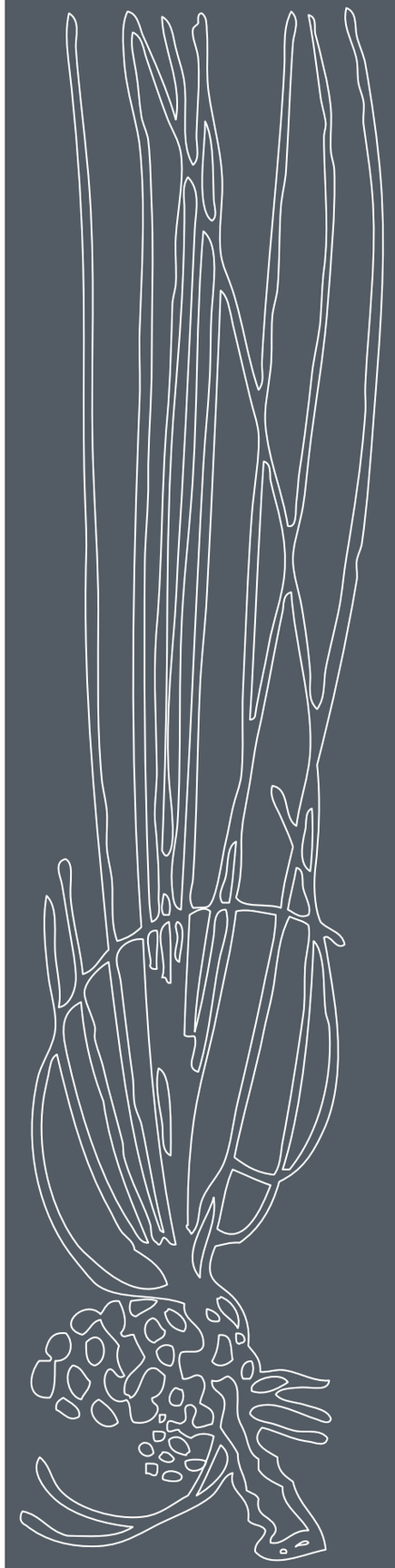
Adel Nikjoo is a tourism geographer whose work focuses on the intersections of tourism, gender, culture, and power. Drawing on fieldwork in southern Iran, this thesis investigates how tourism in conservative Muslim societies can foster adaptation and transformation under ideological constraint. Through the lenses of evolutionary economic geography and resilience, Adel demonstrates how tourism enables women and communities to negotiate new social equilibriums that challenge authoritarian and patriarchal orders. His research reframes tourism as a subtle yet potent space of social change where cultural resilience and economic participation intersect with struggles for justice and inclusion. His work contributes to rethinking resilience as a transformative, political, and culturally grounded process in tourism and beyond.

University of Oulu Graduate School

Publication of The Geographical Society of Northern Finland & Geography Research Unit at University of Oulu

ISBN 978-952-62-4625-3 (print)
ISBN 978-952-62-4626-0 (online)

Painosalama 2025



Nikjoo — Tourism, Resilience, and Gender Relations

nordia geographical publications 54:7

nordia geographical publications

54:7

Tourism, Resilience, and Gender Relations: The Role of Tourism in Socio-Political Transformation in Iran

Adel Nikjoo

nordia
geographical
publications

volume 54 issue 7

Tourism, Resilience, and Gender Relations: The Role of Tourism in Socio-Political Transformation in Iran

Adel Nikjoo

Academic dissertation to be presented with the permission of the Doctoral Training Committee for Human Sciences of the University of Oulu Graduate School (UniOGS), for public discussion in the lecture hall IT116 on the 4th of December 2025 at 12.

Supervisors Professor Jarkko Saarinen
Geography Reserach Unit
University of Oulu
Finland

Associate Professor Siamak Seyfi
Geography Reserach Unit
University of Oulu
Finland

Pre-examiners Professor Sonya Graci
Ted Rogers School of Hospitality and Tourism Management
Toronto Metropolitan University
Canada

Assistant Professor Benjamin laquinto
Department of Geography
University of Hong Kong
Hong Kong

Opponent Associate Professor Julie Wilson
Faculty of Economics and Business
Universitat Oberta de Catalunya UOC
Spain

Nordia Geographical Publications is a publication of The Geographical Society of Northern Finland and Geography Research Unit at the University of Oulu. Address: PO Box 3000 FIN-90014 University of Oulu. Web: www.nordia.journal.fi. Editor-in-chief: Helena Tukiainen helena.tukiainen@oulu.fi. Associate editor: Henriikka Salminen. Layout editor: Teijo Klemettilä. Cover and layout design: Maija Toivanen.

ISBN 978-952-62-4625-3 (print)
ISBN 978-952-62-4626-0 (online)
ISSN 1238-2086 (print)
ISSN 2736-9722 (online)

Printed at Painosalama, Turku, 2025

Contents

Articles are available in the printed version of this publication.

Abstract

Tourism is widely recognized for its economic and developmental potential, but its capacity to facilitate socio-political transformation, particularly in authoritarian and theocratic contexts, remains relatively underexamined. This thesis focuses on the role of tourism in such transformation, analyzing how it interacts with state ideology that regulates bodily autonomy, mobility, gender roles, and public behavior. In these settings, tourism can create subtle spaces for negotiation, adaptation, and the quiet reordering of norms. This study examines how tourism contributes to socio-political, cultural, and gendered transformations through the frameworks of evolutionary economic geography and resilience thinking. The analysis is based on three months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted on Qeshm and Hormuz islands in Iran, utilizing participant observation and semi-structured interviews.

Findings reveal that tourism can reconfigure both vertical (state–society) and horizontal (intra-community) power relations. Tourism helps women and youth to gain visibility, economic independence, and new forms of social legitimacy by creating gray zones where social norms can be contested without direct confrontation. Local inhabitants, particularly women, use the emergence of tourism as tool for direct income, reclaim public space, and challenge traditional gender power relations. The study demonstrates that resilience in these settings involves not only adaptation but also transformation, enabling communities to shape new socio-economic and cultural equilibria.

The thesis offers several theoretical contributions. It aims to advance evolutionary economic geography by proposing path inclusivity as a critical dimension of regional development. By focusing on transformative resilience, this thesis seeks to reframe resilience as a political force capable of reshaping both ideological constraints and social hierarchies. The study also aims to expand cultural resilience discourse, and at the same time conceptualizes co-created authenticity to describe how cultural expressions emerge through dialogical interaction between locals and tourists. The research, therefore, positions tourism as a space of social transformation and contributes to broader debates on power, culture, and agency by showing how tourism-induced change, though incremental and uneven, can erode ideological controls and support gradual, culturally grounded shifts toward gender equality and social change.

Keywords: Community Resilience, Evolutionary Economic Geography, Gender Justice, Cultural Resilience, Biopolitics, Path Inclusivity, Iran.

List of original publications

Article I — Nikjoo A, Seyfi S & Saarinen J (2025) Tourism as a catalyst for socio-political change. *Tourism Geographies* 27(2): 333–355. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2025.2495177

Article II — Nikjoo A, Seyfi S & Saarinen J (2025) Promoting gender inclusivity through community-based tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research Empirical Insights* 6(1): 100181. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annale.2025.100181

Article III — Nikjoo A (Submitted manuscript) The Contribution of Cultural Resilience to Cultural Sustainability in Tourism Encounters.

Author's contributions

In papers I and II, all three authors contributed to the conceptualization of the main idea. Adel Nikjoo, the author of the thesis, conducted the fieldwork, collected and analyzed the data, and wrote the first draft. Professor Jarkko Saarinen and Dr. Siamak Seyfi supervised the research and contributed to the iterative development of the study, validation of the data analysis, and revision of the manuscript.

Paper III was written solely by Adel Nikjoo under the supervision of Professor Jarkko Saarinen and Dr. Siamak Seyfi. It is under review.

Acknowledgments

As I get closer and closer to the end of my doctoral journey, I remember more and more the moments that I enjoyed and learned from. Here at the end, I am proud of having chosen Finland and the University of Oulu for my doctoral journey, a place that taught me not only science but also a way of living, justice, and freedom.

I express my deep gratitude to Jarkko Saarinen and Siamak Seyfi for trusting me and giving me the opportunity to be here and collaborate with them. Jarkko, you always taught me how to fish and gave me the courage to dive into the unknown. These, along with your continuous support and the freedom you gave me in research, allowed me to enjoy my doctoral journey by exploring topics I loved. I want to inscribe here our "First things first" slogan, which has helped me manage my ADHD-driven desire to jump from one issue to another. Siamak, you were more than a supervisor. I will never forget our walk-and-talk sessions around the campus that sometimes lasted for hours. Your critical insights and friendly chats during those walks and coffee breaks strengthened my research arguments and at the same time helped me relax. Thank you both for creating one of the smoothest and most rewarding supervision experiences a doctoral researcher could have.

I also want to express my gratitude to Sonya Graci and Benjamin Iaquinto for examining my thesis so kindly and promptly. Thank you, Benyamin and Sonya, for your constructive comments and positive attitude toward my work. I also thank Julie Wilson for agreeing to serve as my opponent. Julie, when I began working with evolutionary economic geography, your name was among the pioneers, and I eagerly look forward to our discussion. I also thank my follow-up group members Juha Ridanpää and Kaj Zimmerbauer, the head of the unit Jan Hjort, and Helena Tukiainen and the Nordia Geographical Publications team for their professional contributions to my doctoral studies. I also want to express my gratitude to the kind people in the administrative sections of the University of Oulu who, although I did not meet them in person, ensured that my work never stalled thanks to their professionalism. A big thanks also to the functional teams who keep our university clean, comfortable, colorful, and full of plants that nourished my soul during my studies. Special thanks to Pegasus Library, which was my larger office with its wide view of the unforgettable sky of Finland. And thanks to UniMove, particularly for the volleyball and futsal sessions that gave me energy for the next day.

Three months of fieldwork in Qeshm and Hormuz Islands were the most memorable part of my doctoral research. I want to say a big thank you to all 172 people I interviewed, and special thanks to Abdolreza Dashtizadeh, Afsaneh Ehsani, Afshin Abbasnejad, Ahmad Nadalian, Ali Asghar Shalbafian, Ali Pouzan, Alireza Amrikazemi, Alireza Memariani, Bijan Darrehshuri, Dai Mostafa, Ebrahim Khangah, Farzaneh Khangah, Feysal Takhereh, Fuzieh Kuvei, Hamidreza Mohsenpour, Hasan Saadat, Jalil Mordasangi, Jima Fattahi, Khonjizadeh, Leo, Mania Khangah, Mehdi Zarei, Mohammadhashem Dakhteh, Nima Azari, Somayeh Hasanlu, and Tahereh Gourani for their great contributions to this research.

There are always good breaks behind good research. I would like to thank, alphabetically, Aapo, Alberto, Alix, Anita, Bailey, Hidefumi, Johanna, Maija, Maikki, Marek, Marianna, Marika, Marjo, Pekka, Petteri, Primi, Riikka, Roosa, Saara, Sonja, and Ville for the meaningful interactions we had in our coffee room or afterwork gatherings. As a foreigner who was too busy and lazy to learn Finnish, I want to express special

thanks to my Finnish colleagues who always switched to English whenever I entered the coffee room. I never felt excluded from discussions thanks to your inclusive and kind attitude.

Eirini, I single out your name because I cannot imagine these five years without you. You've been beside me through most ups and downs and turned every down into an up. I could write your name as my technical supervisor, as I could not have managed many administrative tasks without your help. Emma, I am so happy that you suddenly appeared in our unit. Your presence was a gift that allowed me to have deep discussions on social justice, gender relations, integration, and our many mutual interests. Henriikka, although I rarely came to the office, I believe I was lucky to be your roommate. I always got energy from you whenever I did. Mehrdad, no need to mention how exciting our ping-pong breaks were. I'd just say that those times I lost were because I was thinking about my research! I will win the December season. Ali, out of nowhere, I just want to name you and say thank you to you and the other Mafia members :D

Maman and Baba, first of all, thank you both for bringing me into this life. I am super happy that I exist and can enjoy life. I am proud to be writing to you from the rapid yet fantastically colorful autumn of Oulu. Maman, I've never cared about being a doctor, but your wish has finally come true. Seeing it through my thesis framework, you were the one who created this path; I just developed it. Thank you both for all your support. I also want to express my gratitude to Afsaneh, Erfan, and Shima's family for their support and the funny moments we shared.

Shima, words are too limited to describe your contribution to my life, of which this PhD is only a part. I would say we made this possible together, and I can title you honorary doctor for all your contributions to the fieldwork, for continuously listening to my research ideas, and for your comments from a woman's lens on my findings about gender relations. I think it would be respectful that, in exchange for this honorary title, you grant me the lifelong title of manager of your art with unlimited agency. Whether you give me that title or not, I hope that we succeed in tying our science and art together to have more power in challenging unequal power structures and contributing to sustainability. We can then make our informal interdisciplinarity more formal and use the synergy of science and art, empowered by love: the love of being together, working together, seeing the world together, and contributing to change together. I write this here so that when we read it later, we remember how we once made another wish come true. I dedicate this thesis to you, and to all Iranian women and men who fight for gender justice and against authoritarianism, and to all people in every corner of the world who act for justice and sustainability.

1 Introduction

Tourism is widely understood as a driver of economic growth and social transformation (Saarinen 2021a), yet its deeper entanglements with politics, power, and resistance often remain underexplored (Church & Coles 2007; Hall 2010; Higgins-Desbiolles & Bianchi 2024), especially in contexts shaped by authoritarian and theocratic governance. In many conservative Muslim societies, where gender roles are tightly regulated and socio-political expression is restricted, tourism may emerge as a subtle but disruptive force (Carrasco-Santos et al. 2024). However, rather than being the primary driver of change, tourism interacts with pre-existing social tensions and aspirations, accelerating or amplifying transformations already underway (Seyfi et al. 2025). This study focuses specifically on how such processes unfold through the lens of tourism. It tries to explain external values, facilitates encounters across social boundaries, and exposes communities to new cultural and economic possibilities (Ghaderi et al. 2024). The shifts that are not uniformly welcomed often generate tensions, cultural frictions, and institutional resistance (Ghaderi et al. 2024). They, however, can open spaces for grassroots adaptation, contestation, and agency, particularly among women (Bagheri et al. 2023).

While socio-political and cultural transformations in authoritarian settings often emerge from complex historical, structural, and grassroots dynamics, this thesis focuses specifically on the role that community-based tourism plays in enabling or accelerating such shifts. It investigates how tourism intersects with entrenched structures of power in settings where both religious authority and traditional patriarchy maintain strong influence. Focusing on Iran, a theocratic governed state where policy often reinforces, rather than moderates, conservative social norms, this study explores how tourism engages with biopolitical control, socio-economic adaptation, and cultural redefinition. Using the evolutionary economic geography framework and resilience thinking, the research foregrounds how local communities respond to the shocks and opportunities that tourism brings. Rather than viewing resilience as a return to tradition, the study highlights how communities navigate forward, toward new socio-economic and cultural equilibriums that potentially challenge both authoritarian rule and patriarchal conventions. In this context, tourism becomes more than a development tool and becomes a space where power can be contested, identities are renegotiated, and alternative futures are quietly imagined (Nilkjoo et al. 2025a)

In societal contexts where the state exercises control over mobility, morality, and bodily autonomy, tourism becomes a politically sensitive space (Rahbari et al. 2019; Seyfi et al. 2018). While tourism's economic, social, and environmental effects have been widely studied, its political and ideological dimensions, especially under authoritarian and theocratic governance, have not been consistently foregrounded (Butler & Suntikul 2017; Seyfi & Hall 2019). Tourism geography has contributed to this turn by emphasizing how tourism shapes and is shaped by power relations, place identities, and socio-spatial justice (Gibson et al. 2025; Scheyvens & Biddulph 2018). Existing literature has not often acknowledged tourism as a potential force (Nikjoo et al. 2025a) through which power can be negotiated between citizens and the state or where local communities assert agency against restrictive social and political norms (Bayat 2022).

At the same time, studies of community-based tourism emphasize participation and sustainability, but often without critically examining how inclusion plays out in gendered or conservative cultural contexts (Benner 2023; Scheyvens & Biddulph 2018). The internal dynamics of change within such communities, especially the shifting power

relations between men and women, between generations, or between traditional leaders and emerging actors remain relatively underexplored (Carrasco-Santos et al. 2024). This relative neglect has left important gaps in our understanding of how tourism might advance social transformation from below.

Moreover, while *evolutionary economic geography* (EEG) offers a valuable framework for understanding regional change and path development, it has often largely focused on economic structures and institutional learning, with comparatively limited engagement with questions of gender, ideology, or cultural politics (Benner 2023; Brouder 2014). This thesis seek to apply evolutionary economic geography in a context marked by authoritarian governance, gendered norms, and moral regulation, where path development is shaped not only by institutional capacity but also by informal networks, cultural expectations, and restrictions on women's agency. This application also speaks to broader debates in tourism geography, where questions of peripherality, resilience, and justice are increasingly central to understanding how tourism reworks localities under uneven power relations (Gibson et al. 2025; Saarinen & Wall-Reinius 2019). The thesis also draws on cultural and community resilience to understand how tourism-induced shocks are absorbed and reinterpreted by local actors. In doing so, the study explores how transformation from below reconfigures both vertical (state–society) and horizontal (intra-community) power relations.

This study draws on three interrelated bodies of theory, evolutionary economic geography, biopolitics, and resilience thinking, to analyze how community-based tourism reshapes power relations, gender dynamics, and cultural practices in conservative Muslim contexts. EEG provides a foundational framework for understanding how regional development paths emerge, evolve, and lock into certain trajectories (Boschma & Frenken 2018; Brouder 2014). Traditionally focused on innovation, learning, and institutional capacity, EEG has more recently expanded to include tourism as a driver of regional transformation (Clavé & Wilson 2017; Brouder 2020). However, this literature often remains rooted in economic indicators, with relatively limited attention to who participates in these paths, under what conditions, and with what consequences for social justice (Benner 2023; Carrasco-Santos et al. 2024). This thesis, therefore, seeks to contribute to a more inclusive turn in EEG-related studies.

In addition to EEG, this thesis draws on Foucault's concept of biopolitics, which offers a valuable lens for examining how states, including theocratic ones (Nikjoo et al. 2025a), govern populations through the regulation of bodies, behaviors, and social norms (Foucault 2008; Minca 2025). As applied in this thesis (see Nikjoo et at. 2025a,b), biopolitics complements evolutionary economic geography by highlighting how power operates not only through institutions and markets but also through the regulation of everyday life. In Iran, the state's biopolitical interventions, especially around gender, dress, and public space (Rahbari et al. 2019; Shahrokni 2019), shape both tourism environments and everyday experiences. This framework helps illuminate how tourism not only triggers economic adaptation but also becomes a terrain of bodily contestation, value friction, and social resistance (Nikjoo et al. 2025a).

Finally, resilience thinking, particularly community resilience, provides the third lens to understand how societies respond to the shocks particularly those imposed by tourism. Resilience here is not framed as a return to the past but as an adaptive capacity to negotiate change, forge new equilibriums, and sustain key cultural or communal functions (Saarinen 2021b; Davoudi et al. 2013). Taken together, these frameworks allow tourism to be examined not simply as development, but as a political field where multiple actors negotiate the limits and possibilities of change.

The empirical focus of this thesis is on Hormuz and Qeshm islands in southern Iran. Located in the Persian Gulf, these islands have historically been shaped by trade, ecological fragility, and geopolitical relevance (Nikjoo et al. 2023). Yet until recently, Hormuz and the western parts of Qeshm remained relatively isolated from mainstream development and retained highly conservative social structures rooted in religious and patriarchal traditions. Over the past two decades, the growth of community-based tourism has brought visible changes, including increased female economic participation, shifts in public space usage, and new forms of interaction with outsiders (Ajayebi & Amrikazemi 2023). These developments appear to have created both openings and frictions within local society.

Iran's political context arguably makes these sites especially significant. As a theocratic authoritarian state, the Islamic Republic regulates not only public behavior but also gender roles, moral codes, and mobility (Rahbari et al. 2019; Seyfi et al. 2018). In this system, tourism is simultaneously promoted for economic purposes and constrained by ideological and biopolitical concerns (Nikjoo et al. 2025a). Domestic tourists, especially youth and women from more urban and secular backgrounds, often bring values and expectations that clash with the enforced norms of the state and the traditional structures of rural communities (Bayat 2022; Nikjoo et al. 2021). As a result, rural destinations such as Hormuz and Qeshm become critical contact zones where competing visions of modernity, morality, and gender coexist and often collide (Ghaderi et al. 2024).

These islands thus offer a unique empirical window into how local communities, caught between state ideology and tourist expectations, respond to the cultural and economic shocks of tourism. While closely connected geographically and socially, Hormuz and Qeshm reveal different facets of how tourism-led change unfolds in a theocratic context, allowing for a nuanced exploration of community resilience, gendered adaptation, and everyday negotiations of power.

1.1 Purpose of research

This thesis seeks to understand how community-based tourism, when emerging in conservative and theocratic contexts, interacts with power, gender, and cultural continuity. Guided by EEG and resilience thinking and grounded in ethnographic research in southern Iran, the study investigates how local communities adapt to tourism-led transformations while negotiating constraints imposed by both the state and tradition. Rather than viewing tourism as a singular force of change, the study examines how it acts as a catalyst for everyday negotiation, enabling communities to incrementally reshape social norms, contest restrictions, and assert agency within existing limits.

The study is guided by four specific objectives:

1. Investigate how tourist-local encounters create openings for political expression and subtle contestation of state authority.
2. Analyze the internal dynamics of conservative Muslim societies in adapting to tourism-led socio-economic changes.
3. Examine the role of cultural resilience in community adaptations to tourism in conservative Muslim societies.
4. Examine how domestic tourism and community resilience influence gender roles and practices.

These objectives are addressed through three interrelated case studies: Paper 1 focuses on socio-political transformation; Paper 2 examines socio-economic and gendered adaptation; and Paper 3 explores gendered and cultural change. Across these cases, the thesis examines how communities negotiate new equilibriums under the pressures of tourism and authoritarian regulation.

1.2 Structure of the synopsis

The thesis is organized into seven main sections that collectively investigate how community-based tourism in Iran catalyzes socio-political and gendered transformation under authoritarian rule. The study draws on ethnographic fieldwork and grounded conceptual frameworks to examine how resilience, adaptation, and norm negotiation unfold through tourism in ideologically constrained settings. The introductory section situates the research problem and identifies gaps in tourism studies concerning the transformative potential of tourism in conservative Muslim societies. The second part outlines the purpose, objectives, and scope of the thesis.

The Literature Review consists of two key parts. The first explores how community-based tourism influences local communities, with attention to debates around empowerment, commodification, and socio-spatial change. The second examines how communities adapt to such change, engaging with concepts like cultural resilience, agency, and norm negotiation. This dual structure reflects the study's concern with both the impacts of tourism and the responses it causes. The Analytical Framework integrates three perspectives: evolutionary economic geography, resilience theory, and biopolitics. Each framework is introduced with its relevance to the study, followed by a discussion of how they interrelate and where their blind spots lie. This combination allows the study to examine tourism as both a developmental pathway and a contested space of bodily and gendered regulation.

