

KISH AS A SMALL ISLAND TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

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ABSTRACT

Small islands are often encouraged to balance their economic and environmental concerns toward sustainable tourism. Universal experience shows that sustainable tourism in small islands should take into account their individual characteristics. This paper investigates the quality of sustainable tourism in a small island, namely, Kish in the South of Iran. Firstly, the main characteristics of small islands in relation to tourism sustainability are studied. Then the characteristics of Kish are identified as a small island. Finally, this study suggests that the crucial issue of sustainable tourism has been neglected in the development planning of the island. It is concluded with some recommendations for improving the development of Kish towards sustainable tourism. The results are generally applicable to other small islands. In addition, the results can be generalized to other tourist destinations in Iran or other countries with similar climatic and cultural conditions.

Keywords: Iran, islands, Kish Island, sustainable tourism.

1. INTRODUCTION

Islands, as one important type of tourism destination in the world, involve with term of sustainable tourism. Briguglio and Briglio (2005), Kingsbury (2005), and Teh (2007) mentioned that the development of small islands needs to be done according to the principles of sustainable tourism because they definitely depend on tourism. Briguglio and Briglio (2005) believe that small islands depend on tourism more than other Islands. They address this to the economic requests and natural potential of the small islands. In addition, the report of “Sustainable Tourism in Small Islands” Conference in Singapore (2006) suggests that the principles of sustainable tourism should therefore be introduced according to the individual characteristics of each Island. This paper investigates the quality of sustainable tourism in Kish Island in relation to the individual characteristics of the Island.

Kish Island is situated in the south of Iran, and it has been considered as one of the important tourism destinations of the country since 1970s. This island can be set in the definition of Small Island as economically depending on tourism and containing unique natural features. Consequently, the development of the Island of Kish needs to be accommodated with the concepts of “sustainable tourism in small islands” (Shahandeh, 1999). This paper firstly reviews the literature related to tourism at the small Island and identifies concerns in relation to sustainability in small islands. Subsequently, it introduces Kish in the category of Small Island based on the characteristics found previously. At the same time, the paper attempts to analyze the extent to which the development of Kish accommodates the principles of sustainable tourism for small islands. It also identifies concerns related to sustainable tourism in Kish in carrying out its development plans. Furthermore, the main characteristics of the small islands in relation to sustainable tourism will be discussed in relation to Kish. In this way, the development background and the environmental characteristics of the island are also reviewed. Consequently, the issues of sustainable tourism in the development of Kish, as well as related concerns for the island are examined through the interview with experts. The paper concludes with some recommendations to improve the planning development of Kish which can also be used for other small islands with similar characteristics.

2. SMALL ISLAND

Ellul (1999), McElroy and Olazarri (1997), Liu and Jenkins (1995), Hein (1990), Briguglio and Briguglio (2005) focused on ‘Small Islands’ among the island tourism that have more tendencies to depend on tourism than larger islands. Poon (1993) and Fennel (2000) consider ‘Island Tourism’ as a paradigm of the “new tourism” that includes more ecological concerns. Generally, the researchers have recognized some major reasons for the importance of islands in contemporary tourism, which includes: 1) the natural priorities of the islands for responding to new tourists’ demands; 2) air transportation; 3) the economic needs of the islands to the tourism sector (Pearce, 1987; Lockhart, Drakakis, & Schembri, 1993; Apostolopoulos *et al.*, 2002; Briguglio & Briguglio, 2005). According to Ellul (1999), McElroy and Olazarri (1997), Liu and Jenkins (1995), and Hein (1990), new tourists need to escape the stresses of modern life, and small islands due to their environmental attractions provide the need (Briguglio & Briguglio, 2005). Small islands, therefore, assume a superior position because of their greater environmental attractions.

Two key reasons have been highlighted for the dependency of small islands to tourism, and these are economic essential and their environmental characteristics as affecting factors (Shaw & Shaw, 1999; Kingsbury, 2005; Andriotis, 2006). According to Briguglio (2005), there is a mutual relationship between the factors that can lead the development of small islands towards tourism development. In addition, Baldacchino (2006) notes that “the separateness, distinctiveness, and more manageable small size of islands” lead them to establish sustainable programs for natural tourism (ecotourism). Thus, development of Small Islands should be identified in relation to concept of tourism.

The economy is rated as the most important reason for the tourism affinity of small islands. According to Shaw and Shaw (1999), Kingsbury (2005), Briguglio and Briguglio (2005), and Andriotis (2006), this is mainly due to their inability to develop export markets for their products. Briguglio (2005) mentions two kinds of economic advantages of small islands; direct advantages which include a plentiful supply of manpower and foreign exchange, and indirect advantages that basically involve the entrepreneurial activities of the local people. Both these advantages associate small islands with the tourism industry.

