh City has 300 historical monuments from the past of which, more than 110 monuments have been registered in the list of national heritage. The mentioned monuments have been selected from different historical periods, so this was a suitable place for scholars and artists over history.

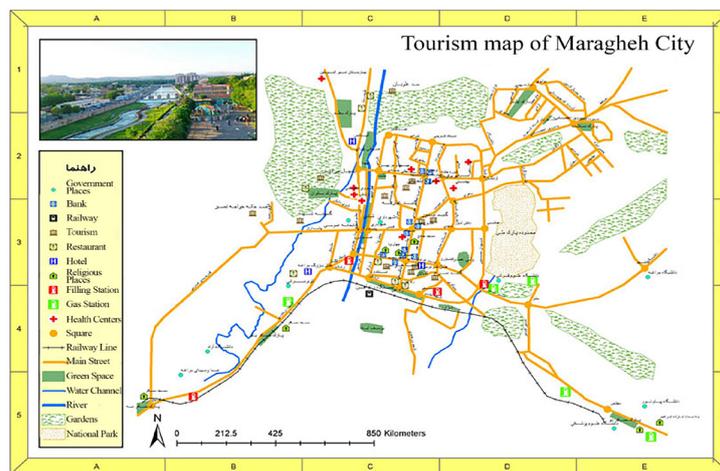


Fig. 2. Map and Area of Maragheh City

Historical sources have named Maragheh as the place of birth of Prophet Zarathustra, and scientists believe that this prophet was born around the Sahand Mountain which is called Asnvand in Avesta. Maragheh was captured by Arabs in 61AH, so became their foothold of them. “Maragheh in Azerbaijan is an important county that has many gardens and fresh fruits. Numerous scientists in different disciplines have emerged in this city,” Yaqut al-Hamawi states in his prominent book (Hamavi 1983, 172). It has been mentioned in Hudud al-'Alam that Maragheh is a large city with flowing waters and fresh gardens with a strong castle that the son of Boosaj destructed (Sephehvand 2002, 49).

Some of the important historical monuments located in Maragheh are as follows: Gonbad-e-Sorkh in 542AH, Borj-e-Modavar in 563AH during the Seljuk era, Gonbad-e-Kabood during the Ilkhani era 725AH, Mehr-e-Zaman Temple of Zoroastrians, Aghalar Grave, Ohadi Maragheh Grave, Huance in 5th and 6th century, Khajeh Nasir al-din Toosi Rasad Khaneh

(observatory house) of Maragheh, Ilkhani specialized museum, Natural cave (Hampoeel), old mosques, Alavian Dam, and beautiful gardens.

#### 5. METHOD

In this research, the decision Delphi method and field studies were used to collect data, and the obtained data were used to address strengths and weaknesses, opportunities, and weaknesses of tourism development based on the SWOT model. SWOT is a qualitative method that was selected for the reason that in the qualitative method, we do purposive interviews with individuals who have experience in the subject, so we can use their comments on a specific topic. Hence, this study considered the professional comments and viewpoints of tourism experts and specialists to develop this category. To implement the Delphi technique, three rounds were considered. All tourism experts, including professionals and practitioners in this field (N=30) were asked in the first round

to express their comments about strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats considering tourism in Maragheh City. In this phase, 30 experts expressed their ideas, and after the comments of experts were collected and summarized in the second round, all collected comments were sent again to all tourism experts to express their ideas about considered subjects based on the Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, no idea, disagree, and strongly disagree). After the questionnaires were received and collected in this round, questions were scored from 1 to 5, and then the questions with scores less than 4 or questions that obtained half plus 1 score less than 4 in the next step were removed and the rest of questions were prepared for the third round. In the final and third round after announcing the scores given to the mentioned options by the individual, respondents and tourism experts were asked to rank these options based on the score range of 1-4. After the results were collected, priority, importance, and consensus indices were measured.