The Context of the Study grounds the study in Iran's political and cultural terrain. The first part focuses on authoritarianism and theocratic governance, especially the use of moral control over gendered behavior. The second part explores the construction of femininity in Iran, including tensions between religious, traditional, and secularism discourses.

The Methodology details a qualitative approach involving fieldwork in Qeshm and Hormuz islands. It explains the epistemological stance, case selection, and fieldwork strategies, semi-structured interviews, and observation. Ethical concerns, reflexivity, and data validation are addressed, alongside discussion of methodological limitations. This section also explains the iterative engagement with the three peer-reviewed papers that form the empirical basis of the thesis.

The Findings are presented thematically across five parts. The chapter begins by situating the findings, then discusses: (1) Chronic shocks in authoritarian Iran; (2) Tourism and challenging authoritarianism through resilience; (3) Tourism as a shock to the socio-economic settings of local communities; (4) Community resilience in adapting to tourism; and (5) Women as the central axis of transformation.

The final section, Discussion, includes five interpretive sections and a conclusion. These sections connect the findings to broader debates around: the transformative power of tourism, resilience as a political rather than passive force, inclusion within EEG, the dynamic tension between cultural change and cultural resilience, and the

contribution of tourism to gender justice in Muslim societies. The Conclusion section synthesizes the study's insights and outlines suggestions for future research.

2 Literature review

2.1 Community-based tourism and change

Tourism is widely recognized as a force that brings both opportunities and disruptions. On the positive side, it can stimulate economic development, generate employment, enhance infrastructure, and promote intercultural dialogue (Boley et al. 2014). In many rural and peripheral regions, tourism has become a viable alternative to traditional livelihoods, offering a means of diversification and income generation (Ruiz-Ballesteros & González-Portillo 2024; Saarinen 2006). It can also strengthen local pride by revitalizing interest in cultural practices and heritage sites (Aquino et al. 2018; Bunten 2008; Cole 2007).

However, tourism's impacts are deeply shaped by political economy and local hierarchies (Duffy 2015). Tourism has often been linked to rising living costs, environmental degradation, cultural commodification, and the erosion of traditional values (Bunten 2008; Trupp et al. 2023). Additionally, the benefits of tourism are frequently captured by elites or external actors, while local residents, especially women remain confined to informal or low-paid roles (Ghouse et al. 2019; Hutchings et al. 2020). In contexts marked by authoritarian governance or ideological control, tourism may reproduce exclusion or serve state narratives, even as it offers limited spaces for negotiation (Nikjoo et al. 2025a; Seyfi & Hall 2019; Seyfi et al. 2025).

Critics argue that conventional tourism, structured through neoliberal logics, often treats communities as instruments rather than partners in development (Blackstock 2005; Higgins-Desbiolles 2020). Without mechanisms for local ownership and voice, tourism risks becoming an extractive industry (Partanen et al. 2025). Its outcomes depend not only on visitor behavior but on political structures, economic models, and community capacity to influence decision-making (Jørgensen et al. 2021).

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) has emerged as a participatory model that reorients tourism around local needs, capacities, and cultural values (Boley & McGehee 2014). Unlike mass tourism, CBT emphasizes bottom-up involvement, where community members manage tourism resources and define how their culture and environment are represented (Tolkach & Pratt 2022; Moayerian et al. 2022). This participatory approach links tourism to broader goals of sustainability, social justice, and cultural resilience (Cole 2006; Moayerian et al. 2022).

CBT holds particular promise in marginalized settings, where it can serve as an avenue for recognition and autonomy (Pang et al. 2024). Women, for example, have leveraged CBT initiatives such as home-based hospitality, handicrafts, and storytelling to generate income and public visibility (Carrasco-Santos et al. 2024; Wang & Sun 2023a). These roles are often grounded in culturally accepted practices, yet subtly shift gender norms by expanding women's mobility, decision-making, and collective organization (Kutlu & Ngoasong 2024; Sharifi-Tehrani et al. 2024). This aligns with the notion of cultural empowerment, not merely gaining resources but reshaping the conditions and meanings of participation (Moayerian et al. 2022).

Still, CBT's transformative regenerative capacity is not guaranteed (Ridanpää 2025). In many cases, it remains embedded in top-down governance or donor-led structures that emphasize economic growth over community-building (Cornelisse 2019; Jamal et al. 2019). Structural barriers, such as patriarchal norms, class inequality, or ideological constraints may restrict who participates and how (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri 2015; Li

2006). Without attention to local power dynamics, CBT risks replicating exclusion under the guise of participation (Jamal & Higham 2021; Shrestha et al. 2025).

Some recent studies (Benner 2023; Scheyvens & Biddulph 2018; Biddulph & Scheyvens 2018) emphasize that CBT can foster inclusive, resilient, and empowered communities. Inclusion refers to both who participates and how decisions are made (Scheyvens & Biddulph 2018). When grounded in co-creation, CBT allows marginalized actors such as women and ethnic minorities to shape development on their own terms (Benner 2023; Scheyvens & Biddulph 2018).

CBT also supports resilience by helping communities adapt to socio-economic change while preserving core values (Saarinen & Gill 2018b). In Qeshm Island, for example, women have redefined cultural symbols like the burqa, transforming it into a source of cultural expression and livelihood (Nikjoo et al. 2025b). These practices reflect not only economic adaptation but also symbolic negotiations with tradition, tourism, and ideology (Tolkach & Pratt 2022; Trupp et al. 2023).

Empowerment in CBT contexts is typically incremental and relational, emerging through shifts in confidence, public presence, and collective belonging (Carrasco-Santos et al. 2024). CBT aligns with context-based agency, where individuals act within cultural and structural boundaries to assert control (Glas & Alexander 2020; Mahmood 2006). Empowerment is not solely individual autonomy but also collective capacity, what some describe as community cultural development (Robinson & Green 2011; Moayerian et al. 2022).

Yet CBT's success depends on how well it avoids reproducing hierarchies and whether it fosters long-term cultural stewardship and inclusive governance (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri 2015). Some initiatives prioritize tourism vitality or entrepreneurialism over community well-being, marginalizing the relational work that sustains inclusion (Höckert 2018; Shrestha et al. 2025).

Despite an expanding literature on CBT, its dynamics in politically constrained settings, including authoritarian and theocratic regimes, remain underexplored. Most studies focus on democratic settings where civic participation is possible (Tolkach & Pratt 2022), overlooking how ideological regimes constrain cultural expression, gender roles, and agency. CBT in such contexts may only be permitted if aligned with state narratives, limiting its emancipatory potential. Vertical power (state–community) and horizontal inequalities (e.g., patriarchy, class) are rarely theorized. Particularly in Muslim societies, the role of CBT in enabling subtle, context-bound agency under intersecting religious and political controls requires deeper scholarly attention.

2.2 Local communities and adaptation to change

In tourism-affected communities, responses to socio-cultural change are often simplified into a binary of resistance or acceptance (Saarinen & Gill 2018a). Resistance typically emerges when tourism threatens local values, autonomy, or control over place (Beel et al. 2017). It may take overt forms such as protests against development or subtler expressions like passive disengagement or performative compliance (Hughes 2018; Knudsen et al. 2016). However, this binary fails to capture the complex, non-linear ways communities negotiate external pressures (Meekes et al. 2017).

In recent years, resilience has emerged as a more dynamic concept (Davoudi et al. 2013). While resistance seeks to preserve the status quo, resilience acknowledges the

inevitability of change and emphasizes the capacity to adapt, reorganize, and persist (Hall et al. 2017; Saarinen & Gill 2018a). Resilience in tourism involves both individual and collective agency, shaped by experience, local knowledge, and institutional context (Hall et al. 2017; Saarinen & Gill 2018b).

Sustainability and resilience are often invoked together, yet they differ in emphasis (Espiner et al. 2017; Lew 2014). Sustainability is normative, rooted in intergenerational justice and long-term equity (Adger et al. 2009; Lew et al. 2016). Resilience is more pragmatic, concerned with how systems absorb stress and adapt under disruption (Espiner et al. 2017). While resilience may support sustainable development, it can also enable problematic systems to endure if structural inequalities are left unchallenged (MacKinnon & Derickson 2013; Hall et al. 2017).

Community resilience refers to the collective capacity of a population to reorganize and maintain its core identity, relationships, and functions in the face of external stress (Adger 2000; Norris et al. 2008). In tourism studies, it helps explain how communities respond not only to sudden crises but also to prolonged, uneven transformations brought about by tourism development (Hall et al. 2017). Community resilience is a process shaped by shared values, institutions, relationships, and informal networks (Beel et al. 2017; Cutter et al. 2008). It encompasses material capacities such as access to infrastructure or markets and intangible ones like trust, social memory, and cultural continuity (Adger 2000; Beel et al. 2017).

A resilient community is not one that remains unchanged, but one that engages in internal learning and adaptation (Saarinen & Gill 2018b). This might involve shifting economic strategies, redefining social norms, or experimenting with new governance models (Gill & Williams 2014; Saarinen 2021a). On Qeshm Island, for example, women have formed informal networks to support handicraft production and tourism-related hospitality (Nikjoo et al. 2025b). These spaces facilitate not only income generation but emotional and intergenerational exchange, helping sustain identity and cohesion during times of economic and ideological stress (Nikjoo et al. 2025b).

Nonetheless, community resources are not always equally distributed. Access to resources, status, and decision-making often reflects existing inequalities related to class, gender, age, and ethnicity (Brown & Westaway 2011; Dredge & Gyimóthy 2017). Resilience discourse may mask these disparities by projecting an image of communal unity, while sidelining marginalized voices (Brown & Westaway 2011; Dredge & Gyimóthy 2017). Furthermore, when governments or external actors invoke resilience without support, it risks becoming a burden shifting responsibility to communities to adapt (MacKinnon & Derickson 2013). Promoting community resilience, therefore, requires attention not only to internal capacity but also to the broader structural conditions that shape vulnerability and response (Seyfi et al. 2025; MacKinnon & Derickson 2013).

Cultural resilience refers to the ability of cultural systems to absorb change while maintaining meaning and coherence (Crane 2010; Holtorf 2018). In contrast to static views of culture as fixed heritage, this approach emphasizes dynamism, adaptation, and negotiation (Crane 2010; Holtorf 2018). In tourism settings, cultural resilience becomes especially important as communities engage with commodification, representation, and market logic (Cole 2007).

Cultural resilience does not imply uncritical preservation, rather, it allows for re-signification and transformation (Trupp et al. 2023). On the Qeshm Island for instance, the creative adaptation of the burqa from a restrictive symbol to a source of cultural and economic expression is one such example (Nikjoo et al. 2025b). Through this adaptation, women navigate religious norms, tourist expectations, and

personal agency, demonstrating how cultural forms can evolve while retaining internal significance (Bagheri et al. 2023; Nikjoo et al. 2025b; Sharifi-Tehrani et al. 2024).

Yet cultural resilience is not without complications. Questions of authenticity, ownership, and representation often arise on for example who defines what counts as culture, and for whom is it performed (Knudsen et al. 2016; Rickly-Boyd 2013)? Adaptation may strengthen identity and cohesion, but it may also marginalize certain voices or simplify complex traditions for tourist consumption (Wang & Sun 2023b). When culture is mobilized as an economic resource, powerful actors, whether market-driven, institutional, or state-affiliated, can shape narratives to fit external agendas (Bunten 2008).

Cultural resilience often intersects with community resilience. Shared cultural practices such as rituals, crafts, language can serve as both symbolic anchors and practical strategies for navigating change (Beel et al. 2017). However, cultural resilience alone cannot address deeper structural conditions (Trupp et al. 2023), such as market dependency or ideological control. Praising resilience thinking must therefore be accompanied by a critical lens on how cultural adaptation is governed, whose voices are legitimized, and how inequality is reproduced or resisted in the process (Shrestha et al. 2025).

Resilience, therefore, shapes and is shaped by the ways communities respond to both vertical and horizontal power structures (Hall et al. 2017; Saarinen 2021b). Vertically, resilience can serve as a strategy for navigating neoliberal forces, authoritarian control, and the structural violence of global tourism markets (Nikjoo et al. 2025a). In such contexts, resilience becomes a mode of quiet negotiation enabling partial adaptations while avoiding confrontation (Nikjoo et al. 2025a). Horizontally, resilience engages with community-level power dynamics such as patriarchy, generational hierarchies, or traditional norms that marginalize women or ethnic minorities (Nikjoo et al. 2025b).

While resilience is often promoted as empowering, it can also obscure these embedded inequalities (MacKinnon & Derickson 2013). When framed without attention to power, it risks romanticizing communities as endlessly adaptable while diverting attention from the structural conditions that create precarity (Seyfi et al. 2025). Thus, resilience must be approached not only as a descriptive concept but as a political one that reveals how adaptation is unevenly distributed, constrained, and sometimes co-opted by dominant interests (Hall et al. 2017).

While resilience has become central to tourism and development discourse, its application in authoritarian and theocratic Muslim contexts remains under-theorized (Nikjoo et al. 2025a; Seyfi et al. 2025). Existing studies often focus on environmental or post-conflict settings, overlooking how resilience operates amid ideological constraints, moral regulation, and limited civic space. In such contexts, adaptation becomes a negotiation with state control, religious norms, and intra-community power structures. Feminist critiques highlight how resilience discourse can depoliticize struggle, yet few studies explore how women in Islamic theocracies use resilience for subtle resistance and re-signification, particularly within community-based tourism shaped by both constraint and agency.

3 Analytical frameworks

To understand how tourism-led change unfolds in ideologically constrained settings, this study applies three interconnected frameworks: evolutionary economic geography, resilience theory, and biopolitics. Each offers a distinct entry point into the complexities of place-based adaptation and transformation. EEG explains how new economic paths emerge from historically embedded institutions and spatial conditions. Resilience theory captures how individuals and communities respond to external shocks, adapt practices, and preserve meaning in the face of instability. Biopolitics reveals how power operates through the regulation of bodies, behaviors, and everyday life, particularly in theocratic settings where moral and gender norms are state-enforced. It helps illuminate how public space, dress, and mobility become arenas of control and negotiation.

These frameworks are not applied in isolation. Their integration allows for a nuanced understanding of how tourism operates not simply as a development tool but as a site of contested meaning, regulation, and transformation, especially in authoritarian and patriarchal contexts where overt resistance is limited and adaptation is culturally embedded and politically charged.

3.1 Evolutionary economic geography (EEG)

Evolutionary economic geography is a dynamic framework that explains how regional economies develop over time through historically contingent, path-dependent, and spatially embedded processes (Brouder 2014; Boschma & Frenken 2018; Boschma & Martin 2010). Rejecting the static assumptions of equilibrium-based models, EEG draws on concepts from evolutionary economics and complexity theory such as variation, selection, retention, and lock-in to understand why economic activities evolve differently across places and how past decisions shape future trajectories (Martin & Sunley 2006; Zhu et al. 2019). Tourism geography has found EEG particularly useful because it highlights how development in peripheral destinations emerges from local resources and histories, while being conditioned by uneven spatial relations with core regions (Brouder et al. 2017; Gibson et al. 2025).

At the heart of EEG lies the path metaphor (Martin & Sunley 2006), including key concepts such as path dependence, path creation, path branching, and path upgrading (James et al. 2023). These describe how new industries or sectors like tourism emerge, evolve, and sometimes become locked into self-reinforcing trajectories (Bohn et al. 2023; Brouder 2019). In many regions, tourism has served as a platform for new path development, where local actors build on existing assets natural resources, cultural practices, and informal labor to create novel directions for economic participation (Clavé & Wilson 2017).

EEG increasingly emphasizes the role of agency in shaping economic paths (see Benner 2023). Drawing on the notion of place-based leadership and institutional entrepreneurship (Grillitsch & Sotarauta 2020), EEG-related studied reveals that local actors actively intervene in development processes (James et al. 2023; Kurikka & Grillitsch 2021). In tourism contexts, women's engagement in community-based initiatives often exemplifies such agency as they assemble new roles and value chains within constrained cultural and regulatory environments (Nikjoo et al. 2025b). These forms of participation contribute to what is now termed inclusive path development, generating opportunities for previously marginalized actors and reconfiguring local

power relations (Benner 2023; Meekes et al. 2017). In this thesis, EEG structures the analysis by reconstructing sequences and critical junctures, specifying mechanisms of asset recombination, branching, and upgrading, and examining how rule interpretation and coordination widen or restrict participation.

3.2 Resilience theory

Resilience theory offers a framework for understanding how individuals and communities respond to change, disruption, and systemic pressures while seeking to maintain continuity in identity, function, and cohesion (Amore et al. 2018; Hall et al. 2017). Originally rooted in ecological science (Hall 2018), the concept has since evolved into a broader analytical tool to assess socio-economical and institutional adaptation in the face of shocks ranging from environmental disasters to economic restructuring and social changes (Saarinen & Gill 2018a, 2018b). In tourism studies, resilience has gained traction as both a theoretical and practical response to vulnerability and volatility (Saarinen & Gill 2018b). Scholars (see Hall et al. 2017) distinguish between bouncing back to pre-disruption states and adaptive or evolutionary resilience, which emphasizes the capacity to reorganize and develop new equilibriums over time. In peripheral or ideologically constrained contexts, resilience is rarely about restoration, rather, it involves navigating instability, maintaining collective agency, and reconfiguring local knowledge and practice in the face of shifting external pressures (Nikjoo et al. 2025b).

Resilience is often framed as a strength of communities, but it can obscure power inequalities (Haisch 2018; Seyfi et al. 2025). Resilience can even stabilize unequal equilibria when coping is privatized or compliance becomes the main adaptation (Brown & Westaway 2011). MacKinnon & Derickson (2013) warn that it is sometimes used to shift responsibility for coping onto communities themselves, masking the absence of structural support or justice. Feminist and postcolonial critiques further note that mainstream resilience discourse tends to depoliticize adaptation, presenting it as a technical problem rather than a negotiation with political, gendered, or ideological constraints (Seyfi et al. 2025). This is particularly relevant in settings where overt resistance may be suppressed, and resilience becomes a mode of quiet survival or adaptation within authoritarian boundaries.

In the context of tourism, resilience intersects with sustainability but must be distinguished from it. Sustainability often carries normative ideals of justice and intergenerational equity, while resilience is more pragmatic, focused on system persistence and adaptability under pressure (Espiner et al. 2017). Tourism-related resilience, therefore, involves not only the capacity to recover from external disturbances but also the ability to reimagine futures, negotiate values, and challenge existing development models (Espiner et al. 2017; Saarinen & Gill 2018b).

This study uses resilience theory to analyze how tourism-affected communities adapt under cultural, economic, and political constraints and shocks. Analytically, I attend to dimensions such as network density and diversity, flexibility in local rules and enforcement, and forms of women's collective agency, treating them as indicative pathways through which adaptive capacity is assembled. The focus is on strategies of survival and on the potential for incremental transformation grounded in place-based knowledge, collective action, and context-specific agency

3.3 Biopolitics

Biopolitics, rooted in Foucault's concept of the politics of life, refers to the governance of populations through the regulation of bodies, behaviors, and everyday practices (Foucault 2008; Minca 2025). It operates through both disciplinary and regulatory power, guiding individuals toward normative roles while reinforcing hierarchies related to mobility, gender, and access (Aradau & Tazzioli 2020; Repo 2015). In tourism, biopolitical mechanisms manifest in who can travel, under what conditions, and how bodies are managed and represented (Iaquinto et al. 2024; Lapointe & Coulter 2020).

In Iran, biopolitical governance is especially pronounced. The female body is central to state ideological projects, framed simultaneously as a site of moral virtue and political threat (Fathzadeh 2021; Rahbari et al. 2019). Policies related to veiling, public conduct, and visibility function as biopolitical techniques that regulate gendered participation in public life (Moghissi 2016; Rahbari et al. 2019), including in tourism (Seyfi et al. 2018). Women's dress, mobility, and voice are not only controlled but symbolically charged, serving as cultural boundaries that define national identity (Yuval-Davis 1996). These constraints extend into tourism spaces, where norms around visibility, interaction, and propriety are strictly enforced (Lapointe & Coulter 2020; Nikjoo et al. 2025a).

However, tourism also creates friction in this biopolitical order. As a worldmaking force (Brouder 2018), tourism introduces new aesthetics, imaginaries, and social encounters that may destabilize established norms (Lapointe & Coulter 2020). Female travelers' acts against imposed hijab rules in tourism destinations and local women's creative adaptation of culture can be read as a negotiation with biopolitical control (Nikjoo et al. 2021; Nikjoo et al. 2025a). This study uses biopolitics to examine how tourism in Iran becomes a site of contested governance. It reveals how bodies and behaviors are disciplined, yet also how subjectivities are reconfigured through micro-resistances, everyday adaptations, and quiet reappropriations within ideologically charged landscapes.

3.4 Interrelations and complementarities between frameworks

While each of the three frameworks, Evolutionary Economic Geography, resilience theory, and biopolitics, offers distinct analytical tools, their integration enables a more comprehensive understanding of tourism-led change in ideologically constrained contexts. Together, they reveal how host–guest encounters, destination governance, and visitor flows are shaped by institutional structures, power relations, historical trajectories, and embodied forms of regulation and negotiation.

EEG provides a macro-level lens to trace how new development paths, such as community-based tourism, emerge from existing economic arrangements and destination assets. However, it often overlooks the role of informal economies and the everyday cultural work that sustains these paths. Resilience theory fills this gap by highlighting how individuals and communities negotiate change, not only through recovery but through transformation. It foregrounds the relational and processual nature of adaptation, especially in contexts where formal support is absent or unreliable.

Biopolitics deepens the analysis by examining how power is inscribed on bodies and behaviors through moral governance and ideological control. It brings attention to how norms around visibility, mobility, and participation are enforced or contested, particularly in public spaces shaped by gendered and political regulation. From a

geographical perspective, these dynamics also map onto specific sites such as beaches, homestays, local markets and streets that become contested terrains of propriety, identity, and agency.

These frameworks allow for a multi-scalar, context-sensitive interpretation of tourism not as a linear force of modernization or empowerment, but as a field of negotiation. They illuminate how people engage with tourism to remake their roles, relations, and futures in ways that are embedded in power, shaped by history, and expressed through everyday life. In authoritarian and patriarchal contexts, this integrated approach is crucial for understanding how transformation unfolds incrementally, often quietly, and rarely without contradiction.

4 Context of the study

Understanding tourism-led change on Qeshm and Hormuz islands requires grounding the analysis in the broader socio-political and gendered context of Iran. As a theocratic authoritarian state, Iran exercises power not only through formal institutions but also through a dense network of moral regulation, ideological discourse, and embodied governance (Seyfi & Hall 2019). These mechanisms deeply influence tourism development, shaping who can participate, what forms of cultural expression are permissible, and how bodies, especially women's, are regulated in public space (Nikjoo et al. 2025a).

Iran's tourism sector, therefore, is embedded in these ideological constraints (Gorji 2024). Although the state promotes tourism for economic diversification and image management, it selectively supports forms that conform to Islamic moral codes and national identity narratives (Seyfi et al. 2025). This selective promotion of culturally safe tourism reinforces vertical power relations, while also enabling localized forms of negotiation and quiet adaptation (Seyfi & Hall 2019). In this context, tourism becomes both a political instrument and a site of managed uncertainty (Nikjoo et al. 2025a).

