Developing a Cultural Tourism Scenario in Iran

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Article Info	Abstract
	This research aims to identify the factors that influence the growth of cultural tourism in Iran and propose a corresponding model. Following the identification of these factors, a scenario is written to optimize their utilization. The research employs a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to achieve its objectives and finalize the factors. Semi-structured interviews are conducted with experts in the field. In the second phase, after the formal validity of the factors is confirmed, their fuzzy cognitive mapping and scenario are designed using the FCMapper and Pajek software programs. As the results show, the factor of "creating investment opportunities and attracting financial resources in the field of cultural tourism" is the most influential, while the factor of "providing diverse and creative services in Iran's cultural tourism" is the most impressionable for the development of cultural tourism in Iran. In the task of scenario writing, it has been discovered that, by focusing on attracting financial resources, managers can enhance the infrastructure, create a context for interaction with other countries, identify new target markets, and offer creative services to Iranian cultural tourists through diverse tours. The findings can help stakeholders, managers, and policymakers in Iran's tourism industry design and develop plans and strategies for the growth of Iran's cultural tourism, thereby improving the position of the country in the global tourism market.

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Introduction

Every country should have strategies to attract tourists in line with its socioeconomic development and infrastructure growth, considering the increasing popularity of travel and tourism as one of the world's largest and fastest-growing global socioeconomic sectors. Tourism accounts for 7% of the global trade and has continued to expand despite interruptions and declines in tourist flows due to the COVID-19 crisis (Penacho et al., 2023). A variety of tourism-related industries, including sports, health, religious, urban, and rural types of tourism, are emerging daily due to the growing interest in travel destinations and global expansion (Asadian et al., 2021). Future travel experiences can take many different forms, and they are yet to be "written". The future of tourism is a hotly debated topic in both academic and non-academic circles, with authors presenting contrasting views. Some envision a bright future, while others foresee a more pessimistic outlook. In a recent tourism-themed issue of the French magazine Tremblay-Huet (2020), the majority of the interviewed activists, practitioners, academics, and politicians argued that there has been a lack of significant commitment on the part of the government or business community to change the way the tourism industry operates. These concerns, while directed at the travel and tourism sector as a whole, certainly apply to specific types of travel, such as cultural tourism. According to a 2018 UNWTO estimate, cultural tourism makes up nearly 39% of all tourism activities. It has recently been widely covered in the media due to its poor sustainability, best exemplified by the overtourism phenomenon. Predicting the future direction of cultural tourism requires a thorough understanding of the various socioeconomic trends and international influences that have shaped people's lifestyles. It is also important to examine the relationship of the concept of culture with customs, heritage, lifestyles, and local values to understand how cultural tourism is implemented and exploited (Matteuccia et al., 2022).

Tourism is often seen as the best way to promote culture and has the potential to transform host cultures at social and cultural levels in many countries. As such, cultural tourism is currently considered one of the most important forms of tourism globally. Before being seen as an economic phenomenon, tourism is fundamentally a cultural matter, as evidenced by the numerous artistic works created around it. Through tourism, people become acquainted with new cultures, individuals, and geographical areas. This acquaintance is the first step towards a deeper understanding of humanity. Moreover, culture is seen as the primary attraction for tourists. Without culture, which creates diversity, all locations would be identical and tourism would lack purpose (Papoli Yazdi, 2013).

Destinations and operators in the field of cultural tourism need to enhance their resilience to unexpected events and disruptive changes and better align with local interests to prosper (Calvi et al., 2020). However, any discourse on the future of cultural tourism must encompass a critical examination of the historical and current trends and developments that have shaped the industry's overall growth. Its

evolution should also be taken into account as a professional and socio-economic phenomenon. Given that tourism is intimately linked to and influenced by the overall development and evolution of the society, it's crucial to gain a comprehensive understanding of the various trends and factors that have shaped our society and the world we live in. Culture, which includes traditions, heritages, regional values and beliefs, is of paramount importance. Therefore, understanding how cultural tourism can adapt to changing conditions and how it might evolve in the future becomes even more crucial (Calvi & Moretti, 2020).

