



# A holistic view of tourism development and potential policy concerns: A case of Birjand City, Iran

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## Abstract

Culture, with its overpowering influence, can explain the nature, purpose, structure, and function of tourism. Birjand, also Romanized as Bīrjand and Birdjand, is the capital of the Iranian province of South Khorasan Birjand and it had a population of 187,020 in 2013. This study sought to explore the cultural influences on the city of Birjand by using a SWOT method to find solutions for the development of tourism in this city. The implications are highlighting the future challenges which potentially can be encountered by the policymakers, legislators and academicians, when discussing tourism as a competency, industry and game-changing player in the economic growth of the country. The policies suggested by this article may help to achieve sustainable development in South Khorasan province and Birjand City. This survey tries to study the impact of globalization on local sustainability and the stability of the region. The primary data used in this research was gathered by interviews with local tourism experts and travelers to the city. By applying the SWOT analysis method, this study suggests different strategies to promote tourism. The results of this study suggest tourism in Birjand city plays an important role in creating cultural changes in the host community, promotes and strengthens the positive cultural elements as well as causing some social disorder in the local culture. This study also shows sociological, economic, and social features, economic dependence on tourism, and attitudes toward tourism, and it illustrates different levels of support or opposition to the development of tourism in this city.

**Keywords:** Tourism, strategic planning, public policy, SWOT, Birjand, Iran.

## Introduction and Literature Review

Tourism is a complex phenomenon influenced by multiple interrelated economic, political, cultural, and social factors, which causes both positive and negative effects on the environment and local communities (Prince, 2018). It combines physical and spiritual dimensions, which may often be further combined into a new dimension (Jepson, 2014). Previous research has focused on the impacts

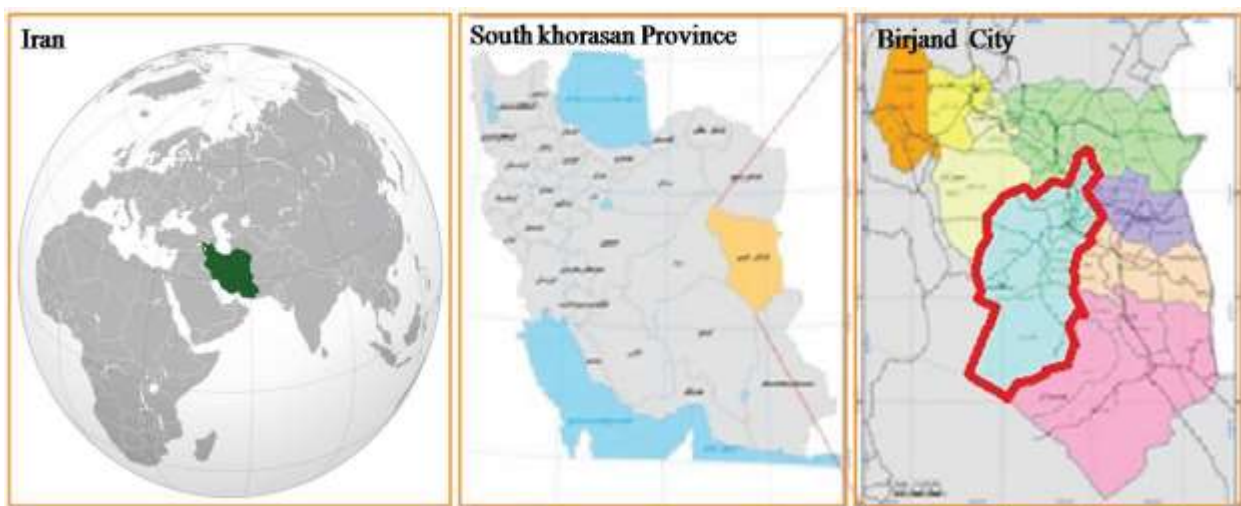


caused from the various types of tourism and leisure activities to a destination and on the effects of visitors' behavior on the tourism experience (Hardymana & Burginbz, 2017; (Ramkissoon & Mavondo, 2017; Manning, 2007; Ritchie & Adair, 2016; McCool & Lime, 2001). While tourism can be considered as an industry, it is also a complex set of social phenomena that may directly or indirectly (even before the economy) affect society and culture (Moradi, 2012). Ebrahimi Meimand et al. (2017) defined a theoretical basis for explaining the interplay of socio-cultural elements that affect a host community's reaction to and support for tourism development. Tourism is the main factor in the formation of new cultural forms, which are combinations of traditional local cultures and modern cultural phenomena (Bernz, 2006). Tourism is not only a mixture of purely commercial activities, but is also the ideological expression of history, nature, and tradition; it's a wording that has the power to make up the culture and nature again, based on the needs. One of the current problems of tourism is the issue of absorption of tourists and applicable procedures to aspects including communication, advertising, and marketing in tourism. Tourism is an important business enterprise, which is demanding an evaluation of the competing scene, defining and setting objectives and judging among various options for investment, establishment, and use of the suitable structure for commercializing the urban tourist products (Dinari, 2005:11)

Nocca (2017) declared if the cultural aspect can contribute to sustainable development, it could be positive only if we can produce empirical evidence about its contribution to improving the economic, social, and environmental efficiency of the city. García-Hernández et al. (2017) discussed the role of heritage in cultural tourism in the context of historic European cities.