This section is divided into two parts: the first discusses Iran's theocratic authoritarianism and its implications for governance and tourism, and the second explores femininity in Iran and how it is shaped and redefined through women's participation in tourism.

4.1 Authoritarianism in Iran

Iran's political system operates under a unique form of theocratic authoritarianism that merges clerical rule with republican institutions (Seyfi & Hall 2019). Following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the Islamic Republic institutionalized the doctrine of velayat-e faqih (Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist), concentrating power in the Supreme Leader, who holds authority over the judiciary, military, and state media (Zweiri & AlObaidan 2021). This structure embeds moral governance into all aspects of political life, making ideological control inseparable from governance (Asadi Zeidabadi 2023; Mohamadi & Shirazi 2023).

At the heart of this model lies a project of moral purification centered on regulating the female body (Asl 2022; Babakhani 2024; Bayat & Hodges 2024; Mohamadi & Shirazi 2023). Drawing on Foucault's concept of biopolitics, Rahbari et al. (2019) argue that the Islamic Republic governs not only through coercive institutions but through the normalization of behaviors, visibility, and gender roles. Public space is managed through gendered surveillance by morality patrols (Gasht-e Ershad), who enforce dress codes, police bodies, and monitor behavior in public and semi-private spaces such as parks, public transport, and tourism sites (Khatam 2023; Seyfi et al. 2018). Tourism spaces therefore become not only economic zones but also biopolitical landscapes, where moral codes are visibly contested (Nikjoo et al. 2025a).

This biopolitical regime is historically continuous with the modernist authoritarianism of Reza Shah, who banned the veil in the 1930s to project a Westernized image of progress (Rahbari et al. 2019). The Islamic Republic reversed this symbolism, institutionalizing veiling in 1983 as a cornerstone of Islamic morality and national identity (Koo & Han 2018; Mahdavi 2009). In both regimes, the female body was politicized as a visible marker of national ideology and a target of state discipline (Rahbari et al. 2019).

Under Iran's theocratic system, control is exercised not only through legal mechanisms but also through visual and discursive regimes such as billboards, religious education, and public campaigns that promote the ideal Muslim woman as modest, domesticated, and pious (Najmabadi 2005; Shirazi 2017). This constitutes an ideological lock-in situation in which foundational ideological investments prevent institutional adaptation to societal change (Nikjoo et al. 2025a).

Tourism development is subject to this moral regime (Seyfi & Hall 2019). Although the state promotes domestic tourism to offset economic stress, it does so selectively (Seyfi & Hall 2019). Tourism that threatens ideological control by encouraging bodily display, gender mixing, or cultural pluralism is restricted or carefully managed (Nikjoo et al. 2025a). Yet, tourism also opens spaces for contestation. In peripheral tourism destinations for instance, interactions between locals and urban visitors challenge the boundaries of moral control (Ghaderi et al. 2024). These spaces offer a degree of negotiated freedom, manifested in relaxed dress norms, increased female visibility in tourism roles, and greater tolerance for informal mixing in public settings, where biopolitical authority is reinterpreted, evaded, or softened in everyday encounters (Nikjoo et al. 2025a).

4.2 Femininity in Iran

Gender inequality persists across mobility, income, and decision-making, and tourism often mirrors these hierarchies in who travels, who hosts, and who profits (Bernard et al. 2022; Khoo et al. 2025; Xu 2018). Feminist tourism geographies trace how debates on empowerment and representation have evolved (Altinay et al. 2026; Lin & Roelofsen 2025), while inclusive tourism work foregrounds the distributive questions of who is included and on what terms (Biddulph & Scheyvens 2018). Studies of women's tourism entrepreneurship highlight gendered constraints, such as unequal access to finance, networks, and family support (Altinay et al. 2026; Zarzadeh & Rastegar 2023), and research on women travelers notes concerns such as safety, harassment, and emotional burdens (Hosseini et al. 2022; Tavakoli & Mura 2021), even as digital platforms open avenues for visibility and income (Ghaderi et al. 2025).

Across Muslim-majority contexts, inequalities are shaped by intersecting structures of religiosity, class, age, and place, which condition both participation in tourism and the experience of travel (Nematpour et al. 2024; Rostami & Trupp 2025). Nisha et al. (2025) explain the marginalisation of female Muslim tourists and the diversity of context-specific strategies through which women navigate segregation, modesty norms, and institutional barriers. Inclusion in tourism enterprises is likewise constrained by factors such as guardianship expectations, licensing regimes, reputational risks, and moral surveillance that limit women's visibility and decision-making authority (Ghaderi et al. 2024; Sharifi-Tehrani et al. 2024). Within this broader pattern, the Iranian case exhibits a particularly dense articulation of ideological and legal regulation of gender, making it a critical setting for examining how inequalities are reproduced, negotiated, and sometimes reworked through tourism (Nikjoo et al. 2025a).

Femininity in Iran has been historically shaped by a dense interplay of patriarchal tradition, religious doctrine, state ideology, and shifting modernities (Najmabadi 2005; Shirazi 2017). Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, the Islamic Republic has institutionalized a specific gender order that constructs the ideal woman as modest, obedient, and domestically oriented (Hoodfar 1991; Najmabadi 2005). Veiling, legal

constraints on mobility, and prescribed gender roles are enforced not only through law but through moral surveillance and ideological discourse embedded in everyday life (Rahbari et al. 2019).

While the state defines femininity narrowly, women have pushed back in more complex ways (Rahbari 2019). This moral regulation has produced both compliance and resistance (Chubin 2020). The state's attempt to define a singular Islamic femininity has inadvertently enabled new forms of self-awareness and critique (Chubin 2020; Mojab 2001). Education, access to the internet, and social media have opened alternative imaginaries, especially among younger generations of women (Mokhles & Sunikka-Blank 2022). This has contributed to the emergence of plural femininities, some aligning with Islamic ideals, others blending religious and secular values, and many challenging dominant norms through aesthetic expression, lifestyle choices, or political engagement (Babakhani 2024).

In this context, agency is not always overtly resistant (Alkhaled 2021; Bayat 2013). Drawing on feminist scholarship, it is essential to understand context-dependent agency, the capacity to act within normative frameworks to reshape them from within (Aghazamani & Hunt 2017; Aghazamani et al. 2020). Many Iranian women participate in religious and domestic life while also redefining what visibility, autonomy, and power mean on their own terms (Mohamadi & Shirazi 2023). Their agency is relational, strategic, and often incremental as it may appear conservative outwardly, but it disrupts gender hierarchies by reconfiguring the meanings of participation and presence (Asadi Zeidabadi 2023).

Legal and cultural limitations such as needing a husband's permission to travel, unequal access to employment, or exclusion from public decision-making continue to shape who can act and how (Nikjoo et al. 2022). Yet, change is not absent. Feminist movements, informal networks, and everyday practices have gradually redefined the boundaries of acceptability and authority (Bayat 2013; Mehtap et al. 2019). These long-term shifts in gender norms and desires for autonomy culminated visibly in the recent "woman, life, freedom" uprising, which did not emerge spontaneously but was rooted in decades of cultural and emotional accumulation (Fadaee 2024; Kohan 2022; Molana et al. 2023; Moqadam 2025; Orazani & Teymoori 2024; Rahbari 2024; Varma & Shaban 2024).

Domestic tourism has also contributed to this transformation. Travelers from urban centers bring with them relaxed dress codes and gender norms, introducing peripheral communities to alternative forms of femininity (Carrasco-Santos et al. 2024; Sharifi-Tehrani et al. 2024). In peripheral tourism destinations, local women encounter new ways of being through these interactions (Bagheri et al. 2024; Ghaderi et al. 2024). Here, the geographical location of Qeshm and Hormuz that are distant from Tehran's political center but highly exposed to domestic visitors has amplified tourism's role as a mediator of gender change. In this study, femininity is thus treated not as a fixed cultural identity, but as a dynamic, adaptive formation shaped by ideology, interaction, and material change.

5 Methodology

5.1 Research philosophy and epistemology

This research is grounded in a philosophical position that views social reality as socially and contextually constructed. I understand social realities as plural, shaped by historical forces, cultural narratives, and relations of power. In this view, deeply held local beliefs, such as religious framing of gender roles, are not seen as natural or timeless but as outcomes of layered socio-historical constructions (Berger & Luckmann 1966). While I recognize the validity of local perspectives, I also hold that certain struggles, such as the global movement toward gender justice or the critique of authoritarianism, represent efforts to shape more inclusive and just realities (Moghadam 2005). These normative values are integral to how I approach and frame the research.

My ontological position closely aligns with constructivism and interpretivism. I view meaning-making as situated within specific social and cultural contexts. At the same time, I draw from critical theory and elements of critical realism, particularly in recognizing that certain social truths, such as the structural marginalization of women, are not merely alternative perspectives but consequences of historically produced inequalities (Sweet 2018). These structures have material effects and demand critical engagement.

Epistemologically, this study adopts a reflexive and dialogical stance. I do not position myself as an external observer but as an active participant in the co-production of knowledge. My subjectivity, shaped by cultural background, gender, and political sensibilities, informed all stages of the research, from field interactions to data interpretation. The narratives shared by participants are treated as situated expressions of lived experiences, while my interpretations are similarly shaped by my positioning within the research relationship.

The aim of this research therefore is not to produce generalizable findings in a positivist sense. Rather, it offers deep, contextual insights that speak to broader patterns of change and contestation. While grounded in the particular histories and geographies of Qeshm and Hormuz Islands, the findings contribute to wider debates on gender, resilience, and socio-political transformation. Their relevance lies not in universal applicability but in offering a situated account of how global structures are negotiated in specific localities (Flyvbjerg 2006).

Theoretical frameworks such as evolutionary economic geography, biopolitics, and resilience are used not simply as analytical tools but as critical lenses supporting the orientation of the research. These perspectives help trace how power operates and how people, particularly women, resist, negotiate, and reshape structures of domination. This study does not claim neutrality. It is committed to challenging oppressive systems and contributing to transformative changes.

5.2 Case selection

This study draws on two neighboring islands in the Persian Gulf, Hormuz and Qeshm, both of which have experienced rapid tourism development over the past two decades. Case selection was guided by the core aims of the research: to explore how tourism-induced change interacts with structures of governance, gender, and culture, and how communities respond through adaptation, negotiation, and resistance. Both islands

offered fertile ground for such inquiry due to the speed and scale of tourism-led transformations.

The insular character of the cases was central to the research design. Islands, by virtue of their bounded geographies, facilitate the observation of dynamic socio-economic shifts and cultural negotiations over relatively short periods (Baldacchino 2004). Their insularity and peripheral location relative to mainland decision-making concentrate flows of people, goods, and regulation into a small number of gateways, which makes allocative and normative shifts legible (Sharpley 2012). These structural features tend to generate path-dependent trajectories (Gounder & Cox 2022), as early configurations of transport, market space, and moral oversight set constraints and opportunities for later participation, especially for women and small-scale actors (Movono & Dahles 2017). This boundedness also made transformations in norms and practices more traceable, as changes were often immediately visible within small, tightly connected communities where shifts in behavior, appearance, or participation could not easily go unnoticed. Hormuz and Qeshm (see Figure 1), in particular, have been shaped by both isolation and strategic positioning. Their geographic proximity was a practical advantage during fieldwork. Over a three-month period, I moved regularly between the two islands by boat, allowing sustained engagement with both contexts.

Hormuz Island was selected as the case for the first paper, which examined tourism as a catalyst for socio-political change. The rapid and organic rise of tourism in Hormuz, initiated largely by youth and artists and amplified through social media, made it an ideal setting. The resulting visibility and perceived cultural openness attracted domestic tourists seeking freer spaces, leading to swift economic dependence on tourism among locals. This alignment between locals and tourists fostered a form of subtle resistance against the Islamic Republic's ideological governance. The convergence of artistic

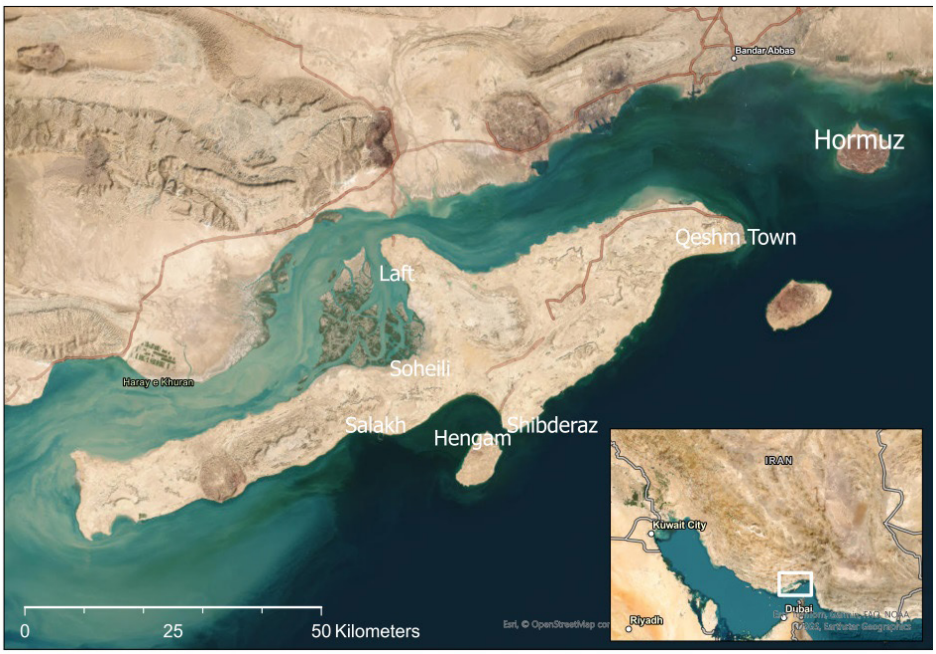


Figure 1. Map of the study area. Source: Google Maps.

practices, youth mobility, and economic necessity produced a unique context to study how tourism dynamics could unsettle authoritarian control. From a geographical perspective, Hormuz represents a micro-scale laboratory of change, where the interaction of insularity, peripherality, and social networks magnifies the visibility of transformation.

The second paper focused on five neighboring villages in the central and western parts of Qeshm Island: Laft, Salakh, Hengam, Soheili, and Shibderaz. These villages shared similar socio-cultural foundations and experienced the emergence of tourism around the same time, yet diverged significantly in how gender roles and women's agency evolved. For instance, in Hengam and Salakh, women became publicly involved in tourism by running stalls, selling crafts, or organizing guest services, whereas in Laft and Soheili, their roles remained largely invisible or confined to domestic contributions. This divergence made the villages ideal cases for comparative analysis of path inclusivity and gender dynamics in community-based tourism. By observing these parallel but differentiated trajectories, the study traced the role of early participation, external interventions, and local socio-economic conditions in shaping gendered opportunities.

The third paper examined Qeshm Island more broadly, focusing on the transformation of the burqa as a site of cultural resilience. A wider lens was required, as the practice and evolution of the burqa were not confined to one village but spanned across the island. The shift in the burqa's meaning, from a symbol of modesty and patriarchal control to one of aesthetic reinvention and economic opportunity, reflected a collective process of cultural adaptation. Qeshm's geographical, economic, and cultural positioning made it an especially appropriate case for exploring how gendered traditions are reinterpreted under the pressures of tourism and broader social change.

5.3 Fieldwork strategies

The methodological approach of this research was ethnographic, combining immersion, informal interaction, observation, and interviews to access complex and often hidden layers of social life on Qeshm and Hormuz Islands. Fieldwork was conducted during the high season of domestic tourism, between January and March 2022, allowing me to observe peak tourism dynamics and their effects on local economies and social relations. It continued with WhatsApp interviews during April and May 2022. A second round of follow-up interviews was conducted remotely in early 2024 to deepen and refine earlier findings.

Fieldwork began with a shadowing phase that was crucial in shaping the research focus (Czarniawska-Joerges 2007). Entering the field with broad questions about tourism-induced change and local resilience, I spent the early weeks observing, participating, and engaging in informal conversations with residents, tourism actors, and officials. This unstructured phase allowed me to identify key local issues, challenge initial assumptions, and recognize dynamics that secondary sources had overlooked. It also influenced the direction of my interview strategy, clarifying which actors were most relevant and shaping the themes that required deeper probing, particularly around gender roles, informality, and governance. I traveled extensively across villages, experienced tourism both as a visitor and as an observer, and initiated pre-interviews with local authorities and informants. During this phase, I also reviewed development plans and familiarized myself with the region's socio-economic landscape. A woman from the research team

accompanied me during engagements with women's groups, contributing to a more gender-sensitive approach.

Building trust was a gradual and intentional process. Prior to entering the field, I obtained official letters of introduction from Iran's national tourism office, which enabled access to provincial governance offices, municipalities, religious figures, and security services. These documents offered legitimacy among authorities but were not disclosed to local communities or tourists, where informal rapport was essential. The Qeshm Geopark and the Free Trade Zone authorities provided valuable networks and unpublished documents, and they facilitated early contacts with tourism entrepreneurs and community leaders. Informal engagements, such as staying in local accommodations and participating in community tourism services, helped nurture trust and ease the transition into more structured interviews.

Participant observation was central to my ethnographic approach. In the early stages, I spent time in villages, ports, markets, and tourism hubs, observing everyday encounters. As the research questions evolved, my observations became more focused on specific groups, such as women entrepreneurs, tourism workers, and informal tourism actors. Photographs were taken selectively to document public spaces and cultural markers without intruding on private lives.

Accessing women's experiences demanded additional care. In conservative settings, many women were hesitant to speak with a male researcher (Nikjoo et al. 2022). A female team member accompanied me in selected interviews, helping create more comfortable spaces for dialogue. Nevertheless, structural gender barriers remained, limiting my access to certain private spheres, particularly among traditional communities.

Fieldwork in this context required a flexible and adaptive approach, shaped not only by theoretical frameworks but also by the political, ethical, and relational realities of conducting research in authoritarian and gendered spaces. The research process depended on ongoing negotiation, responsiveness to evolving risks, and careful attention to the ethical complexities inherent in working across visible and hidden worlds. This adaptive ethnography resonates with arguments in tourism geography that emphasize situated, embodied, and reflexive methodologies as necessary to capture the politics of place and power (see Crossley 2021; Osborne 2019; Ruez & Cockayne 2021).

5.4 Sampling strategy and data collection

Throughout this research, I adopted a flexible and responsive approach to sampling, shaped by the exploratory nature of the study and the relational dynamics of fieldwork. The analysis presented in this thesis draws on an interview dataset of 109 interviews conducted across Hormuz, Qeshm, and their villages, comprising 69 men and 40 women and averaging approximately 81 minutes. This dataset underpins the three studies as follows: Paper 1 on socio-political change in Hormuz includes 46 interviews (32 men, 14 women); Paper 2 on promoting gender inclusivity includes 57 interviews (37 men, 20 women); Paper 3 on cultural resilience includes 15 interviews (13 women, 2 men). Nine participants were interviewed for more than one of the three studies. Interviews were conducted across Hormuz Island, Hengam Island, Qeshm town, and some villages of Qeshm Island including Laft, Salakh, Soheili, Shibderaz, Naqasheh, Borka Khalaf, Guran, Dehkhoda, Tabl, and Gevarzin. Primary fieldwork took place mostly face-to face between January and April 2022, followed by WhatsApp voice-call follow-ups in April–May and a second round in early 2024. All interviews were conducted in Farsi.

My sampling strategy combined purposive and snowball techniques. I prioritized individuals directly or indirectly involved in tourism development or affected by it. This included officials, tourism entrepreneurs, local residents, NGO workers, journalists, religious leaders, environmental activists, unlicensed tour guides, local critics of tourism, and those running home-based enterprises. I sought to capture a spectrum of perspectives across class, gender, and institutional position to understand how tourism development was being contested, negotiated, or embraced in different ways. In Hormuz, which informs Paper 1, the dataset includes locals, authorities, tourists, and non-local residents such as artists and cultural workers. In Qeshm's villages, which inform Papers 2 and 3, I engaged more deeply with community members, women's networks, and inter-village dynamics. This comparative, multi-sited approach reflects a geographical sensitivity to scale, showing how the same process unfolds differently across places depending on local structures, histories, and networks (Lew 2014).

Building trust was essential to the success of the sampling strategy. Early connections facilitated by the Qeshm Geopark and Free Trade Zone authorities proved valuable, as they introduced me to key actors and local tourism figures. In many cases, I built relationships by using local tourism services, such as accommodations and restaurants, which created informal spaces for interaction and later interviews. Snowball sampling expanded these networks, as participants recommended others based on trust, relevance, or shared experiences.

In terms of gender balance, I made intentional efforts to include women wherever possible. Structural features of tourism and governance in Iran created inherent limitations, since women are less present in formal decision-making roles and in sectors such as transportation and infrastructure. Women were active in hospitality, handicrafts, and food services, and their perspectives are central in Papers 2 and 3. In several villages, women formed a greater share of interviewees due to the prominence of home-based hospitality and craft production; this emphasis is reflected in Paper 3's interviews (13 women, 2 men).

While formal interview data formed the core of the analysis, informal conversations, fieldnotes, and photographs enriched understanding and interpretation. Daily fieldnotes were recorded in pocket notebooks and supplemented by secure voice memos stored privately to minimize political risks. These informal materials were not formally coded but informed thematic development and provided contextual insight throughout the analysis. This layered and adaptive approach to sampling and data collection enabled a robust and nuanced account of tourism as a site of negotiation, resilience, and gendered transformation across Qeshm and Hormuz.

5.5 Interview protocol and design

The interview design in this study was based on a semi-structured and iterative approach, shaped by the evolving nature of the fieldwork and the broader commitment to constructivist inquiry. While I worked with sets of guiding questions, I allowed space for adaptation depending on the participant's background, context, and emerging themes throughout the research. Interviews with officials and experts tended to be more issue-focused and structured, while conversations with local residents and tourists often took a more narrative or exploratory form. Across all groups, I prioritized the co-construction of meaning through dialogue rather than strict adherence to a fixed script.

The interviews combined narrative, exploratory, and issue-focused styles. Early interviews were particularly open-ended, serving to surface unexpected themes and refine the emerging focus of the study. As the research progressed, interviews became increasingly targeted. My philosophical positioning in constructivism and interpretivism was reflected in the way I engaged participants, listening actively, encouraging multiple perspectives, and adapting to different viewpoints. At the same time, the influence of evolutionary economic geography and resilience frameworks oriented the discussions toward chronologies of change, historical memory, and adaptive strategies in response to tourism-induced transformations.

While the structure of each interview varied based on the participant group, certain recurring thematic clusters appeared across most conversations:

- The history and evolution of tourism in the area
- Enablers and barriers to tourism development
- Reflections on growth, sustainability, and environmental pressures
- Social and cultural impacts of tourism, including disruptions and benefits
- Resilience and local adaptations to changes
- Gendered dynamics, including women's roles, agency, and visibility

The exact framing of questions was sensitive to context. For example, interviews in Hormuz emphasized the triadic dynamics between locals, tourists, and the theocratic state, while interviews in the villages of Qeshm focused more on internal gender power structures and the uneven distribution of tourism benefits. Officials and decision-makers were asked about policy and governance strategies, whereas local entrepreneurs were encouraged to narrate their lived experiences and adaptive strategies.