### 5.1. Delphi Techniques and Their Different Types

Various definitions of the Delphi technique have been mentioned in the books and papers. For instance, Turov defines Delphi as a technique based on which, a group process is formed allowing group members to engage with issues. Moreover, Dalkey (1967) and Brown (1968) consider the Delphi technique a method used to summarize and correct the comments of a group that is usually experts. In addition, Masini (1993) defines Delphi as a technic that addresses experts' consensus on a specific topic. Although this collective judgment among experts provides various

viewpoints and mental comments, it is more reliable than personal and individual statements providing more objectivity and accuracy. According to Long. The Delphi technique is a research method used for forecast and future assessment (Sarookhani 2004, 91). Woudenberg divides Delphi types into three groups: Traditional Delphi: this method was used by its inventors for two applications: forecast and estimation of unknown indices. This method is used to determine consensus between experts' comments about future advances in science and technology. Political Delphi does not aim to reach a consensus but addresses different views about a political topic of the day. The main purpose of this Delphi is to reach views available in the consensus. Decision-making Delphi is used to achieve joint decisions made by various people about a special issue. The decision-making topic is usually a complicated and multidimensional subject in which, the structural relationship process of a professional group is effective in solving the subject accurately (Ahmadi and Nasiriani Abazari 2008, 176).

### 5.2. How to Calculate the Consensus Index

This index indicates to what extent the experts and scholars have a consensus on tourism items. It is worth noting that strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities have been chosen based on the respondents' comments and recommendations. To reach the consensus on the indices of this process, five options were designed: (A) strongly agree, (B) somewhat agree, (C) somewhat disagree, and (D) strongly disagree. After the data were collected in this phase, the consensus index was measured as follows:

$$\frac{(\text{number of responses to option A} \times 2) + (\text{number of responses to option B} \times 1) + (\text{number of responses to option C} \times -1) + (\text{number of responses to option D} \times -2)}{\text{number of responses to options A-D}}$$

The more this index tends to zero, the more lack of consensus is seen in comments about the considered item, while the more this index is further from zero, the more consensus exists on the topic under question.

### 5.3. How to Calculate the Importance Index

This index indicates the importance rate that experts consider for strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities. This index was used in the second phase

of the Delphi technique after reaching the results of a consensus index about strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities by experts. In this step, the importance rate of operational indicators is surveyed based on the four options, and each respondent could select one of the options of high, moderate, low, or unimportant. The importance index is measured as follows:

$$\frac{(\text{number of responses to high option} \times 100) + (\text{number of responses to moderate option} \times 50) + (\text{number of responses to low option} \times 25) + (\text{number of responses to unimportant option} \times 0)}{\text{total number of responses}}$$

The closed the items to 100, the more important the topics are; the more the index rate tends to zero, the less important the topics considered by respondents will be.

### 5.4. How to Calculate the Priority Index

This index was used in the third step to prioritize strengths, weaknesses, threats, and opportunities.

After analyzing the information obtained from previous steps, the studied individuals were asked in this step to express their ideas about the priority of agreed and important topics. They expressed their responses by selecting one of the options of high priority, moderate priority, and low priority. The priority index is measured as follows:

(number of responses to high priority ×100)+(number of responses to moderate priority ×50)+(number of responses to low priority × 25)

total number of responses

The closed the priority index to 100, the higher the priority of that item, and the more the index tends to zero, the lower the priority of the considered item would be from the viewpoint of experts (Azad Armaki 2012, 20).

## 6. FINDINGS

According to data reported in Table 1, SWOT analysis indicates that experts believe the strong potential for investment in tourism include unique historical and ancient monuments and people's hospitality, which are the most important strength with an average weight of 1.53, 1.5, 1.47, respectively, and horticulture and livestock products and mountainous vegetables used to create local malls is ranked in the next importance degree with an average weight of 1.4. On the contrary, cultural traditions and rituals, Sahand earthen dam lake, and the income-generating tourism industry were the least important internal strengths with average weights of 0.13, 0.9, and 1.12, respectively. According to the data reported in the table, components of improper environment and physical infrastructures

of tourism, absence of tourists in the region, and lack of public investment in this area are the most important internal weaknesses with average weights of 1.3, 1.17, and 1.07, respectively. In contrast, insufficient recreational equipment and facilities, and improper accommodation and comfort amenities were the least important internal weaknesses with average weights of 0.77 and 0.83, respectively.