In this study, the effects of sociocultural factors and traditions of the people of the city of Birjand on tourism development and tourist attraction is evaluated.

Based on the definition of Presidency of the I.R.I Plan and Budget Organization, Birjand is the capital city of the Iranian province of South Khorasan. The city is especially famous for its saffron, barberry, jujube, and handmade carpet exports, and it has a population of 187,000. The location of Birjand city on the map is illustrated in figure one.



**Figure 1:** Location of Birjand city. Source: Nekooee,2011:9

Furthermore, its effect on the whole country as the host community in attracting foreign tourists has been analyzed. In Iran, according to widespread and significant potential in this field, on the one hand, and the existence of weaknesses and shortcomings in the tourism industry, on the other hand, there is a need to review and assess ways to attract tourists. A major tourist attraction of Iran is its



unique socio-cultural status. Each region has various ethnic groups with various traditions across the country, which is particularly true for Birjand city. Birjand city, in particular, due to its unique cultural, historical and natural attractions, has a high potential tourist attraction. Birjand city, located in a historical area which from a very long history up to the Zandieh period, is named Ghohestan, around South Khorasan. Ghohestan or Ghuhestan means mountain. By considering the mountainous situation of this region, the name fits the place. Being located in a distant area and dominating by long and impassable mountains were the most important reasons for Ismaeelian to choose Ghohestan.

Although in the sixth to seventh A. H., Ismeelian presence created many conflicts, these conflicts made Birjand to be recognized by others. From the Seventh Century A. H., the name Birjand has known. But up to the Safavieh period, it was nothing more important than a mere village. Gradually, it flourished. Passing caravans created appropriate opportunities for that infamous city to prosper. During the Safavieh period (907-1135 A.H.), when Arab princes settled down in Tabas Golshan, Birjand was chosen as the center of the kingdom. The basic information of Birjand city is mentioned in table one. Birjand city due to its special customs, ethnic, and tourism potentials, can create entertainment venues to introduce its own culture and traditions to the world.

**Table 1.** Basic Information of Birjand

No.		Unit	Value	Year
1	Area	Km2	95,385	2011
2	Population		662,534	2011
3	Share of Population	%	0.9	2011
4	Population Average Annual Growth	%	0.81	2006-2011
5	Internet (per 100 people)	%	15.01	2011
6	Unemployment Rate	%	10.7	2016
7	Economic Participation Rate	%	38.0	2016
8	Contribution of GDP	%	0.71	2009

Source: Presidency of the I.R.I Plan and Budget Organization

Given that a high percentage of the people of this city are academics and educated, it is possible to hold seminars about tourism in universities to raise the level of knowledge about applicable tourism industry approaches in this city. In table two, the amount of public and private universities of South Khorasan province and the number of the facilities and students is illustrated.

**Table 2.** Census of universities located in the province, 2012-2013

No	University/center	Public/private	Academic/staff	Students	Graduated
1	Province total public universities	Public	2417	29000	30066
2	Province total Azad universities	Private	756	11345	15290
Total			3173	40345	45356

Source: Ministry of Science and Technology of Iran

Table three shows the number of experts in the whole province. In table four, data of all public and private schools, including pre-schools, elementary schools, high schools – first period, high school-second period and others are shown. According to South Khorasan Investment Service Center evaluations and data need more domestic and foreign investments. These investments should be guided and more focused with regards to cultural and traditional factors of the region. Nicknamed the 'City of Pines' and 'City of Culture', Birjand was once an important city in Ghehestan (Part of the



greater Khorasan). The city is today the capital of Southern Khorasan province in eastern Iran. The small but organized and fast-growing city is located on the eastern side of Iran's central desert. Saffron and barberries are the most famous souvenirs of Birjand, anyhow, jujube and plums are also of the best quality. The other souvenir is Birjandi sweet. Basketry is common in the countryside, and Birjand carpet is famous internationally for its good quality and beautiful designs.