The interview guide evolved over time as new issues emerged during fieldwork. For instance, the theme of burqa transformation and cultural resilience only came into focus after several weeks of observation and early conversations. Similarly, early enthusiasm around tourism success stories later gave way to a more critical engagement with unequal development and gendered exclusions. As the research questions shifted, I conducted follow-up interviews with key participants, particularly officials and informed locals, using refined and more targeted questions. In some cases, participants were interviewed two to four times.

Interviews typically began with a broad and accessible opening question: "How did tourism develop in this area?" This allowed participants to share narratives freely, setting a conversational tone while offering rich entry points into deeper themes. Closing questions usually gathered basic demographic information, although these were often integrated naturally into the earlier flow. The language and tone of the interviews were adjusted carefully to match participants' profiles. With officials and experts, I adopted a more formal and academic style. With local residents and workers, conversations were conducted in everyday Farsi, using informal rhythms and expressions that encouraged openness.

Interview settings varied based on participant preferences, ranging from homes and workplaces to public spaces, beaches, and tourism sites. Offering this flexibility helped create more relaxed atmospheres, particularly with community members (Gill et al., 2008). When interviewing women in more conservative environments, a female research assistant accompanied me when appropriate, which proved crucial for building trust and allowing fuller narratives to emerge.

Some interviews profoundly influenced the research direction. One such case was an interview with a prominent local woman who had founded an NGO supporting women's economic empowerment. Her candid reflections on gender norms, sexual taboos, and local practices such as female genital mutilation significantly shifted my analytical focus, from tourism growth alone toward inclusive development and gendered resilience. Encounters like these underscored the importance of maintaining flexibility and responsiveness in the interview design, allowing emerging voices to redirect and deepen the study. This reflective and adaptive interview strategy was central to capturing the contested, plural, and evolving experiences of tourism, resilience, and gender transformation across the diverse contexts of Qeshm and Hormuz. This iterative design mirrors tourism geography's interest in reflexive, situated methodologies that recognize place-specific contingencies rather than seeking universal templates (Crossley 2021; Osborne 2019).

5.6 Ethical issues and data management

Conducting ethnographic research in politically sensitive and socially conservative contexts required continuous ethical reflection and cautious data management (Krause 2021). Ethics in this study was not treated as a procedural checklist but as a situated, relational, and adaptive process that evolved with the field.

Verbal consent was obtained in all interviews. Before each session, I explained the purpose of the research, its academic nature, and the participant's right to withdraw at any time. Many participants expressed a desire to have their names included in the research. However, when sensitive information was shared, particularly critiques of government, security forces, or internal community tensions, participants sometimes asked for those segments not to be attributed. I respected these wishes by anonymizing any content that could risk identification.

In some cases, participants asked me to pause the recording or only take notes. One government official allowed an interview but refused audio recording altogether. While these contributions were not quoted directly, they informed the interpretive process and helped contextualize more formal accounts. I treated these interactions as critical interpretive moments, especially when they illuminated contradictions between public roles and private beliefs.

To gain access to officials, I secured formal letters of introduction from Iran's national tourism office and provincial governance. These letters were essential in building trust with bureaucratic actors, providing reassurance that speaking with me would not endanger their positions. However, I never presented these documents to local communities, tourism workers, or informal actors, as they could have created suspicion or disrupted trust-building. With community members, I approached conversations informally, often through shared meals, casual chats, or participation in local services before initiating formal interviews.

Some officials and participants in sensitive roles spoke candidly off the record. For example, some police officers offered informal critiques of restrictive tourism regulations, expressing sympathy for more open and inclusive tourism environments. While their official narratives remained in the transcripts, I chose not to cite their informal statements directly but used them to interpret state contradictions more critically. Similarly, some locals preferred to speak privately when discussing social

tensions or controversial changes in their communities. These preferences were honored throughout the research process.

Working under an authoritarian regime also required careful risk management. I took precautions when engaging with informal actors such as smugglers, unlicensed tour guides, and hippies. Before accompanying smugglers during a night of livestock movement, an experience that ultimately did not result in actual smuggling, I received informal assurances from high-ranking tourism officials that no serious consequences would follow. Nonetheless, I avoided recording or taking photographs during such encounters. These decisions prioritized participant safety and preserved trust in situations where surveillance or misinterpretation could have serious consequences.

Data security was a key priority. All audio recordings were made on a secure device and transferred every two days to a private cloud server. Original recordings were deleted from the device immediately to prevent risk in case of arrest or search. These practices reduced the likelihood of compromising participant safety, particularly under the unpredictable behavior of Iran's Revolutionary Guard, which often operates independently from formal judicial oversight.

Transcription was carried out with the assistance of a trusted collaborator who worked under a confidentiality agreement. No raw data or transcripts were shared with other parties. I took photographs during fieldwork only with consent and avoided taking photos of women altogether to respect privacy and cultural norms.

Ethical engagement in this study relied on responsiveness, context-awareness, and continuous negotiation. Rather than applying a universal set of procedures, I adapted decisions based on evolving field relationships and risks, always centering the safety, dignity, and agency of participants. The ethical landscape of this research was shaped not just by what I documented, but by what I chose to not document, cite, or record, decisions that were fundamental to maintaining trust and accountability in a politically charged field.

5.7 Positionality and reflexivity

This research was shaped not only by methodological design and field access but also by my identity, political commitments, and epistemological stance. As a young Iranian man conducting ethnographic research in Qeshm and Hormuz, I was both an insider and an outsider, at times privileged by familiarity, and at other times distanced by gender, geography, and worldview. My positionality influenced what I was able to see, what was shown to me, and how I interpreted the field.

Being Iranian and speaking Farsi enabled natural interaction with participants across all groups. This insider status at the national level granted me access to state officials who might have rejected an international researcher. Shared cultural references and familiarity with the sociopolitical landscape allowed for informal conversations and trust-building, particularly among locals and tourists (see Frohlick & Harrison 2008). However, I was still a non-local in Qeshm and Hormuz, and this outsider position had mixed effects. In some cases, locals spoke more openly with me because I was viewed as a temporary visitor. In others, I lacked the embedded knowledge and lived experience required to fully grasp local dynamics, especially in more traditional villages.

Gender posed a more visible and structural limitation. In traditional settings across Iran, gendered spatial norms are sharply drawn, men occupy public and outdoor spaces,

while women often remain in private domains. As a male researcher, I had relatively easy access to men in public spaces, such as ports or tourism markets, but I could not easily enter feminine spaces such as handicraft workshops or private homes. I was only able to speak directly with women who had already crossed certain social thresholds, those who managed tourism businesses, ran local NGOs, or interacted regularly with outsiders. The voices of more traditional or home-based women were largely inaccessible to me. I learned about them indirectly, through the accounts of interviewed women. In some cases, a female research assistant accompanied me during interviews, which made it possible to access more gender-sensitive narratives, though barriers remained.

My political and ethical orientation also influenced how I interpreted the data. I hold a critical stance toward authoritarianism and a strong commitment to gender justice and secular democratic values. These convictions informed the types of stories that drew my attention, especially those involving resistance, resilience, and transformation. However, I made deliberate efforts to include a wide range of perspectives, including those of religious leaders, conservative men, and officials whose views did not align with my own. During analysis, I coded all relevant perspectives, regardless of personal agreement. Still, my interpretations, particularly in the discussion sections of the papers, often leaned toward the values I hold, especially when analyzing power imbalances and women's agency.

Being in the field also raised ethical and emotional dilemmas. For example, I interviewed police officers whose official narratives aligned with the state's ideological position, but in informal moments, they expressed hopes for a more open and tolerant tourism environment. Their off-record thoughts gave me insight into the contradictions embedded in their roles, but I could not reflect these complexities fully in formal writing. I felt ethically conflicted, capturing their formal voice without conveying their private ambivalence felt reductive, yet citing them otherwise would have risked their safety.

Writing about gender created similar tensions. In Soheili, for instance, I was warmly welcomed by male tourism entrepreneurs who emphasized how they consulted their wives in all decisions. Their sincerity was clear, and I appreciated their generosity. But I also observed that women remained largely behind the scenes, without visibility or independent income. While my analysis reflected this gendered division of labor, I occasionally questioned whether my framing was fair to local men and women who might genuinely embrace traditional roles. These moments forced me to confront the weight of interpretation and the distance between my normative commitments and local realities.

Throughout this study, I remained aware that the research is never neutral. I entered people's lives as a visitor with institutional authority and left with stories that I interpreted and published. Reflexivity, for me, meant not only acknowledging bias but also confronting the ethical and representational responsibilities that come with fieldwork. Accepting the partial and situated nature of knowledge was central to my process. This reflexive orientation guided both how I listened and how I wrote, seeking to remain critical without being extractive, and committed without becoming blind to complexity.

5.8 Data analysis, validation, and trustworthiness

Data analysis in this study followed a multi-stage, iterative process grounded in Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework. I adopted an inductive approach,

beginning each paper with three rounds of open coding to allow themes to emerge from the data rather than being shaped by predefined theoretical categories. This bottom-up strategy helped me remain responsive to local narratives and flexible in tracking evolving research questions.

Each paper followed its own analytic path, reflecting its specific focus and dataset. For the first paper on Hormuz, codes were developed thematically and then organized under three stakeholder categories: locals, tourists, and the theocratic state. Initially, I included non-local residents as a separate group, but after feedback from co-authors, their perspectives were integrated into the three main categories to sharpen the focus on core power dynamics.

In the second paper, which focused on five villages in western Qeshm, I developed a case-sensitive coding system. All interviews related to Qeshm and neighboring areas were transferred into Atlas.ti. During open coding, I began each code with a village-specific tag such as "So-" for Soheili or "L-" for Laft, to preserve locality-specific meanings. This tagging system allowed me to analyze each village both independently and in comparison with others. For instance, codes like "So-role of taxi" or "L-Imam's interference" described localized dynamics, while general codes such as "G-tourism risk" referred to insights relevant across all five villages. This structure enabled cross-village comparison while remaining attentive to the internal diversity within each site.

For the third paper, which examined the transformation of the burqa, the analysis was organized chronologically, following three emergent stages: culturing, de-culturing, and re-culturing. These categories reflected recurring patterns in participant narratives about how the burqa's meaning, function, and visibility shifted over time. The structure was later refined through follow-up conversations in 2024, which helped clarify temporal transitions and add nuance to participant interpretations.

Contradictory perspectives were not treated as noise but as important reflections of contested realities. Within villages and across groups, I encountered diverging views on tourism, gender, and social change. I included these multiple perspectives and gave more analytical weight to themes that appeared most frequently across the dataset. At the same time, I preserved less common or dissenting views to highlight tensions and complexities.

Theoretical frameworks shaped the interpretation phase rather than the coding process. Evolutionary economic geography provided the conceptual backbone for understanding tourism as an emergent path shaped by historical, spatial, and socio-cultural factors. While evolutionary economic geography does not offer predefined analytical categories, its emphasis on adaptation, lock-in, and path-dependence guided how I read and organized change. Biopolitics in the first paper, and social and cultural resilience in the second and third, offered additional lenses to interpret power relations and adaptive responses to socio-political pressures.

To ensure trustworthiness, I used multiple strategies. In the first and second papers, two co-authors, both experts in tourism, resilience, and gender, reviewed my themes after initial coding and contributed to the refinement process. In the first paper, this collaboration led to restructuring stakeholder categories to better focus on the central dynamic between locals, the state, and tourists. In the third paper, I conducted participant validation by revisiting key informants in 2024. Sharing the emerging three-stage framework with them prompted feedback that helped sharpen sub-themes and strengthen conceptual clarity.

Working with over 10,000 minutes of interviews across diverse social groups and geographies was intellectually demanding. Not all insights could be explored equally, and

I prioritized material that best served the evolving focus of each paper. Nevertheless, the iterative nature of fieldwork and analysis meant I often revisited earlier assumptions, reframed questions, and returned to the data with new lenses. In some cases, particularly in the third paper, I recognized in hindsight that additional questions could have deepened certain lines of inquiry. These moments, while inevitable in iterative qualitative research, were also generative.

Finally, working in Farsi and writing in English introduced certain limits. Some expressions, cultural references, or affective tones could not be fully translated. Moreover, journal space constraints required me to shorten many quotations, sometimes at the cost of narrative richness. While these constraints shaped the presentation of voices, I attempted to preserve their depth through careful paraphrasing and contextual framing.

5.9 Methodological limitations

While this study was grounded in extensive fieldwork and rich empirical engagement, it was shaped by a number of methodological limitations. These constraints reflect the realities of conducting qualitative research in politically sensitive, gendered, and logistically complex environments.

One of the most significant limitations was the gender imbalance among participants. Although I intentionally sought to include women wherever possible, less than half of my interviewees were women. This reflects broader structural inequalities in Iran, where formal roles in tourism, governance, and investment are predominantly occupied by men. I was able to interview nearly all women available in these positions, as well as many engaged in hospitality, food production, and handicrafts. However, the voices of women in more traditional or home-based roles, particularly in conservative villages like Laft and Soheili, remained largely inaccessible to me as a male researcher. These women were often present only through others' descriptions, limiting the range of firsthand perspectives I could include.

Relatedly, gendered space and cultural norms restricted my ethnographic access. In Iran's traditional settings, many aspects of women's daily lives take place in private or gender-segregated spaces (Nikjoo et al. 2022). While a female assistant accompanied me for some interviews, I could not immerse myself in the informal networks or everyday experiences of less visible women. This was a significant limitation, especially given the research's focus on gender dynamics and inclusivity.

Political risks and sensitivities also constrained access. Although I engaged with groups often excluded from formal narratives, such as smugglers, hippies, and unlicensed tour operators, I avoided recording, photographing, or formally interviewing these actors during high-risk encounters. These decisions, made to protect participants and maintain trust, meant that some of the most sensitive dynamics could not be documented in depth.

The seasonality of tourism in Qeshm and Hormuz created another constraint. Fieldwork occurred during the high season, when tourism was most active and visible. This timing allowed me to observe key dynamics of tourism interaction and economic participation. However, it excluded off-season experiences, when unemployment rises and communities may face different kinds of social or economic pressure. Capturing both seasonal cycles would have provided a more balanced view of tourism's impact.

As in many other ethnographic research, my presence shaped social dynamics. In some settings, especially when I introduced myself formally, participants altered their

tone or behavior. To minimize this, I sometimes delayed disclosing my researcher role, particularly with boat operators or informal tourism workers, allowing more candid interactions. Still, I remain aware that some degree of performativity and filtering was inevitable.

There were also moments when I chose not to document what I observed, especially in politically sensitive or ethically ambiguous situations. For example, when joining smugglers or unregulated tourism groups, I refrained from recording or taking notes to protect participants. I also avoided photographing local women altogether, even with consent, in deference to cultural norms and personal ethics. These decisions, while necessary, limited the granularity of my documentation.

From an analytical standpoint, the volume and diversity of the data posed a challenge. With more than 10,000 minutes of recorded interviews, it was not possible to engage every insight in equal depth. I prioritized material that best aligned with the evolving focus of each paper, while acknowledging that some valuable perspectives remained underexplored. In the third paper, for instance, I later recognized that additional questions could have deepened the analysis of cultural resilience.

Finally, conducting interviews in Farsi and writing in English introduced linguistic and expressive limitations. Certain phrases, emotions, or idioms did not translate fully, and journal publication constraints often forced me to condense or paraphrase participant voices. These reductions sometimes muted the narrative richness of the data, despite efforts to preserve meaning through context.

Despite these limitations, I approached each stage of the research with ethical care, critical reflection, and methodological transparency. Acknowledging what could not be fully accessed or represented is not a weakness but a necessary part of doing reflexive qualitative research, especially in settings shaped by layered inequalities and political constraints.

6 Tourism, gender relations, and socio-political changes in Iran

This chapter presents the main empirical findings of the thesis, which is built on three interrelated ethnographic case studies conducted in Qeshm and Hormuz islands in southern Iran. While each study explores a different facet of socio-economic transformation all three converge on a central concern: how tourism intersects with pre-existing structures of power and inequality in a conservative society under a theocratic ruling system. Drawing from the evolutionary economic geography framework, this chapter traces the multiple layers through which tourism both unsettles and reorder socio-economical norms.

Rather than positioning tourism as a linear catalyst of empowerment, the findings point to more nuanced and uneven processes of change. Tourism in Iran emerges within a highly regulated society where authoritarian power operates vertically through ideological control, and horizontally through patriarchal, moral, and communal norms. In such a context, any form of social transformation particularly regarding gender is neither spontaneous nor uniformly welcomed. Instead, it unfolds in frictional, negotiated, and adaptive ways.

To make sense of these dynamics, the chapter begins by situating tourism-related changes within a broader landscape of chronic and overlapping shocks faced by Iranian society. It then explores how domestic tourism opens grey zones of public life and enables everyday forms of resilience. From there, the analysis turns to the frictions tourism generates within rural communities and the adaptive responses of the society. The final section highlights the central role of women in this transformation process, showing how tourism has reconfigured gendered visibility, labor, and identity. While each section draws on distinct case studies and conceptual contributions from the three papers, together they address the thesis's core concern: how tourism intersects with structures of power and enables incremental yet meaningful socio-political change.

6.1 Chronic shocks in authoritarian Iran

Resilience must be understood in relation to what it responds to. In Iran, similar to many other regions, shocks are not limited to sudden events like earthquakes or economic crises. Rather, they are often chronic and cumulative, embedded in everyday life through political, ideological, economic, cultural, and informational pressures. These overlapping disruptions create prolonged stress that shapes how people live, adapt, and imagine alternatives.

The Islamic Republic's biopolitical governance especially its regulation of women's bodies and behaviors acts as a persistent ideological shock. Mandatory hijab laws, moral surveillance, and ideological filtering extend into education, employment, and public space. These mechanisms enforce compliance through laws, daily routines, symbolic pressure, and so on. In parallel, economic shocks, particularly those intensified by economic sanctions and inflation have destabilized household finances. In relation to tourism, these conditions have made international travel less affordable and increased the tendency toward domestic travel.

Cultural and moral expectations create another layer of tension. These operate between patriarchal norms and the different expectations of new generations and women. In many families and communities, gender norms and moral policing continue to shape how women and youth are expected to behave and appear.

Women and youth resist both vertical and horizontal power structures that limit their ability to live as they wish at home and in public. Tourism provides a temporary way to step outside these pressures. Domestic tourism is more accessible and allows especially young people to escape urban restrictions, creating informal campsites in deserts and along coastlines, often far from the control of the state.

Technological change has further affected this picture. Social media platforms like Instagram and Telegram have opened semi-public online spaces where people, especially women, can share lifestyles and desires which this itself challenge dominant moral norms in the traditional society. This digital visibility produces continuous friction between everyday experiences and official ideology.

People in Iran respond to these pressures with adaptation, resilience, and new forms of agency. The state resists social change, seeing it as a threat to its ideology, but no system can fully prevent people from changing. This persistent disruption creates the conditions where tourism is not just a leisure activity, but one among several spaces where social negotiation becomes visible, especially in how space, gender, and visibility are redefined. The next section turns to domestic tourism as one such arena of everyday resilience and contestation.

6.2 Tourism and challenging authoritarianism through resilience

In Iran's theocratic system, state control is deeply embedded in everyday life, extending beyond formal laws to shape how people move, behave in public, dress, and present themselves, particularly with regard to the visibility of women. This control is exercised through official surveillance and legal mechanisms, regulation of space and the symbolic disciplining of bodies, especially in public environments. Figure 2 represents some of biopolitical actions of Islamic Republic in order to control locals and tourists in Hormuz. In this context, tourism is promoted by the state for its economic benefits, but at the same time it is treated with suspicion, as it provides gray zones where the reach of ideological control weakens. This section explores how domestic tourists, through their bodily presence and everyday activities, participate in subtle acts that challenge the biopolitical order of the Islamic Republic.

In recent years, destinations such as Hormuz Island have become popular among urban youth and women who are searching for spaces where they can experience a greater degree of personal freedom. Unlike larger cities, where morality patrols are integrated into daily life and enforce strict behavioral codes, Hormuz has developed into a relatively relaxed setting due to its geographical remoteness, the inconsistent presence of enforcement forces, and the community's growing reliance on tourism for income. In this condition, tourists engage in activities that are controlled in major cities like dressing freer or riding motorcycle by women. Although these acts may not be intended as political statements, within a system that closely monitors and restricts everyday life, even ordinary desires to relax and enjoy oneself can take on political significance.

The circulation of images online showing young people dancing on beaches, camping in mixed-gender groups, or posing in freer clothing reflects more than just leisure activities; it represents the emergence of new social behaviors and claims to public space that challenge official definitions of morality. When these actions are performed collectively and repeatedly in public, they begin to undermine the symbolic power of

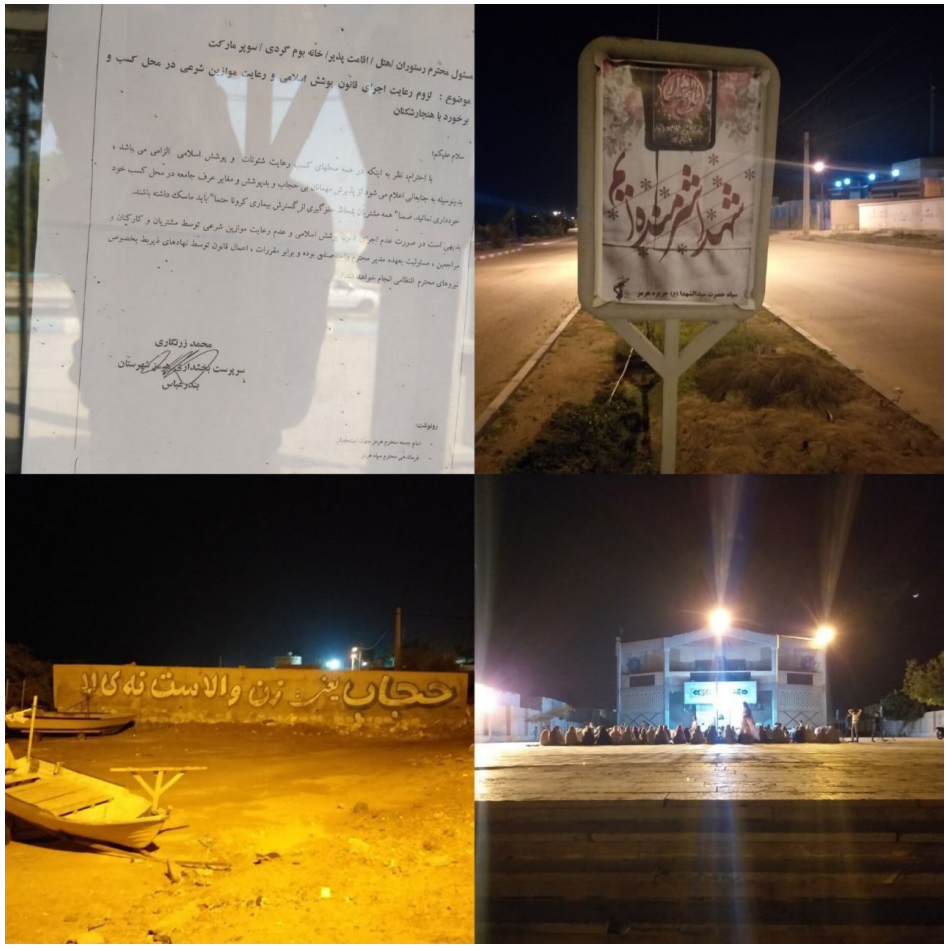


Figure 2. The top left image shows a letter sent from the regional governor to all restaurants, accommodations, and shops, threatening them with closure by law if they accept female tourists with inappropriate hijab. A restaurant has stuck the letter on the window to convey that they are forced to comply by the government's orders. The top right image displays one of the numerous billboards used for hijab propaganda. This particular one reads, "Martyrs, we are ashamed {that we failed to control hijab}," exploiting those who were killed in Iran-Iraq war to promote the state's ideology. The bottom left image captures a wall writing that says, "Hijab means woman is superior, not a commodity." The bottom right image portrays a religious gathering where the Friday Imam speaks about Islamic morals and the role of Hormuzi citizens in preventing vice. Photos by the author.

state-enforced norms. The state's control becomes less effective when many individuals, through small acts, collectively alter the meaning and use of public spaces.

