Cultural and social strategies of the tourism industry for sustainable security, with an emphasis on the geopolitics of the Caspian Sea

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Abstract

The dissolution of the Soviet Union heralded a significant shift in the geopolitical dynamics of the Caspian Sea region, precipitating a series of security challenges for nations such as Iran and Russia. Extending across borders with its abundant hydrocarbon reservoirs, the Caspian Sea, renowned as the largest lake globally, has assumed paramount importance, thrusting it into the global spotlight. The ramifications of these transformations have reverberated across various sectors, notably impacting the intricately interwoven tourism industry. This sector, intricately intertwined with the socio-political and environmental landscape of the region, has borne the brunt of these geopolitical vicissitudes. This article adopts a descriptive-analytical approach to delve into these complexities, with particular emphasis on the geopolitical challenges and their ramifications for tourism. Leveraging library resources, map analysis, and insights from the strategies of neighboring nations, the study offers a comprehensive exploration of these dynamics. The findings underscore the imperative of fostering collaboration among the nations bordering the Caspian Sea. Establishing a unified front is identified as pivotal in comprehensively addressing regional challenges. With enhanced security in the Caspian Sea area, the resolution of tourism-related issues becomes attainable, thereby unlocking potential for sustainable investment opportunities along the Caspian shores for all nations involved.

Introduction

The Caspian Sea, situated at the crossroads of Asia and Europe, lies north of Iran, serving as a convergence point for Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Iran itself. Spanning approximately 1204 kilometers from north to south and with an average width of 6500 kilometers, its coastlines are distributed among Iran (657 kilometers), Azerbaijan (820 kilometers), Kazakhstan (1900 kilometers), Russia, and Turkmenistan (Khorrami, 2022).

Renowned for its strategic significance regionally and globally, the Caspian Sea region garners attention from countries well beyond its borders. Endeavors by the United States and the occupying regime in Jerusalem to exert influence in the area, particularly through substantial investments in Azerbaijan, have met with varying degrees of success. The stability of the region holds paramount importance for the advancement of its tourism sector, which, intricately intertwined with security

considerations, necessitates a stable milieu for sustainable advancement. Iran, with its abundant cultural heritage, assumes a pivotal role in shaping the tourist experience along the Caspian shores (Dickson, Fazli, Sajjadi, & Sedighi, 2020).

While extant literature has explored the geopolitical dynamics and tourism industry of the Caspian Sea region in isolation, there exists a discernible gap in addressing their intersection. Acknowledging the significance of this aspect, this article undertakes a succinct examination of the interplay between geopolitical factors and Caspian Sea tourism (Doroshko & Tsyrfa, 2021).

Commencing with theoretical underpinnings, the article proceeds to scrutinize geopolitical evolutions in the region before delving into the socio-cultural ramifications of tourism. Subsequently, it proffers strategies for mitigating these impacts, recognizing the necessity for bespoke approaches. Ultimately, the article concludes with tailored recommendations aimed at navigating the unique challenges at the confluence of geopolitics and Caspian Sea tourism (Asif, 2022).

Research Theoretical Framework:

1. The Concept of Geopolitics and the Necessity of Analyzing Geopolitical Issues:

The term 'geopolitics' lacks a precise definition, a common issue in social and geographical sciences. Over time, various concepts and definitions have been proposed for this term, showcasing its enduring relevance to scholars. Influenced predominantly by social Darwinism and environmental determinism, theorists in the late 19th and early 20th centuries grounded geopolitics in the environment and geographical phenomena (Criekemans, 2021).

During the Cold War era, the emergence of the power relations approach in international relations, particularly realism, significantly shaped geopolitical dynamics. This period emphasized establishing geopolitical balance and adopting an economic-political approach with a keen focus on global economic dynamics. Consequently, most definitions of geopolitics highlight its international and global dimensions, often neglecting analyses of geopolitical relations in smaller spaces. For instance, Samuel Cohen views geopolitics as the study of relations between international powers and geographical features, while William Fox defines it as the application of geographical awareness in international relations (Agrawal & Fox, 2021).

While the formation of geopolitical spaces may not always be viewed positively, it can be inevitable for any country. Therefore, political elites must possess geopolitical knowledge and foresight to navigate their country's future (Lustick & Tetlock, 2021).

Concept and History of Tourism:

Tourism, defined as the activity of individuals entering a territory other than their residence for a period exceeding one night but less than one year, for purposes other than business and income generation, encompasses a diverse range of activities. These activities, including transportation, catering, accommodation, and event management, collectively form the tourism industry, serving tourists in a seamless chain (Camilleri, 2021).