**Table 3.** Experts in the province, 2012-2013

No	Title	Technical & Engineering	Agriculture	Medicine	Basic Science	Humanities	Architecture and Art	Sum
1	Academic staff	104	70	110	88	135	12	519
2	student B.A.	8340	2878	1847	3388	16862	1092	34407
	M.A.	372	703	19	600	1510	0	3204
	PhD.	24	5	466	81	11	0	587
3	Gratuated B.A.	1385	420	218	684	3229	144	6080
	M.A.	70	131	0	167	268	0	636
	PhD	0	0	37	0	0	0	37

Source: Science and Technology Park of South Khorasan

**Table 4.** Statistical Profile of General Offices of Education of South Khorasan in 2013-2014

Education level	Public			Private			Concentration	
	<i>school</i>	<i>class</i>	<i>student</i>	<i>school</i>	<i>class</i>	<i>student</i>	<i>Public</i>	<i>Private</i>
Pre-school	0	0	0	192	416	6847	0	16.5
Elementary	1160	4169	72065	34	230	4608	17.3	20.0
High school- first period	340	1156	23234	8	18	387	20.1	21.5
High school	151	1031	22929	8	57	817	22.2	14.3
Technical & Occupational knowledge-job	107	604	11761	1	2	48	19.5	24.0
Special needs	105	260	1378	0	0	0	5.3	0
Total	1863	7220	131367	243	723	12707	18.2	17.6

Source: General Office of Education and training-South Khorasan

Tables five and six show the cultural and road status of South Khorasan Province.

This study is aimed at introducing the potential capacity of tourism in the region of South Khorasan, in particular, Birjand City, and to suggest some policies to develop its tourism industry. In this study, first of all, the city of Birjand and its historical and cultural characteristics is introduced, then we pay attention to the dialect and language of the city of Birjand and rituals, customs, crafts as well as people's clothing of this region. Finally, applying the SWOT method, we try to assess social, cultural, ethnic and traditional impacts of the region on its tourism development and suggest effective solutions and strategies to promote tourism in this city.



**Table 5.** South Khorasan Roads Status- 2013

Main Roads			By-ways					Rural Roads				
Four lines	Wide	Usual	Wide Asphalt	Asphalt Grade 1	Asphalt Grade 2	Sandy	Availability	Asphalt Grade 1	Asphalt Grade 2	Sandy	Terrestrial	Total
289	6	1035	1370	734	808	75	1179	3229	1311	1612	4493	16141

Source: General Office of roads and urbanism

**Table 6.** The province culture and Art, 2005

Index	Unit	Number / amount	Percentage of Fluctuation
Number of the titles of the printed books	Title	35	6
Circulation of the written books	Version	52000	-3.7
Number of the title of the translated books	Title	2	0
Circulation of the translated books	Version	2000	100
Number of the titles of written books	Title	33	6.45
Circulation of the written books	Version	50000	-5.66
Number of the titles of media	Titles	77	15
Circulation of the media	Version	16437586	40
Number of the titles printed media	Title	40	14
Circulation of the printed media	Version	16410022	41.6
Number of titles of magazines	Title	24	41
Circulation of the magazines	Version	496400	15
Number of cultural and art institutes	Office	6	100
Number of cultural and Qorani institutes	Office	32	18.5
Number of cinemas	Office	4	0
Number of printing office	Office	36	20
Number of advertisement office	Office	70	23
Number of cultural and artistic institute of mosques	Office	377	19.7

Source: South Khorasan general Office of Islamic Culture-Census, Data, and Planning Unit – March 2014

In recent years the tourism industry is considered as an important factor and motivator in job creation, investment, and regional development in the general economy. The development of this industry in industrialized countries leads to diversification of incomes and reduces inconsistency in the economy and developing countries, and it's an opportunity for export, production of foreign exchange and employment (Hall, 1994). During the development of tourism, urban areas because of their historical and cultural attractions, are often considered as an important tourism destination. Hence the large volume of tourist facilities is concentrated in cities (Papoli Yazdi & Saghayi, 2006).

The era of post-modernity with its main slogan, globalization, is associated with information processing and mobile tourism and has made a new period of social and cultural interaction of people, especially in urban areas (Boniface & Fowler, 1993). Therefore, it is necessary to keep pace with the increase in tourism planning in mind to optimize existing facilities and establishment of facilities we needed (Mikaeili, 2000).

Due to the lack of facilities and services available in a city that can be a problematic issue related to tourism, tourism development can also be useful to urban development. But getting these benefits is possible only when appropriate civil institutions and social infrastructure is also provided. Besides,



before any planning and implementation of development projects, having data of tourist sites is essential (Hadiani et al., 2011). Tourism benefits cannot be applied unless by providing appropriate tourism workaroud development, so the first step is to identify the attractions and planning for their development at a later stage seems necessary (Behzad Far & Zamanian, 2007). Also, as Shahandeh (1999) explained, to achieve the best strategies in tourism, the cooperation of different organizations in the research, dissemination, product development, human resources, marketing, and monitoring the implementation of laws is essential. In other words, given the significant impact of tourism from the economic, social and cultural aspects, it is needed to develop tourism via proper planning and strategy making efforts (Mahalati, 2001).

The sociocultural factors of tourism in Birjand city are explained below.