Iran, one of the richest civilizations in history, offers numerous archaeological, historical, and cultural attractions for tourists. The diversity of ancient Iranian culture and civilization and the current potentials of the country can be transformed into valuable tourism assets through appropriate planning and management (Zare et al., 2015). Culture is, indeed, a primary driver of tourism in Iran. Tourism managers continually strive to meet market demands, respond to global crises, de-seasonalize tourist flows, continuously adapt to technological advancements, and avoid massification that could threaten the historical, artistic, environmental, or landscape heritage (Penacho et al., 2023). With the increasing share of cultural tourists worldwide and Iran's position in terms of cultural tourism, it is crucial to pay special attention to cultural tourism in the country. This necessitates gaining scientific knowledge of the possibilities and limitations, opportunities and threats, and ways and scenarios of development. Therefore, analyzing the state of cultural tourism can be beneficial in taking steps to identify and improve the areas of priority, strengthen capabilities in this industry, and ultimately attract more cultural tourists. Considering the studies conducted so far about cultural tourism development models (Haj Agha Mir et al., 2021) and the models for the optimal development of cultural tourism (Haj Agha Mir et al., 2022) in Iran, the aim of this research is to develop Iran's cultural tourism industry. This will be achieved by writing a scenario for the development of cultural tourism and determining the amount of Indegree and Outdegree between them using the FCM method.

Therefore, the aim of this research is to enhance cultural tourism in Iran further by drafting a development scenario and determining the degree and sequence of the factors affecting the growth of cultural tourism in Iran using the FCM method. This is an attempt to predict the desirable attributes of cultural tourism. It is worth noting that, based on the authors' search in valid scientific sources, there has been little research aimed at determining the scenarios of cultural tourism in Iran.

Literature Review

The connection between tourism and culture: The relationship between tourism and culture has evolved significantly over the past century. There has always been a complex interplay between the two. Throughout the 20th century, many organizations viewed culture and tourism as separate aspects of a

place. The cultural heritage in a destination was primarily seen as an integral part of the cultural resources there, mainly for educating the local population (OECD, 2018). As such, cultural resources were believed to form the basis of cultural identities. Conversely, tourism was mostly perceived as a leisure activity, separate from one's regular work life and the local cultures of the destination. However, the term "cultural tourism" gained popularity in the 1980s due to the rise of international visits to significant sites and attractions. It was considered a "good" type of travel at the time, as it was believed to aid in preserving local cultural heritage and bolstering the local economy. It was also associated with a newly emerging specialized industry (Richards, 2018).

Tourism is, indeed, a cultural matter that fosters interactions and exchanges on both sides of its flow in a location and with people, their motivations, desires, needs, and aspirations, which are shaped by the culture in the surrounding society. The growth of tourism as a cultural phenomenon provides ample opportunities for cultural exchanges between visitors and the host society. Consequently, culture can serve various roles in the tourist experience, ranging from acting as a minor backdrop feature to being the primary motivator for travel (Calvi & Moretti, 2020).

Cultural tourism: While the concept of cultural tourism first appeared as a research objective around the turn of the 20th century, it was not until 2002 when the activity was formally defined. Cultural tourism primarily focuses on the lifestyle of the people, their history, art, architecture, faiths, and other elements that have helped to shape their way of life. It is a type of tourism where visitors engage with the heritage, local cultural and creative activities, and the daily cultural practices of host communities. The goal is to exchange experiences that are mutually educational, artistic, creative, emotional, and/or entertaining (Matteucci & Zumbusch, 2020).

In terms of motivation, the type of tourism standing out from the rest is cultural tourism, which is centered around the architecture of other countries. Global principles divide cultural tourism into two categories including a) travel to physical locations such as museums, archaeological sites, and historical buildings and b) travel that involves intangible cultural heritage, such as traditions, culture, and anthropological science. Cultural tourism includes several features, such as education, forming relationships, social interactions, familiarity with diverse cultures, and social solidarity. Karubi (2003) highlights the importance of cultural tourism by placing culture at the apex of the tourism industry pyramid. In this regard, he asserts that, unlike other industries, one cannot enter this sector without considering culture. This issue illustrates that the culture of the host community is an integral part of the tourism system in all its forms (Karubi, 2003).

The goal of cultural tourism as a driver of sustainable development is to use significant tangible and intangible cultural assets to promote regional development. This is achieved by providing urban and rural communities with tools that can be used to identify opportunities and initiate and monitor projects.

Each region has unique local environments, historical, social and economic contexts, varying levels of tourism development, and the characters, groups, stakeholders and target audiences that make up the region (Penacho et al., 2023). In fact, the primary objective of a visitor is to experience cultural expressions, including performances, rituals, customs, art, and music. Religious sites and artisan businesses serve as tourist attractions in emerging regions. A substantial portion of the global travel demand is made up of cultural tourism (Sanagustín et al., 2020). Cultural tourism is no longer a niche interest for a few, but a powerful attraction for many. Global mobility trends indicate a growth in tourism in general and cultural tourism in particular, which will bring new pressures and demands to the sector. In a social context where diversity among both residents and visitors is a norm, the "culture of encounter" becomes much more complex (Espeso-Molinero, 2020).