The definition of tourism includes day-trippers and sightseers, encompassing all activities undertaken by tourists during their journeys, from travel planning to accommodation. Security, ensuring the absence of threats and the presence of peace and well-being, is vital for the mental, emotional, and physical health of tourists (Patterson & Balderas-Cejudo, 2023).

Throughout history, travel has served various purposes beyond leisure. Prehistoric civilizations traveled for survival, obtaining food, and finding suitable climates. As societies developed skills and techniques, trade and the exchange of goods became primary motivations for travel. Economic and political factors, especially in ancient empires like those in Africa and Asia, drove population movements (Hayden & Earle, 2022).

In ancient Greece, travel advanced with the spread of coinage and the Greek language, facilitating communication across the Mediterranean. The Roman Empire further expanded tourism through its infrastructure and cultural exchange. However, travel declined during the Middle Ages due to infrastructure deterioration and unfavorable conditions, with religious pilgrimages becoming widespread (Shinde & Olsen, 2022).

The Renaissance saw a resurgence of travel for knowledge and education. Mass tourism as we know it today emerged during the Industrial Revolution, fueled by economic and social changes like rural-to-urban migration. While initially limited by economic conditions, the empowerment of workers in the 19th century led to a flourishing tourism industry (Al Saba, Mertzanis, & Kampouris, 2023).

Today, advancements in technology, along with global inclinations and financial capabilities, have enabled mass travel. Modern technologies have transformed lifestyles and leisure activities, driving remarkable developments in tourism and travel management. This has led to the worldwide emergence of the tourism industry (Pencarelli, 2020).

Regime of the Caspian Sea:

The borders between Iran and the Soviet Union were established through the Turkmenchay Treaty, which recognized the free passage of commercial ships of both countries in the Caspian Sea and its coasts. Similarly, the Treaty of Friendship between Iran and Russia in 1921 acknowledged the right of free navigation under the flags of both nations. Subsequently, the 1940 Treaty of Trade and

Navigation stipulated that only ships from Iran and the Soviet Union could navigate the Caspian Sea, with exclusive fishing rights within 10 miles from each country's coast (Janusz-Pawletta & Janusz-Pawletta, 2021a).

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of new coastal states along the Caspian Sea, the existing legal framework based on agreements between Iran and the Soviet Union required revision. However, the five countries bordering the sea have struggled to establish a clear and comprehensive definition that accommodates the interests of all coastal nations (Doelle & Puthucherril, 2023).

Each coastal country has proposed unique legal arrangements based on its interests. Iran and Russia advocate for limited exclusive zones at sea for all five countries, while Kazakhstan advocates for extending the laws and regulations of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea to the Caspian Sea. Azerbaijan proposes a special plan for full and exclusive ownership for each coastal country (Labardini, 2020).

Azerbaijan, possessing the largest recognized oil and gas resources in its continental shelf among the coastal countries, is particularly sensitive to this issue. Despite only a fraction of its oil and gas fields being located in the sea currently, the offshore reserves remain largely untapped. The determination of the legal regime for the Caspian Sea is influenced by various factors such as border demarcation, fisheries, militarization, pipeline transit, and subsea resources (Keshavarzian, 2024).

The proposed division of the sea space into five 20 percent sections, particularly in a non-common law system, presents challenges, especially regarding tensions among Iran, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan in the southern part of the sea. Iran's access to its proposed 20 percent share depends on substantial concessions from Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, as the distribution of maritime space is spread longitudinally and latitudinally (Ardelean, Minnebo, & Gerbelová, 2020).

Overall, if a legal regime is not based on the following three principles, it will create tensions between the five coastal countries, especially the southern countries, and make it impossible to achieve proper security:

1. Guaranteeing the interests of coastal countries;

2. Preventing the military presence of foreign powers in the region and generally preventing the militarization of the sea;

3. Guaranteeing and cooperating and coordinating the five coastal countries in various environmental issues, preserving fish stocks, facilitating transit regulations, transportation, etc.

Environmental Issues in the Caspian Sea:

Environmental issues in the Caspian Sea, including biological damage resulting from unregulated exploitation of biological resources, pollution from energy exploitation, continuous discharge of liquids and toxic substances, and problems arising from the increase in the sea level, pose a serious threat to the unique ecosystem of the Caspian Sea. Addressing these problems is beyond the capacity of a single coastal country and requires regional cooperation among the five coastal countries (Janusz-Pawletta & Janusz-Pawletta, 2021b).

Iran initiated the proposal to establish a Council for Cooperation among the Caspian Sea littoral states. However, direct and indirect interference from foreign powers has prevented the littoral countries from achieving unity in determining the legal regime of the Caspian Sea (Zarei & Jessen, 2022).

All of the above issues ultimately indirectly confront the development of the tourism industry and lead to a decrease in foreign and domestic tourists to the Caspian Sea shores, increasing tourism in other areas.