### ***Cultural heritage capabilities of the province***

Because of the existence of the historical-cultural record of Iranian-Islamic tradition, there is the possibility of research in anthropological and cultural issues. These are some of the Cultural heritages of South Khorasan Province which are listed in South Khorasan Investment Service Center:

There are 1189 mausoleums in this province and there is a recording of 719 of them in the national monument list of Iran; More than 12 historic gardens are registered in the national monument list, and the General Administration tries to register some of them in the UNESCO international monument list to promote internal and external tourism. The existence of highly-valued inscriptions and epigraphs that date back to many years which were found in Kal-e Jangal, Kooch and Makhonic are important as are the existence of enclosures and historical hills with more than five thousand priorities in the province and their high potentiality to be researched and attracted tourist.

The large variety and plurality of historical collections and the ability to revive and use them for social use like caravanserai, historical schools, historic houses, historical baths and historic gardens; The entity of historical castles and fortresses, especially from the Esmailian period and their high potential to be registered in universal monument lists and tourism; The existence of historical and cultural texture of cities and rural areas, including Boshroyeh and Birjand's historical texture villages including; Forg, Koor, Makhunic, and also Bideskan.

The South Khorasan is one of the anthropological poles in Iran, being away from great centers and lack of cultural change. People practice most of the Iranian ancient traditions in South Khorasan and two out of the seven beautiful villages in Iran are located in South Khorasan. Makhunic is reputed for its architecture and the ancient texture of monuments like Makhunic's Epigraph, Golanjir Tower and the rotating castle and house and the region's economy, farming land and small gardens and the smallness of house's doors in Sarbisheh Town.

In Table seven it shows the tourism attraction of Birjand City; Chenesht village is another anthropological attraction of this area concerning its speech, local mantle, and its traditions; The existence of a technical library with more than 7,000 books; The existence of 14 museums in the province.



**Table 7. Tourism Attractions of Birjand city**

Row	Attraction's Name	Location	Type (historical, cultural...)
1	Historic mansions of Akbariah, Rahimabad and Shokatabad	Birjand	Historical and cultural
2	Castle of Birjand	Birjand	Historical and cultural
3	Brjand Band-e-Dareh's special tourism zone	Birjand	Natural
4	Vila region of band-e- Amir Shah	5 km of the south of Birjand	Natural
5	Chehardeh waterfall	Birjand, end of Ghafari St	Natural
6	Gyuk waterfall	Birjand	Natural
7	Ark protected area	Birjand, Khousf	Historical
8	Mazare – shah Soleiman Ali	Birjand, Khousf	Religious
9	Khour Village	Birjand-Kerman road 85Km	Historical
10	Mooshin river-basin	45 <sup>th</sup> km of the north of Birjand	Natural
11	Akbarabad percussion	100 <sup>th</sup> km of Birjand	Natural
12	Sahlabad pool	110 <sup>th</sup> km of Birjand	Natural

Source: South Khorasan Investment Service Center (2011)

### ***Race, language and dialect***

As this area has a special climate, it never tempted invaders a to attack it. That's why the people's language and race have not seen any great changes. Hence, Fars and Farsi have been the dominant race and language, respectively, the formal race and language became untouched. This language received a special dialect in each region, e.g. Birjandi dialect, Qaeni dialect. These dialects are different from one another in vocabularies, sentence construction and sometimes in the accents. Some Arab tribes still live in this region. They keep their language, though they have mixed with Farsi a lot.

### ***Ceremonies, festivals, and rituals***

Rituals and ceremonies of South Khorasan province, especially in the case of Birjand city, can be divided into two categories:

#### **A) Religious rituals and customs**

Among religious rituals and customs that are held specifically in the province, we can mention the "Bara'at Night (Mid-Sha'ban)", "Ramadan Khani", "Bibi Seshanbe" and "Bil Zani (spading)."

Bara'at Night (Mid-Sha'ban) is a holiday observed by various Muslim communities on the night between 14 and 15 Sha'ban months, according to the Islamic lunar calendar. It is considered as a night when the fortunes of humans for the coming year are decided and when Allah may forgive sinners. This day in Birjand is like a party where people put fruit and food and sweets on the tombs of their departed family and friends; Bil Zani (spading) is the only ritual in Birjand County, which is held in Khosef city once a year in the Ashura day. Bil Zani has a long history. For this ritual a total of fifteen people who are two of the four categories and each of the member shovels in hand, circle and stuck together and hold their shovels up to sky, and when they are moving one by one jump up and touch his shovel blade to other's, and they say "Heydar Ali" rhythmic all together! The people of this city believe that if they do not hold this ritual on this day, they will not have a good year and their products will be damaged.



## **B) Regulation and traditional customs**

Despite some similarities to other parts of the country, in the city of Birjand, there are different rituals and traditional customs the same as “New year ceremony”, “Marriage ceremony”, “Yalda Night (Chelle Night)”.

### ***Games and Entertainments***

Local games, derived from culture and social beliefs, reflect the lifestyle of the people of each region. The common games which are popular among the people of Birjand are “Choob Bazi”, “Toshle Bazi”, “Gole Bazi”, “Haft Sang”, “Yek Ghol Do Ghol”, “Gook” etcetera.