In conclusion, the greater tendency of small islands towards tourism stems largely from the reasons of economy and environmental attraction. At the same time, environmental attractions give rise to the economy concerns. This study highlights the concept of sustainable tourism in small islands with special emphasis on the environment.

3. SUSTAINABLE TOURISM ON A SMALL ISLAND

The World Tourism Organization has recommended that small islands, as a type of tourism destination, should follow sustainable tourism development guidelines (WTO, 2004). It is also known that small islands are more environmentally impacted by the tourism industry because of their small size (Baldacchino, 2004; Briguglio & Briguglio, 2005). Due to the natural characteristics of tourism islands, on the other hand, the strategies related to sustainability are often discussed on the balance between economic and environmental concerns (Briguglio & Briguglio, 2005). In small islands, according to Briguglio and Briguglio (2005), numerous economic activities negatively impact the environment and these will further give a feedback outcome on their economy. Consequently, the development of small islands should be planned and done according to or in line with sustainable tourism guidelines based on tourists’ needs and environmental concerns.

Hirano (2008) mentions that the term “sustainable tourism” has definitely been directed at small islands since the 1990’s. The researcher believes that many small islands have long been aware of their small size, limited resources, remoteness from the global market, and environmental and economic vulnerabilities (Hirano, 2008). According to Hirano (2008, p. 5), the results of the 1994 Conference recognized “that small island states face special challenges in planning and implementing sustainable development because of their limited developmental options.”

Small islands also need individual consideration because they are different in term of their characteristics and sizes, as well as the types of tourism development (Apostolopoulos *et al.*, 2002, p. 131). The relevant literature such as Baldacchino (2004), Briguglio and Briguglio (2005) and Kingsbury (2005) indicate the significance of paying specific attention to the environmental features of Islands. The report for “Sustainable Tourism in Small Island Conference” in Singapore (2006) highlights the significance of the tourists’ needs in the development of small islands and also shows many central concerns that have remained in the matter of sustainability. According to this report, it is important that small islands recognize appropriate recommendations based on their individual characteristics. Thus, small islands should specifically identify the needs of their own tourists, and establish their development based on these individual needs, priorities and resources in order for them to move toward sustainable tourism (Hirano, 2008).

In order to recognize the individual needs of the small islands toward sustainable tourism, Briguglio (2005) identified their general characteristics. Four main characteristics of small islands were identified, and these include economic dependency on tourism, small size, fragility of own ecosystem, and finite resources. According to Briguglio (2005) and Hirano (2008), these characteristics should be used as the criteria to address concerns of sustainably for each small island.

A review of the literature has shown that although small islands have long been aware of their intrinsic limitations for tourism development, none has seriously made any accommodation with sustainable tourism. On this matter, small islands are assumed to have balanced their social, economical and environmental aspects toward sustainable tourism development. In order to achieve this objective, they should identify their own tourists’ needs both in the short- and long-term, as well as the concerned individual characteristics like small size, the fragility of the ecosystem and finite resources. This paper utilizes these characteristics for investigating sustainable tourism in a small island, namely, Kish in the south of Iran (Figure 1, 2).



Figure 1: Location of Kish in Iran (source: www.worldatlas.com)



Figure 2: Location of Kish in the region, (source: www.worldatlas.com)

4. KISH AS A SMALL ISLAND

Kish Island is a popular tourism destination of Iran and it sets in the characteristics of small islands. Based on the characteristics mentioned above and official documents, Kish contains all the main characteristics of small islands, including economic dependency on tourism and environmental characteristics (Shahandeh, 1999; Ghahreman, 2005; Master Plan, 2007).

4.1 Economic Dependency on Tourism

Based on the historical background of Kish, tourism has been regarded as an economic driving force of the island (Zalzadeh, 1997). Among other, Zalzadeh (1977) addresses the economic role of tourism in Kish up to its transformation of 1968 when modern tourism was established. At present, Kish is depending on tourism because of its internal and regional benefits to the economy. According to the National Plan (2005) mentioned in the previous section, the tourism in Kish would indirectly fulfil the objectives of the national economic. In addition, “Destination Master Plan of Kish” (2007), i.e. the last master plan, considers tourism as the main economic opportunity for Kish, whereby it attempts reliant on its own economic sectors and resources. Therefore, based on the national and local planning, the tourism industry has a key role in the economy of Kish.

