CrossMark
click for updates

QSPM USAGE IN SWOT ANALYSIS AS A TOOL FOR STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF CASPIAN SEA COASTS (CASE STUDY: TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN CASPIAN EASTERN COAST AT GILAN PROVINCE)

Mohammad Ali Rahimipour Sheykhani Nejad[1] --- **Farzaneh Nasiri Jan Agha**[2]† --- **Yalda Fattah Zadeh**[3]
[1,2,3]*Department of Regional Studies, Research Deputy of Guilan Branch of the Academic Center for Education, Culture and Research (ACECR), Rasht, Iran*

ABSTRACT

The studied area is located in the eastern coast of Caspian Sea at the Gilan province in Iran including the sea shores at Rudsar, Langaroud, Lahijan, and Astane Ashrafiyeh cities. This research aims to study and analyze the important factors on developing tourism industry in the selected area. Therefore, the influential capabilities that lead to growth of potential tourists and tourism in the coasts, and have positive impacts on the economy and job growth of the area have been evaluated; the current weak points are discussed as well. This research employed field operation, observation, interview, survey and opinions of experts for data collection and analysis of the current situation in this area. Results show that to improve the tourism industry in the eastern coast of Caspian sea, the current coast-relevant proposals have to be integrated with other tourism factors applicable in the sea coasts; such as linking the sea and mountain, enhancing the cooperation of local people, increasing the number of secured sites, increasing the number of lifeguards, providing utility services in the research area, equipping the infrastructures specially accessibility and transportation, health and security, education and information. At the end, strategic suggestion are provided.

Keywords: Coasts of caspian sea, SWOT, QSPM, Tourism, Guilan province, Strategic planning.

Contribution/ Originality

This study is one of the few studies of tourism management on the eastern coast of the Caspian sea using a combination of SWOT and QSPM that is examined.

1. INTRODUCTION

In developing countries, tourism plays an important role in attracting the foreign exchange and employment. Growth in this sector has been rapid and continuous in developing countries over the past few decades at a rate higher to that of developed nations due to the availability of sea, sun, and sand. Tourist sector is an economic activity that promises huge benefits for the countries. Tourism has been the most important industry at global level (World Travel and Tourism Council, 2006). One of the applications of Integrated Coastal Management in a local scale is beach management. The beaches have a basic role in attracting tourists and in increasing tourists' visits to the country. Beaches are areas where many human activities are developed (Ariza *et al.*, 2007).

Coastal and marine tourism are among the oldest and largest segments of the tourism industry, and have evolved from a leisure activity of the wealthy in the 19th century to a more 'democratic' activity open to middle and

working classes, and facilitated by paid vacations and the growth of affordable types of transportation. Businesses in beachfront communities are supplied by businesses in nearby metropolitan areas.

Despite Iran's outstanding potential situation for tourism industry in general and the situation of Caspian sea coastal regions in the northern provinces in particular (Gilan, Mazandaran and Golestan provinces), Iran and it's northern coasts have not yet achieved their true place neither in the world nor in the Middle East tourism. The merits of tourism and natural features of these regions have a unique value compared to other areas of the country or even in the Central Asia, Middle East and north of Africa that in addition to providing attractions for domestic tourists, they can meet the expectation of international tourists, specially the Muslims. The share of tourism in the economy of Iran can compete with other sectors of economy including petroleum industry. However, unlike the periodical income of petroleum industry, the tourism industry income is stable and can support national economy in long term. Presently, Iran's tourism industry is in its infancy and lack of infrastructures and absence of required skills in this area cause insufficient utilization of the notable capacities of its northern provinces.

Within recent years, Iranian authorities have considered tourism industry as one of the important parts of development program in designing programs at the macro Economic and Social Development policies. Hence, development of this industry in Iran's Northern provinces is of special value.

The concept of sustainable tourism development involves balanced economic, social and cultural development without endangering the environment. Sustainable development is a process that allows development to be achieved without degradation or depletion of those resources on which it is based. Generally speaking, it can be accomplished through resource management, recycling and renewal. Through this approach, resources can be used in future to the extent as same as the current generation us (Angelevska-Najdeska and Rakicevik, 2012).