### ***Music and Dance of Birjand***

The prominent feature of south Khorasan traditional music is dramatic and rhythmic movement. The music in this region has a long history, especially in the city of Birjand. The city has very diverse traditional dances and music. Birjand folk instrument includes Dohol, Sorna (similar to Trumpet), Dayere and Ney, which are usually made by musicians. Asil, Nare Nare, Shirje, Ahval, Se Zarb, etc. are some special Sheet kinds of music of folk dances in this region. In addition to the solo, duet, and group dances, there are other kinds of traditional dances in Birjand. Today, Birjand folk dances survived during the century and now it’s popular in the whole country.

### ***Production of souvenir and traditional arts***

South Khorasan has a long history of handicraft products. Handicrafts of this province include carpet weaving, cloth weaving, Gelim weaving, Jajim weaving, Ziloo weaving, basketry, mat weaving, spinning, Felting, and pottery. Among these crafts, carpet weaving played an important roll in Birjand handicrafts.

### ***Agricultural and herbal remedies***

Among agricultural products, sugar beet ranked eighth in the country, and also wheat, barley, cotton, grains, forage crops are grown in this province. As mentioned in many sources, saffron, barberry, jujube, and plums are four strategic crops in this region which are the main souvenirs of Birjand. In addition to agricultural products, herbal products also constitute a major part of South Khorasan souvenirs. In general, unique herbal medicines in Birjand are applicable and suitable for tourists to buy.

### ***Sweets and snacks***

Ginger Bread, Charkhi Bread, Coulombe, sugar cookies, Shah Daneh, coconut bread, Walnut bread, Rice bread are the most popular sweets in Birjand. "Ginger cookies" is one of the traditional pastries baking in South Khorasan province and especially in the city of Birjand. These kinds of cookies are produced and supplied by traditional and industrial entities.

## **Results and Research Methodology**

### **Questions and Hypotheses**

In this section, the questions the study tries to answer are discussed:





Question one: Does the city of Birjand have the ability to attract tourists in terms of its social and cultural attractions?

Question two: What are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats city of Birjand in terms of attracting tourists and the tourism industry?

Two hypotheses are posed, namely:

*H#1: Does Birjand city with current tourist facilities have the predictable possibility of attracting tourists annually?*

*H#2: Can Birjand with its different customs and traditions, and also cultural tourism be one of the tourist attractions zones in Iran?*

### **Primary data and modeling**

Preliminary data were collected using questionnaire surveys, unstructured interviews, and observations. The questionnaire survey was conducted on three different groups of stakeholders, including visitors survey, staff and authorities survey and survey on experts active in the field of tourism. There were some open questions in the questionnaire survey seeking further comments supposedly necessary and were mentioned in the questions. In the questionnaire, a five point Likert scale was used to extract and deduce the effective factors and driving forces in visitor's satisfaction and employees' and locals' opinions about the Birjand City attractions as well as problems. This scale included a chain of questions and/or statements related to the attitudes in question.

The respondents were required to indicate the degree of agreement or disagreement with each of these statements. Answers were given a numerical score that systematically reflected the direction of the individual's attitudes on each question or statement. The respondent's total score was computed by finding the sum of the scores of all statements and the final measure depended on the percentage of each indicator (Kinnear & Taylor, 1995).

Table eight shows the reliability of statistics of the surveys, and the alpha coefficient for the 31 items is .734, suggesting that the items of our questionnaire have relatively high internal consistency, and the survey is highly reliable and acceptable.

**Table 8.** Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.734	31

As it is mentioned in the Pearson Correlation matrix in Table nine, the Overall Rate of visitors and experts had chosen to travel to Birjand shows the satisfaction of travelers to Birjand city, and it has a very high positive correlation to the Cultural Factors with the value of 0.640. Besides, as the P-value is less than 0.01, the correlation is perfectly significant, meaningful, and the two variables are linearly related.



**Table 9.** Correlations Matrix

		Cultural Factors	Trip Experience	Overall Rate	Media
Cultural Factors	Pearson Correlation	1	.771**	.640**	-.639**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	50	50	50	50
Trip Experience	Pearson Correlation	.771**	1	.325*	-.552**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.021	.000
	N	50	50	50	50
Overall Rate	Pearson Correlation	.640**	.325*	1	-.543**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.021		.000
	N	50	50	50	50
Media	Pearson Correlation	-.639**	-.552**	-.543**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	50	50	50	50

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The Cultural Factors obtained from the questionnaire were:

1. Cultural Activities including:
  - I. Ceremonies, festivals, and rituals, both traditional and religious ones.
  - II. Local Games and entertainments
  - III. Local folklore music and dance
2. Souvenirs:
  - I. Agricultural and herbal remedies
  - II. Sweets and snacks
3. Local Outfits

The high correlation between the overall rate and cultural factors agreed with hypothesis two and question one, which say Birjand city can attract tourists in terms of its social and cultural attractions, and it can be one of the key tourist attractions zones in Iran.