4.2 Environmental Characteristics

In addition, the tourism development of Kish has continually dependent upon the environmental characteristics. Zalzadeh (1977) noted that Kish had been selected very early as a tourism zone due to its environmental characteristics. Meanwhile, the last master plan of Kish (2007) was also based on its environmental tourist attractions. However, the environmental characteristics of Kish are impacted by tourism development (Ghahreman *et al.*, 2007). The tourism development of Kish, therefore, involves the challenges faced by small islands in balancing economy and the environment. Thus, the environmental characteristics of Kish were studied in order to understand the challenges in Kish as a small Island; these include all the environmental characteristics of a small island such as small size, fragile ecosystem, and finite resources. All these characteristics give rise to certain limitations for tourism development because of their vulnerability. Table 1 illustrates some impacts and vulnerabilities in relation to the environmental characteristics of Kish that have been extracted from the report of Kish Destination Master Plan (2007).

Table 1: Corresponding the general characteristics of Small Islands and their related impacts in Kish basis on report of Kish Destination Master Plan (2007), prepared by Authors (2009)

General Characteristics of Small Islands	Tourism related dangers (What has been happened)	Environmental results (Threats)	
Small size: 9000 Hec.	Land Depletion: - Airport take up 5% of the total land area - Urban area take up 36% of the total land area that will be - The purely tourism lands increase from 1.3% of total to 1.4% of total land area - Residential & second home take up %22 of the total land area	- Taking up large area for tourism activities and new urban area	
Fragility of own ecosystem	Lack of accommodation with the sever climatic & fragile ecological condition in: - Current land use pattern - Sit development trends - Construction techniques	- Increased air pollution compromising tourism potential - Oil spills in Persian Gulf - Spoilage to marine water with excessive shore development - Rising level increased pollution in groundwater - Extinction an absence of species on Kish - Declining habitats - Threatening species used	
Finite Sources	Increased demand for resources	High population increase due to rapid economic developments since 1980's: - High rate of development - A speculative real development - Land allocations have taken place at an increasing pace	- Exhausted resources - Pollution levels become excessive
	Coastal area	Irregular development of the coastal area: - Very extensively developed area in the shorefront of the Eastern Band and little remained open in beachfront lands of Marjin mall south - The lands where remained relatively untouched in the south and west Offshore development & land reclamation: In Lotus Hotel , Lower of the East , Saffien coastal park	- Environmental consequence in Marine and coastal area
	Internal area	Developed urban area without comprehensive and coordinated planning direction or development control; Scattered site development in south has resulted in the conversion of undeveloped land with potentially beneficial resources	- Urban encroachment of environmentally sensitive areas

Kish has a small island size being only about 9,000 square hectares which limits its development. The report by Dress and Sommer Company (DSC) in 2007 showed land depletion by uncontrolled urban development and tourism development. This report revealed that at present, urban development takes up 36% of the total urban area as well as 22% of the total residential and vacation home area. Furthermore, in relation to the current tourism development up to 2020, the land allocated for purely tourism activities increased from 1.3% to 1.4% of the total land area. Finally, the airport, which supports all aspects of development in Kish, has already taken up to 5% of the whole land area. It seems that tourism development is capturing a high percentage of Kish lands because almost all aspects of the development are related to tourism (Table 1).

As a small island, Kish has finite resources and a fragile ecosystem. The resource and ecological conditions of Kish have been generally examined by DSC (2007) in a study to prepare for the last Master plan. These have also been expertly investigated through the "Plan of Environmental Management of Kish" (2008) by FDC as well as in Ghahreman's (2007) study. In these studies, however, the scientific data on the resources and ecosystem of the island are rather limited (Table 1).

The DSC (2007) report categorizes the resources of Kish as earth resources, water resources, air resources, biotic resources, and terrestrial resources. There are no estimations on the life span of these resources and the Island's future requirements for these resources. The report estimates that the earth, water and biotic resources are threatened more by development, despite their key importance as tourist attractions. Furthermore, according to this estimation, the air quality is good due to the exposure of the island to fresh ocean breeze and general lack of polluting industries. In addition, the FDC (2008) report points out that terrestrial resource are less important than other Kish's resources. According this study, scanty vegetation predominates because of the hot climate and low precipitation. Meanwhile, animals in this habitat are non-domestic. In spite of the lack of comprehensive information about the natural resources of Kish, the findings show that the earth, water, and biotic resources are limited and threatened.

The FDC (2008) reports that the main components of Kish ecosystem into "marine water" and "biotic resources". The components have been damaged by urban development and tourism activities.

Based on the findings by the DSC (2007), the marine water around Kish is in satisfactory condition. This is partly due to the geographically advantageous situation of Kish which is close to the mouth of the Persian Gulf and the flush of fresh seawater. This report also indicates that the pollution of the seawater does exist, it is unaffected by the wash away of the water, and therefore, the three major sources of marine pollution remain, namely, urban run-offs which cause increased temperatures and higher salinity, harbour processes, where oil and polluted water are spilled out and then taken by the tides, and reclamation of land at the harbours, which also disturbs the natural marine system. Finally, increasing irrigation and water requirements are placing greater pressure on the desalination plants. It seems that despite the satisfactory condition of the marine water in its natural state is damaged by different reflexes of development.