Heritage tourism: As mentioned earlier, "cultural tourism" involves travel to metropolitan regions, particularly to cities of historical significance and cultural landmarks such as theaters and museums. Additionally, this type of tourism can include travel to remote locations and the display of regional customs and traditions as well as the values and lifestyle of cultural groups through events like festivals and ceremonies (Abbasi et al., 2018).

As defined by some scholars, the term "cultural tourism" often encompasses a variety of different yet related activities. For example, the terms historical tourism and creative tourism are frequently used in academic literature in connection with cultural tourism. While creative tourism is associated with the concept of tourists engaging creatively with cultural assets, the boundary separating cultural tourism from heritage is less distinct and depends on how heritage is defined. Heritage encompasses a broad range of historical events, myths, artifacts, folk memories, and the places they are associated with. As a result, heritage tourism has been defined as "tourism centered on what we have inherited, which can mean anything from historic buildings, to artworks, to beautiful scenery" (Hall et al., 2016, p. 13). In other words, heritage tourism involves the interpretation and representation of the cultural legacies of the past. In the past, tours that allowed visitors to interact with actual artifacts were the primary means by which tourists ingested history (Matteucci & Zumbusch, 2020).

Theoretical background

In the following, the similar studies conducted in the field of cultural tourism are summarized.

•   Haj Agha Mir et al. (2021) designed an ideal model for the development of cultural tourism in Iran. Based on a sample of 383 research specialists and a questionnaire, the researchers concluded that social indicators are the most influential among the main indicators of cultural tourism in Iran. The growth of cultural tourism in Iran has been influenced by social, environmental, and cultural tourism practices as well as economic considerations.

• Asadian et al. (2021) conducted a study titled "Design of Cultural Tourism Development Platforms in Yazd Province Using the Structural-Interpretive Modeling Method". The aim of that study was to provide a comprehensive framework for identifying and examining the direct and indirect impacts of the infrastructures and platforms needed for the growth of cultural tourism in Yazd Province. To achieve it, the factors influencing the growth of cultural tourism were first identified with a focus on the platforms and infrastructure required for development in the province. This was done by conducting a thorough review of the literature and consulting experts in the field. These factors were then ranked using the ISM method. Based on the findings, the fundamental components of the tourism development scheme include the "infrastructure" of the program, suitable accommodation options, adequate promotion, information about cultural sites, and the availability of knowledgeable and competent cultural guides. These elements embody the culture of Yazd Province.

• Within the context of cultural tourism, Calvi et al. (2020) discussed the role of governance in a post-pandemic phase. They recognized that any effort to identify future directions for cultural tourism requires the careful examination of how destination managers interpret culture and incorporate it into the products that they develop. Based on an extensive analysis of the literature on sustainability and cultural tourism, the authors differentiated between two main approaches to cultural tourism governance, namely "community-oriented" and "economy-oriented". The community-oriented approach to cultural tourism aims to enhance community wellbeing and revitalize local cultures, while the economy-oriented approach relies on local cultural resources to maximize economic benefits for the tourism sector. The authors suggested that, in addition to these forms of governance, the demand for cultural tourism is another crucial factor influencing the development of cultural tourism. They defined "slow" and "fast" cultural tourism demand as two distinct customer categories. Slow cultural tourism demand is characterized by small and dispersed niches where individuals are eager to experience the specific "authentic" aspects of a local culture and willing to pay a premium for that authenticity. Fast cultural tourism demand reflects a more homogeneous, global, and less authenticity-driven demand type that is also focused on "consuming" local cultures as part of a budget-conscious travel experience.

• Calvi et al. (2020) established four possible scenarios for the future of cultural tourism based on the intersection of the styles of governance and the demand for cultural tourism. According to them, there are four different types of slow cultural tourism including community-driven, economic-driven, globalized, and glocalized types.

• Matteuccia et al. (2022) envisioned the future of cultural tourism. They first reviewed future possibilities and trends in cultural tourism in the literature. Following that, they presented utopian, dystopian and heterotopian scenarios as three possibilities for cultural tourism in the coming decades. It was concluded that a heterotopian perspective would provide the most accurate understanding of the

future of cultural tourism. The research also provided a discussion and recommendations on the potential implications of this perspective.

• Hampu and Coroş (2022) conducted a study on "cultural, religious, and spiritual tourism attractiveness among youngsters". They observed that the subcategories of cultural tourism, such as spiritual tourism, have significantly grown in recent years. They also found that young people, who are often attracted to "novelty" in trends, are interested not only in spiritual tourism but also in visiting religious places while engaging in other activities. Some young people do not travel to holy sites or engage in prayers, but they mostly associate religious tourism with these activities. Conversely, they identify spiritual tourism with self-realization or meditation. The studied young people suggested that religious tourism could be an attraction when paired with a strong marketing plan. However, the majority were unable to identify the marketing initiatives in this field. Businesses in this sector could greatly benefit from a well-crafted marketing plan that is developed after accurately identifying the primary objectives, preferences and expectations of the target market. Although the study does not focus extensively on cultural tourism, it does offer valuable recommendations in this area.

