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A Conceptual Framework for Cultural Tourists' Perception of Travel with Focus on Spirituality (Case Study :Isfahan)

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Abstract

Statement of Problem: The quest for the discovery of reality and meaning of existence prompted human being to tour the globe in order to realize his non-material and spiritual dimensions in parallel with his quest for cognition. Cultural attractions have always captivated tourists. Tourists travel to culturally important spots to get familiar with and understand the culture and history of inhabitants of different territories. When the cultural tourist is a human being endowed with non-material faculties based on the five senses, the environment and society, his perception of travel is not limited to materialistic perception. Therefore, it is necessary to study the concept of a cultural tourist's perception based on spiritual themes.

Objective: Presenting a conceptual framework for cultural tourists' perception of travel to Naqsh-e Jahan Square of Isfahan with a focus on spirituality

Research Methodology: This qualitative research follows a descriptive-analytical approach using desk research data and relying on direct observations of foreign tourists at Naqsh-e Jahan Square in Isfahan in spring 2018.

Conclusion: A cultural tourist's perception at the level of the five senses, the environment and society occurs in the context of spirituality as the very existential essence of human being. A cultural tourist's perception stemming from individual and environmental factors on a cultural attraction guarantees spirituality that is expressed with the focus on internal joy and happiness, connection with self and existence, metaphysical forces, feeling of serenity, return to self and exploring one's missing soul through connection with the Creator of being.


Keywords: *Perception, Spirituality, Travel, Cultural tourist.*

Statement of Problem

Mankind has always been interested in the cognition and perception of being. To that effect, travel is viewed as a source of cognition that can largely raise one's awareness; culture, in particular, is a

valuable source that can be instrumental in one's exploration, cognition and perception of the world during cultural tourism and visit to a historically and culturally attractive area.

Cognition and perception of the realities of being is intertwined with human being's spirit and soul and is not limited to material and apparent passions

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because human being incorporates a material and a spiritual dimension, hence, inclination for cognition, exploration and perception is specifically interconnected with human's spirit. Therefore, spiritual themes, i.e. spirituality, are among concepts which can bring human being closer to his non-material and spiritual dimension. The question here is to know the cognition and perception of a cultural tourist reach during a visit to a culturally and historically attractive area in the context of spiritual themes and the non-material dimension of human's being. Secondary research indicates that a tourist's perception of travel in light of spirituality has not been precisely studied. Since spirituality, or in general terms the non-material faculties of human being, constitutes the very essence of mankind, a tourist's perception and cognition would be beyond material passions and the exterior dimension that rely merely on senses; a non-material perception and cognition guaranteeing his spiritual faculties. Therefore, this research seeks to answer the following question:

What is the general framework of a tourist's perception of travel in the context of the foundations of spirituality?

Research Background

A review of theoretical foundations shows that no research has been conducted to study perception, tourism and spirituality on the same front. Nonetheless, we briefly review the most significant research projects that have studied each of these concepts separately. The research on tourist's perception is focused mainly upon interaction between tourists and the host society. For instance, Zaidan (2016) highlights the mutual impacts of cultural differences in the host society and tourists' perception of travel. He concludes that the host society's behavior affects the tourists' perception of the destination of tourism. The interaction between the host society and tourists in the light of development of cultural tourism in the Southeast Asian region of Yogyakarta has been studied by Azmi, Shuhada Ngadi & Ngelambong

(2015). The findings of their research show that the host society's offering of guidance can be instrumental in a better cognition and further acquisition of cultural experience during visits to cultural tourism destinations. Wong, McIntosh & Chris (2013) concluded that social interactions would affect perception. Studying spirituality in tourism also unveils new issues. For instance, Imani Khoshkhoo, Shahrabi Farahani & Araqi (2015), adopting content analysis methodology, summarize approaches vis-à-vis spirituality in tourism studies. Jarratt (2013) has conducted a socio-cultural analysis of the traditional seaside resort and its contemporary meaning to tourists within the framework of spirituality. Furthermore, Willson, McIntosh & Zahra (2013) conducted a conceptual analysis of tourism and spirituality, concluding that spirituality is a key pillar of travel and displacement.

Theoretical Foundations

• Perception

In general terms, perception implies human being's knowledge and cognition of his interior and exterior world. Perception has long laid the foundation for human being's cognition. The simplest form of perception is human being's encounter with the world and his impression of the environment and the situation he lives in (Borchert, 1996: 394). Perception follows specific stimulants like foreknowledge and expectations, motivational states of the affective or cognitive variable and finally decision-making and willpower of the perceiver (Iravani & Khodapanahi, 2011: 22, 25 & 26). A variety of factors affect one's perception, are shown in Figure 1.