Ghahreman (2007) states that the Biotic Resources of Kish are different existing eco-habitats, including the coral reef, intertidal flats, turtle breeding beaches and the Savannah landscape. Both DSC (2007) and FDC (2008) confirm degradation of the coral reef. Moreover, Ghahreman (2007) believes that all of them are encroached upon by at least some degree of urban development. The estimation of FDC (2008) additionally indicates that there is limited scientific evidence of the state of Sea Water Birds – on the Intertidal Flats; however, due to the proximity of hydroponics operations, the waste run off could have an effect on these habitats. In addition, FDC (2008) studies the Turtle Breeding Beaches and Savannah landscape. It points out that the turtle species on the Island are critically endangered and facing the risk of extinction. The lives of the turtles remain quite undisturbed at the moment; however, increasing tourism and urban development along the southern shore near the unoccupied hospital building and along the north shores, where a resort development is planned, will mean an increased need for the eco-management of these habitats. Thus, the biotic resources of Kish being damaged by urban development, as important tourist attractions of Kish, have a key role in tourism development for the Island.

In summary, the environmental characteristics of Kish are not in a stable condition in the face of development. The Kish environment is threatened by land depletion, uncontrolled use of resources, threatening the ecosystem. Meanwhile, there is no clear estimation of these threats and damages. The environmental condition of Kish brings to the foreground concerns of sustainability in this island. As a result, this Island has to adapt its development with the principles of sustainable tourism proposed in the development of small islands.

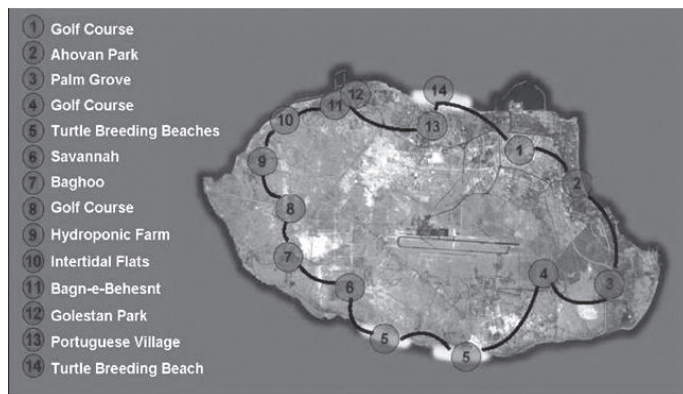


Figure 3: Natural Attractions of Kish Island; (Source: DSC - Destination Master Plan, 2007)

5. TOURISM IN KISH

According the tourism master plan of Iran (2001), Kish Island is one of main tourism destinations of the country and the tourism centre of the Persian Islands in the Persian Gulf. Besides the Caspian Sea shore, Kish Island is the only sea and beach recreational holiday and tourist destination in Iran. The background of Kish shows a strong relationship between the development of the island and the tourism industry. This section presents an overview of the tourism industry in Kish to help recognize the situation of tourism in the development of the island.

Based on the evidence, the historical background of Kish is illustrated through three main eras, namely, before modernization, modernization-before the Islamic Revolution and modernization-after the Islamic revolution (Baum & O’Gorman, 2010). The term tourism undertakes a main role in all the eras and has always been influenced by the political, social and economic features of the island. Kish Island, which is located between the Persian Islands in the region, has the longest history of tourism, with more than 1300 years (Nasr, Mostoufi & Zaryab, 1971) (Figure 4). The modernization of Kish was established in 1968 when Kish Island was selected as a tourism free zone by American experts due to its natural geographical features (Zalzadeh, 1997). At that time, huge changes were made to the island, and these emphasized on the development of international tourism (Zalzadeh, 1997).



Figure 4: a house in Harireh city and Jameh Mosque are some samples of historical parts of Kish (Source: Erfanian, 2007)

After the Islamic Republic, and since 1990, the government has embarked on an aggressive promotional and developmental campaign to tailor Kish as a trade and tourism zone and it has then become a duty-free shopping centre. Since then, “Kish Free Zone Organization” or KFZO has adopted Kish conduction. Since 2000, however, the tourism development of Kish has concentrated on the environmental and recreational aspects more than trade and shopping. It follows the national strategies of the government towards the tourism industry and environmental tourism.