• Meng and Liu (2021) argued that predictive computing has become a key technological advancement in developing contents for intelligent navigation systems to enhance personalized cultural tourist services. In their article, titled "A Meaning-Aware Cultural Tourism Intelligent Navigation System Based on Anticipatory Calculation", they sought to analyze the need for personalized information about the tourism consumption experience in the communicative activities of intangible cultural heritage. This was done with an emotional and meaning-oriented creative design in a navigation system. The researchers computed the connections among attitude, experience behavior, and representation of visitors' information needs using the theory of planned behavior. The results highlighted two issues. First, the demand from tourists for the leisure-related features of intangible cultural assets exceeds the demand for the features related to educational performance. Second, significant informational components have the potential to change visitors' perceptions of intangible cultural heritage as well as their attitudes and actions towards it. As the findings suggested, enhancing the specific aspects of group knowledge can boost people's sense of cultural identification and satisfaction with tourism. The research has implications for the content design of intelligent navigation systems for museums.

• Rodríguez-Vázquez et al. (2023) asserted that the tourism industry is one of the sectors most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. A consequence of this pandemic is the increased demand for peaceful, secure areas, leading people to seek a new lifestyle known as the "slow life," which may offer opportunities for cultural tourism. The current discourse aims to determine the importance of cultural tourism for the Spanish citizens living in the autonomous communities along the French Way of St.

James. It also seeks to understand these individuals' behavior concerning their organizational tourism promotion websites. In this research, tests of equality of means and ANOVA were used to collect the data for a period from 2002 to 2020. Also, measures of positioning, engagement, audience origin, and access devices served to provide the data for the period of 2020-2021. As the key finding, despite a significant increase in the number of those who visit the websites of tourism marketing organizations, the Way of St. James does not act as a catalyst for cultural tourism. The research examined the primary connection between cultural tourism and the location of official tourism marketing organizations before and after COVID-19 through an investigation of the French Way of St. James in Spain.

Based on the existing research and the aforementioned information, it can be inferred that, while there have been a few studies worldwide on the subject of cultural tourism, none have been conducted in Iran with regard to the scenario writing for cultural tourism. As a result, this study was designed to focus on Iran's enormous potential for developing cultural tourism and to determine the standards and approaches that should be followed. It should be noted that the unique feature of this research, which sets it apart from previous studies in the same sector, is the establishment of an unpaid scenario for the growth of cultural tourism in Iran. This can be taken into consideration in Iran and other countries.
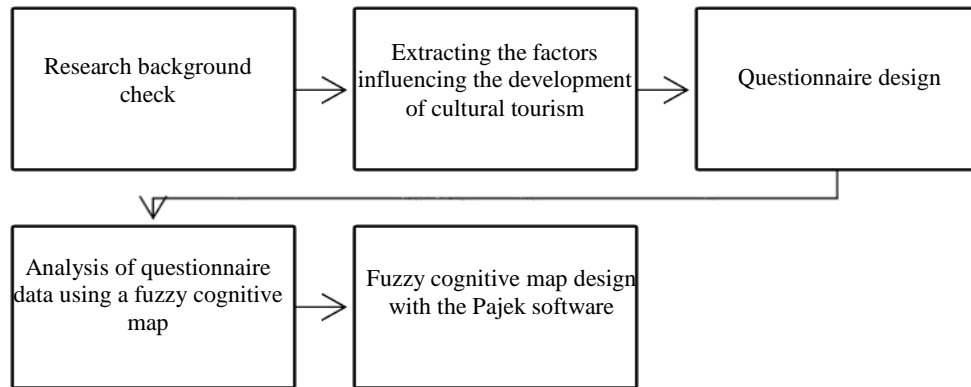
Methodology

This research is developmental-applicative in terms of its goal and is based on a survey method for data collection. Figure 1 shows the steps of the research

Initially, a survey of the research literature and an analysis of the developed models in this field were conducted to identify the factors influencing the growth of cultural tourism in Iran. The relevant publications, databases and webpages were examined and reviewed to compile the materials for this section. A questionnaire was used as the data collection tool. During the research, some experts including managers and activists in the tourism industry and university professors with a minimum of ten years of experience in the field were asked to assess the current state of each of the identified factors using a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire. The sample in this study was selected through the Snowball sampling method and consisted of 54 individuals from the statistical population.