1.1. Background of Study

Blancas et al. (2010) In an article titled "The assessment of sustainable tourism: Application to Spanish coastal destinations" introduces an indicator system to evaluate sustainability in established coastal tourism destinations. the results serve as a guideline for tourism planning and the conclusions of this research can be extrapolated to the study of other tourism destinations. Sarisik et al. (2011) in an article titled "How to manage yacht tourism in Turkey: A swot analysis and related strategies", r discussed some relevant strategies based on SWOT outputs, . Estimations were interpreted in the light of a case study that investigated the applications and conditions of two marinas located in Istanbul. Needham and Szuster (2011), in an article titled "Situational influences on normative evaluations of coastal tourism and recreation management strategies in Hawai'i", examined how situational factors such as coral reef damage, use levels, and amount of litter differentially influence support and opposition toward these management strategies. Panigrahi and Mohanty (2012) in an article titled "Effectiveness of the Indian coastal regulation zones provisions for coastal zone management and its evaluation using SWOT analysis", some recommendations/suggestions are made to improve the effectiveness of the Coastal Zone Management (CZM) and CRZ provision in India. Zhang (2012) in an article titled "Research on Tourist Attractions Performance Promoting Method Based on the SWOT Analysis Method", concluded that giving full play to the advantage of the attractions, overcome the drawbacks, grasp the development opportunities in order to create the brand strategy of the scenic spots, and give full play to the tourist attractions of its own advantages are necessary. Reihanian et al. (2012) in an article titled "Sustainable tourism development strategy by SWOT analysis: Boujagh National Park, Iran", the results showed that the existing tourism activities in the park did not conform to sustainability requirements. Thus, a SWOT analysis was used to identify the required management strategies to improve tourism in the park. XueMing (2012) in an article titled "Research on the Development Strategies of Rural Tourism in Suzhou Based on SWOT Analysis", suggested to provide a decision reference for the development of rural tourism in Suzhou, and

promote the sustainable development of rural tourism in Suzhou. Ghorbani *et al.* (2015) in an article titled "Ecotourism sustainable development strategies using SWOT and QSPM model: A case study of Kaji Namakzar Wetland", South Khorasan Province, Iran, it can have positive effects on developing sustainable strategies to increase ecotourism activities in the region and to reduce the adverse effects on the environment. Lakshami and Shaji (2016) in an article titled "Transformation of Coastal Settlements Due To Tourism", gives an overview about the impacts of tourism development in coastal areas and the impact of tourism on the coastal environment of Papanasam beach in Varkala.

Review articles and studies mentioned above suggest that SWOT analysis is used to identify required management strategies and to improve tourism in the coastal region and promote sustainable tourism development. Evaluation of internal and external environmental factors is an important part of strategic planning which is an instrument for adopting the strategies and a component of sustainable ecotourism management. The positive effects of sustainable strategies include increasing ecotourism activities in coastal areas and reducing adverse effects on the environment states. SWOT analysis helps to properly analyze the current situation in order to achieve an efficient strategy for tourism management of the studied area in future.

2. THE SCOPE OF STUDIED AREA

Guilan province is one of the northern provinces of Iran that is connected to north-west of the Republic of Azerbaijan. This case study is known for its proximity to the mild temperature and a better position than all over the southern coast of the country. The purpose of this survey that was carried out during summer at 2014 was to identify the potential coastal tourism and also identify the weaknesses and threats to coastal tourism in the study area.

The studied area consists of Rudsar, Langerud, Lahijan and Astaneh-ye Ashrafiyeh cities (Figure1).The selected area is located in the following coordinates, Zone 39 N at the Universal Transverse Mercator (UTM):