Geo-economic Issues in the Caspian Sea:

Experts posit that establishing an effective legal framework for the Caspian Sea holds the potential to address a range of pressing challenges, including the equitable exploitation of hydrocarbon and fisheries resources, navigation issues, military concerns, and environmental degradation such as extensive pollution (Mondal & Palit, 2022).

However, it's emphasized that while defining the legal regime, particularly concerning hydrocarbon exploitation and long-term economic investments aimed at promoting tourism, is important, it may not fully resolve all existing crises. Notably, the influence of Russia and its strategic objectives in the northern region, alongside Iran's position in the south, are pivotal factors shaping the dynamics of the sea (Noori & Masoudi, 2021).

Currently, Russia stands as the predominant military power in the Caspian Sea, with control over international shipping routes among the littoral countries. This dominance grants both Russia and Iran significant leverage over neighboring nations, influencing resource allocation and potentially escalating tensions in the long run (Khan, Khurshid, & Cifuentes-Faura, 2023).

In light of this, cooperation between Iran and Russia is deemed essential in determining a comprehensive legal regime for the Caspian Sea. Their alignment with other littoral countries' interests will play a crucial role in fostering stability and resolving various challenges facing the region.

Cultural and Social Impacts of Tourism on the Caspian Sea and its Effects on Security:

The effects that the tourism industry can have on the Caspian Sea coast can be physical, economic, cultural-social, and ultimately security-related. Nevertheless, since the outcomes of the tourism industry are usually intricate and interdependent, each of these effects often falls into more than one category or group. When distinguishing between the cultural and social impacts of this industry, we face such a dilemma (Lefkowitz, 2021).

Society and Tourism Effects:

Society" encompasses various facets and typically pertains to the structure and organization of social relations within a community or group of individuals. Social impacts refer to the transformations that occur in the daily lives of people residing in a particular region, primarily resulting from direct interactions between locals and tourists (Ramkissoon, 2023).

On the other hand, cultural impacts denote alterations in the arts, customs, religious practices, and architectural landscape of the host community. These changes have the potential to influence the broader culture of a nation over time due to ongoing interactions. Such cultural shifts are often intertwined with the growth and evolution of the tourism industry, as tourism activities bring about cultural exchange and exposure to diverse traditions and practices (Ramkissoon, 2023).

The table below presents the positive and negative cultural-social impacts of tourism:

Positive and Negative Cultural-Social Impacts of Tourism:

Factor:	Positive Effects:	Negative Effects:
Use of culture as an attraction	Increased support for traditional culture, showcasing national identity, revitalizing traditional culture, festivals, and language.	Changes in traditional and artistic activities to cater to tourists, encroachment on traditional areas, overcrowding and destruction of these areas.
Direct interaction between tourists and residents	Elimination of negative aspects, increased social opportunities.	Reinforcement of negative stereotypes, increased commercialization, emergence and spread of new diseases, and difficulties in managing large populations.
Changes in occupations and economic structure, as well as and Changes in social roles	New social and economic opportunities leading to reduced social inequalities.	Conflict and discord among community members, increased social inequalities, loss of language.
Development of tourism organizations	Increase in tourism and recreation.	Inaccessibility of recreational areas.
Population increase due to tourism development	Establishment of health and educational organizations to improve quality of life.	Overcrowding and population density, increase in crime and criminal activities.

Cultural Changes Regarding the Caspian Sea Periphery:

Given the pivotal role of culture in attracting tourists, tourism activities can wield significant economic and social influence, particularly in preserving diverse cultural practices. Various studies across different tourism sectors illustrate tourists' keen interest in experiencing the authentic culture

of a destination. Anecdotes further attest to tourists' contributions to the preservation and enhancement of cultural and artistic traditions, often fostering a sense of camaraderie with local communities and actively participating in indigenous events and rituals. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in regions adjacent to the Caspian Sea, owing to factors such as the renowned hospitality of local inhabitants (Ghadami, Dittmann, Pazhuhan, & Aligholizadeh Firouzjaie, 2022).

However, the commercialization of traditional artworks to cater to tourist demands has led to notable changes in cultural products. The pursuit of cheaper alternatives has resulted in the mass production of lower-quality items and the proliferation of imitations. Moreover, tourists' influence has spurred alterations in cultural ceremonies, festivals, and social practices, sometimes diluting their authenticity and cultural significance. Critics contend that such transformations may erode the genuine essence of these cultural elements. Additionally, the intense interest of tourists in cultural activities may inadvertently intrude upon the personal boundaries of the host community, raising concerns about cultural appropriation and preservation of local identity (Isaac, 2022).