As Fig. 1 shows the objective or the subject of perception, including its novelty, motion, size and background, as well as the perceiver's individual attributes like interests, character, motivations and expectations influence one's perception where the perception of data is taking place. Individual perception generally stems from the five senses (sense perception), communications and interaction

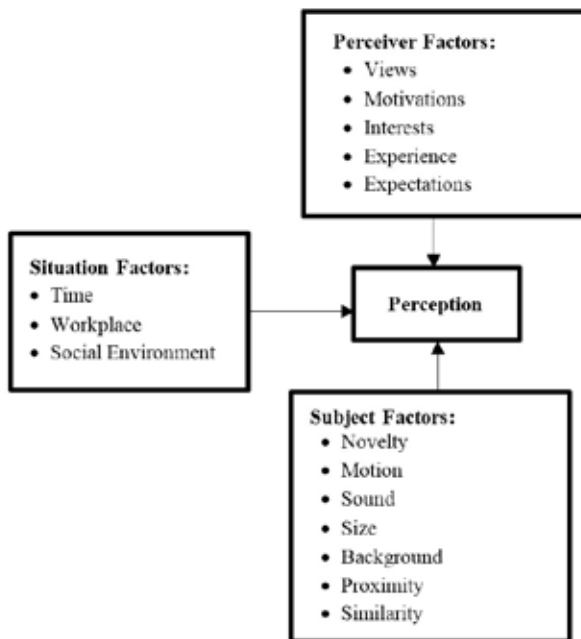


Fig. 1. Factors Influencing Perception. Source: Perech, Yousefi Amiri & Imani, 2013: 41.

with others (social perception) and the surrounding environment (environmental perception).

Sense perception is a mental process giving meaning to sense experience and helping human beings understand the relation between ongoing affairs and the meaning of objects. This action occurs in one's mind so rapidly that it creates the impression of being simultaneous with sensing. The factors involved in this process are sense experience, subsequent concepts and imaginations, individual motivation and the situation in which perception occurs (Irvani & Khodapanahi, 2011: 10).

Perception of exterior mechanism is a process pertaining to the mode of stimulation of sense members and data gathering; and cognition of interior mechanism is the process and mode of the impact of past experience, psychological factors like motivations and values, and personal factors in the interpretation of sense data. Although human beings communicate with their environment via various senses, 80% results from seeing. Therefore observation of scenes and their perception by humans are instrumental in their cognition of the environment (Bell, 1993). In social psychology, perception lays emphasis on the process of formation of individual

reactions to mental perception of others, which is known as social perception (Hamilton, 2005; Phillips, Weisbuch & Ambady, 2014). From such aspect, the issue of perception is not limited to senses and covers the mode of individuals' cognition and perception of others during encounters based on their senses (Balçetis, E. & Lassiter, 2010; Adams, Ambady, Nakayama, & Shimojo, 2011). To that effect, general indices, cultural, symbolic and identity values, entertainment values, endorsed values and social sensitivities may be described as indicators of social perception (Cassatella & Peano, 2011:188). One of the most important parameters of social perception is one's face. Facial features like happiness or sadness, similarity with another face in the perceiver's mind, similarity to friend or foe, and apparent features like skin color, eye color and other features influence perception. Nonetheless, the significant point is that this process occurs very rapidly and will significantly affect one's interaction and behavior (Ruffman, Henry, Livingstone & Phillips, 2008; Ryan, Murray & Ruffman, 2009). Environmental perception underlines the interconnectedness and intertwinement of perception, cognition and environmental circumstances and such connection emerges particularly when the perception of objects is separated from the perception of the environment (Shahcheraghi, 2009: 75).

The term "environment", which is derived from French *environ* in the 17th century, is defined as a collection of external conditions surrounding a living organism or society and influencing their behavior and activities in a way or other (Shakuei, 2003: 114). In fact, environmental perception is possible when one is required to move within the environment. And during movement in the environment, diverse scenes will be observed one after another (Motallebi, 2001: 56).

