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Gender affecting tourists' needs for a public open space Case study: Kish Island, Iran

Abstract

In contemporary urban thinking, public open spaces will be successful if respect their users' needs. This study posits that in an island with tourist attraction, where users of urban open spaces are majorly tourists, these spaces are affected by numerous demographic factors and specifically clarifies factor of gender. It takes Kish Island in Iran as the case where supposed to enhance the open spaces and public zones due to its current development plans. The methodology of this study involved reviewing the related literature and subsequently drives a tourists' survey. The results clarified the factor of gender affecting tourists' needs for public open space in Kish and showed the groups of needs that are more affected by it. Hence, some suggestions for planning and designing these spaces would certainly contribute towards improving the quality of them in Kish Island as well as can be generalized for other cases with similar culture and climate.

Key words: gender; tourists' needs; open public space; Iran

Introduction

According to Maslow (1970, 1987) although the basic human needs are common between people they can change in different contexts. At present, there is consensus that public open space as a kind of urban space cannot achieve success unless it meets the users' needs (Mean & Tims, 2005; Chaplin, 2008). On a tourism island, the majority of users of a public open space are tourists. Therefore, researchers (Pearce, 1987; Drakakis-Smith, 1997; Apostolopoulos, Gayle & Dennis, 2002; Briguglio & Briguglio, 2005) recognise that islands are responding to contemporary tourists' needs for connecting with nature; and open spaces provide a chance for this connection. Public open space makes an expanded interface between two conceptual domains of 'open space' and 'public space' (Doorn, 1998). It can provide a connection between the public sphere and the environment (Madanipour, 1996, 2007). Consequently, it is important that users' needs should be identified in relation to the factors affecting them (Maslow, 1987; Lang, 2005; Madanipour, 2007). Demographic factors such as age, gender, ethnic, and marital status significantly affect users' needs in a public open space (Moughtin, Cuesta, Sarris & Signoretta, 1999; Woolly, 2003; Lang, 2005; Mean & Tims, 2005; Pearce, 2005; Weaver, 2006; Madanipour, 2007; Donovan, 2008). This study specifically investigates gender as one of the demographic factors in relation to tourists' needs for a public open space.

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This study is conducted on Kish Island in the south of Iran and the northern part of the Persian Gulf. It is an important sea and beach recreational holiday and tourism destination in Iran. Based on the evidences of Kish Free Zone Organization (KFZO) (2008), tourism is one of the major strategies of Kish development according to the third national socio-economic development plan. The report of KFZO (2008) estimated that the island receives about one million, mostly domestic, visitors annually. Thus, the Kish Islands development strategy focus on domestic tourism development.

Figure 1

Location of Kish Island in the north of Persia Gulf



Source: www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/asia/ir.htm

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) (1995) guidelines, tourism is one of the major economic policies of Iran government in the recent plans. However, Butler and Hinch (2007) indicate an incompatible situation for Iran tourism as, despite the huge natural and cultural opportunities, it is countered by a mixture of "political ambivalence at the best and antipathy at the worst." Furthermore, Butler and Hinch (2007), Aref, Redzuan and Emby (2009), Baum and O'Gorman (2010) note some socio-cultural limitations in the process of Iranian tourism development. The political and social characteristics of Iran as an Islamic country significantly influence developments of its tourism industry (Butler & Hinch, 2007; Baum & O'Gorman, 2010). In this regard, the social and legal limitations present an obstacle for the development of the country's tourism industry. Thus, there is an urgent need for balancing social, environmental and economical conditions. Moreover, given the current circumstance, tourism planning in Iran is going to focus more on domestic market.

"Destination Master Plan of Kish" (2007) highly recommends improving open spaces and developing public areas. Thus, creating public open spaces on Kish as an objective of the island's tourism development is important. This paper focuses on needs of the tourists who are main users of these spaces in Kish and examines them in relation to gender. The paper concludes with recommendations to improve the quality of public open space of Kish which can support management, planning and design of the spaces. The outputs can be used for other islands or tourism destinations similar in socio-cultural characteristics.

Literature review and conceptual framework

This study firstly reviews literature related to tourists' needs for public open space and then gender as the factor affecting these needs.