X_{min} = 386016 Y_{min} = 4054600

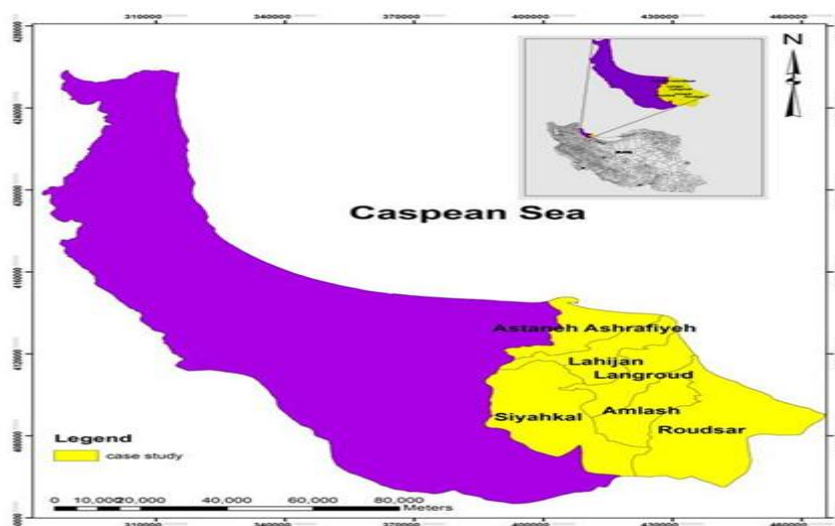X_{max} = 465324 Y_{max} = 4147309

Figure-1. location of case study

Source: Generated by author

3. METHODOLOGY

First, the most important internal and external key factors were identified based on experts' opinions and monitoring the research area. At the next step, a list of identified strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and

threats which were relevant to development of tourism industry in Caspian Sea coasts has been constructed. Then, the Internal Factor Evaluation (IFE) matrix and the External Factor Evaluation (EFE) matrix have been used to analyze the internal and external factors, respectively. Here, the total weighted score obtained from each of these matrices indicate the condition of the environment in terms of the influential internal and external factors on developing coast tourism. In the next step, using the list of strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats, SWOT matrix was constructed. After comparing and evaluating these internal and external factors based on SWOT analysis the following strategies were (Table 1):

Table-1. Strategies

Shifting Strategies (WO)	Offensive Strategies (SO)
Defensive Strategies (WT)	Competitive Strategies (ST)

Source: Helms and Nixon (2010)

By comparing the internal strengths and external opportunities SO strategies were developed; also, WO strategies by comparing the internal weaknesses and the external opportunities; ST strategies by comparing the internal strengths and external threats, and WT strategies by comparing the internal weaknesses and external threats were determined.

In the last step, the attraction and priority of selected strategies have been determined using the results of internal and external factors matrix (Tables 2 & 3), and constructing Quantitative Strategic Planning Matrix (QSPM).

Table-2. IFE Matrix of SWOT model

Internal Factor Evaluation Matrix of Caspian Sea Coast Tourism Development - East of Gilan Province			
Internal Weaknesses	**Rating**	**Weight**	**Weighted Score**
W1: immaturity of tourism industry, lack of infrastructures including suitable access ways, parking lots and resorts, and absence of required skills in this area	1	0.07	0.07
W2: financial problems	2	0.06	0.12
W3: absence of a specific authority	1	0.05	0.05
W4: absence of efficient projects to encourage people's cooperation in tourism development	1	0.07	0.07
W5: insufficient sanitary and hygienic facilities	2	0.03	0.06
W6: inadequate guards and security	2	0.04	0.08
W7: unsuitable access ways	1	0.06	0.06
W8: insufficient support services such as accommodation, supplies and banking services	1	0.05	0.05
W9: absence of travel packages and tourism information centers	2	0.05	0.1
W10: absence of tourist attractions and entertainment facilities in the coasts	2	0.06	0.12
W11: absence of adequate infrastructure for water-sports such as swimming, diving, water polo, waterskiing and etc.	1	0.06	0.06
Internal Strengths			
S1: 700Km of Caspian Sea shore are the coasts of Iran's Northern provinces	4	0.07	0.28
S2: annually 90% of domestic tourists travel to Iran's Northern cities to visit the sea	4	0.07	0.28
S3: high potential of local people for tourism such as cooperation and hospitality	3	0.07	0.21
S4: rich tourist attractions such as local foods, rituals, sports and clothes, traditions, architecture and etc.	3	0.06	0.18
S5: unique natural attractions such as plant and animal diversity near the coast	4	0.07	0.28
S6: existence of sandy beaches	4	0.06	0.24
Total		1	2.31