• Spirituality During Travel

The real principle of human being, as the main pivot of travel and tourism, is a reasonable, coordinated and practical thinking system about spirituality, whose objective is spiritual evolution, which is

better known as spiritual perceiver faculty (Elahi, 1998: 25). Humans embark on the discovery of being during their lifetime, and for that purpose they travel to different places in search of cognition and experience to communicate with earth, nature and the Creator with a view to understanding the concept and the meaning of life (Willson, McIntosh & Zahra, 2013: 153). The values which are presented to humans throughout travel are considered as guidelines for perceiving the reality and the meaning of life (Schwartz, 1994). They influence one’s perception of life and subsequently his behaviors in light of his cognitive system (Kim, Borges & Chon, 2006; Ramdas & Mohamed, 2014). Today, spirituality covers a vast area from the most exalted human relations to the quest for existential meaning, from the transcendent dimension of humanity to his personal views and behaviors that indicate devotion to a transcendent dimension or even further. Generally speaking, one may say that spirituality is among human virtues giving meaning to human life and setting an ultimate objective for it, besides giving rise to a specific mode of life in the world and linking one with self, others and the entire Universe (Imani Khoshkhoo, Shahrabi Farahani & Araqi, 2015: 283). Spirituality in tourism comprises the parameters shown in Table 1.

Everything existing in this vast Universe is constantly moving in its very essence and substance towards the main center of their being, which is nothing but eternal God. Travel is the key to the

esoteric and exoteric dimensions of wayfarer, treasure of divine mysteries, source of perfection, knowledge, learning and lessons, soundness and richness, opening hidden features, knowing companions and experience of time, and reaching the state of perfection (Qobadi, Eraqi & Shahrabi Farahani, 2016: 85). Since tourism – as the largest displacement and movement of human beings – incorporates touring due to physical movement, i.e. moving from one point and returning to the same point (Ambrož & Ovsenic, 2011: 5), such displacement is always endowed with a thinking and intention so as to set thoughts in motion. Therefore, tourism is instrumental in one’s self-cognition and his multilateral ties with material and non-material worlds (Imani Khoshkhoo, Nadalipour & Pourjam, 2015: 29).

• **Cultural Tourism**

Human being has historically been interested in knowing about his ancestors and their modus vivendi. That is why cultural tourism was developed as a new type of tourism (Azmi, Shuhada Ngadi & Ngelambong, 2015; OECD, 2009). Data released by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) for 2017 show an increase in cultural tourism; 39% of international travels in 2017 belonged to cultural tourism, which included roughly 516 million international travels all across the globe (Richards, 2018).

UNWTO defines cultural tourism as follows:

“Cultural tourism covers all aspects representing overarching and clearly defining ways of life and lifestyle of a population both past and present, with implicit carry-forward into the future. Importantly, they go beyond the curio/arts and craft stereotypes to reflect aspects of identity, both visible and invisible, daily and special occasion. Ultimately, they are aspects which give the people of a nation/region a sense of identity, community, belonging and pride.” (UNWTO, 2017: 18)

There are two general approaches in cultural tourism: The first one is attractions and monuments approach pointing to historical and cultural

Table 1. Parameters of Spirituality in Tourism. Source: Jarratt, 2013:99.

Parameters of Spirituality in Tourism	
Awareness Sensing	- Here and Now - Tuning - Flow (Movement) - Focusing
Mystery Sensing	- Awe and Wonder - Imagination
Value Sensing	- Delight and Despair - Ultimate Goodness - Relationship - Meaning

attractions and monuments; the second one is a conceptual approach introducing cultural tourism as a way of describing motivation and the meaning of cultural activities. On one side stand tourists and their motivations for cognition, quest and knowledge of history and culture in a specific region while on the other stand the culture itself as well as historical attractions and monuments setting the foundation of tourism (Richards, 1996: 23).

Therefore, cultural tourists are classified as general and specific tourists. The general cultural tourists travel for the sole purpose of entertainment and recreation and therefore the cultural destination they travel to counts in their definition of cultural tourism. But specific cultural tourists focus on one or several cultural sectors, upon which they conduct in-depth studies to gain profound experience (Yun, Hennessey, Macdonald & Maceachern, 2008). Table 2 classifies cultural tourists.

Table 2. Classifying Cultural Tourists. Source: Petroman et al., 2013.

Category	Description
Purposeful cultural tourists	Cultural tourism plays a central role in the decision of travelling and the person in cause enjoys a deep cultural experience.
Tour-amateur cultural tourists	Cultural tourism plays a central role in the decision of travelling but the person in cause enjoys an insignificant cultural experience.
Occasional cultural tourists	Cultural tourism plays a moderate role in the decision of travelling and the person in cause enjoys an insignificant cultural experience.
Incidental cultural tourists	Cultural tourism plays a small role or no role at all in the decision of travelling and the person in cause enjoys an insignificant cultural experience.
Accidental cultural tourists	Cultural tourism plays a small role or no role at all in the decision of travelling and the person in cause enjoys a deep cultural experience.