The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed by calculating Cronbach's alpha for each of its aspects, and the validity of the survey was evaluated through a content validity test. Using the SPSS software, Cronbach's alpha was determined, and the value of each factor was found to be more than 0.75. Moreover, the total alpha score of 0.871 signified that the reliability of the survey was satisfactory. A fuzzy cognitive map was also employed to investigate and interpret the collected data.

Kosco was the first to introduce the concept of fuzzy cognitive maps. They establish a communication model between research variables. These maps have numerous applications in research.

This study made the use of the model proposed by Kosco. The fuzzy cognitive map technique allowed measuring the type, quantity, and effectiveness of each variable. Subsequently, a suitable scenario was developed based on the results derived from the communication map used in the research. In the fuzzy cognitive map technique, a scenario represents a series of actions that contribute to enhancing the overall research environment (Brännback & Carsrud, 2009).

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│ Research        │     │ Extracting the      │     │                 │
│ background      │ ──> │ factors influencing │ ──> │ Questionnaire   │
│ check           │     │ the development     │     │ design          │
│                 │     │ of cultural tourism │     │                 │
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┌─────────────────┐     ┌─────────────────────┐
│ Analysis of     │     │ Fuzzy cognitive     │
│ questionnaire   │ ──> │ map design          │
│ data using a    │     │ with the Pajek      │
│ fuzzy cognitive │     │ software            │
│ map             │     │                     │
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Findings

In accordance with the procedures detailed in the research methodology section, the first step was to identify the factors influencing the growth of cultural tourism in Iran. This was accomplished through a review of the research literature, historical texts, and expert interviews. After eleven specialists were consulted and a thorough analysis of the factors was conducted, these factors were categorized into nine groups. This categorization took into account the fact that certain factors are interconnected or overlapping.

Table1. Factors influencing the growth of Iran's cultural tourism

Factor code	Factor	Factor description
C1	Attracting financial resources	Providing the opportunity to invest and attract financial resources in the field of cultural tourism
C2	Providing a variety of services	Developing and providing diverse and creative products and services in the field of cultural tourism
C3	Information technology	Using information technology and cyberspace to introduce cultural places and events
C4	Various tours	Designing and implementing various sightseeing tours with the aim of cultural activities
C5	Important events	Holding important and international events in cultural settings
C6	Educational courses	Developing and holding educational and awareness-raising courses for all the beneficiaries of cultural tourism
C7	Improving infrastructure	Improving the infrastructure for the development and growth of cultural tourism
C8	Target markets	Identifying target markets for cultural tourism in Iran
C9	Interaction with other countries	Establishing interactions and concluding contracts and agreements for the exchange of tourists with countries that have cultural tourism

The final factors were presented to the experts via a questionnaire. A Pearson correlation matrix was extracted using the data collected from the questionnaire, analyzed with the SPSS software, and then put in the FCMapper program. A fuzzy cognitive map was subsequently created by feeding the output from FCMapper into the Pajek program, which interpreted it based on the findings of the software. It is important to note that the correlations among the statistically validated factors were evaluated using the insights of eleven experts, as reported in Table 2.

Table 2. Matrix of the correlations among the factors

Cutural tourism	c1	c2	c3	c4	c5	c6	c7	c8	c9
c1	0.00	-0.73	-0.84	-0.14	-0.29	-0.32	-0.19	0.13	0.20
c2	-0.73	0.00	0.67	0.21	0.05	0.35	-0.10	-0.37	0.04
c3	-0.84	0.67	0.00	-0.05	0.11	0.49	0.33	0.15	0.09
c4	-0.14	0.21	-0.05	0.00	0.71	0.20	-0.56	0.09	0.05
c5	-0.29	0.05	0.11	0;71	0.00	-0.15	-0.50	0.49	-0.22
c6	-0.32	0.35	0.49	0.20	-0.15	0.00	0.14	0.01	0.37
c7	-0.19	-0.10	0.33	-0.56	-0.50	0.14	0.00	0.09	0.17
c8	0.13	-0.37	0.15	0.09	0.49	0.01	0.09	0.00	0.33
c9	0.20	0.04	0.09	0.05	-0.22	0.37	0.17	0.33	0.00

Next, based on the output from the FCMapper software, a fuzzy cognitive map was designed. It illustrated the relationships among the identified factors, as determined by the Pajek software.

Through the process of fuzzy cognitive mapping and the collection of expert knowledge, the connections among the factors of cultural tourism development were uncovered. The general data for the FCM model are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. General data for the FCM model

Hierarchy index	Total no. of factors	Total no. of connections	No. of transmitters	No. of receivers	No. of ordinary-type factors	No. of Connections	No. of self-loops	No. of regular connections
Deactivated by the author	9	42	0	0	9	0	0	0.568

The presented model comprises nine primary factors, with 42 observable connections among them. Each factor is of an ordinary type and exhibits identical positive input and output effects. Table 4 reports the outdegrees, indegrees and centrality of the factors.