Moreover, components of the rich background of the county which was the capital of Iran in the past, and registration of this event in historical books, fresh water and weather, and gardens in the Maragheh region for tourist attraction were the most important external opportunities with average weights of 1.5 and 1.43, respectively. However, components of Maragheh County's location in the route of Western Azerbaijan and Kurdistan provinces from the west towards the center of the country and vice versa, and less improper recreational space in adjacent cities were the least important external opportunities with average weights of 0.9 and 0.57, respectively.

**Table 1. SWOT Analysis Matrix (Ranking and Prioritizing)**

SWOT Analysis	Priority Index	Importance Index	Consensus Index	Rank
Strengths (S)				
S <sub>1</sub> = strong potential for investment in tourism	92.5	90	1.53	1
S <sub>2</sub> = diversity of horticulture and livestock products and mountainous vegetables to create local malls	87.91	85.83	1.4	4
S <sub>3</sub> = cultural traditions and rituals	45.83	42.5	0.13	11
S <sub>4</sub> = participation of people in tourism programs	80.83	77.5	1.33	5
S <sub>5</sub> = unique historical and ancient monuments	88.33	86.66	1.5	2
S <sub>6</sub> = unspoiled gardens and nature	77.5	76.66	1.23	7
S <sub>7</sub> = hospitality of indigenous people	87.5	84.16	1.47	3
S <sub>8</sub> = different heights especially Sahand Mountain	77.5	75	1.27	6
S <sub>9</sub> = Alavian earthen dam lack	66.66	65	0.9	10
S <sub>10</sub> = presence of many rivers	74.16	71.66	1.13	9
S <sub>11</sub> = income-generating tourism industry	80	75	1.2	8
Weaknesses (W)				
W <sub>1</sub> = lack of public planning and investment in this region	75.83	73.33	1.07	4
W <sub>2</sub> = lack of willingness among indigenous people to invest in tourism due to lack of information about the tourism industry	72.5	70	1.1	3
W <sub>3</sub> = lack of sufficient tourists in the region	67.5	65.83	1.17	2
W <sub>4</sub> = improper and insufficient service and hygiene amenities	68.33	66.66	1	5

SWOT Analysis	Priority Index	Importance Index	Consensus Index	Rank
Weaknesses (W)				
W <sub>5</sub> = inappropriate and insufficient accommodation and recreational amenities	16.89	5.87	83.0	6
W <sub>6</sub> = improper environmental and physical infrastructures (road, etc.)	66.76	83.75	3.1	1
W <sub>7</sub> = insufficient recreational equipment and facilities	60	83.55	77.0	7
Opportunities (O)				
O <sub>1</sub> = government's attention to investment in the tourism industry	66.67	65.83	1	5
O <sub>2</sub> = encouraging the private sector to invest in the tourism sector	67.5	65.83	1.03	4
O <sub>3</sub> = increasing motivation for travel among people who live around the county and other parts of the country	76.67	75.83	1.23	3
O <sub>4</sub> = populated regions and cities around the county	61.67	59.17	0.97	6
O <sub>5</sub> = fewer improper recreational spaces in adjacent cities	46.47	44.17	.57	8
O <sub>6</sub> = fresh water and weather and gardens for tourist attraction	80.83	80	1.43	2
O <sub>7</sub> = Maragheh County location in the route of Western Azerbaijan and Kurdistan provinces from the west towards the center of the country and vice versa	70	67.5	0.9	7
O <sub>8</sub> = rich background of the county which was the capital of Iran in the past and registration of this event in historical books	48.33	32.5	1.5	1
Threats (T)				
T <sub>1</sub> = probable failure or lack of profitability of investment in the tourism sector	63.33	60.83	1.1	2
T <sub>2</sub> = possible increase in recreational and tourism amenities and facilities in adjacent cities	51.67	50	0.47	6
T <sub>3</sub> = enhancing tendency and motivation of tourists for surrounding regions	63.33	60.83	0.93	4
T <sub>4</sub> = gradual loss of indigenous and local culture	70.83	68.33	1.06	3
T <sub>5</sub> = loss of ecology and vegetation of region under the influence of tourist presence	38.33	36.67	1.2	1
T <sub>6</sub> = strict and inflexible administrative system for issuing licenses to create tourism facilities and establishments in the region	51.67	44.17	0.8	5