Despite this, tensions persist. For instance, the presence of morality patrols on the island, although sporadic, still generates moments of conflict. However, these confrontations are usually managed through informal strategies. Tourists may temporarily adjust their appearance when patrols arrive and resume their previous behavior once the patrols leave. Local service providers often play a mediating role, advising visitors on how to behave in such situations, when to comply, and when it is safe to return to more relaxed practices. Officially, business owners are instructed not to serve women who do not follow hijab rules, yet in practice many prioritize their economic survival.

As one restaurant owner explained, refusing service to women without hijab would lead to a significant loss of customers:

> *"If I were to stop 80% of them from entering every day, I would go bankrupt. Is this correct or not?"*

It suggests that strict compliance with ideological demands is often impractical in everyday economic life. These examples illustrate the contradictions that arise between state ideology and the lived realities of tourism. What emerges is an informal understanding between tourists and locals, where both sides accommodate each other for mutual benefit. While some residents may hold conservative values privately, many tolerate or even support tourists' behavior because of the income and opportunities tourism provides. In this way, an unspoken cooperation is established, in which the rigid norms of the state are softened through everyday interactions and practical needs.

Tourism, in this context, becomes more than a leisure activity since it functions as a space where the limits of state control are tested and sometimes redefined. The regime's dependence on ideological control, especially over gender roles and public morality, is challenged by the presence of alternative norms introduced through tourism. The state's limited ability to fully enforce its dress codes, prevent gender mixing, or control visual representations on social media highlights the gaps between its ideological ambitions and its actual capacity to govern social life. These everyday actions, though often small and seemingly apolitical, create disruptions that slowly reshape the social landscape.

What gives these practices their transformative potential is precisely the fact that they do not always appear confrontational. Many tourists are simply seeking pleasure, comfort, and the ability to express themselves without fear. Yet their actions, when repeated and normalized in public spaces, gradually contribute to social change. This change is neither sudden nor dramatic, but it accumulates over time through shared practices, repeated behaviors, and embodied experiences. Figure 3 shows a photo shared by Iranian female tourists on Instagram. This online circulation of travel photos with clothes that do not follow the moral standards of Iran's theocratic ruling system helps women reclaim space, both through physical presence and through online representations. This synergistic cycle encourages more women to act against biopolitical control in their travels and everyday life.

This analysis does not aim to present tourism as a straightforward or ideal form of resistance. It recognizes the complexities, including the risks of commodification, occasional friction between tourists and local residents, and the constant threat of state backlash. Nevertheless, it argues that within these constraints, tourism can create spaces for everyday resilience. These spaces allow individuals to experience a degree of freedom from ideological control, even if only briefly, and in doing so, they reveal the tensions and limitations within the regime's system of moral governance. By occupying public space, circulating alternative images, and simply being present in ways that contradict the official order, tourists and locals together contribute to a quiet but persistent reimagining of everyday life.

While this section has focused primarily on vertical power relations, highlighting the interactions between citizens and the state, the following sections will turn to horizontal dynamics. These include the internal negotiations within communities themselves, particularly how tourism influences gender roles, social hierarchies, and the adaptive strategies employed by local residents, especially women, in response to ongoing change.

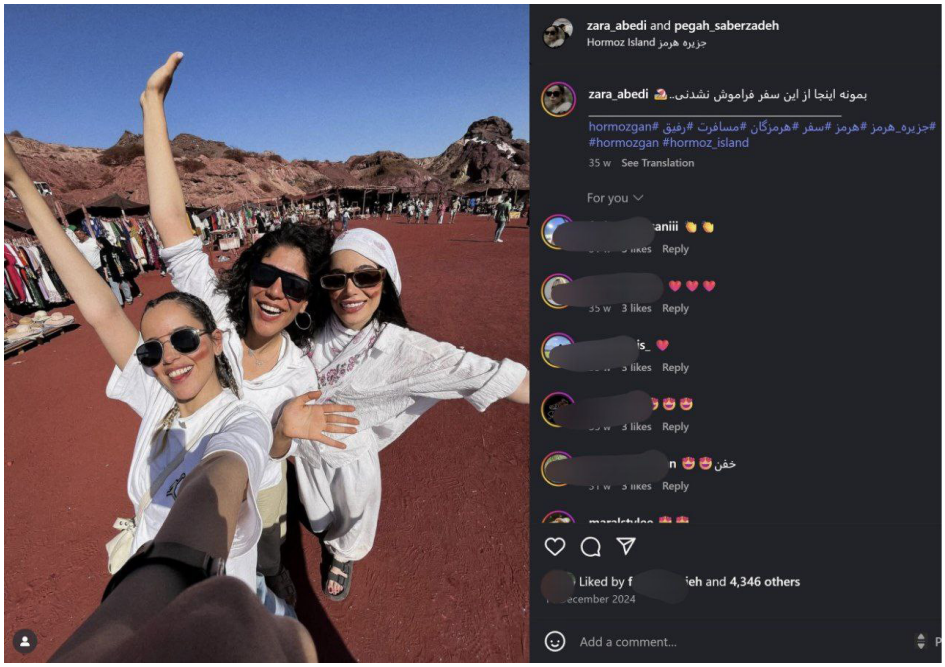


Figure 3. A photo shared on a public Instagram page shows three Iranian girls capturing a moment from their trip to Hormuz Island. Their clothing does not conform to the moral standards of the Islamic Republic. Photo from the public Instagram pages of Zara_abedi and Pegah_saberzadeh, published on December 14, 2024.

6.3 Tourism as a shock to the socio-economic setting of local communities

While tourism may provide a buffer against vertical ideological domination, it also acts as a disruptive force within local communities. It brings opportunities but at the same time friction, as new behaviors, values, and expectations begin to unsettle the existing cultural order. In Hormuz and Qeshm islands tourism emerged not into a vacuum but into a complex social fabric structured by patriarchal hierarchies, cultural conservatism, and economic uncertainty. The arrival of tourists, many of whom carried more urban or secular values, introduced a series of socio-economic shocks that placed pressure on these traditional systems.

These shocks unfolded across multiple layers of village life, creating tensions not only between tourists and hosts, but also within the communities themselves. They revealed generational divides, exposed gender inequalities, and created new points of negotiation between the old and the new. In Hormuz for example, tour guiding with three-wheelers (see Figure 4) has become the most common tourism job for local men, while women increasingly engage in cooking for tourists, managing accommodations, and selling handicrafts. The involvement of nearly all segments of society in tourism has intensified internal negotiations over social issues, particularly women's hijab. As a male restaurant owner in Hormuz explained: As a male restaurant owner in Hormuz explains: "*Our WhatsApp group constantly buzzes with discussions about hijab. Even government employees understand the island's dependence on tourism.*" A central axis of these local shocks was the body. Tourists, and especially women, often dressed in ways that were considered inappropriate by local standards. The presence of unveiled women, instances of public affection, and music playing in shared spaces introduced unfamiliar public expressions

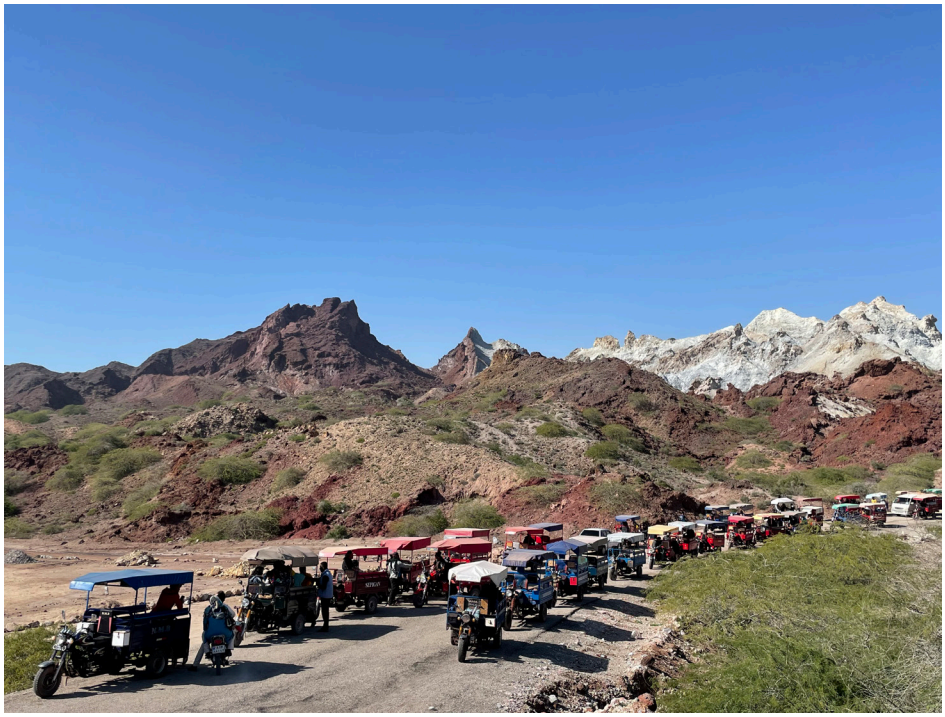


Figure 4. Local male tour guides with their three-wheelers waiting for tourists near a natural attraction in Hormuz. Photo by the author.

that clashed with established expectations. In villages where gender segregation had long been practiced, these changes were difficult to ignore. For some, the discomfort was immediate and visceral. As one resident of Laft remarked:

> *"Some travelers want to come with their girlfriend to stay in local houses in Laft and spend the night. This offends people. What do they think our house is, a brothel?"*

Yet the tension was not only rooted in moral judgment. It was also symbolic, reflecting shifts in generational perception and aspiration. Many younger villagers, particularly women with access to education or online platforms, found in tourists a visible contrast to their own constrained roles. The freedom tourists displayed in dress, movement, and speech became a point of fascination and, for some, a source of inspiration. This admiration occasionally translated into small but significant changes in behavior, such as relaxing personal dress codes, experimenting with social media, or seeking independent income from tourism-related work. These shifts were rarely discussed openly, but they often led to friction within families, where elders framed the changes as a departure from shared values. For instance, a local male restaurant owner in Hormuz said:

> *"At the cost of my 10-year-old daughter growing up and asking, 'Dad, why are they all so free and why can't we be free too?' Is it [tourism] worth this price?"*

Still, the emergence of internal debate, negotiation, and gradual adjustment suggests that the meanings of tradition were not fixed but continually evolving. Tourism also

altered the local economy in ways that unsettled existing power structures. In several villages, activities such as running homestays, preparing food for visitors, or selling handicrafts became new forms of labor. Although these roles were often seen as secondary or informal, they offered women a pathway to public participation and financial independence. Those with fewer restrictions or supportive male relatives were more likely to engage in these opportunities. Over time, this created new divisions within communities. Differences emerged between women who participated in tourism and those who did not, between families who adjusted to the new economy and those who held back, and between expectations tied to domestic roles and new forms of public engagement. These divisions were subtle but influential, reshaping how inclusion and exclusion were defined within village life.

The experiences of the six villages included in this study demonstrate that community responses to tourism were far from uniform. They were shaped by a variety of factors, including the legacy of earlier economic structures, the strength of local leadership, the level of exposure to outside influences, and the visibility of role models, particularly women who navigated these changes on their own terms. In Soheili, for example, tourism remained centered around male-dominated activities such as boating and restaurant services, with women continuing to work behind the scenes. In contrast, Hengam presented a different picture. There, women were economically present, highly visible in public spaces, managing their own stalls in the beach bazaar and interacting directly with tourists. In this regard, Mania, a local women entrepreneur explains:

> *"In other villages, men control money, keeping women in the backstage [...] In Hengam, however, money and power are in the hands of women."*

The divergent outcomes across villages show that tourism can take different forms, and its impact depends on how each community engages with it, both practically and culturally. Despite the disruptions, these changes did not result in collapse or widespread rejection. Communities responded in varied and dynamic ways. Some individuals chose to resist the influence of tourism, others embraced its possibilities, and many adopted a cautious or selective approach, balancing familiarity with adaptation. These responses are not easily categorized as either acceptance or opposition. Instead, they reflect a broader pattern of community resilience, one that unfolds through negotiation, adjustment, and the slow reworking of boundaries and norms. The next section explores this process of resilience in greater depth, examining how communities navigate the pressures of change while attempting to preserve a sense of cohesion and continuity.

6.4 Community resilience in adapting to tourism

In the face of tourism-related shocks, communities do not merely resist but they adapt. This adaptation is neither passive nor uniform but rather shaped by local histories, social hierarchies, and shifting possibilities. It involves selective appropriation, negotiation of values, and strategic engagement with tourism as both an economic opportunity and a cultural disturbance. Across the villages of Qeshm Island and Hormuz Island, community resilience did not appear as a return to a prior state of stability, but instead unfolded as a slow and uneven reordering of norms, livelihoods, and identities. This process reflected both continuity and change, and revealed how communities recalibrate in response to external pressures.

The six villages examined in this study including Laft, Soheili, Salakh, Shibderaz, Hengam, and Hormuz, each followed a distinct trajectory. While they faced similar types of disruption, including contact with urban tourists, shifts in gender dynamics, and growing pressures to commercialize cultural life, the ways they responded were shaped by internal variables. Leadership structures, degrees of urban exposure, and the presence or absence of women who could act as role models played a significant role in defining the paths each village took.

In Laft and Soheili, adaptation was shaped and limited by entrenched patriarchal norms and traditional moral authority. In Laft, where the village head also served as the local Imam, tourism was regarded with moral suspicion rather than embraced as a tool for development. Although women in Laft possessed valuable cultural skills, including handicrafts that had gained UNESCO recognition, they remained largely invisible in the public sphere. Economic life continued to revolve around the male-dominated smuggling economy, reducing the social pressure to involve women in tourism. Here, resilience among women was expressed through quiet forms of labor and subtle visibility, maintained through modest compromise and concealed agency.

Soheili presented a more layered situation. Despite having better infrastructure and a relatively high dependency on tourism, women in Soheili were similarly marginalized from public-facing roles. Men controlled the main sources of income, including mangrove boat tours and hospitality services, while women remained in kitchens or small workshops, their work contributing significantly to the local economy but receiving little social recognition. In Soheili, tourism created economic integration without social empowerment. Women's labor was essential, yet their agency remained restricted by the norms that governed public participation.

In contrast, Salakh and Shibderaz provided examples of more inclusive adaptation, though their pathways differed. In Salakh, internal leadership by women such as Zinat (see Figure 5) and Tahereh played a decisive role in shaping tourism development. These women leveraged their social status and family networks to establish accommodations, manage markets, and organize performances. Through their efforts, other women were encouraged to participate, which gradually expanded female visibility and redefined gender norms within the village. Economic participation brought with it greater confidence and spatial mobility, and over time, tourism became not only a source of income but also a space for renegotiating what it meant to be a woman in Salakh.

Shibderaz followed a different path. Tourism development there was catalyzed by external interventions, especially the national sea turtle conservation project, NGOs and small UN initiative. These organizations engaged local men, softened resistance, and introduced new roles for women in the tourism economy, particularly through handicrafts and home-based services. While this externally induced inclusion lacked the organic leadership found in Salakh, it nonetheless created opportunities for women who had previously remained inside their homes. Some began to travel to exhibitions, produce crafts, and contribute to the family income. However, when the external support declined, male dominance in the public sphere reasserted itself, and many of these gains were rolled back. The experience in Shibderaz illustrates that externally facilitated change can enable inclusion but may also remain vulnerable if local power relations are not simultaneously transformed.

Hengam represents the clearest case of transformative adaptation. Owing to its history of displacement, persistent poverty, and the relative weakness of patriarchal norms, women in Hengam were able to claim public space rapidly as tourism expanded. The beach bazaar as shown in Figure 6, emerged as a distinctly female space where

Figure 5. Zinat standing at the entrance of her accommodation, the first tourism lodging established in the entire western part of Qeshm Island. Zinat is the most well-known figure in Qeshm's villages, serving as a role model for many local women. Two films have been made about her life. Photo from the public Instagram page of Tarikhe_zanane_iran, published April 17, 2024.

women engaged in selling goods, socializing, and interacting with visitors without relying on male intermediaries. Although this shift provoked tensions, particularly among some men who expressed unease at their declining authority, it marked a clear departure from the past. In Hengam, resilience was not about absorbing change but about reshaping the community itself. Through visibility, economic participation, and collective initiative, women transformed their position within the local social structure.

A similar transformation took place in Hormuz, though through different mechanisms. As tourism grew rapidly, women who had initially remained in the background began organizing food stalls, offering accommodations, and participating in cultural activities. The steady influx of urban tourists, the presence of artistic events, and the attention of external media created a space where traditional constraints were harder to enforce. Local resistance to women's public presence weakened, and over time, women's participation in tourism became a source of pride for the community. Economic necessity, coupled with daily interactions with tourists and the islands' reputation as socially freer spaces, pushed the local community toward a new socio-economic equilibrium in which female agency and tourism became mutually reinforcing.

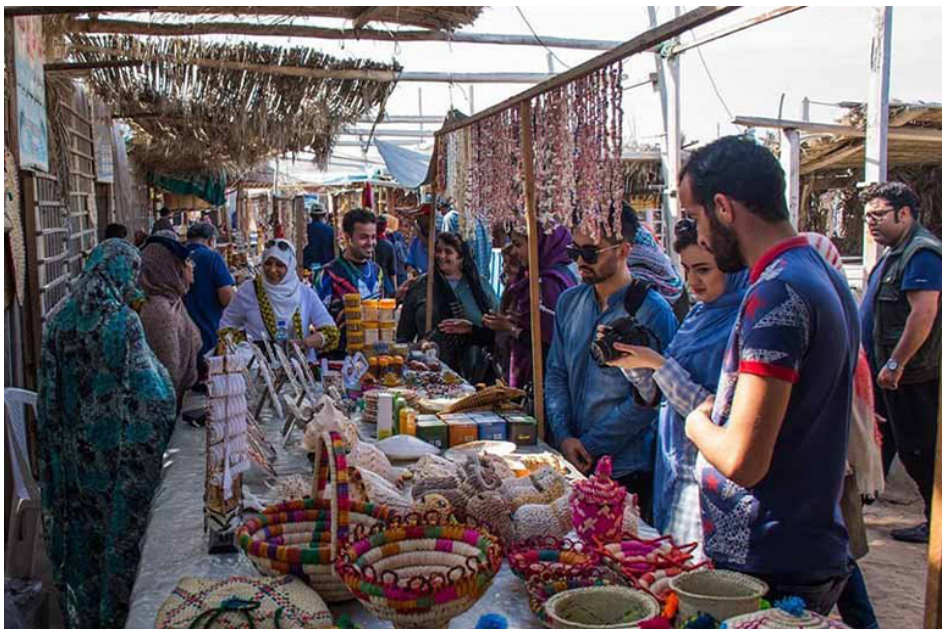


Figure 6. The local market of Hengam, a space managed entirely by women, which has become a central site of visibility, economic participation, and interaction with tourists. Photo from www.itto.org.

In all these communities, adaptation was not only economic or spatial, but it also involved cultural transformation. One of the clearest examples of this is the burqa, with its traditional and contemporary forms shown in Figures 7 and 8, respectively. Once a symbol of modesty and religious discipline, the burqa was reinterpreted by local women as an aesthetic and economic object. Through design, performance, and craft production, women infused the burqa with new meaning, turning it into a source of income and self-expression. This process exemplifies cultural resilience, where continuity is maintained not through rigid preservation but through creative adaptation.

Cultural resilience was also evident in how communities responded to the expectations of tourists. Rather than strictly adhering to tradition or completely adopting external norms, many women developed hybrid practices that were meaningful both to themselves and to visitors. They created forms of cultural exchange that protected local identity while meeting the demands of the tourism market. These efforts reflect a broader pattern of adaptive capacity, where cultural negotiation becomes an integral part of economic and social transformation.

Human communities, therefore, do not simply bounce back or move forward but they branch, hybridize, and adjust, even if these changes are often uneven.. This complex pattern of adaptation opens a window into the transformative potential of tourism in conservative settings but also its limits. In the following section, attention turns to women more directly, as their evolving role within these transformations has become central to understanding the broader socio-economic changes taking place.

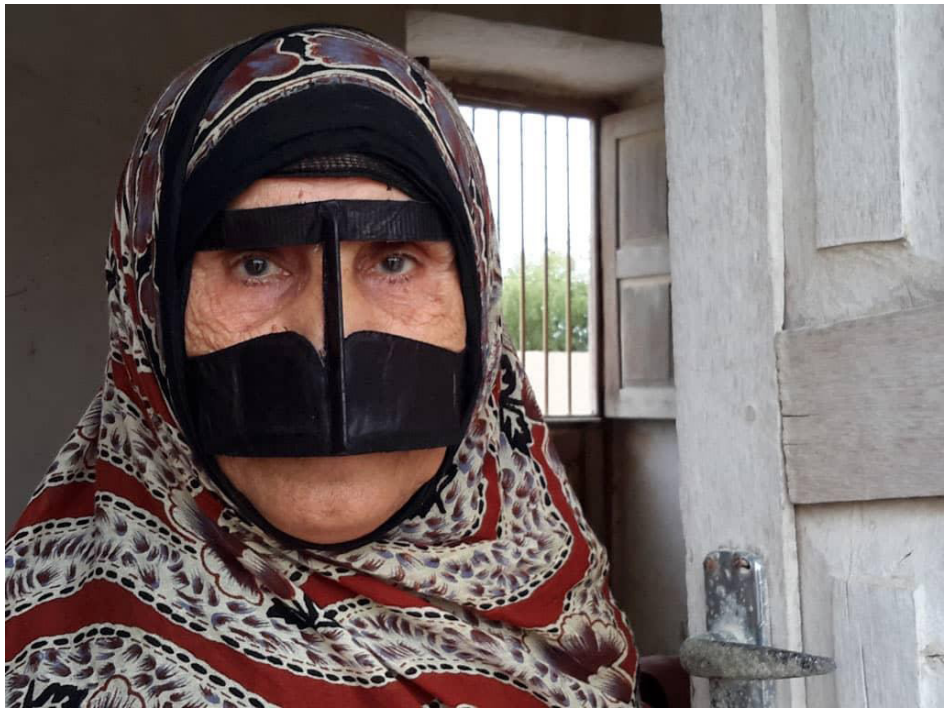


Figure 7. A local woman wearing a traditional burqa, a form gradually abandoned by younger generations due to its historically obligatory nature and association with modesty. Photo by Ahmad Nadalian.