Table 4. Calculation of the indicators in the FCM model and the ranking of the cultural tourism development components in Iran

Concepts	Outdegree	Indegree	Centrality	Ordinary
C1	5.57	5.61	11.18	1
C2	4.90	6.34	11.25	1
C3	2.80	0.71	3.51	1
C4	4.83	4.89	9.72	1
C5	4.17	1.68	5.85	1
C6	2.32	4.66	6.98	1
C7	3.93	4.59	8.52	1
C8	3.83	2.34	6.17	1
C9	3.76	5.29	9.05	1

As the acquired communication matrix was fed into the FCMapper software, the analytical data of the communication model were obtained. Figure 2 illustrates the indegree of the criteria in relation to one another. In essence, the indegrees of individual factors determine the influence of those factors on one another.

Figure 2. The indegree of the factors affecting the development of cultural tourism in Iran

According to Figure 2, the factors of "attracting financial resources", "providing diverse services" and "designing diverse cultural tours" have the highest indegrees.

Figure 3 examines the outdegree of each factor in relation to the others. Generally, outdegrees represent the extent to which influential factors contribute to the formation of an organizational environment.
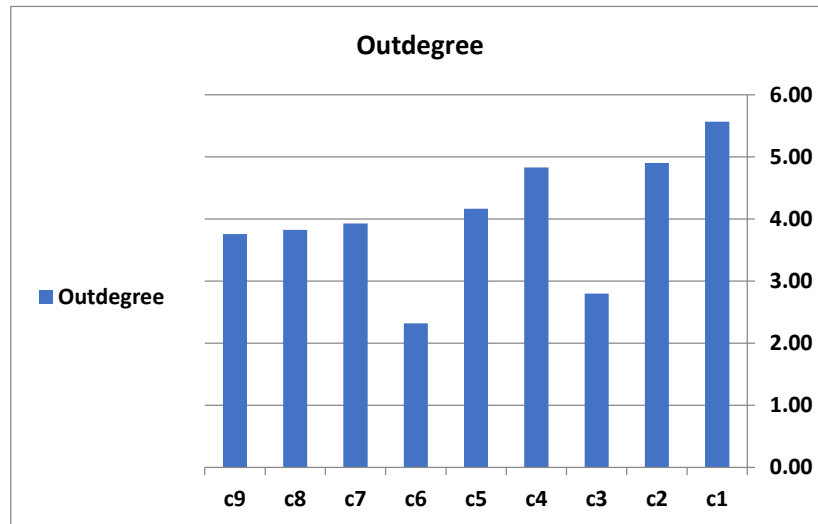

Figure 3. The outdegrees of the factors affecting the development of cultural tourism in Iran

Based on Figure 3, the factors of "providing diverse services", "attracting financial resources" and "establishing interaction with other countries" were identified with the highest outdegrees. Figure 4 shows the centrality degrees of the factors versus one another. Basically, the degree of centrality is the sum of the two factors of "attracting financial resources" and "providing a variety of services".
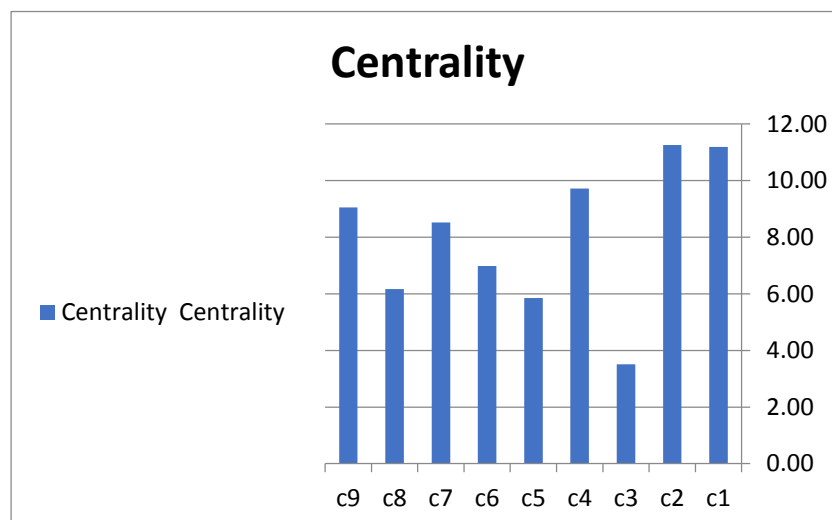

Figure 4. The degree of centrality of the variables influencing the growth of Iran's cultural tourism