As seen in Table 1, the SWOT analysis matrix indicates that components of loss of ecology and vegetation of the Maragheh region caused by the tourist presence and probable failure or lack of profitability of investment in the tourism sector if Maragheh are the most substantial external threat for tourism development with average weights of 1.2 and 1.1, respectively, while increased recreational and tourism amenities and facilities in adjacent cities (0.47) and strict and flexible administrative system to issue a license to create tourism facilities (0.8) have lower ranks among external threats.

## 7. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Regarding the strategies presented for tourism, competitive/aggressive (SO) can be emphasized because the natural location of the county and ecotourism and geotourism development, as well as registered historical monuments, confirm that this strategy must be more considered. However, this natural location and the potential available in sports infrastructures to hold sports matches can consider paying attention to diversification strategy (ST). The following points can be stated about the competitive-

aggressive strategy:

Emphasis on natural tourism (ecotourism) and geotourism development, including Sahand mountains and Hampoel cave due to the advantages of this tourism for the development of the region;

Identifying and using historical monuments, including Rasad Khaneh and Kabood, Ghafarieh, Sorkh Gonbad, and Mehr Temple to attract tourists;

Creating a suitable platform for private sector investment and supporting this sector to develop tourism infrastructures;

Employing experts and skilled forces to form non-governmental associations to promote tourism and teaching people to how treat tourists;

Coordinating different institutes and sectors to develop the tourism industry in the county.

According to the reviewed strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) of tourism, the following results were obtained:

1. Of the total internal factors affecting tourism development in the Maragheh region, 11 factors were strengths and 4 factors were weaknesses.

2. Of the total external factors influencing the tourism region in the Maragheh region, 8 factors were external opportunities and 6 factors were external threats.

According to results obtained from quantitative aspects of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, strong potential for investment in tourism, and the presence of unique historical and ancient monuments are the most substantial strengths in the tourism development of Maragheh. This result has been confirmed by Kazemi and colleagues, Nurkovic, and Pedrana who believe that Lorestan Province has numerous tourism sources that can attract tourists and develop the region. Moreover, Nurkovic and Pedrana believe that tourism sources result in development. hence, Maragheh has many tourism sources both naturally and historically, which can contribute to the development of city and tourism infrastructures with the presence of tourists. In addition, components of improper environmental and physical infrastructures are the most critical weakness in tourism development. regarding the strengths and weaknesses of tourism in Maragheh, urban management must provide the required field and space for the presence of investors who invest in tourism because a high potential exists in this sector. On the other hand, insufficient infrastructure for tourism and investment in this sector can bring a bright view towards tourism in Maragheh. Hence, urban management can play a vital role in developing the infrastructure of tourist places as an equilibrium weight is considered an element for tourism infrastructures mentioned in the study conducted by Mafi and Saghaei. Furthermore, among external opportunities, the component of the unique background and history of the county that was the capital of Iran in the past and registration of this event in history books is the most significant external opportunity, while among external threats, loss of ecology and vegetation of region caused

by tourist presence in the region is the critical threat for tourism development. Since Maragheh was popular in the past and now is not that much famous, some measures must be taken to minimize the threats to tourism in Maragheh City.

The achievement of this research implies that tourism development in Maragheh is more provided through controlling threats and improving its strengths. This case is achieved through a purposive plan, prospective and coherent principles, paying attention to elements constituting tourism, including different attractions, transportation inside and outside the city, virtual and environmental promotion, efficient management, tourism service and infrastructures, enacting facilitating rules, and cultural indices. Meanwhile, any city must be examined based on its conditions and potential, so strategies for tourism development in Maragheh County that has specific conditions must be considered based on its features and specifications.