Source: Calculated using Primary data

Table-3. EFE Matrix of SWOT model

External Factor Evaluation Matrix of Caspian Sea Coast Tourism Development - East of Gilan Province			
External Opportunities	**Rating**	**Weight**	**Weighted Score**
O1: integration with other applicable tourism-relevant factors in the sea coasts	4	0.06	0.23
O2: linking the see and mountain	4	0.05	0.20
O3: enhancing local people cooperation	4	0.05	0.20
O4: increasing the number of Secured Sites and lifeguards	3	0.06	0.17
O5: providing quality services in the research area	3	0.04	0.12
O6: equiping the infrastructures, specifically in terms of accessibility, transportation, health and therapeutic and security	4	0.06	0.23
O7: education and awareness	3	0.02	0.07
O8: providing tourism attractions for international tourists specially for Muslims due to implementing Islamic ethics	4	0.06	0.23
O9: using the experience of successful previous projects in coasts utilization	3	0.04	0.12
O10: providing suitable conditions for economy and job growth for local people	3	0.04	0.12
O11: providing safe areas for the tourists in order to make joyful and memorable visits of natural attractions, enjoy entertaining and exciting activities	3	0.06	0.17
O12: Attracting private sector investments for coast tourism in order to improve job growth in the area	4	0.06	0.23
O13: using the coasts' potential capacities in the cold seasons	3	0.04	0.12
O14: providing maritime traveling and fishing coastguards	3	0.04	0.12
O15: supplying other native productions in the provided tourism platforms	3	0.03	0.10
O16: improving regulations and order in the coast to prevent from tourists' confusion and increase the travelers peace-of-mind and security	3	0.02	0.07
O17: facilitating the requirements for issuing permissions and organizational supports	3	0.04	0.12
External Threats			
T1: preventing the release of Caspian sea frontage	1	0.06	0.06
T2: mismanagement of coasts which may lead to environmental and social inconvenience	1	0.06	0.06
T3: impairing the secured sites due to temporal seasonal usage	1	0.05	0.05
T4: tourists dissatisfaction and reluctance of travelers for revisiting the region	1	0.06	0.06
Total		1.00	2.88

Source: Calculated using Primary data

It should be noted that brainstorming method has been adopted to identify the criteria for developing the coastal tourism strategy in accordance with the opinions and recommendations of experts of development planning, tourism and environment.

To assign weights to strengths, weakness, opportunity and threats factors, the value given was between 0 (least important) and 1 (most important). The assigned weight represents the importance and relative weight of the factors in the success; the total value of all weights should be equal to 1.

The rating of opportunities and threats were as follow: major opportunity = 4, minor opportunity = 3, minor threat = 2 and major threat = 1. The factors were expressed quantitatively to avoid any kind of misinterpretation and misjudgment. The rating scale of internal factors was based on the most important priority from 1 to 4. The rating of strengths and weakness were considered as: major strength = 4, minor strength = 3, minor weakness = 2, and major weakness = 1.

The Weighted score was obtained by multiplying each factor's relative weight in the rating of that factor. The total weighted score was obtained from summing up the weighted scores of external and internal factors. In the end, the total weight was written. For external factors, if the total weighted score is more than 2.5, then it can be concluded that the environment has merits to utilize the external opportunities; and by a proper usage of these opportunities the potential threats can be handled. For internal factors, if the total weighted score is more than 2.5, then it can be concluded that the environment has a desirable condition regarding the internal factors.

Based on the internal and external weighted scores, SWOT matrix was constructed to develop a suitable strategy. SWOT matrix is an important evaluation tool which helps managers to compile the four types of strategies as SO, ST, WO and WT.

SO strategies: use strengths to pursue and exploit opportunities.

WO strategies: pursue opportunities to overcome weaknesses.

WT strategies: minimize the weaknesses and avoid threats.

ST strategies: use strengths to avoid threats (Table 4).

Table-4. SWOT Matrix

SWOT	O	T
S	Offensive Strategies (SO) SO1: development of current active procedure of management and exploiting coast tourism SO2: increasing advertisement to encourage tourists to use the available facilities and infrastructure	Competitive Strategies (ST) ST1: minimizing the social disadvantages, minimizing the pressure on the environmental resources due to economic empowerment by tourism industry. ST2: protection and development of resources, maximizing the available natural, cultural and historical capacities, utilizing the resources and facilities, preventing their permanent physical damage
W	Shifting Strategies (WO) WO1: providing the required infrastructures and services to attract international tourists, specially Muslims, and consequently improving local economy and revenues, providing job opportunities and minimizing unemployment, improving social welfare at the studied area. WO2: preparing the ground for to evacuate the sea frontage of private parties and organizational ownership and make it available for public usage through tourism development projects WO3: establishing an independent regional organization for sustainable development of coast tourism WO4: education, awaking and encouraging private sector and attracting public participation WO4: integrating coast tourism factors with other potentials and types of tourism in the environment specially mountain ecotourism and water-sports.	Defensive Strategies (WT) WT1: Organizing the usage pattern of natural and artificial environments by tourists WT2: protecting the natural landscapes and coasts in the research area as important national assets and guarantee the stability of the tourism industry revenue for the country