Cultural tourists refer to tourists traveling to a city or country to learn about their culture and customs despite cultural contrasts and differences. Therefore, cultural attractions incorporate the pillars of cultural tourism (Petroman, Petroman, Marin, Ciolac, Văduva & Pandur, 2013). The perception of a tourist during a visit varies based on cultural richness, friendliness of the host society and hospitality facilities (Rahman, 2012: 83) because the tourists' level of cognition and culture is distinct from the socio-cultural structure of the host society (Zaidan, 2016: 110).

• **Cultural Tourism in Isfahan, Naqsh-e Jahan Square**

Since its construction during the Safavid dynasty, Naqsh-e Jahan Square has been the most significant urban square in Isfahan, playing a significant role in urban structure and activity. A review of Naqsh-e Jahan's status during various historical periods shows that it saw the highest degree of prosperity and glory under the Safavid rule. After the end of the Safavid rule and up until the Pahlavi period, the square plunged into stagnation. The edifices surrounding the square were damaged seriously, not to mention harms inflicted upon the activity of the tourist destination. During the Safavid period, Naqsh-e Jahan Square experienced prosperous activity. Besides political and religious affairs under way in the surrounding buildings, the bazaar and open space around the square provided an international-class venue for profitable business and trading. People from small merchants to international tradespeople were doing business around the square (Shahabinejad, Abouei, Qale-Noei & Emami, 2014: 48 & 62); (Fig. 2).

Before Isfahan was chosen as the Safavid capital, Naqsh-e Jahan Square used to be a namesake vast garden. Under Shah Abbas I, it was expanded as far as what we see today. After that, what we know today as the most famous and glorious historical monuments of Isfahan – Abbasid Royal Mosque (Imam Mosque), Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, Ali Qapu Palace and Qeysarieh Gate – were built around it. The square is 500 meters long and 165

meters wide. Under Shah Abbas and his successors in the 17th century, the square was the place of polo, army march, festivities and spectacles. Two rocky goals still stand there – a legacy of the past glory (Zendehdel, 2009: 128).

Ali Qapu Palace was known by the Safavids as the government palace. It displays unique architecture among Safavid palaces. Ali Qapu was built at the order of Shah Abbas I in 11th century A.H. Located west of Naqsh-e Jahan Square, Ali Qapu has five stories, each specially decorated (Ibid: 83); (Fig. 3).

Abbasid Royal Mosque (Imam Mosque) was built in 1020 A.H. at the order of Shah Abbas I. The mosque was inaugurated when the Shah was celebrating his 24th

year in power. The mosque is an eternal masterpiece of Persian architecture, tile work and stonework in the 11th century A.H. (Ibid: 140); (Fig. 4).

Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque is another architecture masterpiece of the 11th century AH. Shah Abbas I ordered its construction east of Naqsh-e Jahan Square and in front of Ali Qapu Palace. The project lasted 18 years. Sheikh Lotfollah was a Shia scholar of Lebanese origin. He settled in Isfahan at the invitation of Shah Abbas I. The mosque was built as a sign of respect for Sheikh Lotfollah. Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque’s architecture is endowed with such glory that foreign archeologists have cast doubt on the man-made origin of such mosque (Ibid: 142); (Fig. 5).



Fig. 2. Naqsh-e Jahan Square, Isfahan. Source: <https://www.nikangasht.com/tours/isfahan-tour>



Fig. 3. Ali Qapu Palace, Naqsh-e Jahan Square. Source: <http://jahangard-travel.com/isfahan>



Fig. 4. Abbasid Royal Mosque (Imam Mosque), Naqsh-e Jahan Square. Source: <http://jahangard-travel.com/isfahan>



Fig. 5. Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, Naqsh-e Jahan Square. Source: <http://wi.tasnimnews.com>

Research Methodology

This qualitative research follows a descriptive-analytical approach using desk research data of the theoretical foundations and direct observations at Naqsh-e Jahan Square in Isfahan. The population comprises foreign cultural tourists who visited Isfahan in spring 2019. The participant observation method was applied to observe the behavior and perception of foreign cultural tourists visiting Naqsh-e Jahan Square in Isfahan. This strategy combines analysis of documents, interviews, participation, direct observation and self-analysis (Flick, 2015: 244). Descriptive observation, focused observation and selective observation constitute the three stages of the research method. First, the locations visited by foreign tourists were specified. Then, after describing the location of study, procedures and problems arising possibly during observation were focused upon. Finally, the selective stage comprised data collection based on the research question, studying the perception of foreign cultural tourists visiting Isfahan through informal interviews, with local shopkeepers and residents as well as observing them during their visits to the cultural site, having lunch at restaurants around Naqsh-e Jahan Square, sitting at cafés there, visiting shops and their rest time at the square. Therefore, the findings of this research are presented in two sections: theoretical foundations and observation.