## 8. STRATEGIES FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

This study aims to identify strengths and weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and their impacts on tourism to present some strategies for tourism development in the region, increase positive effects, reduce negative effects, and find tourism sources and attractions using them appropriately. Therefore, the following strategies and measures are recommended to actualize tourism goals in Maragheh City considering the obtained findings:

- Identifying tourism attractions in different areas of Maragheh and providing the field with sustainable job opportunities;
- Maintaining historical monuments and introducing them to tourists with different techniques;
- Establishing a work group to make coordination between different entities to overcome the problems of tourism development in Maragheh;
- Using a component of the hospitality of people and encouraging the culture for tourist acceptance;
- Performing various promotional programs in the real and cyberspaces to introduce historical, cultural, and natural places and permanent presence of tourism in the county through various regional and national programs and gatherings;
- Attracting investors to develop tourism infrastructures;
- Optimal allocation of resources for investment and distribution of suitable amenities based on the priority of regions with high yield in the tourism field for job creation in Maragheh;
- Establishing and creating different mountainous shelters on the slopes of Sahand Mountain for the settlement of mountaineers and attract sports tourists;
- Creating bazaars for agricultural, livestock products, and mountainous vegetables next to the historical monuments.

## REFERENCES

- Aghajani, Hamid, and Mostafa Azkia. 2015. Sociological Analysis of Tourism Impact on Regional Development (Case of Study: Rasht City, Gilan Province). *Journal of Iranian Social Development Studies (JISDS)* 7(4): 7-28. [https://jisds.srbiau.ac.ir/article\\_9060.html](https://jisds.srbiau.ac.ir/article_9060.html). [in Persian]
- Ahmadi, Fazllah, Khadijeh Nasiriani, and Parvaneh Abazari. 2008. Delphi technique: a tool for research. *Iranian Journal of Medical Education* 8(1):175-85. [in Persian]
- Azad Armaki, Taghi, Mahdi Mobaraki, and Zohreh Shahbazi. 2012. Investigation and Identification of Social Development Applied Indicators (Using the Delphi technique). *scds* 1 (1): 7-30. <http://journals.sabz.ac.ir/scds/article-121--fa.html>. [in Persian]
- Azkia, Mustafa, and Ali Imani. 2015. *Sustainable rural development*. Tehran: Information. [in Persian]
- Hamavi, Yaqut. 1983. *The common choice of Yaqut Hamavi*. Translated by Mohammad Parvin Gonabadi. Tehran: Amir Kabir. [in Persian]
- Hataminejad, Hossein, and Amir Sharifi. 2015. Examines the role of urban tourism development on sustainable urban development (Case study: Sanandaj). *urban tourism* 2(1): 61-74. doi: [10.22059/jut.2015.54066](https://doi.org/10.22059/jut.2015.54066). [in Persian]
- Jaswal, Sultan Singh. 2014. Role of Tourism Industry in India's Development". *Journal of Tourism & Hospitality* 3: 1-6. doi: [10.41720269.1000126-2167/](https://doi.org/10.41720269.1000126-2167/)
- Kazemi, Mahdi, Mahmoodreza Esmacilei, and Alahyar Beigi Firozi. 2013. 'Establishment and Selection of Strategy for Tourism Development in Lorestan Province Based on SWOT Analysis and Quantitative Strategic Planning Matrix'. *Geography and Development* 11(32): 47-60. doi: [10.22111/gdij.2013.1163](https://doi.org/10.22111/gdij.2013.1163). [in Persian]