Conflict in the Community:

While it's true that not all cultural interactions between tourists and locals result in negative outcomes, there are varying perspectives, particularly among younger generations, regarding the impact of tourism on societal openness. Some view tourism as a force for positive change, facilitating cultural exchange and fostering a more cosmopolitan (Alamineh, Hussein, Mulu, & Taddesse, 2023)

For instance, the emulation of behaviors and styles observed among tourists from more developed nations by young urban or suburban residents may be seen as a departure from traditional societal principles. This trend can potentially spark conflicts as it challenges established cultural norms. Additionally, the creation of new job opportunities, while beneficial in terms of economic development, can also generate tensions within society. These tensions may stem from disparities in wealth distribution, changes in social dynamics, or conflicts over resource allocation. Nonetheless, it's important to recognize that such conflicts tend to diminish over time as communities undergo historical interactions and cultural exchanges, leading to a gradual easing of tensions (Salameh, Alraggad, & Harahsheh, 2021).

Other Effects of Tourism in the Region:

Positive Effects:

1. **Competition among Companies:** Competition among companies and organizations in the tourism sector can stimulate growth but may also create tension in the community and region.

2. **Unequal Distribution of Tourism Income:** Those with capital investment capabilities in this industry often have better opportunities to capitalize on the benefits, leading to increased class disparity.

3. **Renewed Interest in Local Language:** Tourism may either intensify interest in revitalizing and using the local language or conversely lead to a softening of attitudes toward learning other languages for better communication with tourists.

4. **Infrastructure Development:** Facilities such as sports complexes, restaurants, recreational areas, clinics, and educational and service institutions are established to cater to tourists.

5. **Income Increase and Quality of Life Improvement:** Tourism boosts income and enhances the quality of life for local residents.

6. **Population Increase and Crime Rise:** The influx of travelers and tourists can lead to overcrowding, congestion, and an increase in criminal activities, thereby reducing public safety.

Negative Effects:

1. **Pressure for Tourist Facilities:** The demand for tourist facilities may reduce opportunities that should be available to local residents.

2. **Competition between Tourists and Locals:** Tensions may arise due to the competition for resources and facilities between tourists and local residents.

3. **Cultural and Social Displacement:** Some cultural and social norms may be challenged or displaced by the influx of tourists, leading to conflicts within the community.

4. **Economic Disparity:** Unequal distribution of income from tourism may exacerbate economic disparities within the region.

5. **Language Dynamics:** Changes in language usage and attitudes towards language learning may occur as a result of increased interaction with tourists.

6. **Inappropriate Behavior and Facilities:** Some behaviors and facilities may not align with local norms and may need to be modified or standardized.

Cultural-Social Impact Management Strategy for Caspian Sea Periphery:

1. **Pre-Travel Information:** Tourists should be educated about the local culture and climate before their visit.

2. **Transportation Changes:** Implement awareness-raising strategies to mitigate negative cultural-social impacts of tourism.

3. **Social Marketing:** Ensure that tourism marketing portrays the cultural image of the region positively and accurately.

4. **Appropriate Facilities:** Modify or standardize buildings and facilities to discourage inappropriate behavior.

5. **Cultural Exchange Opportunities:** Create opportunities for cultural exchanges that highlight the rich cultural heritage of the region.

6. **Evaluation Skills:** Develop proper evaluation methods to assess the cultural-social impacts of tourism accurately.

7. **Tourist Education:** Educate tourists about local customs and traditions during their visit.

8. **Community Participation:** Involve local communities in regional and local tourism planning.

9. **Conflict Resolution Training:** Provide training in conflict resolution to mitigate tensions arising from tourism.

10. **Law Enforcement:** Enforce strict control over drug-related crimes and other offenses to maintain security in the region.

Conclusion:

The significance of the Caspian Sea region extends beyond its abundant hydrocarbon resources; its geopolitical position is equally crucial. As newly independent countries emerge around its shores, they face pivotal decisions shaping their futures and international relations. Russia, recognizing the strategic importance of Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus, seeks to maintain its influence in these regions. Encouraging political, economic, and military cooperation among countries bordering the Caspian Sea aligns with Russia's foreign policy objectives. However, unresolved legal and regional disputes could create opportunities for external powers to intervene, exacerbating existing tensions.

Amidst these geopolitical dynamics, the tourism industry emerges as particularly vulnerable due to its intricate connections with both human societies and natural environments. Therefore, meticulous long-term planning for tourism development in the region becomes imperative. Emphasizing cultural aspects becomes especially pertinent given Iran's rich cultural and historical heritage. By safeguarding and promoting cultural heritage, the region can enhance its resilience against external disruptions while fostering sustainable tourism practices that benefit both local communities and international visitors.

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