• Section I: Conceptual Design Based on Theoretical Foundations

Citing theoretical foundations, one may argue that a cultural tourist is influenced by various individual

and environmental factors in the tourism space. Having their own culture in mind, cultural tourists visit a new cultural environment and get diverse impressions on the cultural site. The significant point is that a cultural tourist differs from other groups of tourists on certain grounds and such difference influences the level of perception. Such cognition materializes wholly in the context of spirituality or non-material dimension of human being. Therefore, a cultural tourist's general perception of spiritually-focused travel can be shown as follows in Figure 6.

• Section II: Data Collected from Qualitative Observation

Along with foreign tourists visiting Naqsh-e Jahan Square in Isfahan in spring 2018, direct observation was made with the focus being on the tourists' perception of and attention to the spiritual foundations. At Naqsh-e Jahan Square, foreign cultural tourists visit Imam Mosque, Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque, Ali Qapu Palace and the bazaar. Normally, a full day is spent on visiting Naqsh-e Jahan Square. However, tourists travelling on their own may have a different schedule.

The outcome of qualitative surveys and interviews with tourists, merchants and local residents, and accompanying them to directly observe them during their visits to cultural and historical attractions at Naqsh-e Jahan Square of Isfahan shows that in the general sense, social and environmental perceptions of tourists are comprised of a variety of elements. A tourist visiting a site will have different perceptions resulting from his five senses (sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste). The architecture of the tourism site influences the tourist's sight. Traditional music played

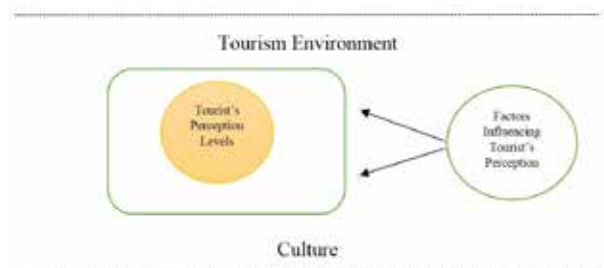


Fig. 6. Cultural Tourist's General Perception of Travel. Source: Authors (Based on the fundamental foundations of research).

at the square or at nearby restaurants and cafés as well as calls for prayers heard from the minarets of the mosques target the sense of hearing. Many tourists even ask about the meaning of calls for prayers. Traditional foods symbolizing history and culture are also influential. Handicraft stores located at the square stimulate the touch sense of visitors. Handicraft work like vitreous enamel, traditional costumes, silverware, pendants, copperwork, ceramic, marquetry, traditional rugs and carpets, as well as decorative designs create a perception of culture, history and beliefs in the host society in the mind of tourists. That in turn gives rise a general and integrated cognition of his perceptions. Every perception emerging out of the five senses of a cultural tourist creates cognition of cultural attractions, but all perceptions of tourists would not be limited to their five senses because the tourists' description of their five senses during encounters with cultural elements goes beyond material passions. The significant point is that all these perceptions happen in the context of spirituality, i.e. the spiritual and original essence of mankind who is led to have a deeper look into himself. The perceiver is a human being whose original essence is the spiritual dimension of his being. Therefore, such inward look and possible quest for human and cultural commonalities represent the innate foundations, or in general terms the spiritual foundations of the being of the tourist, which take shape in his soul through perceptions. The important point is that the first perceptions and interpretations expressed by a cultural tourist are spiritual concepts which could not be easily expressed in words. In other words, the spiritual cognitions of a cultural tourist cover his perceptions and may even be more significant and more innate to him. Such perception occurs fully in a tourism and cultural environment, which is influenced by the tourist's cultural beliefs and the host society. Furthermore, the interaction and communication developing between the tourist and the host society may prove to be significant due to similarities and differences. The cultural tourists' general cognition of Naqsh-e Jahan Square in Isfahan are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Cultural Tourists' Parameters of Perception. Source: Authors.