Then, the QSPM Matrix relevant to the development of tourism in Caspian Sea has been constructed (Table 5 & Figure 2). The columns from right to left, are internal/external strategic factors and their weights which is inferred from Internal-External (IE) Matrix. In the next columns, the mentioned strategies in the SWOT matrix

are represented, and each column has been divided into two sub-columns representing Attractiveness Score (AS) and Total Attractiveness Scores (TAS). The TAS is the result of multiplying the weights by the AS. The range of AS is from 1 to 4 while 4 is indicative of highly attractive and 1 is not attractive. If some of the key strategic factors are not attractive, then the AS should not be given any value. It is important that the assigned value to AS should not be based on speculation but they should be precise, reasonable and justifiable. At the end, the sum of each TASs for each strategy should be calculated; each strategy that has the greater value represents the highest priority for the environment.

Since the total weighted score of the internal factors was obtained as 2.31, the research area does not have a good condition in terms of the internal factors.

Moreover, the total weighted score for the external factors was obtained as 2.88. Hence, research area has good advantages for utilizing the external opportunities, and by proper use the possible threats can be eliminated. Regarding the calculated scores, quadruple strategies of SWOT matrix were obtained and the emphasis was on the shifting strategy (WO).
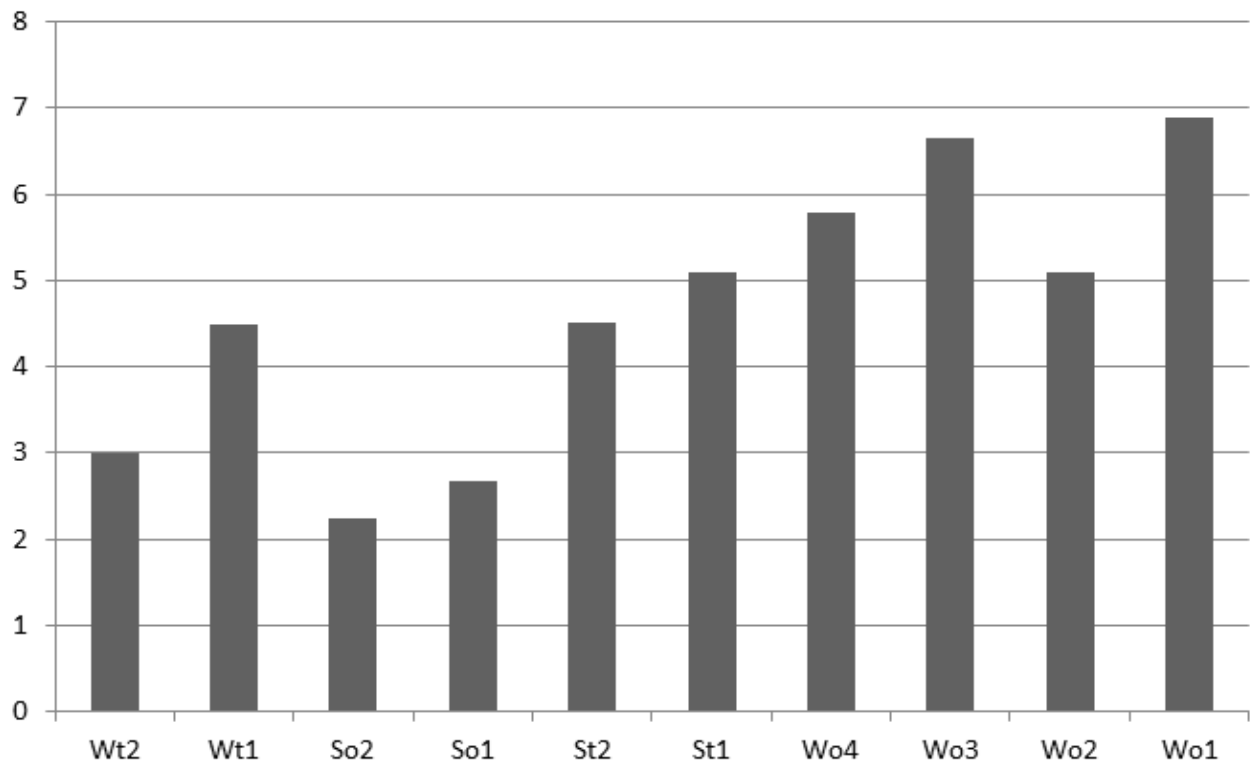
Figure-2. Strategy Priority Graph