The required data were generated by the FCMapper software and subsequently fed into the Pajek program. This process resulted in the creation of a fuzzy cognitive map (Figure 5), which represents the factors influencing the growth of cultural tourism in Iran.
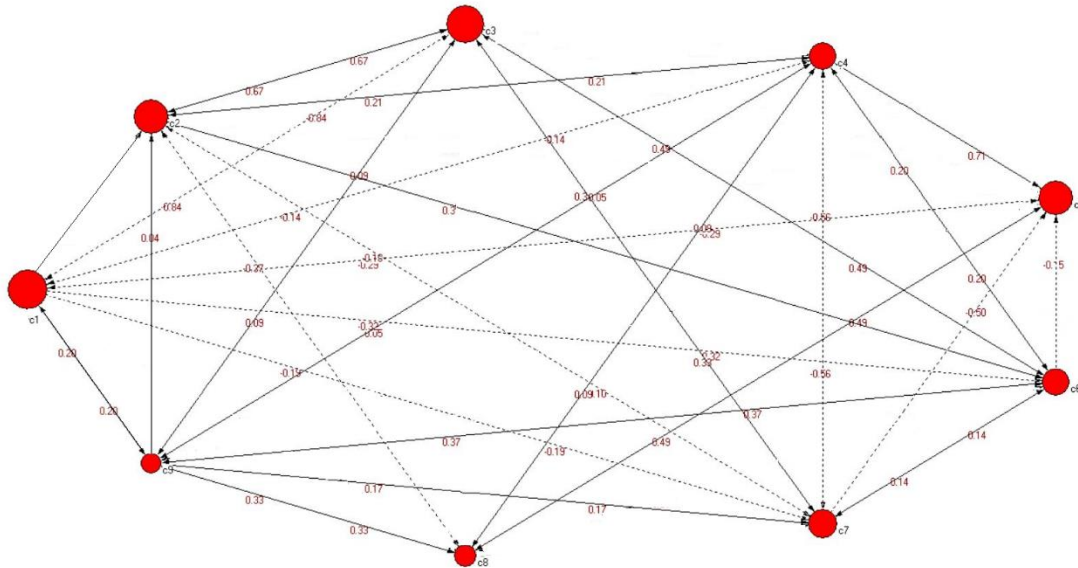

Figure 5. A fuzzy cognitive map illustrating the factors influencing the growth of Iran's cultural tourism

The connections among the factors are illustrated in Figure 5. The degree of centrality for each element is represented by the size of the circles in the diagram. The numbers on the lines truly depict the strength of the relationships. The factors with the highest degree of centrality are those that attract financial resources and provide a variety of services, highlighting their importance in the growth of cultural tourism in Iran.

Next, using the map depicted in Figure 5, the scenarios were created. This article develops two types of scenarios. The first scenario was made through backward creation, and the second one resulted from forward creation. Initially, the factor "providing diverse services", which had the highest degree of effectiveness, was selected, and a path was established to enhance it. In the second type (i.e., forward scenario creation), the factor "attracting financial resources" was chosen because it had the highest degree of effectiveness among the components. For this factor, a scenario path was formed to determine if there was an improvement. The question is 'what factors lead to the attraction of financial resources?' The FCMapper software was used for scenario creation. It should be noted that the scenarios formed in

this research focus on a sequence of operations, so there is a process of change formed from a systemic perspective for appropriate policy making in the field of cultural tourism development.

To create a backward scenario path for the "providing diverse services" component, all the input factors to this component were set to zero separately and the resulting changes were examined. These factors are reported in Figure 5.

With the output from the FCMapper software, the component "execution of various tours" was identified as the factor exerting the most influence on the component "providing a variety of services". This implies that, during cultural tours, a range of services and facilities should be provided to cultural tourists. To continue the scenario path, the factors influencing the component "implementation of various tours" were individually set to zero, and the resulting changes on the experience factor were identified. Once again, the output from the FCMapper software was taken with these changes, and the factor "target market identification" was found to be of the greatest impact on the aforementioned factor compared to the others. In other words, to implement different tours, the target markets in Iran's cultural tourism must be identified and analyzed so that suitable services can be designed and provided according to the needs of tours. As the scenario creation process continued, it was discovered that the factors of "improving infrastructure" and "attracting financial resources" were more influential. Thus, by gathering financial resources in various ways and then strengthening the existing infrastructure, the target audience can be identified and effective measures can be taken to attract them for the growth of cultural tourism in Iran.

Through the path of the backward scenario, it was found that the "identification of the target market" has the most influence on the "resource attraction". In this section, the scenario creation process was halted due to the formation of a loop, as this factor was already formed in the path of the backward scenario. Consequently, the following path forms the backward scenario for the factor of providing diverse services.