Tourists' needs for public open space

The concept of tourists' needs for open public space is linked to two broad literature areas. Firstly, tourists' needs are based on various psychological theories applied in the tourism and travel context. Secondly, the theories about user needs of public open space are examined following. In this study tourists' needs for public open space are based on Maslow's theory often applied in, both, tourism and urban design. Pearce (1988, 1991, 1993); Pearce and Caltabiano (1983), Pearce and Mascardo (1986) applied it in development of the Travel Career Ladder (TCL), whereas Lang (2005) used this theory in urban design. Thus, both, Maslow's and TLC models are applied in work related to understanding tourists' needs in public open space and used for development of the conceptual model used in this study. In Table 1, Maslow's hierarchy is adopted and described by themes in Pearce's models (TCL) and Lang's models. Subsequently, the themes are interpreted by other data which are derived from the literature review carried out in both fields as shown in Table 1.

In addition, according to Maslow (1970, 1987), the basic needs are common between people; however, they can change in different contexts like culture and time. Thus, in this study, in order to identify the tourists' needs on Kish, the theoretical findings are examined in relation to traditional and current contexts.

Table 1
Tourist needs for public open space based on the literature review

Lang's model /Pearce's TLC model	Tourists' needs in urban design & tourism literature	References
Comfort/Relaxation	Freedom of enquiry & expression, Relaxation, Release, Easy access to public realm, Physical comfortable & reassurance: Comfort (seating, vantage point, shelter & protection, movable seating, leaning, comfort breaks, eating & drinking), movement	Lang (2005, 1999); Carr (1992); Moughtin (1999); Shaftoe (2008)
Development	Recreational & play, entertainment	Matsuoka & Kaplan (2008); Shaftoe (2008)
Health/Bodily reconstruction	Human recreational habit with natural process	Thomson (2002)
Privacy/Own safety	Safety, Privacy (different level of privacy)	Lang (2005); Matsuoka (2007); Moughtin (1999); Madanipour (2007); Jacob (1996)
Formal organization/Initial relationship	Meeting of stranger, communication	Thomson (2002); Madanipour (2007); Shaftoe (2008)
Communal Organization	Citizen participation, sense of community identity, losing in anonymity of crowd, social contact	Matsuoka & Kaplan (2007); Thomson (2002)
Kinship system	Socialisation	Jacob (1996)
A sense of place	Distribution, legibility	Shaftoe (2008)

Table 1 Continued

Lang's model /Pearce's TLC model	Tourists' needs in urban design & tourism literature	References
A sense off important	To be present, territoriality	Jacob (1996); Shaftoe (2008)
Non-material rewards	Travelling news	Jacob (1996)
Personalization	Stimulation	Oldenburg (1989)
Fulfilling social relationship	Social interaction	Matsuoka & Kaplan (2007)
Control over one's life	Interpersonal distance	Shaftoe (2008)
Aesthetic	Aesthetic preferences, natural elements	Matsuoka (2007); Carolyn & Cooper (1997); Shaftoe (2008)
Setting	A healthy biogenic environment, contact with nature, passive and active engagement with environment	Lang (2005) Matsuoka 2007); Carr (1992); Carolyn & Cooper (1997)
Experiencing	Discovery Intrigue and curiosity	Carr (1992); Shaftoe (2008)
Beauty	Natural elements, colour	Carolyn & Cooper (1997); Shaftoe (2008)
Symbolism	Natural elements, public art	Shaftoe (2008)

In order to establish the conceptual framework, theoretical review is now further focused on general (international) context and the current content of Kish Island.

Tourists' needs for public open space on Kish Island

As human needs are strongly dependent on cultural (Maslow, 1987) and social context (refer to Lang, 2005), it is necessary that people's needs are investigated in a traditional context of Kish Island. Likewise, related to urban design, Lang (2005, p. 13) highlights that "urban design patterns developed within one culture are not necessarily transferable to others with success." Moreover, many writers (i.e. Pour-jafar, 1985; Sultanzade, 1991; Tavassoli, 1992; Hooshangi, 2000) have confirmed the important role of people's needs in the traditional urbanization for Iran. Thus, the study regards the traditional and current context of Kish in reference to Iranian urbanization and the regional features of the country.

According to these, the most important needs in traditional context are related to climate, privacy and social characteristics. The severe warm and humid climate in the southern Iran strongly highlights this kind of need in relation to this particular area (Tavassoli, 1982). The traditional pattern of urban design in the southern Iran has numerous solutions to meet these needs, whereas the new urbanization may ignore them.