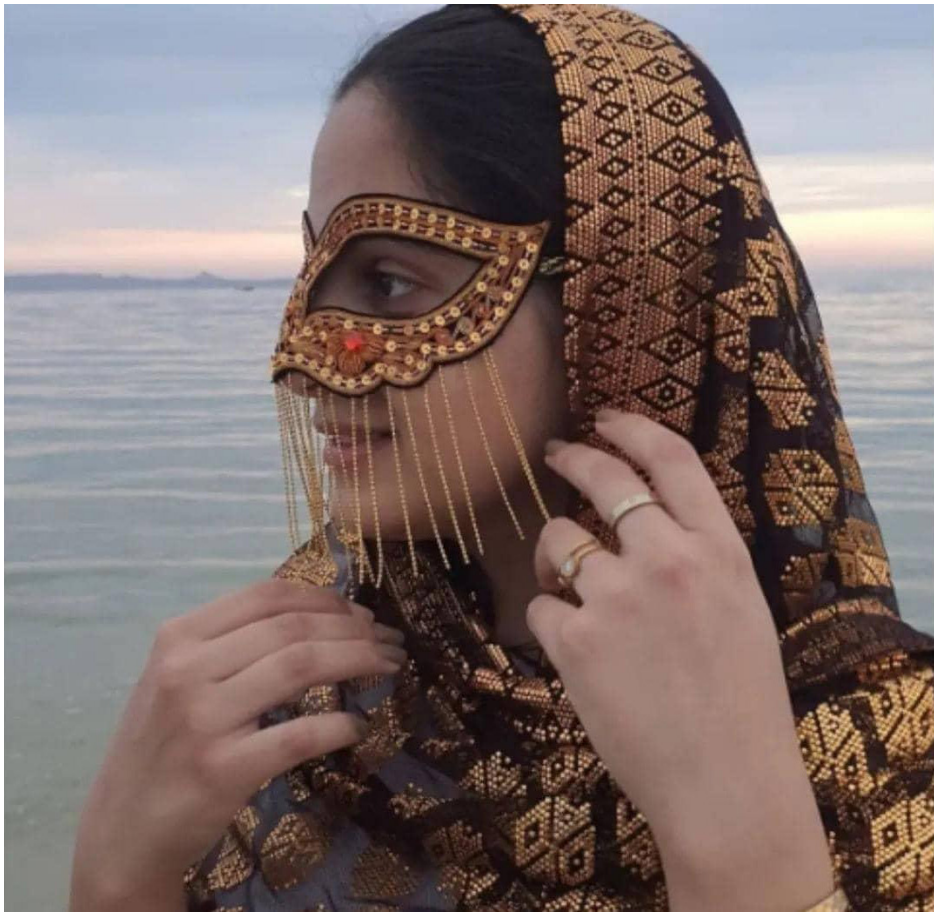


Figure 8. A local girl wearing a Venetian-style contemporary burqa with local embroidery, matched to the color of her garment. Unlike the traditional form, the contemporary burqa is worn by choice, associated more with fashion, and embraced by younger generations as a symbolic cultural item. Photo by Fathiyeh Rezvani.

6.5 Women as the core axis of transformation

Community-based tourism in Qeshm and Hormuz has produced a variety of changes, including new forms of economic activity, shifts in cultural expression, and the reorganization of space. However, its most profound and contested effects are found in the domain of gender relations. Across all three empirical studies, gender did not emerge as a secondary theme, but rather as the central axis along which the most significant tensions, negotiations, and transformations unfolded. Tourism provided rural women with access to income, visibility, and social interaction that had previously been restricted or inaccessible. In doing so, it challenged not only material inequalities but also long-standing expectations about femininity, morality, and public presence. Women's growing participation in tourism has contributed not only to household income but also to broader shifts in who appears in public spaces and under what conditions. A local man in Hormuz said:

"I see women in Hormoz riding motorcycles and bicycles today [...] men have lost some of their previous authority with the presence of tourists."

In many of the studied settings, traditional femininity was defined through domestic roles, modest behavior, and dependence on male guardianship. Tourism, however, opened spaces in which these ideals could be reinterpreted or renegotiated. In Hengam, for instance, the emergence of the beach bazaar as a woman-led public space enabled women to organize, work, and interact with tourists without male accompaniment. Over time, this space became so clearly associated with female presence that male participation in it came to feel inappropriate. As one woman in Hengam Island noted:

"If a man came to the bazaar next to his wife, other women would say, 'What's the man doing here? We are the women.'"

This everyday remark reflects how gendered spatial norms were being reshaped through lived practice. This spatial transformation was closely linked to economic shifts. Tourism offered women one of the few accessible and low-barrier entry points into income-generating activities. Many repurposed their existing domestic skills such as cooking, hosting, and handicraft production to fit into the emerging tourism economy. Through homestays, food services, and craft sales, women moved from being hidden contributors to becoming visible economic actors. This transition not only brought income, but also contributed to symbolic change which women gained increased freedom of movement, greater decision-making power, and a more active role in communal discussions. These shifts signaled a deeper renegotiation of gender roles, rooted in economic participation but extending into social and cultural life.

It is however important to note that this form of agency did not emerge equally across all villages. Its development depended on a combination of factors, including the timing of women's involvement, the nature of early tourism initiatives, and access to social networks. This research revealed that women's early participation in tourism development played a decisive role in shaping the inclusiveness of tourism pathways. In Hengam, where women were among the first to engage in tourism, the sector evolved in ways that made space for them. In contrast, in Soheili, where early tourism was dominated by men, women were either sidelined or confined to background roles. As a local man proudly mentioned *"women* [in their village] *are always behind the scenes."* Drawing from the evolutionary economic geography framework, this study emphasizes that early involvement is not merely beneficial, but foundational in determining whether tourism develops along gender-inclusive or exclusionary trajectories. Once a male-dominated structure becomes path-dependent, it becomes increasingly difficult for women to enter or reshape it later on.

The transformations associated with tourism extended beyond work and income. They also involved changing the meanings attached to gendered practices and cultural symbols. These changes were not imposed from the outside but emerged through daily interactions between tourists and locals, between daughters and parents, and among peers. The evolution of the burqa offers a powerful example. Once a marker of modesty and religious discipline, it was gradually reimagined by local women as a medium of self-expression and economic value. Rather than rejecting the burqa, women redefined it, creating hundreds of new designs that maintained cultural continuity while signaling social change.

What gave these transformations their strength was their grounding in local norms and moral frameworks. Most women did not describe themselves as activists or feminists. They explained their actions through reference to religious commitment, family responsibilities, or community service. This form of situated agency allowed them to stretch the boundaries of what was possible without provoking direct confrontation. From an external viewpoint, this may appear gradual or conservative, but its effectiveness lies precisely in its ability to take root and spread without immediate backlash.

Nonetheless, these shifts have not occurred without contestation. As women's visibility and financial autonomy increased, some men experienced these changes as a loss of control. In several cases, this resulted in household tensions, verbal opposition, heightened surveillance, or even incidents of violence. The process of gender transformation, therefore, is not linear or universally accepted. It remains a site of ongoing negotiation, and its outcomes are fragile. Yet the very existence of such tensions reveals that established gender hierarchies are no longer unchallenged.

Ultimately, gender transformation in these villages is not solely about women entering the tourism workforce. It reflects a broader restructuring of everyday life. Women are no longer confined to domestic responsibilities. They are managing accommodations, participating in exhibitions, interacting with outsiders, and forming connections beyond their immediate surroundings. These are not isolated events, but part of a wider pattern of change that connects different generations and villages. The image that emerges is one of slow, adaptive, and decentralized transformation, what could be described as a rhizomatic movement. This movement does not follow one leader or path but grows in multiple directions, depending on local conditions and opportunities.

For this reason, gender justice should not be treated as just one among many components of tourism development. It is the terrain where economic, cultural, and political questions intersect most directly. Tourism therefore is not a neutral activity. It brings with it tensions, negotiations, and new arrangements of power. Often quietly and incrementally, women have become central to shaping the contours of tourism and redefining what it makes possible. In the context of conservative norms and authoritarian governance, their actions stand as clear expressions of transformative resilience.

7 Discussion

7.1 Transformative power of tourism

Tourism is widely acknowledged as a catalyst for economic diversification and intercultural dialogue (Boley et al. 2014), yet its deeper potential to transform political and social orders has received less attention, particularly in authoritarian and theocratic contexts. In such environments, where state ideology regulates bodily autonomy, mobility, and public interaction (Rahbari et al. 2019), tourism often generates quiet frictions and reconfigurations of power (Seyfi & Hall 2019). The transformative power of tourism in these contexts lies not merely in its developmental promises but in its ability to reshape the spatial, moral, and gendered orders from below (Nikjoo et al. 2025a, 2025b). However, tourism is not a singular driver of change, it interacts with broader societal currents and often amplifies shifts already underway. Furthermore, it is important to mention that authorities can instrumentalize tourism zones in peripheral islands by selectively relaxing rules on dress and sociability, projecting an image of tolerance and modernity. This controlled liberalization however, may operate as a safety valve that signals reform yet leaves the underlying architecture of repression intact.

Alongside these state-managed showcases, bottom-up community-based and domestic tourism in peripheral and conservative areas opens everyday spaces of negotiation between citizens and prevailing power structures. As an example, this study shows that on Iran's Qeshm and Hormuz islands, CBT has provided rural women and marginalized groups with accessible entry points into public economic life through home-based hospitality, food production, and handicrafts. These everyday engagements extend beyond income generation (Carrasco-Santos et al. 2024; Wang & Sun 2023a). According to Sharifi-Tehrani et al. (2024), these engagements reorder visibility, alter community norms, and incrementally weaken the boundaries that have long confined women to the backstage of society. It is worth noting that these shifts often build upon evolving gender dynamics already shaped by education, media, and internal critique, rather than tourism alone.

Tourism can also introduce competing value systems into ideologically restricted spaces. Female travelers, youth groups, and middle-class urbanites from major cities bring with them less rigid interpretations of femininity, religion, and sociability (Nikjoo et al. 2021). In line with Ghaderi et al. (2024), I argue that these embodied alternatives enter peripheral communities not through confrontation but through co-presence, creating affective and symbolic frictions. Beyond that, this study also mirrors Bayat's (2022) analysis of Muslim youth "living normal lives" as a form of resistance, where tourism becomes an arena of quiet defiance against theocratic regulation. Such encounters exemplify what Lew et al. (2020) describe as tourism's worldmaking capacity, where spatial encounters reconfigure not only imaginaries of place but also subjectivities and social relations.

The transformative power of tourism however is not limited to vertical contestations with the state. Community-based tourism also reshapes horizontal power relations within communities, especially gendered divisions of labor and authority. In Hengam, women's early involvement in tourism led to new configurations of agency, while in Laft or Soheili, male-dominated paths excluded women from the outset, reinforcing patriarchal structures as it narrated in the finding chapter and will be discuss later. These shifts reflect what Biddulph & Scheyvens (2018) describe as the inclusive turn in tourism, where marginalized actors are not simply added to tourism economies but

actively redefine their terms of participation. Where male brokers mediate access, however, inclusion may be conditional and reversible.

Yet tourism's effects are far from uniform as it can also reproduce existing inequalities or be co-opted by local elites. Its outcomes depend on local governance, timing of inclusion, and the existing social fabric (Benner 2023; Saarinen & Gill 2018). Or as Saarinen and Wall-reinius (2019) note, such processes highlight the spatiality and contestation, where tourism becomes embedded in place-specific struggles over belonging, recognition, and power. It can also be folded into state-development narratives that leave underlying controls intact. Still, the cumulative evidence from Qeshm and Hormuz suggests that even within ideologically constrained systems, tourism can function as a vehicle for socio-political change. It allows constrained actors, especially women, not only to gain economic autonomy but also to renegotiate norms of visibility, propriety, and participation.

Tourism thus becomes more than a development strategy as it can be a space where embodied practices, economic roles, and interpersonal encounters work together to create new cultural and political equilibriums. While these processes are incremental and often uneven, and sometimes even reinforce hierarchies, they challenge ideological lock-ins and allow alternative futures to be imagined from within. In such contexts, the transformative power of tourism lies not in grand resistance, but in the slow, negotiated remaking of everyday life.

7.2 Resilience: more than adaptation

Resilience in tourism studies is commonly understood as the capacity of individuals, communities, or systems to adapt to change, absorb shocks, and reorganize while continuing to function (Hall et al. 2017). Rather than implying a return to a former state, resilience in human societies has been associated with the ability to develop new social and economic equilibriums in response to external pressures (Cheer & Lew 2017). This view is consistent with the conceptualization of tourism destinations as complex, adaptive systems that absorb disturbances and reorganize while preserving core functions and identity (Davoudi et al. 2013). Within tourism, resilience has thus been approached not as restoration but as continuous adaptation and transformation, particularly in the face of environmental, political, or economic disruptions (Saarinen & Gill 2018). These tourism related dynamics are inherently spatial, unfolding unevenly across peripheries and centers, with marginal areas often carrying disproportionate burdens of adaptation (Gibson et al. 2025). In practice, this adaptation redistributes costs and benefits, which makes questions of power and distribution central to any assessment.

Therefore, resilience discourse has not been without critique. Resilience discourse, when applied uncritically, can shift responsibility for structural failure onto communities themselves (MacKinnon & Derickson 2013). It may romanticize adaptability while ignoring how power and inequality shape vulnerability. In authoritarian settings, this danger is especially acute (Seyfi et al. 2025). I, therefore, agree with MacKinnon & Derickson (2013) in this sense and argue that encouraging communities to be resilient may depoliticize their struggles and obscure the forces that create precarity in the first place. As noted by Brown & Westaway (2011), resilience narratives can mask internal inequalities related to gender, class, and ethnicity, and when external actors

invoke resilience without redistributive support, the burden of adaptation falls disproportionately on already marginalized groups.

The cases of Hormuz and Qeshm islands illustrate how resilience in constrained contexts is not passive but agentic. In a setting where theocratic governance regulates gender, bodies, and public conduct, domestic tourism contributes to changing norms by creating gray spaces through which people can resist ideological control through practice not direct confrontation. Youth and women, by participating in tourism as travelers and hosts, have reshaped the spatial and moral order of the islands and Iran in general. Acts such as ignoring mandatory hijab, camping in mixed-gender groups on beaches, women swimming without full-body covering, and organizing music and dance gatherings in mountains and coastal areas may seem ordinary but are deeply political. These are not merely acts of survival or adaptation but strategic adjustments and negotiations that signal social transformation.

Through resilience and the creation of new norms, people have produced a situation in which it is increasingly the citizens who impose shocks to the system, while the regime attempts to resist. Yet this does not mean the state is simply reactive. While people push boundaries in certain tourism spaces, the regime still holds significant coercive power. This inversion, where society appears dynamic and the regime defensive, offers a compelling way to rethink resilience as a form of quiet contention. The state, through moral policing and regulatory control, attempts to stabilize an ideological order that is increasingly out of sync with lived realities. Meanwhile, citizens move forward, adapting and innovating. In such contexts, resilience becomes a tool for navigating oppressive structures while simultaneously bending them toward new norms. Here, I want to extend Scott's (2016) and Bayat's (2022) concept of "everyday resistance" to "everyday resilience," as resilience is a more agentic and dynamic concept that better captures the realities of social change in the Muslim world.

This process is not limited to the vertical axis of state–society relations. At the horizontal level, community resilience functions through social learning and value negotiation. Tourism introduces new behaviors and expectations (Saarinen & Gill 2018a; Lew 2014), and local communities must decide whether to reject, resist, or adapt. In the cases of this study, the presence of more secular urban visitors catalyzed reevaluations of gender norms in villages such as Salakh and Shibderaz. These encounters did not provoke cultural breakdown but rather triggered norm revisions that allowed women to appear in public spaces, engage in business, and gradually shift perceptions of propriety and femininity. Such transitions illustrate what Saarinen & Gill (2018) describe as resilience through reorganization rather than restoration.

Women, in particular, have emerged as key agents in this process. By adapting their domestic skills such as cooking, hosting, and handicraft production to tourism economies, they built economic agency and challenged patriarchal norms. This aligns with a range of studies (see Aljarodi et al. 2022; Bagheri et al. 2023; Mehtap et al. 2019; Seyfi et al. 2025) showing the importance of micro-entrepreneurship in expanding women's agency in Muslim societies. Using resilience as a framework, this study reflects how women created new equilibriums in their communities. These are not grand revolutions but quiet reconfigurations: who can host, who can be seen, what constitutes respectable labor. In this way, resilience is not just a response to disruption. It instead is a generative force that allows communities to accommodate change on their own terms (Seyfi et al. 2025).

Resilience thus bridges the political and the everyday. It is practiced through acts of adjustment that appear mundane but accumulate into structural shifts. This is particularly

true in constrained systems where overt resistance is dangerous or impossible. In such settings, resilience is a form of pragmatic transformation (Nikjoo et al. 2025a). It allows people to move forward without triggering repression, while still eroding the norms that sustain inequality (Nikjoo et al. 2025b). However, resilience is not a panacea, as its scope and sustainability depend on supportive institutions and protections.

These new equilibriums are not neutral adjustments, but according to Seyfi et al. (2025), they reflect deep shifts in values and power. Whether through the normalization of unveiled women in tourist spaces, the creation of women-led networks in tourism accommodation, or the renegotiation of family roles, these transitions challenge established social hierarchies. Resilience, in this light, is not just about continuity. It becomes a pathway to gender justice and community agency, especially in ideologically constrained environments.

7.3 Evolutionary economic geography; An inclusive turn

Evolutionary Economic Geography provides a dynamic framework for analyzing how regional economies develop through historically embedded, path-dependent, and spatially situated processes (Brouder 2014; Boschma & Frenken 2018; Boschma & Martin 2010). Drawing on concepts such as variation, selection, retention, and lock-in, EEG captures the uneven evolution of economic activities across places, making it suitable for understanding tourism-led transformations in peripheral or ideologically constrained settings (Martin & Sunley 2006; James et al. 2023). Recent contributions have emphasized the role of agency and institutional entrepreneurship in shaping new development paths (Benner 2023; Grillitsch & Sotarauta 2020), yet EEG has often privileged formal innovation systems and economic diversification while overlooking informal economies, marginalized groups, and the political structures under which new paths emerge (Benner 2023), particularly in contexts like Iran where tourism intersects with moral governance and biopolitical control (Nikjoo et al. 2025b).

Benner (2023), therefore, calls for a more inclusive turn in EEG, one that attends to marginalized actors and the social foundations of path creation. In this view, new development paths are not neutral trajectories but socially produced outcomes shaped by power, culture, and identity. Community-based tourism on Qeshm Island exemplifies this shift. Here, new economic activities emerged in response to tourism demand, creating opportunities for women to enter the public and economic sphere through culturally legible roles in hospitality and handicrafts. Such openings were uneven and contingent, often mediated by household bargaining, local gatekeepers, and moral surveillance.

The comparative case of five villages of Qeshm including Hengam, Salakh, Shibderaz, Laft, and Soheili demonstrates how inclusion in the early stages of path creation determines long-term patterns of access and visibility. This study shows that early engagement of local women in tourism created a gender-inclusive trajectory that normalized women's presence in tourism spaces and gradually transformed local gender norms as happened in Hengam Island. Normalization was, however, uneven and sometimes contested, marked by episodes of backlash and attempts to recentralize control. Over time, this early engagement created an inclusive path dependency, where initial inclusion generated reinforcing mechanisms of participation and recognition for women.

Conversely, the case of Soheili shows women exclusion or late entrance to tourism meant they remained confined to marginal roles and invisible in the village's new economic path. The village became locked in a gender-exclusive trajectory, where the structures and norms that shaped early development continued to limit women's participation. This contrast exemplifies the core insight of inclusive pathways: who is included in the creation of new paths matters as much as what kind of economic activity emerges.

The cases mirror the inter-path dynamics explained by Frangenheim (2023) and the EEG framework more broadly, which suggests that new economic paths do not emerge in isolation but are rooted in pre-existing capabilities. In several villages, women tapped into these existing skills and integrated them into the expanding tourism economy. Rather than following linear or top-down models, women's involvement emerged through the adaptive use of local resources and contextual knowledge. However, such transformation was not automatic. It was facilitated by dense informal networks that enabled learning and trust-building (Mehtap et al. 2019; Sharifi-Tehrani et al. 2024), cultural legitimacy that rendered women's participation acceptable (Binz et al. 2016), and the visible success of local role models who normalized alternative gender roles (Bosma et al. 2012).

This study contributes to the emerging perspective of inclusive pathway development (Benner 2023) as a crucial dimension of regional transformation within EEG-informed studies. In advancing this view, I argue that inclusive path creation which means the involvement of marginalized groups from the early stages of new economic activity, ensures that these actors do not merely adapt to emerging trajectories but help shape them from the outset. By incorporating cultural and political constraints into the analysis of path development, the study extends EEG's analytical scope beyond formal innovation systems to include informal, gendered, and morally regulated dimensions of regional change. This underscores the importance of designing tourism and development interventions that attend to who participates early on, and whether those engagements reproduce or disrupt existing inequalities.

Community-based tourism offers a unique testing ground for this approach. Its relatively low barriers to entry (Vukovic et al. 2023) allow for bottom-up experimentation (Tolkach & Pratt 2022), especially in settings where formal employment is limited (Seyfi et al. 2025). But without intentional inclusion, even community-based tourism can replicate exclusionary dynamics as seen in the case of Soheili.

7.4 Tourism and cultural resilience

The literature on tourism and culture often oscillates between two poles: tourism as a vehicle of cultural degradation and tourism as a platform for cultural revitalization (Bunten 2008; Trupp et al. 2023). Critics have long warned that tourism can erode local values, reduce tradition to spectacle, and accelerate the spread of neoliberal and Western aesthetic norms (Bunten 2008; Trupp et al. 2023), often through brokerage chains and state cultural programs that centralize interpretive authority. In many Global South settings, local cultures are commodified into simplified symbols to satisfy tourists' desires for authenticity, reinforcing exotic stereotypes and alienating communities from their own practices (Knudsen et al. 2016). Such perspectives imply that culture in peripheral settings is inherently fragile, something to be preserved intact rather than open to evolve.

Yet this essentialist framing imposes a double standard. It assumes that cultures in the Global North are dynamic, open to reinterpretation and innovation, while cultures in the Global South are static, sacred, and unchangeable. This view not only romanticizes pre-tourism cultural forms but also denies local communities the agency to re-signify their traditions. As Roudometof (2019) notes, globalization does not simply dilute local identity but creates new opportunities for cultural reflexivity and reinvention. Agency, however, is exercised within boundaries set by moral surveillance, reputational risk, and unequal access to markets, so room to innovate is uneven.