The next factor that has a positive correlation to the level of satisfaction, Overall Rate, is Trip Experience. This factor includes the experiences of travelers and views of experts about:

1. Accommodation including hotels, inns and hostels.
2. The hospitality of the local people they have observed.
3. Facilities and tourism infrastructures such as city public transportation, inter-city means of transportation, shopping centers, public parking lots, and roads.
4. Advertising and information about the attractions of the city.

As it is demonstrated in Table nine, the P-value of the correlation between Overall Rate and Trip Experience is less than 0.05, the correlation is significant, meaningful, and the two variables are linearly related.

The correlation value is positive, but the value is 0.325, which is relatively low, which means the two factors are correlated but the level of correlation is not very high. Based on the other questions in the

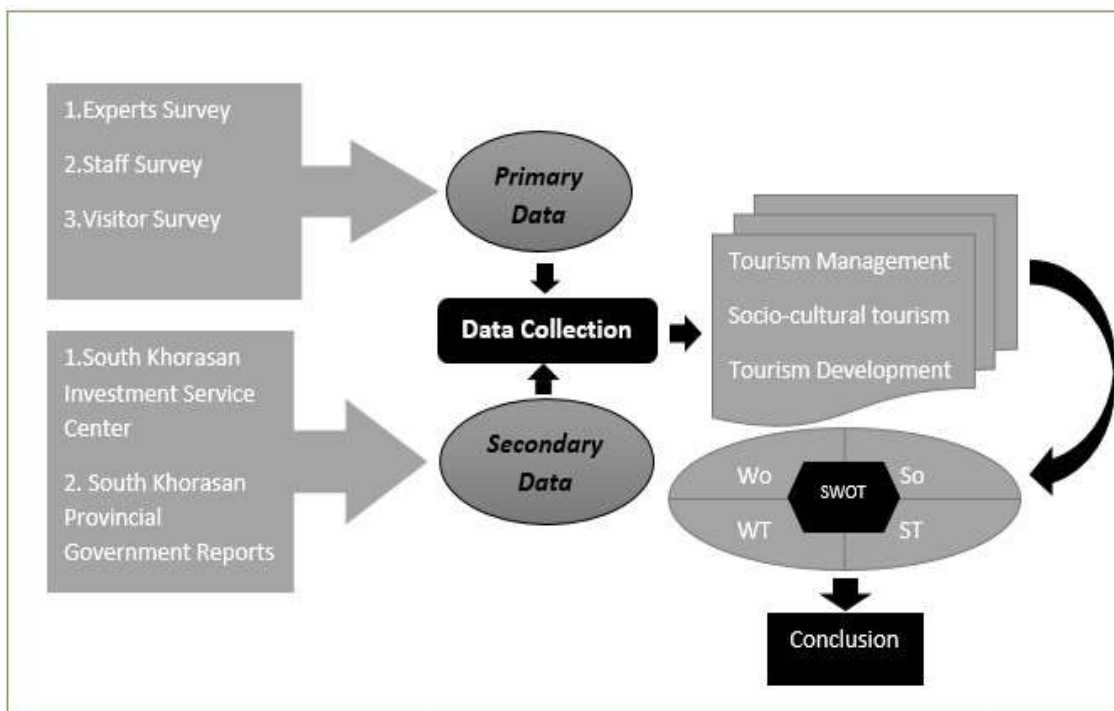
questionnaire, this fact is due to some level of shortcomings in the items of accommodation, facilities, and also advertising.

The third factor which is mentioned in the correlation matrix is Media, which shows the effect of international media on traveling to Iran. As it is mentioned in table nine, Overall Rate and Media the Pearson Correlation value is -0.552 which means the two factors are negatively correlated, and this negative correlation is of high level. In other words, directions of satisfaction of travelers and the media propaganda are vice versa. And as the p-value is zero and it is less than 0.01, the negative correlation between the two factors is perfectly significant, meaningful and the two variables are linearly related.

There are some open-ended questions in the questionnaire and below are the results of those questions:

1. Local experts are familiar with agricultural and herbal remedies of Birjand and consider it as an attraction, but travelers had no information on this issue, which shows some level of notification is necessary on this issue.
2. There are some opportunities mentioned by the interviewees, such as being nearby Mashhad city as one of the hubs of religious tourism in the Islamic World and a high number of universities and academicians in Birjand.
3. Most of the interviewees believe that tourists cause some environmental problems and this is considered as one of the threats to tourism in Birjand.

Two types of data collection have done problem-solving, analysis and strategy suggestions. The primary data refers to the questionnaire survey from experts, staff, and visitors, and the secondary data is collected from provincial and countrywide public reports. The process of data collection is illustrated in figure two.