Furthermore, privacy is another need that is important in relation to the traditional urban design that originates from ideology. To meet this need, the traditional urban spaces in Iran generally include three main zones: private zone such as a courtyard, semi-public spaces such as an octagonal space (*Hashhti*), and public space such as a square or a street. All these three types, in combination, create a spatial hierarchy for access to certain spaces with specific functions such as a mosque.

However, it is in relation to the social needs that difference between the traditional urbanization of Iran and that of West are most visible (Tavassoli, 1992; Sultanzade, 1991). Because of the social limitations and strict rules of the authorities, public places in old civilization of Iran have often met social needs through other needs and functions (Habibi, 1997; Ashraf, 1998). Mosque, Bazaar, and Tekkieh are old patterns of urban open public space which, although meeting the cultural and physiological needs, also need to provide opportunities for social interaction.

In addition, investigation of the current context of Kish Island shows the important role of the authority in creation of the quality public spaces. The local authority shapes or controls people's needs for public open use though laws and regulation that mostly focus on women. However, that legal framework merely supports the religious beliefs that are accepted by a considerable part of society.

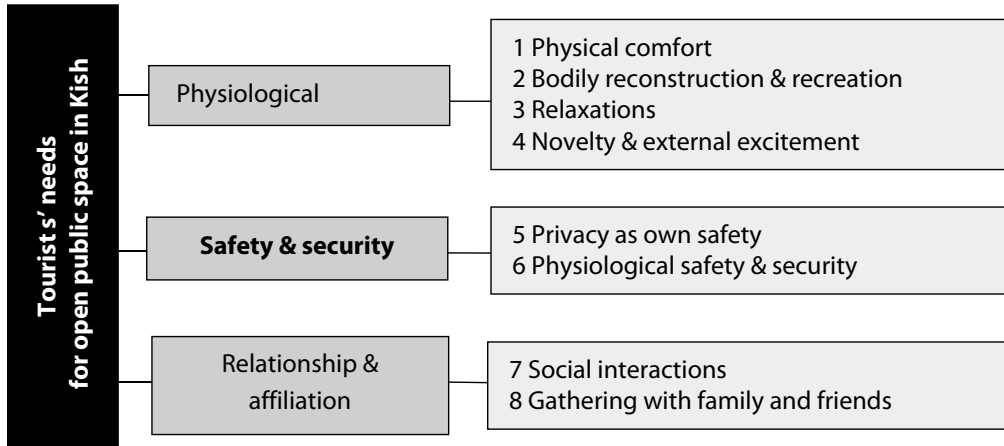
Table 2 presents an overview of general and Kirsh Island's specific tourist needs in public space compiled from the relevant literature. The findings were classified according to theoretical constructs presented in Table 1. It is important to note that this analysis is focused on the first three groups of needs - 'physiological', 'safety and security' and 'relationship and affiliation'. This is due to the limitation in the scope of this research. Such decision is also supported by the fact that the majority of definitions and theories in both fields of tourism and urban design (such as Maslow, 1970, 1987; Pearce, 1989, 2005; Madanipor, 1986, 2007; Carmona, Tim, Oc & Tiesdell, 2006; Carmona & Tiesdell, 2007) highlight them as the most essential needs.

Table 2
The tourists' needs for public open space in general and in the contexts of Kish Island

Theoretical basis	Users (tourists) needs in general	Source	Tourists' needs on the Kish Island	Source
1 Physiological	- Easy public access - Comfortable in all weather conditions - Legibility	Tavassoli (1992); Hooshangi (2000)	- Access to coastal line/walkway - Away from any noise interfering activities/remote location - Clean and fresh water - Use of sport facilities for health - Quality service - Access to public realm - Marine quality	Master plan (2007); Bavand (2005); Taebi (2008); Karami (2000); KFZO (2006); KFZO K. F. (2008)
2 Safety/ Security	- Privacy - Safety and security	Tavassoli (1992); Tafahomi, Lamit & Bushri (2007)	- Security	Dress & Sommer (DSC) (2007)
3 Affiliation/ relationship	- Religious ceremonies (Taezie, Ashoora, Shabih—khani, The Friday prayer) - Togetherness in neighbourhood centres, bazaar, mosques, - Interaction	Sultanzade (1991); Habibi (1997); Tafahomi, Lamit & Bushri (2007)	- Festivals and public ceremonies	Master plan (2007); KFZO (2006)

Figure 2 summarizes the final themes emerging from the analysis which form the basic building block of the proposed conceptual framework and are used as dependent variables in the research design.