Source: Generated using the results

The QSPM can be used to overcome the weaknesses of SWOT relatively. However, the scores obtained from QSPM matrix also showed that the shifting strategies (WO) are in priority for the region rather than the other strategies. Since the system has many opportunities, it is vital to utilize the available opportunities to overcome the existing weaknesses in coast tourism development planning.

Table-5. QSPM Matrix

Wt2 TAS	AS	Wt1 TAS	AS	So2 TAS	AS	So1 TAS	AS	St2 TAS	AS	St1 TAS	AS	Wo4 TAS	AS	Wo3 TAS	AS	Wo2 TAS	AS	Wo1 TAS	AS	Weight	Strategic Factors
0	0	0.3	4	0.07	1	0.1	2	0.1	2	0.21	3	0.21	3	0.28	4	0.21	3	0.3	4	0.07	w1
0.06	1	0.2	4	0.12	2	0.2	4	0.1	2	0.12	2	0.24	4	0.24	4	0.24	4	0.2	4	0.06	w2
0.2	4	0.2	4	0.1	2	0.1	1	0.2	4	0.2	4	0.2	4	0.2	4	0.2	4	0.2	4	0.05	w3
0	0	0.1	2	0	0	0.2	3	0.3	4	0.28	4	0.28	4	0.28	4	0.07	1	0.1	2	0.07	w4
0.12	4	0.1	4	0	0	0.1	3	0.1	4	0.12	4	0	0	0.12	4	0	0	0.1	4	0.03	w5
0.16	4	0.2	4	0	0	0.1	3	0.2	4	0.08	2	0	0	0.16	4	0	0	0.2	4	0.04	w6
0	0	0.1	2	0.06	1	0.2	3	0.1	2	0.12	2	0.24	4	0.18	3	0.06	1	0.2	4	0.06	w7
0	0	0.2	4	0.1	2	0.2	3	0.1	2	0.1	2	0.05	1	0.2	4	0	0	0.2	4	0.05	w8
0.05	1	0.2	4	0.2	4	0.2	3	0.2	4	0	0	0.2	4	0.2	4	0	0	0.2	4	0.05	w9
0	0	0.2	3	0.06	1	0.1	2	0	0	0	0	0.24	4	0.24	4	0.12	2	0.2	4	0.06	w10
0.06	1	0.1	1	0.12	2	0.1	2	0	0	0.18	3	0.24	4	0.24	4	0.06	1	0.2	4	0.06	w11
0.28	4	0.1	1	0.07	1	0	0	0.3	4	0.28	4	0.21	3	0.28	4	0.28	4	0.2	3	0.07	s1
0.28	4	0.3	4	0.28	4	0.1	2	0.3	4	0.28	4	0.28	4	0.28	4	0.28	4	0.2	3	0.07	s2
0	0	0.1	2	0	0	0.1	1	0	0	0.21	3	0.07	1	0	0	0	0	0.2	3	0.07	s3
0	0	0	0	0.06	1	0.1	1	0	0	0.18	3	0.06	1	0	0	0	0	0.2	3	0.06	s4
0.28	4	0	0	0.07	1	0.1	1	0.3	4	0.28	4	0.28	4	0	0	0	0	0.2	3	0.07	s5
0.24	4	0	0	0.06	1	0.1	1	0.2	4	0.18	3	0.06	1	0	0	0.24	4	0.2	3	0.06	s6
0	0	0.1	2	0	0	0	0	0.1	1	0.17	3	0.23	4	0.23	4	0.23	4	0.2	3	0.06	o1
0.1	2	0.1	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0.15	3	0.2	4	0.2	4	0.2	4	0.1	3	0.05	o2
0.15	3	0.1	2	0	0	0	0	0.2	4	0.2	4	0.15	3	0.2	4	0.2	4	0.1	3	0.05	o3
0	0	0.2	4	0.12	2	0.1	2	0	0	0.12	2	0.06	1	0.23	4	0.23	4	0.2	4	0.06	o4
0	0	0.2	4	0.04	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0.04	1	0.17	4	0.04	1	0.2	4	0.04	o5
0	0	0.2	4	0.06	1	0.1	1	0	0	0.12	2	0.23	4	0.23	4	0.23	4	0.2	4	0.06	o6
0.1	4	0.1	4	0.1	4	0	1	0.1	4	0.1	4	0.02	1	0.1	4	0	0	0	2	0.02	o7
0	0	0.1	1	0.06	1	0.1	1	0	0	0	0	0.23	4	0.23	4	0	0	0.2	4	0.06	o8
0.17	4	0.2	4	0.08	2	0	0	0.2	4	0.17	4	0.17	4	0.17	4	0.17	4	0.1	3	0.04	o9
0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.17	4	0.17	4	0.17	4	0.2	4	0.04	o10
0.23	4	0.2	3	0	0	0	0	0.2	4	0.23	4	0.23	4	0.23	4	0.23	4	0.2	4	0.06	o11
0	0	0.1	2	0.06	1	0.1	1	0.1	1	0.23	4	0.23	4	0.23	4	0.23	4	0.2	4	0.06	o12
0.04	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.1	2	0.08	2	0.17	4	0.17	4	0.17	4	0.2	4	0.04	o13
0	0	0	1	0.04	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.12	3	0.17	4	0.17	4	0.2	4	0.04	o14
0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0.13	4	0.07	2	0.1	3	0.1	4	0.03	o15
0.02	1	0.1	4	0.02	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0.1	4	0.07	3	0.1	4	0.02	o16