Attracting resources → Improving infrastructure → Identifying target markets → Holding various tours → Providing a variety of services

Figure 6. The path resulting from the creation of the backward scenario for the "providing diverse services" component

In the subsequent part of the research, forward scenarios were compiled for the component "attracting financial resources", which exhibited a high degree of effectiveness. To design the sequence of operations in the forward scenario for this factor, the output factors of this component were initially identified as in Figure 5. Also, to create a scenario path, the "attraction of financial resources"

component in the scenario section of the FCMapper software was set to zero, and the effectiveness of the output factors from this factor was examined. The changes indicated that the "infrastructure improvement" was the one most influenced by this factor. Thus, if financial resources are attracted, the infrastructures in Iran's cultural tourism can be improved.

To design the path of the forward scenario, the numerical value of the "infrastructure improvement" factor was set to zero, and the rate of changes in the influencing factors was examined. As the result indicated, the component "educating the beneficiaries" can be prioritized when the infrastructure conditions of tourist destinations are improved. For the continuation of the scenario, the factor "stakeholder education" was set to zero, and the effectiveness of the other factors was measured. The precise rate of changes resulting from improving this component showed that the "tourist exchange" factor can be more effective than the beneficiary education factor. Therefore, tourism policymakers should focus on educating their beneficiaries in order to gain trust and improve tourist exchange with other countries.

Finally, it was discovered that the "training" component has the most influence on the "tourist exchange". Since this factor was already included in the path of the forward scenario and a loop was formed, the continuation of the scenario creation process was halted. Consequently, the scenario for this topic can be articulated as follows:
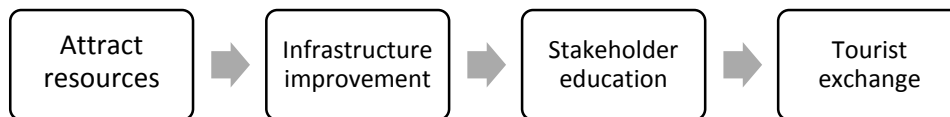

Figure 7. The path resulting from the forward scenario of "resource absorption"

Discussion and conclusion

This research was based on Iran's enormous potential for cultural tourism and the need to expand this sector. It primarily sought to construct a cognitive map of the factors contributing to the development of cultural tourism in Iran. The secondary objective of the research was to design a scenario that would replicate the path of the factors influencing the expansion of this type of tourism.

As the results suggest, among the nine identified factors, "providing diverse services at cultural tourism destinations" is the most effective. Furthermore, "attracting financial resources" is not only a highly effective factor but also the most centrally located one.

In this study, two distinct scenarios were developed based on the factors with the highest influence. These scenarios were designed to model and simulate the processes of factor enhancement. The overlap and congruence of the two scenarios attest to the accuracy of the results of this study. The scenarios

suggest that managers and policymakers at Iran's tourist destinations should focus on the infrastructure and the accommodations offered to tourists. This focus is crucial for the success in the field of cultural tourism as it enhances the competitive advantage of destinations. A tourist destination that outperforms its competitors can provide visitors with positive and unique experiences, thereby creating a favorable and distinctive image in the minds of travelers. Ultimately, this leads to the commitment and credibility expected by both managers and tourists.

All the factors presented in both scenarios have proved to be effective in the development of cultural tourism. Ultimately, a comprehensive scenario can be presented through combining these two scenarios, as depicted in the Figure 8:
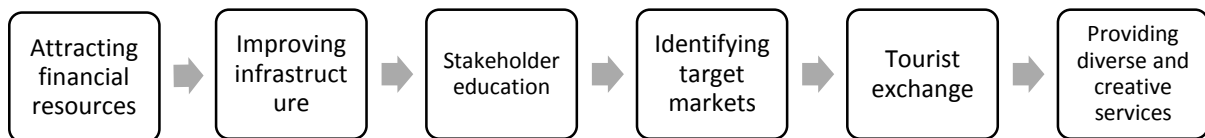
| Attracting financial resources | → | Improving infrastructure | → | Stakeholder education | → | Identifying target markets | → | Tourist exchange | → | Providing diverse and creative services |

Figure 8. Factor in the scenario for the growth of cultural tourism in Iran

The distinction between this research and the other studies lies in its novelty of creating a scenario for cultural tourism in Iran. The present study was an attempt to identify all the factors influencing the development of this type of tourism and to determine their interrelationships. It provides insights for other researchers in the field. They can strategize using the existing cognitive map and the system dynamics technique to account for the temporal dimension in each of the factors. They may also analyze the communication map for each factor individually on an appropriate platform. This can be highly effective in the process of implementing plans for branding tourism destinations.

Conflict of interests

The authors state that they have no conflict of interests regarding the publication of this article.

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