According to the “Tourism Master Plan of Iran”, Kish was committed to two actions; firstly, to increase the domestic tourism and open up Iran to foreign travellers by upgrading run-down tourism facilities, historical and natural attractions, and secondly, to increase the trend of Iranian travel domestically. Based on the discussion given above, the process of tourism development in Kish can be interpreted in the global tourism scenario. Thus, it is obvious that the tourism at Kish Island has grown in parallel with the evolution of tourism worldwide. The establishment of modern tourism in Kish also coincides with the appearance of the ‘island tourism’ in other parts of the world (see section 2). Meanwhile, the natural trend of Kish tourism also corresponds with the environmental views in other similar tourism destinations. However, some historical events such as the Islamic Revolution and the War have caused some serious differences between the tourism in Kish and the global tourism scenario.

6. SUSTAINABLE TOURISM IN KISH

The condition of the environmental characteristics of Kish demonstrates that its development has not accommodated the term 'sustainable tourism'. Therefore, this study investigated the issues of sustainable tourism in the development process of Kish. It also identified the existing gaps in this field. This investigation was conducted in two stages. First, it studied the development plan of Kish in terms of sustainable tourism. Secondly, it systematically investigated the tourists and experts' opinions about sustainable tourism at the island. The first method involved document analysis and the second used the results of a semi-structured interview to verify the documental findings. The results of both the stages were compared with one another in order to identify the issues concerning sustainable tourism in Kish Island.

Based on the discussion given above, Kish Island is set in the category of small island so it has to adapt its development to the principles of sustainable tourism proposed in the development for small islands. Consequently, sustainable development of Kish should: (1) lead tourism development towards balancing social, economical and environment aspects, (2) concentrate more on the environmental concerns, and (3) identify tourists' needs in the short- and long-terms. This section attempts to investigate the development of Kish in relation to each of these items.

6.1 Sustainable Tourism and Planning Development in Kish

Among the background of Kish, the procedure of development plan has hardly been constant. Based on the documents of KFZO, the management structure and strategies have continuously been changing ever since Kish was chosen as a Tourism Free Zone. Thus, investigating the procedure of development plan in Kish reveals concerns over sustainability in tourism development and related gaps. The development plan of Kish should be investigated through its history of the last four decades when its development began to major on tourism. During this period, it never followed a constant planning although tourism had been the core of Kish development. According to Tahmaseb-pour, the Deputy of Tourism in KFZO, the earlier Kish master plans (i.e. prior to 2000) considered Kish Island to be a kind of "Free Zone" with more attention paid to business tourism (Monfared, 2009). Tahmaseb-pour (2009) mentioned that the previous master plans were never accepted due to the different changes in the economic protocols and government view (as cited in Monfared, 2009). During the four recent decades, the pace of development started to quicken and caused many urban and landscape schemes to fail.

The plans belonging to Geno Company (1995) and Pajoohesh & Memari Company (2000) placed more emphasis on the shopping and business potential of Kish. Furthermore, Ghahreman (2007) believes that these earlier plans seldom addressed environmental issues and environmental tourism. Ghahreman et al. (2007, 2) states that "...from this time on, the rush of tourism and relentless expansion on the Island got started, including adding various commercial structures and bazaars, expanding piers and the airport facilities, building new hotels, with the emphasis on import-export operations as well as building new recreational centres, town squares, roads, green spaces commensurate with the needs of the growing population and increased tourism". He also believes that environmental worries were of low priority during that period. According to Tahmaseb-pour, however, the management strategies of Kish changed in 2000, i.e. when the economic policies of the central government began to be inclined towards tourism and its contribution to the gross domestic product (GDP) (Monfared, 2009). The researcher further (2009) believes that KFZO needed to gain prominence in the development of the national Iranian plans at that time since the overall vision was to create a new destination image with a new brand. According to Tahmaseb-pour, the same vision guided the design of the last Master Plan which is named "Destination Master Plan-Kish Island-Persian Garden in the Persian Gulf" (Monfared, 2009). To Tahmaseb-pour, since none of the plans was able to provide objectives of Kish development, 'Destination Master Plan' was applied (cited in Monfared, 2009). From the first of this decade, the Kish Free Zone authorities have a continuous desire to remain at the forefront of growth and tourism development more often, and this marks among the more focused tourism development in Iran (Taebi, 2008; Monfared, 2009).

Based on the report of the plan (2007), "this plan pretends to establish growth management tools to encourage more cost sustainable development patterns to conserve the Island's resources. It also attempts to develop a sound base for tourism growth." In addition, the environmental recommendations of the Kish master plan are presented in three groups, namely, develop a resource plan, conservation and management, and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). Table 2 illustrates these recommendations in detail.