Source: Calculated using the results

0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.1	2	0.08	2	0.04	1	0.17	4	0.17	4	0.1	3	0.04	o17
0.23	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0.2	4	0.23	4	0.12	2	0.23	4	0.23	4	0.1	2	0.06	t1
0.23	4	0.2	4	0	0	0.1	1	0.2	4	0.23	4	0.06	1	0.23	4	0.23	4	0.1	2	0.06	t2
0	0	0.1	2	0.05	1	0.1	3	0.2	4	0	0	0.1	2	0.2	4	0.05	1	0.1	3	0.05	t3
0	0	0	0	0.23	4	0.1	2	0.2	4	0	0	0.23	4	0.06	1	0.23	4	0.2	4	0.06	t4
3		4.5		2.23		2.7		4.5		5.09		5.79		6.66		5.1		6.9			**Total**

Source: Calculated using the results

4. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research aimed to evaluate the effective factors on tourism development of Caspian Sea coasts. Hence, the existing weaknesses and potentials in the studied area which could possibly be effective have been addressed. Some of the weaknesses were relevant to the current plans and administration such as the limited number of lifeguards and secured sites, lack of public information, absence of transportation infrastructures and suitable health and medical services, etc. Some other weaknesses are due to lack of attention to other touristic potentials of the studied area such as water-sports, local cultural products, coast entertainments, links between the sea and mountainous areas in the sample area, and etc.

Hence, the following action are essential in this area: to accelerate the process of dispossession of sea frontage from the ownership of private sector, organizing the management of coasts, providing welfare and entertainment facilities, establishing and equipping the secured sites, improving the quality of swimming pools separated for men and women in the seashores of the studied area.

The objective of the research was to find a strategy for developing coast tourism. The development has many different economic, physical and cultural dimensions. Regarding the obtained results of this study, first of all it is required to establish an independent organization for the coast tourism. This organization has to be able to facilitate the multi-dimensional requirements of development, minimize the obstacles of administrative and managerial regulations and prevent doing parallel jobs through cost saving. The improvement of the welfare services is the next priority. It is necessary to establish the infrastructures and sites which can encourage exciting and entertaining activities for tourists, and guarantee a comfortable, secure and joyful long-time traveling for them. With respect to religious issues, the infrastructures have to be provided in a way that this region becomes a suitable travelling destination for Muslim tourists.

To maintain a developed tourism industry, the studied area has unique natural and cultural attractions; however it needs policy making, planning and precise implementation of research projects. The research projects have to be able to satisfy the tourists, improve tourism sustainability in the area, empower the economy, increase job opportunities and improve natural environment for the host society. In this regard, governmental authorities cannot be much successful neither in investment nor in executive process without people participation and private sector investments. Despite the rich capacities in Caspian Sea coasts and Iran's northern area i.e. the plain and highlands of Alborz Mountains, unfortunately most utilizations of these capacities have been done for private purposes, and incurred severe damage to its environment and natural resources; also, the available facilities and environmental resources have been exploited regardless of the touristic objectives. However, the actions of other executive parties responsible for Caspian Sea coasts were done based on a physical viewpoint that could not achieve any desirable result.