The concept of cultural resilience offers a more nuanced lens. Rather than viewing change as loss, cultural resilience sees transformation as part of the endurance of meaning (Crane 2010; Holtorf 2018). It frames culture not as a bounded heritage to be frozen in time but as a dynamic system capable of adapting to new conditions while retaining internal coherence. In tourism contexts, cultural resilience captures how communities navigate commodification and external pressure without relinquishing cultural autonomy (Cole 2007; Saarinen & Gill 2018).

The transformation of the burqa on Qeshm Island offers a vivid case. Traditionally worn as a symbol of modesty, family honor, and religious identity, the burqa has undergone a process of deconstruction and reinvention. Local women, responding to tourist demand and shifting social norms, have redesigned it as an artistic object, a souvenir, and a fashion accessory. Some styles now incorporate embroidery from traditional trousers or blend local designs with global aesthetics such as Venetian masks. These new forms do not erase the burqa's cultural meaning but re-signify it, as has been observed in other contexts (Gardiner et al. 2022; Wang & Sun 2023b). In doing so, they challenge the binary of authenticity versus commodification and demonstrate that cultural meaning is relationally produced.

This process closely aligns with the concept of constructive authenticity, which Wang (1999) defines as authenticity that is not inherent in the object but socially constructed and interpreted through cultural and symbolic processes. It emerges from the interplay between tourists' expectations and locals' representations. Rickly-Boyd (2013) extends this by emphasizing that authenticity in tourism is shaped through ongoing negotiation, relational dynamics, and situated performances. Building on these perspectives but moving beyond them, I propose the notion of co-created authenticity, where cultural meaning arises not just through perception and performance but through dialogical interaction, mutual needs, and adaptive creativity, though under unequal bargaining power that can limit voice and steer outcomes. The transformation of the burqa is neither a capitulation to market forces nor a fixed heritage form. Rather, it is a strategic negotiation, where women deploy cultural expression to assert presence, generate income, and update aesthetic codes on their own terms.

Cultural resilience in this context is not conservative. It does not aim to restore past forms but to sustain cultural relevance in changing conditions. The burqa's evolution shows how resilience can produce new cultural equilibriums, allowing local women to shape how tradition is practiced, displayed, and consumed. This echoes Beel et al.'s (2017) view of cultural heritage as a shared resource that enables communities to assert identity, counter dominant narratives, and sustain cohesion.

At the same time, this study underscores that not all change is harmful. The rejection of religious symbolism attached to the burqa by younger generations and the shift toward aesthetic or entrepreneurial reinterpretations reflect a desire to retain cultural identity while disengaging from imposed moral codes. In this way, resilience serves as both a protective and a transformative force, sustaining the continuity of meaning while

transforming its expression. By framing culture as resilient rather than endangered, this approach challenges static preservationist models and, in line with Cole (2007), affirms the agency of communities to adapt without losing themselves.

7.5 The contribution of tourism to gender justice in the Muslim world

The position of women in Muslim societies is shaped by multiple and intersecting forces such as religious doctrine, state ideology, patriarchal norms, class, age, and geography (Babakhani 2024; Carrasco-Santos et al. 2024; Rahbari et al. 2025). Despite stereotypes that homogenize Muslim women, internal diversity is substantial (Babakhani 2024). Younger generations and urban women increasingly engage with secular or hybrid values, while rural and older women often remain closer to traditional gender norms (Rahbari et al. 2025), yet these boundaries are not fixed. Tourism, especially domestic and community-based tourism in contexts like Iran, can open discreet avenues for mobility and visibility while still operating within moral–legal constraints that bound women's room for maneuver (Ghaderi et al. 2024; Nikjoo et al. 2025a).

Tourism introduces new forms of visibility and mobility into women's lives (Nikjoo et al. 2021, 2022). These changes unfold on both sides of the host–guest divide. Among travelers, particularly young urban women, tourism offers moments of temporary liberation from familial oversight and state surveillance (Lapointe & Coulter 2020; Morshed & Hernandez-Lara 2024; Rostami et al. 2024). Traveling with friends, visiting beaches, or joining mixed-gender tours allow women to practice autonomy in gray zones which is spaces that lie between legality and informality, visibility and discretion (Hosseini et al. 2023; Rostami et al. 2024). In these moments, women experience and perform new forms of femininity, which in turn normalize alternative gender norms across society (Gorji et al. 2022; Nikjoo et al. 2021, 2022).

Here I argue that these performances are not without political effect. Women, by traveling and hosting, shift what is thinkable and acceptable in public space. In an ideologically constrained context like Iran, where women's bodies are tightly regulated through veiling laws and moral policing (Rahbari et al. 2019), the act of appearing unveiled on a southern beach or sharing photos online becomes a claim to autonomy and self-definition, yet such claims remain precarious in periods of heightened enforcement and uneven across class and place. Tourism thus becomes a space where bodily agency is enacted, and social norms are gradually reconfigured. These everyday encounters serve as lived critiques of theocratic power and as expressions of women's agency that are incremental, situated, and culturally legible.

On the host side, community-based tourism provides women with accessible platforms to enter the public and economic spheres (Carrasco-Santos et al. 2024; Kutlu & Ngoasong 2024; Wang & Sun 2023a). Women use their homes, kitchens, and sewing skills as economic assets which are activities that are culturally accepted yet subversively transformative. They generate direct income, gain financial independence, and expand their social networks (Carrasco-Santos et al. 2024; Mehtap et al. 2019; Sharifi-Tehrani 2024). Thus, in this situation, I believe that hosting tourists also redefines the meaning of hospitality, shifting it from a private, invisible duty to a public, compensated service that places women at the center of local economies.

Through these roles, women reclaim public space not by challenging tradition head-on, but by reshaping its practice. In villages like Salakh and Hengam, they formed peer networks to manage guest accommodations, organize handicraft production,

and coordinate local services. These collective structures enhance not only economic resilience but also social recognition, emotional support, and political voice. Local female role models such as Zinat and Fathiyeh became central nodes in these networks, demonstrating how women can navigate tradition while simultaneously transforming it. Bosma et al. (2012) also emphasize the critical role of local female role models in shifting gender power dynamics. However, leadership and market access can concentrate in a few hands, creating gatekeeping that some women struggle to cross.

The implications extend beyond individual empowerment. Through repeated interaction with tourists, including more secular women from urban areas, local norms are gradually renegotiated. These encounters open spaces of dialogue, mutual recognition, and moral negotiation. Rather than unidirectional influence, these interactions foster reciprocal learning and subtle shifts in perception, where gendered expectations are contested, re-evaluated, and occasionally softened. Empowerment in this context does not stem from rejecting tradition, but from reinterpreting and reshaping it through everyday engagement (Glas & Alexander 2020; Mahmood 2006).

Tourism also softens rigid gender hierarchies by reframing the value of women's work. Activities once considered domestic are now marketable, visible, and celebrated. This challenges the dichotomy between productive and reproductive labor and repositions women as legitimate economic actors within their communities. As a result, gender justice is not only an outcome of new laws or top-down reforms, but an incremental rebalancing of power within households, markets, and public life. Nonetheless, it must be acknowledged that tourism is only one of many forces shaping women's lives.

Importantly, these dynamics do not constitute a break with culture but a negotiation with it. In the Muslim world, where overt feminist discourse may be marginalized or mistrusted, tourism provides a culturally acceptable terrain for gender transformation. It supports an organic movement toward equality that is grounded in lived experience, emotional resonance, and shared interests.

8 Conclusion

This thesis has examined how community-based tourism functions as a subtle yet powerful mechanism of social transformation in theocratic and conservative settings. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in Qeshm and Hormuz, it shows that tourism can serve as a modest but meaningful platform for social change. While I acknowledge that tourism is not the root cause of transformation, it creates new spaces, physical, economic, and symbolic spaces that allow existing norms to be quietly challenged and reconfigured.

The findings show that tourism enables incremental shifts in visibility, propriety, and participation, especially for women. Through roles in hosting, food production, and handicrafts, women entered public life and altered community expectations in ways that were both culturally legible and politically significant. These shifts were not confrontational, but they unsettled long-standing boundaries and introduced new possibilities for agency. Framed through resilience and biopolitics, these outcomes speak to wider debates on how power governs bodies and spaces, and how everyday adaptations rework those governing techniques.

By tracing how tourism-induced shocks are absorbed, adapted to, and reinterpreted by local actors, the study has foregrounded the concept of resilience as a form of agency rather than submission. Resilience here is not about returning to the past, but about creating new equilibriums that reflect community priorities and emerging identities. In particular, women have used tourism to enter public and economic life, challenge the boundaries of propriety, and normalize new forms of agency. These processes are not dramatic ruptures, but accumulative shifts that nonetheless reshape the distribution of power.

The thesis has also argued that the timing and structure of inclusion matter. Drawing from the lens of Evolutionary Economic Geography, it has shown how early participation in new tourism paths enables marginalized actors, especially women, to shape the trajectory of development rather than being incorporated later under unequal terms. Where women were excluded from early phases, as in Soheili, tourism deepened existing inequalities. Where they were included from the outset, as in Hengam, tourism catalyzed more inclusive outcomes. Early inclusion is necessary but not sufficient; without supportive coordination and protection, path dynamics can revert to exclusion or consolidate low-value positions.

Cultural change has also been approached not as a binary between loss and preservation, but through the lens of cultural resilience. Communities do not passively accept commodification or resist change. Instead, they reinterpret cultural expressions such as the burqa in ways that sustain meaning while adapting to new social and economic conditions. This positions cultural resilience as a bridge concept between adaptation and contestation, with clear implications for gendered visibility and recognition.

Ultimately, this thesis positions tourism as a vehicle for pragmatic transformation. In the Iranian context, where overt political dissent is often dangerous, tourism enables forms of adaptation that shift norms, redistribute visibility, and expand agency within culturally legible frameworks. These shifts, however, should not be read as substitutes for legal and institutional reform. These findings contribute to broader debates on gender, power, and development by highlighting how resilience, inclusion, and cultural negotiation unfold in everyday life, shaping alternative futures from within rather than outside existing structures.

8.1 Future Studies

Based on the findings and conceptual contributions of this study, several promising directions emerge for future research. First, the relationship between tourism and politics deserves deeper and more critical engagement. While tourism is often framed in relation to peacebuilding or cultural diplomacy, this study has shown that in authoritarian and theocratic contexts, tourism may quietly contribute to political change from below. Future research can further explore how tourism challenges authoritarian control over space, morality, and public life. Such inquiries could examine different regimes, geographies, or religious frameworks, to develop a more comparative understanding of tourism's subversive potential. A parallel line should examine how states instrumentalize tourism zones as managed tolerance and the conditions under which these showcases entrench, rather than loosen, control.

Second, this study opened a line of inquiry into the relationship between tourism and Islamic biopolitics. Tourism, as a bodily and spatial practice, unsettles state control over gender, dress, and public visibility especially for women. Future studies could extend this line of analysis to explore how tourism disrupts religious-moral regulation of the body, and how such disruptions vary across Muslim-majority societies. In particular, more ethnographic research is needed to understand how Muslim women travelers and hosts negotiate Islamic laws in tourism contexts, and what forms of autonomy and friction emerge from these interactions. Linking this to resilience would clarify when adaptive practices widen agency and when they normalize selective permissibility.

From a theoretical perspective, the study has contributed to evolutionary economic geography by proposing the notion of path inclusivity, emphasizing the importance of early participation by marginalized actors in shaping development trajectories. Future EEG-informed studies could examine how this concept applies to other marginalized groups such as ethnic minorities, youth, or informal laborers, and in other economic sectors or governance regimes. Comparative studies could further test the long-term effects of inclusive versus exclusive path creation. To make stronger claims about distributional change, future work could also operationalize path inclusivity with gender justice indicators to assess improvements in key areas like mobility, decision-making authority, and income control.

This study also proposed co-created authenticity and expanded on cultural resilience as a framework that embraces change while evolving meaning. These concepts offer useful tools for understanding how cultural expressions evolve under tourist influence. Future research could build on these ideas to study different cultural practices, especially where the boundary between commodification and empowerment is blurred.

Finally, this study adopted a critical lens on resilience, framing it as a potentially political and transformative force. While the idea of transformative resilience was only subtly introduced here, and disruptive resilience left unintroduced, both offer fertile ground for future theorization. Scholars could investigate how resilience not only sustains communities but actively reorders power relations, both vertically (state–society) and horizontally (within communities), offering new paths toward justice and agency.

References

Adger WN (2000) Social and ecological resilience: are they related? *Progress in Human Geography* 24(3): 347–364. https://doi.org/10.1191/030913200701540465

Adger WN, Dessai S, Goulden M, Hulme M, Lorenzoni I, Nelson DR, et al. (2009) Are there social limits to adaptation to climate change? *Climatic Change* 93: 335–354. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10584-008-9520-z

Aghazamani Y & Hunt CA (2017) Empowerment in tourism: A review of peer-reviewed literature. *Tourism Review International* 21(4): 333–346. https://doi.org/10.3727/154427217X15094520591321

Aghazamani Y, Kerstetter D & Allison P (2020) Women's perceptions of empowerment in Ramsar, a tourism destination in northern Iran. *Women's Studies International Forum* 79: 102340. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2020.102340

Alkhaled S (2021) Women's entrepreneurship in Saudi Arabia: Feminist solidarity and political activism in disguise? *Gender, Work & Organization* 28(3): 950–972. https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12626

Altinay L, Toros E, Vatankhah S & Seyfi S (2026) Women entrepreneurs as cultural custodians in tourism: A social feminism theory perspective. *Tourism Management* 112: 105267. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2025.105267

Amore A, Prayag G & Hall C M (2018) Conceptualizing destination resilience from a multilevel perspective. *Tourism Review International* 22(3–4): 235–250. https://doi.org/10.3727/154427218X15369305779010

Aquino RS, Lück M & Schänzel HA (2018) A conceptual framework of tourism social entrepreneurship for sustainable community development. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management* 37: 23–32. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2018.09.001

Aradau C & Tazzioli M (2020) Biopolitics multiple: Migration, extraction, subtraction. *Millennium* 48(2): 198–220. https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829819889139

Asadi Zeidabadi P (2023) Political identity: Feminists and feminism in Iran. *Gender, Place & Culture* 30(12): 1712–1732. https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2022.2118240

Asl MP (2022) Gender, space and counter-conduct: Iranian women's heterotopic imaginations in Ramita Navai's City of Lies: Love, Sex, Death, and the Search for Truth in Tehran. *Gender, Place & Culture* 29(9): 1296–1316. https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2021.1975100

Babakhani A (2024) Control over Muslim women's bodies: A critical review. *Sociological Inquiry* 94(1): 241–262. https://doi.org/10.1111/soin.12529

Bagheri F, Ghaderi Z, Abdi N & Hall CM (2023) Female entrepreneurship, creating shared value, and empowerment in tourism; the neutralizing effect of gender-based discrimination. *Current Issues in Tourism* 26(21): 3465–3482. https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2022.2126749

Baldacchino G (2004) The coming of age of island studies. *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie* 95(3): 272–283. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9663.2004.00307.x

Bayat A (2013) *Life as Politics: How Ordinary People Change the Middle East*. Stanford University Press, Stanford.

Bayat A (2022) Is there a youth politics? *In* Rennick SA (Ed) *Reassessing Activism and Engagement Among Arab Youth*: 89–100. Transnational Press London.

Bayat F & Hodges N (2024) Just say "no" to compulsory hijab: Exploring the motivations and meanings of bad-hijabi in Iran. Clothing and Textiles Research Journal 42(4): 247–262. https://doi.org/10.1177/0887302X221089580

Beel DE, Wallace CD, Webster G, Nguyen H, Tait E, Macleod M (2017) Cultural resilience: The production of rural community heritage, digital archives and the role of volunteers. Journal of Rural Studies 54: 459–468. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrurstud.2015.05.002

Benner M (2023) Making spatial evolution work for all? A framework for inclusive path development. Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society 16(3): 445–462. https://doi.org/10.1093/cjres/rsad015

Berger P & Luckmann T (1966) *The social construction of reality*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday.

Bernard S, Rahman I & McGehee NG (2022) Breaking barriers for Bangladeshi female solo travelers. *Tourism Management Perspectives* 41: 100932. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2021.100932

Biddulph R & Scheyvens R (2018) Introducing inclusive tourism. *Tourism Geographies* 20(4): 583–588. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2018.1486880

Binz C, Truffer B & Coenen L (2016) Path creation as a process of resource alignment and anchoring: Industry formation for on-site water recycling in Beijing. *Economic Geography* 92(2): 172–200. https://doi.org/10.1080/00130095.2015.1103177

Blackstock K (2005) A critical look at community based tourism. *Community Development Journal* 40(1): 39–49. https://doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsi005

Bohn D, Carson DA, Demiroglu OC & Lundmark L (2023) Public funding and destination evolution in sparsely populated Arctic regions. *Tourism Geographies* 25(8): 1833–1855. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2023.2207544

Boley BB & McGehee NG (2014) Measuring empowerment: Developing and validating the resident empowerment through tourism scale (RETS). *Tourism Management* 45: 85–94. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2014.04.003

Boley BB, McGehee NG, Perdue RR & Long P (2014) Empowerment and resident attitudes toward tourism: Strengthening the theoretical foundation through a Weberian lens. *Annals of Tourism Research* 49: 33–50. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2014.08.005

Boschma RA & Frenken K (2018) Evolutionary economic geography. *In*: Clark G L, Feldman M P, Gertler M S & Wójcik D (eds) *The New Oxford Handbook of Economic Geography*: 213–229. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Boschma RA & Martin RL (eds) (2010) *The Handbook of Evolutionary Economic Geography*. Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham.

Braun V & Clarke V (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3(2): 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Brouder P (2014a) Evolutionary economic geography and tourism studies: Extant studies and future research directions. *Tourism Geographies* 16(4): 540–545. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2014.947314

Brouder P (2014b) Evolutionary economic geography: A new path for tourism studies? *Tourism Geographies* 16(1): 2–7. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2013.864323

Brouder P (2019) Evolutionary economic geography: Reflections from a sustainable tourism perspective. *Tourism Planning and Development* 19(3): 438–447. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2016.1274774

Brouder P (2020) Reset redux: Possible evolutionary pathways towards the transformation of tourism in a COVID-19 world. *Tourism Geographies* 22(3): 484–490. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2020.1760928

Brouder P, Clavé S A, Gill A & Ioannides D (eds.) (2017) *Tourism Destination Evolution*. Routledge, London.

Brown K & Westaway E (2011) Agency, capacity, and resilience to environmental change: Lessons from human development, well-being, and disasters. *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* 36(1): 321–342. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-environ-052610-092905

Bunten AC (2008) Sharing culture or selling out? Developing the commodified persona in the heritage industry. *American Ethnologist* 35(3): 380–395. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1425.2008.00041.x

Carrasco-Santos MJ, Seyfi S, Hosseini S, Hall CM, Mohajer B, Almeida-García F & Macías RC (2024) Breaking boundaries: Exploring gendered challenges and advancing equality for Iranian women careers in tourism. *Tourism Management* 103: 104913. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2024.104913

Chubin F (2020) Glocalizing women's empowerment: Feminist contestation and NGO activism in Iran. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 49(6): 715–744. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891241620947135

Church A & Coles T (eds) (2007) *Tourism, Power, and Space*. Routledge, London.

Clavé SA & Wilson J (2017) The evolution of coastal tourism destinations: A path plasticity perspective on tourism urbanisation. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 25(1): 96–112. https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2016.1177063

Cole S (2006) Information and empowerment: The keys to achieving sustainable tourism. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 14(6): 629–644. https://doi.org/10.2167/jost607.0

Cole S (2007) Beyond authenticity and commodification. *Annals of Tourism Research* 34(4): 943–960. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2007.05.004

Cole S (2017) Water worries: An intersectional feminist political ecology of tourism and water in Labuan Bajo, Indonesia. *Annals of Tourism Research* 67: 14–24. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2017.07.018

Cornelisse M (2020) Peru case study: Power relations in community-based tourism. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change* 18(4): 437–454. https://doi.org/10.1080/14766825.2019.1640707

Crane TA (2010) Of models and meanings: Cultural resilience in social–ecological systems. *Ecology and Society* 15(4). https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-03683-150419

Crossley É (2021) Deep reflexivity in tourism research. *Tourism Geographies* 23(1–2): 206–227. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2019.1571098

Cutter SL, Barnes L, Berry M, Burton C, Evans E, Tate E, et al. (2008) A place-based model for understanding community resilience to natural disasters. *Global Environmental Change* 18(4): 598–606. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2008.07.013

Czarniawska-Joerges B (2007) *Shadowing: And Other Techniques for Doing Fieldwork in Modern Societies*. Copenhagen Business School Press, Copenhagen.

Davoudi S, Brooks E & Mehmood A (2013) Evolutionary resilience and strategies for climate adaptation. *Planning Practice & Research* 28(3): 307–322. https://doi.org/10.1080/02697459.2013.787695

Dredge D & Gyimóthy S (eds.) (2017) *Collaborative Economy and Tourism: Perspectives, Politics, Policies and Prospects*. Springer, Cham.