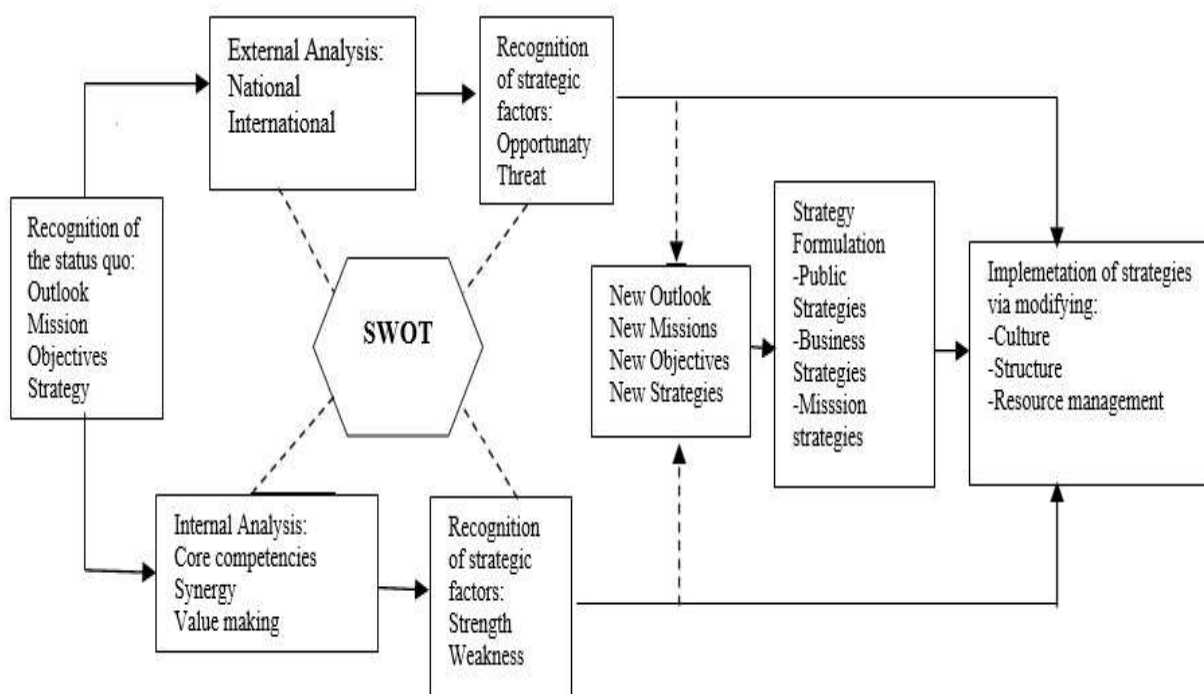
**Figure 2.** Data collection and analysis: two types of data collection have done problem-solving, analysis and strategy suggestions. The primary data refers to the questionnaire survey from experts, staff, and visitors, and the secondary data is collected from provincial and countrywide public reports.

### **Problem Solving and Methodology**

One of the most important tools in the process of determining strategy is the SWOT technique that is used to compare information; therefore, SWOT is a tool for strategic planning (Hom Haacke, 2001). Today, SWOT is used as a tool for analyzing performance and the gap situation by managers and policymakers (Nilson, 2004). SWOT is also a conceptual framework for analyzing the system. SWOT tool from the perspective of a strategy maximizes strengths and opportunities and minimizes weaknesses and threats.

The systematic strategic planning process includes environmental assessment (outside-inside), strategy formulation, strategy implementation, evaluation, and control (Mosalayi, 2007). SWOT Analysis is a useful method for understanding the Strengths and Weaknesses, and for recognizing both the Opportunities and the Threats.

The SWOT analysis (or SWOT matrix) is an abbreviation for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats and is a planning method to evaluate those four components of a project or business venture. A SWOT analysis can be executed for a company, product, place, industry, or person. In this study, we use the SWOT method to analyze the current situation of tourism in Birjand city and to suggest policies for its development as it is modeled in figure three.



**Figure 3.** Strategic Management in Tourism Development: SWOT method has been applied to analyze the status quo of tourism by External Analysis (Opportunity and Threat) and Internal Analysis (Strength and Weakness). Based on the analysis, strategy formulation and policy strategies are developed and modeled.

### **Analysis**

#### **Internal Analysis**

- A socio-cultural analysis of the strengths of Birjand City in tourism development

According to the investigation and material presented in this study via interviews with local experts and managers as well as field research, Birjand city, in terms of cultural factors in attracting tourists, has noticeable strengths. According to analysts, the most important strengths of the tourist city of Birjand



in terms of socio-cultural factors related are S1 (ceremonies, celebrations, rituals); S2 (souvenirs and handicrafts); S3 (Local outfits and clothing) and S4 (Agricultural and herbal medicines).

- A socio-cultural analysis of the weaknesses of Birjand City in tourism development

The most important tourism weaknesses of Birjand in terms of socio-cultural related factors are: W1 (lack of places for the accommodation of tourists); W2 (lack of facilities and transportation for the welfare of tourists); W3 (little information and poor advertising about tourist attractions of Birjand).