In conclusion, the following recommendations are proposed to overcome the problems:

▪ The research area has many capacities for more secured sites; however, only 4 sites are established in the area.

▪ The current secured sites are unknown for the majority of tourists. So it is needed to inform public more extensively.

▪ Establishing suitable shopping centers/areas near to the coasts.

▪ Establishing suitable accommodations and resorts near to the coasts.

▪ Establishing suitable medical centers and clinics.

▪ Establishing monetary and banking service centers.

▪ Providing cultural and native products in the area of secured sites (e.g. local foods, sports, architecture and etc.)

▪ Providing maritime and tourism entertainments such as sea glider, balloon flights over the area, etc.

▪ Providing traveling packages in order to make connection between sea and mountain. Many of the travelers had no idea about the mountain attractions existing in the research area. Hence, authorities should try to inform the public.

▪ Establishing and linking various types of rail transports and water taxis which can be interesting and motivating for travelers. Currently these facilities do not exist in this area.

REFERENCES

Angelevska-Najdeska, K. and G. Rakicevik, 2012. Planning of sustainable tourism development. Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, 44: 210-220. *View at Google Scholar*

Ariza, E., R. Sarda, J.A. Jimenez, J. Mora and C. Avila, 2007. Beyond performance assessment measurement for beach management: Application to Spanish mediterranean beaches. Coastal Management, 36(1): 47-66. *View at Google Scholar | View at Publisher*

Blancas, F.J., M. Gonzalez, M. Lozano-Oyola and F. Perez, 2010. The assessment of sustainable tourism: Application to Spanish coastal destinations. Ecological Indicators, 10(2): 484-492. *View at Google Scholar | View at Publisher*

Ghorbani, A., V. Raufirad, P. Rafiaani and H. Azadi, 2015. Ecotourism sustainable development strategies using SWOT and QSPM model: A case study of Kaji Namakzar Wetland, South Khorasan Province, Iran. Tourism Management Perspectives, 16: 290-297. *View at Google Scholar | View at Publisher*

Helms, M.M. and J. Nixon, 2010. Exploring SWOT analysis - where are we now?: A review of academic research from the last decade. Journal of Strategy and Management, 3(3): 215-251. *View at Google Scholar | View at Publisher*

Lakshami, S.R. and T.L. Shaji, 2016. Transformation of coastal settlements due to tourism. Procedia Technology, 24: 1668-1680. *View at Google Scholar | View at Publisher*

Needham, M.D. and B.W. Szuster, 2011. Situational influences on normative evaluations of coastal tourism and recreation management strategies in Hawai'i. Tourism Management, 32(4): 732-740. *View at Google Scholar | View at Publisher*

Panigrahi, J.K. and P.K. Mohanty, 2012. Effectiveness of the Indian coastal regulation zones provisions for coastal zone management and its evaluation using SWOT analysis. Ocean & Coastal Management, 65: 34-50. *View at Google Scholar | View at Publisher*

Reihanian, A., M. Binti, N.Z. Mahmood, E. Kahrom and T.W. Hin, 2012. Sustainable tourism development strategy by SWOT analysis: Boujagh National Park, Iran. Tourism Management Perspectives, 4: 223-228. *View at Google Scholar | View at Publisher*

Sarisik, M., O. Turkay and O. Akova, 2011. How to manage yacht tourism in Turkey: A swot analysis and related strategies. 7th International Strategic Management Conference, 24.

World Travel and Tourism Council, 2006. League tables: Travel and tourism climbing to new heights: The 2006 travel & tourism economic research. London, UK: World Travel & Tourism.

XueMing, Z., 2012. Research on the development strategies of rural tourism in Suzhou based on SWOT analysis. Energy Procedia, 16: 1295-1299. *View at Google Scholar | View at Publisher*

Zhang, Q., 2012. Research on tourist attractions performance promoting method based on the SWOT analysis method. IERI Procedia, 1: 254 − 260. *View at Google Scholar | View at Publisher*