Duffy R (2015) Nature-based tourism and neoliberalism: Concealing contradictions. *Tourism Geographies* 17(4): 529–543. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2015.1053972
Eger C, Munar AM & Hsu C (2022) Gender and tourism sustainability. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 30(7): 1459–1475. https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2021.1963975
Espiner S, Orchiston C & Higham J (2017) Resilience and sustainability: A complementary relationship? Towards a practical conceptual model for the sustainability–resilience nexus in tourism. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 25(10): 1385–1400. https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2017.1281929
Fadaee S (2024) Woman, life, freedom movement: Dynamics of a movement in progress. *Social Movement Studies*: 1–6. https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2024.2365745
Fathzadeh F (2021) The veil: An embodied ethical practice in Iran. *Journal of Gender Studies* 30(2): 150–164. https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2020.1863194
Flyvbjerg B (2006) Five misunderstandings about case-study research. *Qualitative Inquiry* 12(2): 219–245. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077800405284363
Foucault M (2008) *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*. Davidson A I (ed) & Burchell G (trans). Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke.
Frangenheim A (2023) Regional preconditions to shape interpath relations across regions: Two cases from the Austrian food sector. *European Planning Studies* 31(2): 328–347. https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2022.2087236
Frohlick S & Harrison J (2008) Engaging ethnography in tourist research: An introduction. *Tourist Studies* 8(1): 5–18. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468797608094676
Ghaderi Z, Bagheri F, Esfehani M, Beal L & Houanti LH (2025) Exploring cybersecurity threats to solo female travelers. *Journal of Travel Research*: 00472875251361466. https://doi.org/10.1177/00472875251361466
Ghaderi Z, Bagheri F, Makian S & Sinha R (2025) Women's fight for equality in tourism and hospitality; insights from conservative cultures. *Tourism Recreation Research*: 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2025.2391576
Ghaderi Z, Tavakoli R, Yarahmadi F, Bagheri F & Almuhrzi HM (2024) Islamic views on local tourism engagement in conservative societies: An insight from Oman. *Current Issues in Tourism*: 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2024.2356232
Ghouse SM, McElwee G & Durrah O (2019) Entrepreneurial success of cottage-based women entrepreneurs in Oman. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research* 25(3): 480–498. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEBR-05-2018-0296
Giampiccoli A & Mtapuri O (2015) Between theory and practice: A conceptualization of community based tourism and community participation. *Loyola Journal of Social Sciences*. https://openscholar.dut.ac.za/handle/10321/1582
Gibson C, Gillen J, Ioannides D, Molz JG, Saarinen J, & Scheyvens R (2025) Making tourism geographies: a tribute to Alan A. Lew's lifework. *Tourism Geographies*, 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2025.2546542
Gill P, Stewart K, Treasure E & Chadwick B (2008) Methods of data collection in qualitative research: Interviews and focus groups. *British Dental Journal* 204(6): 291–295. https://doi.org/10.1038/bdj.2008.192
Glas S & Alexander A (2020) Explaining support for Muslim feminism in the Arab Middle East and North Africa. *Gender & Society* 34(3): 437–466. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243220915494
Gorji AS (2024) *Journey to the Country of Contrasts: A Holistic Exploration of the Projected and Perceived Images of Iran as a Tourism Destination*. Doctoral thesis, Universidad de Málaga.
Gorji AS, Hosseini S, Garcia FA & Macias RC (2022) Complexities of women solo travelling in a conservative post-Soviet Muslim society: The case of Uzbek women. In: *Contemporary Muslim Travel Cultures*: 155–169. Routledge, London.
Gounder A & Cox C (2022) Exploring the role of tourism dependency on COVID-19 induced economic shock in the Small Island Developing States. *Current Issues in Tourism* 25(7): 1151–1168. https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2020.1865289
Grillitsch M & Sotarauta M (2020) Trinity of change agency, regional development paths and opportunity spaces. *Progress in Human Geography* 44(4): 704–723. https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132519853870
Haisch T (2018) Working towards resilience: Collective agency in a tourism destination in the Swiss Alps. In: *Resilient Destinations and Tourism*: 121–134. Routledge, London.
Hall CM (2010) Power in tourism: Tourism in power. *In* Macleod D & Carrier JG (eds.) *Tourism, Power and Culture: Anthropological Insights*, 199–213. Routledge, London.
Hall CM (2018) Resilience theory and tourism. *In* Saarinen J & Gill AM (Eds.) *Resilient Destinations and Tourism*, 34–47. Routledge, London.
Hall CM, Prayag G & Amore A (2017) *Tourism and Resilience: Individual, Organisational and Destination Perspectives*. Channel View Publications, Bristol.

Higgins-Desbiolles F & Bianchi R (2024) Towards understanding and managing the politics of tourism in a crisis-challenged world. *Annals of Tourism Research Empirical Insights* 5(2): 100160. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annale.2023.100160

Higgins-Desbiolles F (2020) The "war over tourism": Challenges to sustainable tourism in the tourism academy after COVID-19. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 29(4): 551–569. https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2020.1803334

Höckert E (2018) *Negotiating Hospitality: Ethics of Tourism Development in the Nicaraguan Highlands*. Routledge, London.

Holtorf C (2018) Embracing change: How cultural resilience is increased through cultural heritage. *World Archaeology* 50(4): 639–650. https://doi.org/10.1080/00438243.2018.1510340

Hoodfar H (2007) Women, religion and the 'Afghan education movement' in Iran. *Journal of Development Studies* 43(2): 265–293. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220380601125136

Hosseini S, Gorji AS, Macías RC & García FA (2023) Gender, empowerment and tourism in Iran: A Muslim perspective. *In* Wilson E & Chambers D (eds.) *A Research Agenda for Gender and Tourism*: 115–134. Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham.

Hosseini S, Macías RC & García FA (2022) The exploration of Iranian solo female travellers' experiences. *International Journal of Tourism Research* 24(2): 256–269. https://doi.org/10.1002/jtr.2505

Hughes N (2018) 'Tourists go home': Anti-tourism industry protest in Barcelona. *Social Movement Studies* 17(4): 471–477. https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2018.1468244

Hutchings K, Moyle CL, Chai A, Garofano N & Moore S (2020) Segregation of women in tourism employment in the APEC region. *Tourism Management Perspectives* 34: 100655. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2020.100655

Iaquinto BL, Cheer JM, Roelofsen M, Minca C, Ong CE, Wong C, et al. (2024) Coercive geographies: Biopower, spatial politics, and the tourist. *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space* 42(2): 149–170. https://doi.org/10.1177/23996544221133079

Jamal T & Higham J (2021) Justice and ethics: Towards a new platform for tourism and sustainability. In: *Justice and Tourism*: 1–15. Routledge, London.

Jamal T, Budke C & Barradas-Bribiesca I (2019) Community-based tourism and 'development'. In: *A Research Agenda for Tourism and Development*: 125–150. Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham.

James L, Halkier H, Sanz-Ibáñez C & Wilson J (2023) Advancing evolutionary economic geographies of tourism: Trigger events, transformative moments and destination path shaping. *Tourism Geographies* 25(8): 1819–1832. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2023.2185954

Jørgensen MT, Hansen AV, Sørensen F, Fuglsang L, Sundbo J & Jensen JF (2021) Collective tourism social entrepreneurship: A means for community mobilization and social transformation. *Annals of Tourism Research* 88: 103171. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2021.103171

Khatam A (2023) Mahsa Amini's killing, state violence, and moral policing in Iran. *Human Geography* 16(3): 299–306. https://doi.org/10.1177/19427786231203126

Khoo C, Thakur P, Yang MJH, Pung JM & Ting A (2025) Body hair and booty calls: Conceptualising 'empowered-ness' in travel and tourism for solo female vanlifers. *Annals of Tourism Research* 111: 103905. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2025.103905

Knudsen DC, Rickly JM & Vidon ES (2016) The fantasy of authenticity: Touring with Lacan. *Annals of Tourism Research* 58: 33–45. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2016.02.004

Kohan MA (2022) Politics of the body in the 'woman, life, freedom' movement in Iran. *Psychotherapy & Politics International* 20(4): 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1002/ppi.1624

Koo GY & Han HE (2018) To veil or not to veil: Turkish and Iranian hijab policies and the struggle for recognition. *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 24(1): 47–70. https://doi.org/10.1080/12259276.2018.1427703

Krause J (2021) The ethics of ethnographic methods in conflict zones. *Journal of Peace Research* 58(3): 329–341. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343321996795

Kurikka H & Grillitsch M (2021) Resilience in the periphery: What an agency perspective can bring to the table. *In* Wink R (ed) *Economic Resilience in Regions and Organisations*: 147–171. Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden, Wiesbaden.

Kutlu G & Ngoasong MZ (2024) A framework for gender influences on sustainable business models in women's tourism entrepreneurship: Doing and re-doing gender. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 32(3): 500–518. https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2023.2227978

Lapointe D & Coulter M (2020) Place, labor, and (im) mobilities: Tourism and biopolitics. *Tourism Culture & Communication* 20(2–3): 95–105. https://doi.org/10.3727/109830420X15913034412270

Lew AA (2014) Scale, change and resilience in community tourism planning. *Tourism Geographies* 16(1): 14–22. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2013.864325

Lew AA, Ng PT, Ni CC & Wu TC (2016) Community sustainability and resilience: Similarities, differences and indicators. *Tourism Geographies* 18(1): 18–27. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2015.1122664

Lew A, Cheer J, Brouder P, Teoh S, Clausen HB, Hall CM, et al. (2020) Visions of travel and tourism after the Global COVID-19 transformation of 2020. *Tourism Geographies* 22(3): 455–466. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2020.1770326

Li W (2006) Community decisionmaking participation in development. *Annals of Tourism Research* 33(1): 132–143. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2005.02.004

Lin CCT & Roelofsen M (2024) Feminist tourism geographies as reflected in their emergent histories. *Tourism Geographies*: 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2023.2292056

Lin CCT & Roelofsen M (2025) Feminist tourism geographies as reflected in their emergent histories. *Tourism Geographies* 27(3–4): 691–704. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2024.2292056

MacKinnon D & Derickson KD (2013) From resilience to resourcefulness: A critique of resilience policy and activism. *Progress in Human Geography* 37(2): 253–270. https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132512454775

Mahdavi P (2009) But what if someone sees me? Women, risk, and the aftershocks of Iran's sexual revolution. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies* 5(2): 1–22. https://doi.org/10.2979/mew.2009.5.2.1

Mahmood S (2006) Feminist theory, agency, and the liberatory subject: Some reflections on the Islamic revival in Egypt. *Temenos – Nordic Journal for the Study of Religion* 42(1). https://doi.org/10.33356/temenos.4805

Martin R & Sunley P (2006) Path dependence and regional economic evolution. *Journal of Economic Geography* 6(4): 395–437. https://doi.org/10.1093/jeg/lbl012

Meekes JF, Buda DM & de Roo G (2017) Adaptation, interaction and urgency: A complex evolutionary economic geography approach to leisure. *Tourism Geographies* 19(4): 525–547. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2017.1342140

Mehtap S, Ozmenekse L & Caputo A (2019) "I'm a stay at home businesswoman": An insight into informal entrepreneurship in Jordan. *Journal of Entrepreneurship in Emerging Economies* 11(1): 44–65. https://doi.org/10.1108/JEEE-09-2017-0061

Minca C (2025) On tourism, geography and the biopolitical. *Tourism Geographies*: 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2025.2408295

Moayerian N, McGehee NG & Stephenson MO (2022) Community cultural development: Exploring the connections between collective art making, capacity building and sustainable community-based tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research* 93: 103355. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2022.103355

Moghadam VM (2005) *Globalizing Women: Transnational Feminist Networks*. Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.

Moghissi H (2016) *Populism and Feminism in Iran: Women's Struggle in a Male-Defined Revolutionary Movement*. Springer, Cham.

Mohamadi J & Shirazi F (2023) Resistance through clothing styles: Iranian young women's body representation in public spaces. *Asian Journal of Women's Studies* 29(2): 266–285. https://doi.org/10.1080/12259276.2023.2211804

Mojab S (2001) Theorizing the politics of 'Islamic feminism'. *Feminist Review* 69(1): 124–146. https://doi.org/10.1080/01417780110070197

Mokhles S & Sunikka-Blank M (2022) 'I'm always home': Social infrastructure and women's personal mobility patterns in informal settlements in Iran. *Gender, Place & Culture* 29(4): 455–481. https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2021.1916440

Molana H, Ranjbar AM & Razavi S (2023) Woman, life, freedom: Decoding the feminist uprising in Iran. *Political Geography* 103: 102834. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2023.102834

Moon K & Cho HD (2024) Biopolitics and a right to tourism. *Current Issues in Tourism* 27(8): 1265–1280. https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2023.2185100

Moqadam M (2025) Fractal scaling of feminist politics and the emergence of woman life freedom movement in Iran. *Social Forces*: soaf050. https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/soaf050

Morshed TB & Hernandez-Lara AB (2024) Women travelers and social media: Charting the path to economic and entrepreneurial opportunities. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management* 34: 100952. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2023.100952

Movono A & Dahles H (2017) Female empowerment and tourism: A focus on businesses in a Fijian village. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research* 22(6): 681–692. https://doi.org/10.1080/10941665.2017.1310400

Najmabadi A (2005) *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity*. University of California Press, Berkeley.

Nematpour M, Oshriyeh O & Ghaffari M (2024) Behind the invisible walls: Understanding constraints on Muslim solo female travel. *Tourism Management Perspectives* 50: 101213. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2023.101213

Nikjoo A, Markwell K, Nikbin M & Hernández-Lara AB (2021) The flag-bearers of change in a patriarchal Muslim society: Narratives of Iranian solo female travelers on Instagram. *Tourism Management Perspectives* 38: 100817. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2021.100817

Nikjoo A, Seyfi S & Saarinen J (2025a) Tourism as a catalyst for socio-political change. *Tourism Geographies* 27(2): 333–355. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2025.2495177

Nikjoo A, Seyfi S & Saarinen J (2025b) Promoting gender inclusivity through community-based tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research Empirical Insights* 6(1): 100181. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annale.2025.100181

Nikjoo A, Zaman M, Salehi S & Hernández-Lara AB (2022) The contribution of all-women tours to well-being in middle-aged Muslim women. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 30(7): 1720–1735. https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2021.1879820

Nisha F & Cheung C (2022) Locating Muslimah in the travel and tourism research. *Tourism Management Perspectives* 41: 100940. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2021.100940

Nisha F, Cheung C & Tung VWS (2025) Intersectional marginalisation of female Muslim tourists. *Tourism Management* 108: 105099. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2023.105099

Norris FH, Stevens SP, Pfefferbaum B, Wyche KF & Pfefferbaum RL (2008) Community resilience as a metaphor, theory, set of capacities, and strategy for disaster readiness. *American Journal of Community Psychology* 41: 127–150. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-007-9156-6

Orazani N & Teymoori A (2024) The manifold faces of political resistance: The woman, life, freedom movement. *In* Zeineddine FB & Vollhardt JR (eds.) *Resistance to Repression and Violence*, 137–156. Springer, Cham.

Osborne N (2019) For still possible cities: a politics of failure for the politically depressed. *Australian Geographer* 50(2): 145–154. https://doi.org/10.1080/00049182.2018.1481890

Pang Q, Liao Z & Xiao H (2024) Communities of learning and practice: A research agenda in tourism. *Tourism Geographies* 26(3): 474–497. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2023.2268742

Partanen M, Kettunen M & Saarinen J (2025) Community inclusion in tourism development: Young people's social innovation propositions for advancing sustainable tourism. *Tourism Recreation Research*, *50*(1): 58-73. https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2023.2226040

Rahbari L (2024) (Gender) politics in the field: The precarities of diasporic (women) scholars of Iranian politics during and after the 'Woman, Life, Freedom' uprising. *Politics & Gender* 20(2): 506–512. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X23000061

Rahbari L, Longman C & Coene G (2019) The female body as the bearer of national identity in Iran: A critical discourse analysis of the representation of women's bodies in official online outlets. *Gender, Place & Culture* 26(10): 1417–1437. https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2019.1582369

Rahbari L, Roggeband C & Kolbe K (2025) Introduction to 'Gender, Sexuality, and State Violence: International Perspectives on Institutional and Intersectional Justice'. *Societies* 15(4): 86. https://doi.org/10.3390/soc15040086

Repo J (2015) *The Biopolitics of Gender*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Rickly-Boyd JM (2013) Existential authenticity: Place matters. *Tourism Geographies* 15(4): 680–686. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2013.823845

Ridanpää R (2025) Framework for regenerative entrepreneurship in tourism: fostering reciprocal relationships within place. *Tourism Geographies*, 1-18. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2025.2535690

Robinson JW & Green GP (eds) (2011) Introduction to Community Development: Theory, Practice, and Service-Learning. Sage, Thousand Oaks.

Rostami A & Trupp A (2025) Gender, religion, and sociospatial (im) mobilities: Toward an intersectional framework for Muslim female solo travel. *Erdkunde* 79(2): 147–156. https://doi.org/10.3112/erdkunde.2025.02.05

Rostami A, Trupp A & Stephenson ML (2024) Female solo travel experiences: An autoethnography on social and emotional challenges with tourism industry stakeholders. *Advances in Southeast Asian Studies* 17(2): 201–212. https://doi.org/10.14764/10.ASEAS-0090

Roudometof V (2019) Cosmopolitanism, glocalization and youth cultures. *Youth and Globalization* 1(1): 19–39. https://doi.org/10.1163/25895745-00101003

Ruez D & Cockayne D (2021) Feeling otherwise: ambivalent affects and the politics of critique in geography. *Dialogues in Human Geography* 11(1): 88–107. https://doi.org/10.1177/2043820621997012

Ruiz-Ballesteros E & González-Portillo A (2024) Limiting rural tourism: Local agency and community-based tourism in Andalusia (Spain). *Tourism Management* 104: 104938. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2023.104938

Saarinen J & Gill AM (2018a) Introduction: Placing resilience in the sustainability frame. *In* Saarinen J & Gill AM (eds.) *Resilient Destinations and Tourism*, 3–12. Routledge, London.

Saarinen J & Gill AM (2018b) Tourism, resilience, and governance strategies in the transition towards sustainability. *In* Saarinen J & Gill AM (eds.) *Resilient Destinations and Tourism*, 15–33. Routledge, London.

Saarinen J & Gill AM (eds) (2018) *Resilient Destinations and Tourism: Governance Strategies in the Transition Towards Sustainability in Tourism*. Routledge, London.

Saarinen J & Wall-Reinius S (2019) Enclaves in tourism: producing and governing exclusive spaces for tourism. *Tourism Geographies* 21(5): 739–748. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2019.1668051
Saarinen J (2006) Traditions of sustainability in tourism studies. *Annals of Tourism Research* 33(4): 1121–1140. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2006.06.007
Saarinen J (2021a) Tourism for change: Change management towards sustainable tourism development. *In* Saarinen J & Rogerson J M (eds.) *Tourism, Change and the Global South*, 15–32. Routledge, London.
Saarinen J (2021b) Is being responsible sustainable in tourism? Connections and critical differences. *Sustainability* 13(12): 65-99. https://doi.org/10.3390/su13126699
Sagheim KB (2023) The role of legitimation and delegitimation in new path development in tourism. *Tourism Geographies* 25(4): 1186–1203. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2022.2109207
Sanz-Ibáñez C, Lozano S & Clavé SA (2019) Brokers in a destination's knowledge networks. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management* 11: 120–129. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jdmm.2019.03.001
Scheyvens R & Biddulph R (2018) Inclusive tourism development. *Tourism Geographies* 20(4): 589–609. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2018.1486881
Scott JC (2016) Everyday forms of resistance. *In* Scott JC (ed) *Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*: 3–33. Routledge, London.
Seyfi S & Hall CM (2019) Deciphering Islamic theocracy and tourism: Conceptualization, context, and complexities. *International Journal of Tourism Research* 21(6): 735–746. https://doi.org/10.1002/jtr.2301
Seyfi S, Kimbu AN, Tavangar M, Vo-Thanh T & Zaman M (2025) Surviving crisis: Building tourism entrepreneurial resilience as a woman in a sanctions-ravaged destination. *Tourism Management* 106: 105025. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2024.105025
Seyfi S, Nikjoo A & Sharifi-Tehrani M (2018) Domestic tourism in Iran: Development, directions, and issues. *In*: Seyfi S & Hall C M (eds) *Tourism in Iran: Challenges, Development and Issues*: 38–54. Routledge, London.
Shahrokni N (2019) *Women in Place: The Politics of Gender Segregation in Iran*. University of California Press, Berkeley.
Rickly-Boyd JM (2013) Existential authenticity: Place matters. *Tourism Geographies* 15(4): 680–686. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2013.823845
Robinson JW & Green GP (eds) (2011) Introduction to Community Development: Theory, Practice, and Service-Learning. Sage, Thousand Oaks.
Rostami A & Trupp A (2025) Gender, religion, and sociospatial (im) mobilities: Toward an intersectional framework for Muslim female solo travel. *Erdkunde* 79(2): 147–156. https://doi.org/10.3112/erdkunde.2025.02.05
Rostami A, Trupp A & Stephenson ML (2024) Female solo travel experiences: An autoethnography on social and emotional challenges with tourism industry stakeholders. *Advances in Southeast Asian Studies* 17(2): 201–212. https://doi.org/10.14764/10.ASEAS-0090
Roudometof V (2019) Cosmopolitanism, glocalization and youth cultures. *Youth and Globalization* 1(1): 19–39. https://doi.org/10.1163/25895745-00101003
Ruez D & Cockayne D (2021) Feeling otherwise: ambivalent affects and the politics of critique in geography. *Dialogues in Human Geography* 11(1): 88–107. https://doi.org/10.1177/2043820621997012
Ruiz-Ballesteros E & González-Portillo A (2024) Limiting rural tourism: Local agency and community-based tourism in Andalusia (Spain). *Tourism Management* 104: 104938. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2023.104938
Shrestha RK, L'Espoir Decosta JNP & Whitford M (2025) Creating authentic indigenous tourism experiences. *Annals of Tourism Research* 110: 103882. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2024.103882
Sweet PL (2018) The feminist question in realism. *Sociological Theory* 36(3): 221–243. https://doi.org/10.1177/0735275118794990
Sharifi-Tehrani M, Seyfi S, Vo-Thanh T & Zaman M (2024) Women's network resource acquisition in informal rural entrepreneurship: A developed view of opportunity versus necessity dichotomy. *Journal of Travel Research*: OnlineFirst. https://doi.org/10.1177/00472875241300974
Sharpley R (2012) Island tourism or tourism on islands? *Tourism Recreation Research* 37(2): 167–172. https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2012.11081701
Shirazi F (2017) Iran's compulsory hijab: From politics and religious authority to fashion shows. *In* Almila AM & Inglis D (eds.) *The Routledge International Handbook to Veils and Veiling*, 95–115. Routledge, London.
Shrestha RK, Decosta J P L E & Whitford M (2025) Creating authentic indigenous tourism experiences. *Annals of Tourism Research* 110: 103882. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2024.103882
Sweet PL (2018) The feminist question in realism. *Sociological Theory* 36(3): 221–243. https://doi.org/10.1177/0735275118794990
Tavakoli R & Mura P (2021) Muslim women travellers' constraints: A critical review. *In* Valek NS & Almuhrzi H (eds.) *Women in Tourism in Asian Muslim Countries*, 25–40. Routledge, London.

Tolkach D & Pratt S (2022) Globalisation and cultural change in Pacific Island countries: The role of tourism. *In* McLeod MT, Dodds R & Butler R (eds.) *Island Tourism Sustainability and Resiliency,* 10–35. Routledge, London.

Trupp A, Shah C & Hitchcock M (2023) Globalisation, crafts, and tourism microentrepreneurship in the South Pacific: Economic and sociocultural dimensions. *Journal of Heritage Tourism* 18(6): 733–755. https://doi.org/10.1080/1743873X.2022.2119860

Varma A & Shaban S (2024) Conceptualizing feminist solidarity through resistance in the "Woman, Life, Freedom" movement. *Communication, Culture & Critique* 17(2): 120–126. https://doi.org/10.1093/ccc/tcad014

Wang N (1999) Rethinking authenticity in tourism experience. *Annals of Tourism Research* 26(2): 349–370. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0160-7383(98)00103-0

Wang S & Sun J (2023a) Embodiment of feminine subjectivity by women of a tourism destination. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 31(6): 1447–1463. https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2022.2068463

Wang S & Sun J (2023b) Taste pursuing in rural residents' consumption: A comparative study of tourism impact in Dali, China. *Tourism Management Perspectives* 48: 101158. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2023.101158

Xu H (2018) Moving toward gender and tourism geographies studies. *Tourism Geographies* 20(4): 721–727. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2018.1479720

Zarezadeh ZZ & Rastegar R (2023) Gender–leisure nexus through a social justice lens: The voice of women from Iran. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management* 54: 472–480. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2023.03.017

Zhu S, Jin W & He C (2019) On evolutionary economic geography: A literature review using bibliometric analysis. *European Planning Studies* 27(4): 639–660. https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2019.1569594

Zweiri M & AlObaidan A (2023) The second succession in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Change or continuity? *In* Kardaş Ş & Aras B (eds.) *Geopolitics of the New Middle East*, 77–93. Routledge, London.