Figure 2
The conceptual framework



Gender as a factor affecting tourists' needs for public open space on Kish Island

As already mentioned, tourists' needs are affected by several factors, generally referred to as social and individual (Maslow, 1987; Lang, 2005; Madanipour, 2007). The review of literature shows that demographic factors significantly affect tourists' needs in public open spaces (Maslow, 1987; Moughtin, Cuesta, Sarris & Signoretta, 1999; Weaver, 2004; Woolly, 2003; Lang, 2005; Pearce & Lee, 2005; Mean & Tims, 2005; Madanipour, 2007; Donovan, 2008). Among the human factors affecting tourists' needs, gender is noted as important by researchers such as Weaver (2004), Pearce (2005), Madanipour (2007) or Donovan (2008).

Gender is thus important in the current context of Kish Island. Among the socio-cultural factors, the ideological themes have been indicated as affecting human's attitudes and people's needs in the urban spaces of an Islamic city (see Castello, 1977; Mirsepasi, 2006; Tafahomi, Lamit & Bushri, 2007). For instance, the term, 'privacy' as a part of religious belief strongly implies separation between public and private spaces (Tavassoli, 1992). The socio-cultural factors rooted in religious beliefs emphasize the importance of gender as a demographic factor and are reflected in emergence of special needs for public open space. In short, religious beliefs embedded in the lifestyle create specific demands and impose certain social limitations for public domains.

In addition, the interface between tradition and modernity also has an influence on the public open space use. Although the Iranian society has a long history and a rich tradition, its life patterns are continually changing due to influences of modern developments (Mirsepasi, 2006; Katouzian & Shahidi, 2008). The contemporary development of Iran is impacted by contemporary developments elsewhere, just like in other Middle-East countries (Castello, 1977). Throughout this process, Iran has faced manifold social, political and economic issues (Mirsepasi, 2006). Thus, the social characteristics

of the current development and people's needs in a public space of Kish can be based on, both, modernization and tradition paradigm (Mirsepasi, 2006; Katouzian & Shahidi, 2008). This is evident from plans and documents made by the local government (KFZO) where the religious concerns in Kish public realm can be identified clearly, despite the fact that the new, more modern society is emerging in Iran. Yet, there is much less restrictions for public places in Kish than the main land because it is a free trade zone and a recreational resort. Nevertheless, gender separation when using the beach, an obligation for women to cover in public places and many regulations controlling social relationships are still present. The condition of public realm in Kish thus clearly displays that gender effects tourists' needs in public open spaces.

Methodology

In order to fulfil the main aims of this study, a questionnaire-based survey was carried out on Kish Island. The research population was defined as Kish Island's tourists above 18 years of age. The age restriction was put in place because children and teenagers have different needs for public open space (Naderi & Barani, 2005). The cluster sampling by time interval was used, given that the population could not be easily listed for sampling (Veal, 2009; Babbie, 2009). Such sampling gives an equal chance of each unit of population to be selected (Babbie, 2009). Data collection took place at departure gates of Kirsh Airport and Kirsh Coach Terminal during 4 weeks involving, both, Iranian weekends (Thursday, Friday) and mid-week (Monday). In total, 245 fully completed questionnaires were collected, of which 78% were males.

Self-completed questionnaire was used in this study primarily because it involved respondents' motivation and preferences. According to Langens and McClelland, (1997) this data collection method is preferable when personal data is collected. Interviewers have approached respondents, asked them to participate in the survey and collected completed questionnaire in a sealed envelope to ensure anonymity of respondents. The data collected in the survey included their opinions on set of items tapping into the quality of public open space, the respondents' background and demographic characteristics. Data analysis entailed comparison of mean differences of tourist needs for public open space by gender using t-test.

Results

To ascertain differences between male and female in their public open space needs, t-test was conducted. Furthermore, base on the T-test analysis, some significant differences appeared in the responses of male and female tourists that definitely confirmed that gender factor does have effects on the tourists' needs for public open space (Table 3).