Table 2: Environmental recommendations of the destination master plan;
Resource: Destination Master Plan DSC (2007), prepared by authors

General recommendations	Guidelines for environmental recommendations
a. Development Resource Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Earth resources: to manage habitat or reuse mining sites . Air resources: to exploit the strong west wind in order to prevent air pollution . Water resources: to ensure marine water quality in order to reduce groundwater pollution . Biotic resources: to enhance the savannah landscape area and ensure protection of sea turtles and birds in the intertidal flats as well as protection of the coral reef; to elaborate on a landscaping policy
b. Conservation and Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> .To strengthen the importance of the environment for the local authority decision taker .To form an environmental management system .To design environmental zones .To manage the human impact on the natural environment .To educate inhabitants and companies about environmental friendly behavior
c- Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Define the legal framework for EIA . Educate employees and distribute information among them . Provide information for investors

However, the latest master plan was supposed to establish growth management tools toward sustainable development, and there are some critical opinions in relation to the suggestions of the master plan, although it is the main reference for Kish development. Bavand Company (2005) as the supervisor of the Kish Master plan highlights some inconsistencies in the recommendations. In this assessment, some developmental strategies of the master plan impact the environment despite its emphatic recommendations about sustainability. The Bavand (2005) report mentions the following reasons for the incompatibility:

- Uncontrolled urban development due to lack of clear boundaries for urban areas;
- Limited awareness of the plan concerning the ecological characteristics of the Island;
- Incompatibility between proposed urban development and environmental recommendations.

In spite of the above objections, the same plan was approved in 2007 and has been used as a guideline for the development projects of Kish. The plan is nowhere perfect on the issue of sustainability because of limited awareness and incompatible proposals. Along with the environmental recommendation of the master Plan, the “Plan of Kish Environmental Management” was prepared in 2008. The plan (2008) aims to equip future development plans of the island with enough safeguards for environment protection and decreasing impact. This plan indicates sensitive points, with

particular potential for development, and the ecological sensitivities of the island relevant to the environment. Finally, it establishes the criteria for the environmental assessment of development plans. Although the results of this plan provide a useful guideline for environmental concerns, they do not specify performance details. In fact, this plan simply covers macro concerns but it is lacking in the particular implementation. Since only two plans in the KFZO report mentioned above discussed about the environmental concerns and issues of sustainability and they are not inconsistent with sustainability, these could not be used to cover all the scales in relation to the objectives of sustainable tourism. Both the approved plans merely comprise some general recommendations for sustainable tourism and environmental protection.

Moreover, tourism at Small Island is assumed to have identified tourists’ needs in both the short- and long-terms but there has been no comprehensive planning to respond to tourists’ demands as yet. In a few tourist surveys conducted by KFZO (2006, 2009), tourists to Kish have often complained about tourism programmes and lack of information.

It seems that although Kish is absolutely dependent on tourism and its development planning has never been adapted to the concept of sustainable tourism. Two main reasons can be found in the process of Kish’s development. First is unsustainable planning for the development of Kish because the strategies and objectives have continuously been changed. Second, inefficient attention to environmental concerns in the plan’s recommendations has given rise to the neglect of sustainable tourism. The KFZO documents only have two plans that take into consideration sustainable concerns. These plans, not only have inconsistencies with sustainability, but also cannot cover all scales to achieve the objectives of sustainable tourism. Both the approved plans merely comprise general recommendations for sustainable tourism. At present, there is no plan of a minor scale which could fulfil the objectives of sustainable tourism in a more practical way. Therefore, development planning in Kish does not give enough attention to environmental concerns, in addition to the lack of practical guidelines to approach the principles of sustainable tourism. Thus, the issues of Kish in relation to sustainable development can be summarized as follows:

- a) Weak management and restriction due to central government regulations;
- b) Insufficient attention given to the environment; as well as,
- c) A weak planning for tourism, particularly in term of the qualification of tourism attractions and setting practical guidelines.

6.2 Sustainable Tourism in Kish and the Experts' Viewpoint

To understand the current conditions of sustainable tourism in Kish, the results of a documented study were examined in a systematic manner. For this purpose, a semi-structure interview is appropriate for investigating the layers of issues expressed, informing the documental findings, and opening up for new perspectives to study (Creswell, 1994). The interviews were conducted with experts who are currently involved in related experiences in Kish Island since 2000. For this purpose, fifteen participants were chosen from three domains, namely, local offices, consulting companies, and government. These people were selected based on their backgrounds, and the number was regarded as sufficient enough to produce sound, valid, and reliable data. The respondents were asked to give definite answers to two questions: whether the development Kish accommodates principles of sustainable tourism, and what the issues of sustainability in Kish's development are.

The analysis of the interviews was done based on the definition relating to Small Island since the responses specified the main characteristics of Small Island for Kish, namely: economic dependency on tourism and environmental characteristics. 90% of the respondents noted that the economy of Kish is entirely dependent on tourism. In addition, they also generally confirmed the importance of the environmental characteristics of the Island for tourism development. In relation to this, the respondents pointed out its small size, fragile ecosystem and finite sources, at the rates of 75%, 93%, and 100%. Therefore, the experts, in confirming all the above-mentioned characteristics, set Kish in the Small Island category. This specifies the framework of planning for Kish toward sustainable objectives.