- Khajehnebei, Fahimeh, Mohammad Reza Zand Moghadam, and Zeynab Korkeh Abadi. 2021. Analysis of Social, Cultural, Economic, Environmental and Institutional Structures in the Growth and Development of Urban Tourism, Case Study: Galugah City. *Journal of Urban Ecological Research* 11(21): 13-28. doi: [10.30473/grup.2020.7469](https://doi.org/10.30473/grup.2020.7469). [in Persian]
- Khosravi, Mohsen. 2005. Investigating the tourism capabilities of Qom province and its effects on the development of this province. M.A. thesis, Shahid Beheshti University.
- Mehdizadeh, Abbas, Mehdi Talebpour, and Mehrdad Fathi. 2014. 'The study of sport tourism Status in the city of Mashhad based on SWOT Analysis'. *Applied Research in Sport Management* 2(4): 23-36. [https://arsmb.journals.pnu.ac.ir/article\\_804.html](https://arsmb.journals.pnu.ac.ir/article_804.html). [in Persian]
- Nurkovic, Rahman. 1995. "Influence of Tourism on the regional development of Bosnia and Herzegovina". Bosnia and Herzegovina: University of Sarajevo.
- Pedrana, Margherita. 2013. Local economic development policies and tourism. an approach to sustainability and culture. *Regional Science Inquiry, Hellenic Association of Regional Scientists* 0(1): 91-99. <https://ideas.repec.org/a/hrs/journal/vvy2013i1p9199-.html>
- Roknodin Eftekhari, Abdoreza, Davood Mahdavi, and Mehdi Poortaheri. 2011. Localization Process of Sustainable Development Indicators of Rural Tourism in Iran. *Journal of Rural Research* 1(4): 1-41. [https://jrur.ut.ac.ir/article\\_22685.html](https://jrur.ut.ac.ir/article_22685.html). [in Persian]
- Sarookhani, Baqher. 2004. 'Qualitative Delphi; A Research Tool in the Social Science'. *Women's Studies Sociological and Psychological* 2(4): 86-121. doi: [10.22051/jwsp.2004.1244](https://doi.org/10.22051/jwsp.2004.1244). [in Persian]
- Sepehrvand, Majid. 2002. *Maragheh in the course of history*. Tabriz: Ahrar. [in Persian]
- Scheyvens, Reina. 1999. "Ecotourism and the empowerment of local communities". *Tourism Management* 20(2): 245-249. doi: [10.1016/S02617-00069\(98\)5177-](https://doi.org/10.1016/S02617-00069(98)5177-)
- Taghvaei, Masoud, and Azam Safar Abadi. 2011. The role of urban management in achieving sustainable development of urban tourism in the city of Kermanshah. *Journal of Arid Regions Geographic Studies* 2(4): 35-52. [http://jargs.hsu.ac.ir/article\\_161278.html](http://jargs.hsu.ac.ir/article_161278.html). [in Persian]
- Yasoori, Majid, Esmail Ramezanzpour, and Marziyeh Qani PourTafreshi. 2012. Investigating the impact of urban tourism on the economy of a case study: Lahijan city. In Processing First Conference of Iran's national tourism and nature tourism. <https://civilica.com/doc/195486/certificate/print/>. [in Persian]
- Zivyar, Parvaneh, Somayeh Teymoori, and Mostafa, Norouzi. 2013. 'Feasibility of Tourism Industry in Khorram Abad based on SWOT Analytical Model'. *Territory* 10(39): 75-90. [https://sarzamin.srbiau.ac.ir/article\\_6147.html](https://sarzamin.srbiau.ac.ir/article_6147.html). [in Persian]

#### HOW TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

Ghahreman, Naser, Seyyed Mohammad Seyyed Mirzaie, and Mostafa Azkia. 2023. Planning for Sustainable Tourism Development in Maragheh City Based on SWOT Technique. *Armanshahr Architecture & Urban Development Journal* 16(42): 221-231.

DOI: 10.22034/AAUD.2023.288865.2488

URL: [https://www.armanshahrjournal.com/article\\_173193.html](https://www.armanshahrjournal.com/article_173193.html)



#### COPYRIGHTS

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with publication rights granted to the Armanshahr Architecture & Urban Development Journal. This is an open- access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution License.

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