**External Analysis**

- Analysis of socio-cultural opportunities Birjand City in tourism development

Opportunities that can be obtained from the research include O1 (being close to Mashhad as a hub of religious tourism), O2 (high number of academics and educated workforce in Birjand), O3 (high culture inhabitants).

- Analysis of the social and cultural threats Birjand City in tourism development

Issues that threaten the city of Birjand in the field of tourism, including T1 (Tourism attractions in larger cities in Iran); T2 (Some international media negative image against Iran); T3 (environmental pollution by tourists)

The SWOT factors in terms of cultural tourism in Birjand city are indicated in Table ten in details.

**Table 10. SWOT Factors**

	1	2	3	4
<b>Internal Environment</b>				
Strenght	ceremonies, celebrations, rituals	souvenirs and handicrafts	Local outfits and clothing	Agricultural and herbal medicines
Weakness	lack of places for the accommodation of tourists	lack of facilities and transportation for the welfare of tourists	little information and poor advertising about tourist attractions of Birjand	
<b>External Environment</b>				
Opportunity	being close to Mashhad as a hub of religious tourism	high number of academics and educated manpower in Birjand	high culture inhabitants	
Threat	Tourism attractions in larger cities in Iran	Some international media negative image against Iran	environmental pollution by tourists	

The strategies explored by applying SWOT analysis are listed below in 4 categories of offensive, conservative, competitive, and defensive strategies:

**Discussion and Conclusion**

A major tourism-related challenge in Iran has been the development of appropriate communication, advertising, and marketing strategies to improve tourism flow into the country. Iran has the potential to be a primary worldwide tourist destination but there are specific shortcomings that require revisiting/reassessment of the country’s tourism marketing strategies. Specifically for Birjand city via SWOT method, this study suggests below strategies for tourism development of the city.



- **SO strategies (offensive or Aggressive)**

In this strategy due to the position of the strengths and opportunities, there are possibilities to develop. By considering the strengths and opportunities, the aggressive strategies of tourism development the city of Birjand are:

1. Organizing seasonal festivals for advertising local customs, souvenirs, crafts, and clothing, which can held by educated experts with the help of residents.
2. The mechanization of herbal and pharmaceutical products for medical purposes.
3. The publishing of brochures about tourism attractions of Birjand in the nearby city of Mashhad, as a tourism hub.
4. Developing entertainment and amusement areas for the development of ecotourism attractions as a supplement to increase the duration of stay of tourists.

- **WO strategies (conservative strategy)**

By considering the weaknesses and opportunities, the conservative strategies of tourism development the city of Birjand are:

1. Planning by senior management to create convenient places with high capacity to accommodate visitors.
2. Appropriate publicity of the tourist attractions in the city and surrounding villages, particularly in Mashhad as the nearest metropolis.
3. The establishment of rail lines and increase investment in urban and suburban transportation system from other cities to Birjand.
4. Increasing transportation service to tourist destinations in the city.
5. Increasing coordination between organizations related to tourism and the creation of a united management system for the implementation of tourism development plans.

- **ST strategies (competitive strategy)**

According to the assessment, the competitive strategy indicates that, despite external threats, cultural and social factors of Birjand city have the strengths in which with the help of them, external threats as a competitor can be omitted.

1. Creating tourist websites, tours and advertising in the media, can compete in attracting tourists from home and abroad.
2. Creating billboards and brochures about the culture of maintaining the cleanliness of the environment.
3. Efforts to identify and register local tourist sites of the city on the list of national and international tourist attractions to introduce to more people.

- **WT strategy (defensive strategy)**

By considering the weaknesses and threats, the defensive strategies of tourism development the city of Birjand are:

1. Despite the intense competitive environment to attract tourists and restrictions on the accommodation of travelers, there is a need to identify ecotourism attractions and recreational tourism centers due to be carried out in the region.
2. Efforts to promote competition and progress in the field of tourism by familiarizing hotel managers and travel agencies with new advertising techniques and tourism marketing are needed as well.

Diversity in ceremonies, celebrations, and religion, clothing, etc. in this city created differences that can be effective in attracting tourists. Therefore, the development of infrastructure and control threats and ways to cover up weaknesses with strengths and opportunities in this important issue will take



place. In this study, using SWOT and field investigation has been trying to introduce strategies to be done to make recommendations to the managing directors. The priority is the conservative strategy that is recommended in this study. Easy and low-cost implementation of the strategies outlined in this strategy are the most important reason for having the priorities. An aggressive strategy that is required by emphasizing and reinforcing strengths and using environmental opportunities is the next priority which is emphasized in this study. A strategy to strengthen and increase facilities and services in the tourist attractions of national importance and the emphasis on seasonal festivals and local traditional customs Birjand is required.

### **Limitations**

As it is the first research on tourism in Birjand city, as there was no relevant literature found. Having access to only tourism experts of the city was another limitation for this study.

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