Table 3

Means for the T-test between gender groups and need factors

Needs	Gender	Mean	Std. dev	t- value	Significant (p value)
Physical comfort	Female	4.41	0.41	2.25	0.025
	Male	4.22	0.53	2.25	0.025
Physical recuperation & recreation	Female	4.26	0.53	2.56	0.011
	Male	4.01	0.62	2.56	0.011
Novelty & excitement	Female	4.04	0.55	2.23	0.026
	Male	3.82	0.65	2.23	0.026
Socialisation with family & friends	Female	4.03	0.57	2.39	0.017
	Male	3.78	0.69	2.39	0.017
Social interaction	Female	3.69	0.68	2.20	0.028
	Male	3.41	0.84	2.20	0.028
Privacy and safety	Female	4.46	0.50	3.62	0.000
	Male	4.15	0.70	3.62	0.000

Significant level, $P < 0.05$ Source: Tourists' Survey (2010)

As for the item, needs of 'physical comfort', the mean score for the females ($M=4.41$, $sd=0.416$) was shown to be significantly higher than that of the males ($M=4.22$, $sd=0.529$), whereas for the needs of 'physical recuperation', the mean score for the females ($M=4.26$, $sd=0.530$) was found to be significantly higher than that of the males ($M=4.01$, $sd=0.618$). In terms of 'novelty and excitement' needs, the mean score for the females ($M=4.04$, $sd=0.552$) was higher than that of the males ($M=3.82$, $sd=0.653$). This is similar for the need of 'socialisation with family and friends', whereby the mean score for the females ($M=4.03$, $sd=0.568$) was considerably higher than that of the males ($M=3.78$, $sd=0.686$). As for needs of 'social interaction', the mean score for the females ($M=3.69$, $sd=0.683$) was also substantially higher than that of the males ($M=3.41$, $sd=0.841$). For another item, 'privacy and safety', it was found that the mean score for the females ($M=4.46$, $sd=0.495$) was significantly higher than that of the males ($M=4.15$, $sd=0.707$).

These findings indicate that the largest differences between males and females is for "privacy and safety" followed by the "social interaction", "socialisation with family and friends", "physical recuperation", "novelty and excitement" and, finally, physical comfort.

Discussion and conclusion

In this paper, we tried to contribute to the growing gender effects literature by investigating the question of how gender affects tourists' needs for public open space on Kish Island. According to the literature review, gender is one of the demographic factors which affect tourists' needs. It is even more important in situation when there are some social and legal restrictions governing the use of public open space such as Iran even though these rules are somewhat relaxed on Kirsh Island due to its tourism development. The findings, nevertheless, reveal that gender is an important factor impacting tourists' needs for public open space.

As for the factor of gender, both the female and male participants in this study were found to have all three kinds of needs - 'physiological', 'safety/security', and 'affiliation/relationship'. However, the females' preferences are more varied in relation to the needs.

The results are in accordance to the expectations derived from the literature. It demonstrated traditional origin of religion in contemporary thinking of the people as well as referred to modernity manifested in the public domain of Kish. The findings showed that in relation to needs of privacy and social interaction, female tourists are different from the males. It is corresponding with the theoretical findings that highlighted legal and social restrictions in public spaces of Kish. According to the religious beliefs, the legal and social restrictions focus on the female more than the male. That is why the female tourists are more affected than the male about the needs of 'privacy' and 'social interaction'.

The study has contributed to the growing body of literature relating to gender in relation to the public open space. In particular, it has highlighted the difference in needs for public open space between males and females in a social context where gender roles are clearly defined and embedded in religion, laws and daily social practice. As the tourism in this part of world is growing, so the issue of gender roles in relation to design and use of public space is becoming an important issue.

The study has also revealed the effect of gender on the three basic groups of needs. As such, these results can serve as a guideline for designing public open space. In particular, the results indicate that the types of public open space in Kish should be diversified in order to provide facilities for male and female tourists who expected different qualities in open space design. It is also of value for tourism management and marketing, urban planning and urban designing. Specifically, the results of this study indicate that to satisfy the needs of, both, females and males, urban and tourism plans need to establish a proper balance of attractions and facilities for enjoyment of both as well as to make sure that there is a compatibility between the quality of spaces, the inherent characteristics of the society as well as its modern tendencies. Finally, engaging tourists in planning and design of public open spaces is also recommended.

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