In addition, there is a general agreement that Kish is not accommodated for sustainable tourism. One hundred percent of the respondents (n=15) believe that Kish's development does not go according to the principles of sustainable tourism, despite some related attention. All the respondents also believe that the development of tourism continually impacts Kish Island, and the majority (n=14, 93%) noted little attention to the natural environment. Therefore, the respondents' opinions confirmed the significance of environmental concerns for sustainable tourism in Kish (refer to Table 3).

Table 3: The environmental threats mentioned by the experts (Source: Results of interviews, 2009)

Tourism related dangers (What has been happened)	Participant Code	Number	Percentage
1 Land Depletion	A ,D, C,G, I,K,L,M,N,O	10	75%
2 Lack of accommodation with the sever	A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H,I,J,K,L,M,O	14	93%
3 climatic & fragile ecological condition in:	A,B,C,G,I,J,K,L,M,N,O	11	73%
4 High population increase due to rapid	A,B ,G,I,K,L,M,N,O	9	60%
5 Economic developments since 1980's			
6 Irregular development of the coastal area:	G,I,J,K,L,M,N,O	8	53%
7 Offshore development & land reclamation:	I,J,K ,M,N,	5	33%
8 Developed urban area without comprehensive and coordinated planning direction or development control	A,B,C,D,E,F,G,H,I,J,K,L,M,N,O	15	100%
9 Scattered site development in south has resulted in the conversion of undeveloped land with potentially beneficial resources	I,J,K,M,N,O	5	33%

On this matter, different weaknesses of tourism development toward sustainability were mentioned by the interviewees. The highlighted weaknesses can be categorized into five big groups which are illustrated in detail in Table 4. Based on the percentages of the responses, three items were further emphasized, namely, weak planning for tourism, insufficient attention to the environment, and weak management. In addition, the respondents also referred to the 'weaknesses of tourism planning' as ignorance of tourists' needs and demands, lack of action plans, and practical guidelines. As a result, the experts demonstrated that the fundamental reason for the weaknesses of tourism development lie on the gaps in tourism planning.

Table 4: Weaknesses of tourism development according to the experts, Source: Results of interviews (2009)

General Concerns	Weaknesses mentioned by experts	% of Responses
1) Weak planning for tourism	1 lack of tourism definition in Kish 2 Ignorance of the tourists' needs 3 Relation between tourism and economy 4 Relation between tourism and local habitat 5 Relation between tourism plan and environment 6 No consideration to the next tourism and its demands 7 No consideration to national background 8 Lack of comprehensive and united planning 9 No attention to natural characteristics of Kish 10 little attention to families 11 Lack of action plans and practical guidelines 12 Educating to domestic tourism 13 Weak market management	100
2) Insufficient attentions to the environment	14 Excessive occupation of lands 15 Rushing activities for tourism development 16 Uncontrolled development 17 Limited and scattered attentions to sustainability 18 Little attention to resources 19 Little attention to fragile ecosystem 20 Attention to minor details instead of main problems 21 Priority on economic goals	93
3) Weak management	22 Impacts from the main land's strategies 23 Involvement of political trends 24 Lack of sub-structures	73
4) Restrictions caused by central government regulation	25 Many limitations of tourism potentials 26 Effects of legal limitations on development 27 Restricted foreigner policies in Iran	40
5) Weak tourism attractions	28 Shortage in original green spaces 29 Weak ecological resources, such as water resources 30 Decreasing shopping attractions 31 Frequent changes of management 32 Frequent changes of strategies and objectives	13

In summary, the experts considered in Kish as a Small Island while highlighting the environmental concerns for this particular island. Their responses indicated that the development of Kish is not accommodating the objectives of sustainable tourism at a Small Island. In the experts' opinions, the main reason for the incompatibility between Kish's development and sustainable tourism is the weaknesses of tourism planning. These weaknesses contain various sub-reasons. This includes the lack of sufficient attention to the environment and action plans for ensuring objectives of sustainability, which are identified as the most important sub-reasons.

7. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the development of Kish towards sustainable tourism in order to support general planning for the island. The study introduced the term of 'Small Island' in relation to sustainable tourism. It frequently revealed that Kish could be considered as a small island due to its economic dependency on tourism, small size, fragile ecosystem and finite resources. According to the current literature, small islands are expected to recognize their concerns for sustainable tourism with attention to the individual characteristics mentioned above. Consequently, Kish has to follow the principles of sustainable tourism in relation to its individual characteristics, and this study was thoroughly conducted based on such characteristics of small islands.

The results obtained in the study partially support the initial hypothesis that the developmental procedure of Kish has not been accommodated with the objectives of sustainable tourism. The results are a comparison between the findings of documental studies and interviews with the experts. The findings preliminarily explore the characters of Small Island in Kish and basically demonstrate many challenges of sustainable tourism in the development of Kish Island. Both the current documents and the experts' opinions confirm the characteristics of Small Island in Kish. These findings also specify that Kish, with its small size and environmental characteristics, is threatened by land depletion, fragile ecosystem and finite resources (see Tables 1 and 3). It leads to concerns over sustainable tourism at this Small Island.

Table 5: Comparison between results of documental study and semi-structure interview, Prepared by Erfanian (2010)

Main findings of Documental Study	Main findings of Interviews
A weak planning for tourism, particularly in term of the qualification of tourism attractions and setting practical guidelines	1) Weak planning for tourism
Insufficient attention given to the environment,	2) Insufficient attentions to the environment
Weak management and restriction due to central government regulations,	3) Weak management
-----	4) Restrictions caused by central government regulation
-----	5) Weak tourism attractions

As Kish is recognized a small island, tourism planning should be based on proper developmental procedures. Table 4 shows the results of this study in relation to the existing weaknesses in the developmental procedure of Kish. The table illustrates the comparison done between the results based on the development plans of Kish and those of the interviews in relation to sustainability of Kish's development. Consequently, three items have been emphasized in both groups of data. In the order mentioned by the experts, the three items are 'Weak planning for tourism', 'Insufficient attentions to the environment', and 'Weak management', that are also noted by plans of Kish (see Figure 5). In addition, the experts highlighted two more items, namely, 'Restrictions caused by central government regulation' and 'Weak tourism attractions'.

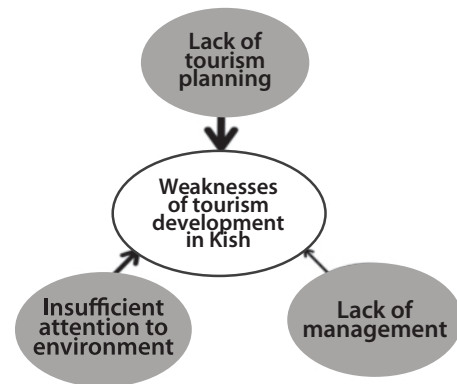


Figure 5: Weaknesses of tourism development of Kish (Prepared by Erfanian, 2010)

Based on both the databases, tourism planning is highlighted more. Meanwhile, the results of the interview revealed that various items could weaken tourism planning. However, they definitely highlight two items, namely, 'neglect of tourist demands', and the 'lack of action plans and practical guidelines'. On this basis, there are two key gaps to tourism planning in Kish. Firstly, the current plans for development rarely pay attention to the demands of tourists in Kish. As illustrated in Table 4, some experts believe that the needs of tourists are not met because tourism in Kish has not been clearly defined. Secondly, looking at the existing documents and experts' opinions, there are lacks of action plans which will steer developments towards sustainable

objectives in a practical way. In this matter, the tourism planning of Kish can be improved by identifying tourism demands and developing specific plans. In addition, the experts also believe that although tourism is the main economic sector of Kish, it cannot attract tourists properly. The experts relate this particular weakness to the several reasons, which include 'shortage in original green spaces', 'weak ecological resources (e.g. water resources)', 'decreasing shopping attractions', 'frequent changes of management', and 'frequent changes of strategies and objectives'.

As shown in the results in Table 5, all the weaknesses in the development procedure of Kish directly and indirectly relate to planning. However, the lack of planning for tourism in Kish is recognized as the main weakness of Kish's development, while other weaknesses are addressed to the other side of planning for development. For this reason, the island should be enhanced in this area towards sustainability.

In conclusion, for establishing sustainable tourism in Kish, the planning of development should be enhanced in the area of tourism planning, environment concerns and management. Meanwhile, tourism planning is a priority for attention due to its role in the development of Kish as a small island. Tourism planning can be improved by giving more consideration to tourist demands, action plans and practical guidelines. Therefore, it is essential that subsequent researches and plans consider each of the above priorities in order to support and improve the development of Kish.

The study helps to establish some strategies for sustaining development in a Small Island (namely Kish) and other Island with similar characteristics. The procedure of the study was wholly developed by paying attention to the dimensions of sustainable tourism, which include economic, socio-cultural and environmental. With better tourist facilities, a small island like Kish could be expected to improve its economic development. Improving the development of Kish will also affect its surrounding region and the country as a whole. In addition, the results of this cover a specific cultural and geographical domain which includes the south of Iran, with its distinctive cultural and climatic features, and other countries in the Persian Gulf region with similar climatic and cultural characteristics. Therefore, the concerns identified for Kish's development towards sustainable tourism could be generalized to other tourist destinations in Iran and other countries having similar climatic and cultural conditions.

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