Perception	Parameters
Sense Perception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Architecture • Calls for Prayers heard from mosques at specific times of the day • Traditional Iranian music • Touching handicraft • Tasting local and traditional food • Smelling perfume
Social Perception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowing the host society • Interaction and dialogue with people, vendors and other visitors • Comfortable feeling • Gaining new experience in communications with others
Environmental Perception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aesthetics of attractions • Sainthood • Attractive atmosphere and environment
Spiritual Perception	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal joy and happiness • Connection to self • Connection and proximity to being • High potential in creating artworks • Tranquility • Return to self and finding the missing innate soul • Emergence of non-material needs • Metaphysical forces • Spiritual exaltation • Proximity to the Creator of being

Summation

This research has examined the cultural tourists' perception with a focus on spirituality, using qualitative method based on secondary studies and direct observation in spring 2018. The population under study comprises foreign cultural tourists visiting Naqsh-e Jahan Square in Isfahan. An analysis and review of the theoretical foundations and findings indicates that a cultural tourist's perception based on the five senses, the environment and the society take place in the context of human essence and his spiritual being, which are influenced by individual and environmental factors; Individual factors like motivation, character, age, sex, education and self-awareness, and environmental factors like governing regulations, travel and tourism services, the host society's behavior and climate conditions. These factors influence cognition and perception in order for sense, social and environmental cognition to show diverse qualities in the context of the spiritual

and non-material essence of human being. The findings of this research show that cognition and the quest for the meaning of life prompted human beings – as a reasonable, coordinated and spiritual system – to choose to travel in order to take cognizance of his own culture and history, provide for his essence of being, take steps to explore the Universe and make efforts for gaining cognition and experience to communicate with earth, nature, the Creator and to understand what life means. Exploring and taking cognizance of the meaning of life in the general sense of the world, i.e. human being's knowledge of his own interior and exterior worlds is described as the path towards perfection, decrypting secrets and human presence on earth. Such movement helps tourist perceive mystery sense, awareness sense and communications with the environment. Therefore, perception and cognition take up added significance as the birthplace of human essence on one side and as the spiritual perception faculty on spiritual identity path, particularly in tourism, on the other side. The values presented to humans throughout travel are like guidelines for the cognition of the reality and the meaning of life. It is particularly important in cultural tourism as in 2017 approximately 39% of international tourists all across the globe were cultural tourists who travelled to other cities or countries to take cognizance of cultures and customs. Perceiving and interpreting the surrounding environment based on the parameters of the five senses, interaction and social communications with fellow mankind, and the surrounding atmosphere set the stage for the cognition of meanings and non-material aspects of being, the environment, existence and self. Since human being derives his essence from a non-material dimension, it is possible for him to perceive spirituality and communicate with himself, with the environment and the Creator. However, the level of sense cognition based on the five senses, communications with others and attention to architecture and atmosphere may differ in tourists. Such difference is expressed in the tourists' statements, but

cognition, interpretation and perception are seen in all tourists at varying levels.

To answer the research question, the general framework of cultural tourists' perception of travel to Naqsh-e Jahan Square of Isfahan can be sketched out as follows (Fig. 7).

Conclusion

Cognition and perception of the existence is a human issue which is not limited to exoteric dimensions and material senses; rather it is intertwined with the spirit and more specifically spiritual themes. This human character highlights the non-material and spiritual essence of his existence. Therefore, human beings examine various options in their quest for realities and cognition. Travelling is a significant source of cognition. Visiting cultural and historical attractions of an area would largely influence the tourist's awareness and perception.

A cultural tourist's perception of a cultural site in the context of the five senses, the environment and social senses occurs on the ground of spiritual themes. By visiting cultural and historical attractions, a cultural tourist will have a sense perception related to the five senses, a social perception resulting from interaction and communications with others on the site of tourism, and an environmental perception of the space and the atmosphere in which he is located. All these perceptions are interconnected in the context of spiritual themes that are in turn intertwined with his spirit and existence. Therefore, based on personal characters like belief, view, experience and expectations, character, self-cognition, tourism site as well as environmental conditions – from geographical features to architecture and non-manipulation of historical and cultural environments – human being perceives spirituality in light of the objective of travelling, which would be accompanied by a sense of serenity, internal joy and happiness proximity to existence and the Creator, return to oneself, attention to non-material elements and metaphysical forces. Therefore, each tourist would have a different perception depending on the

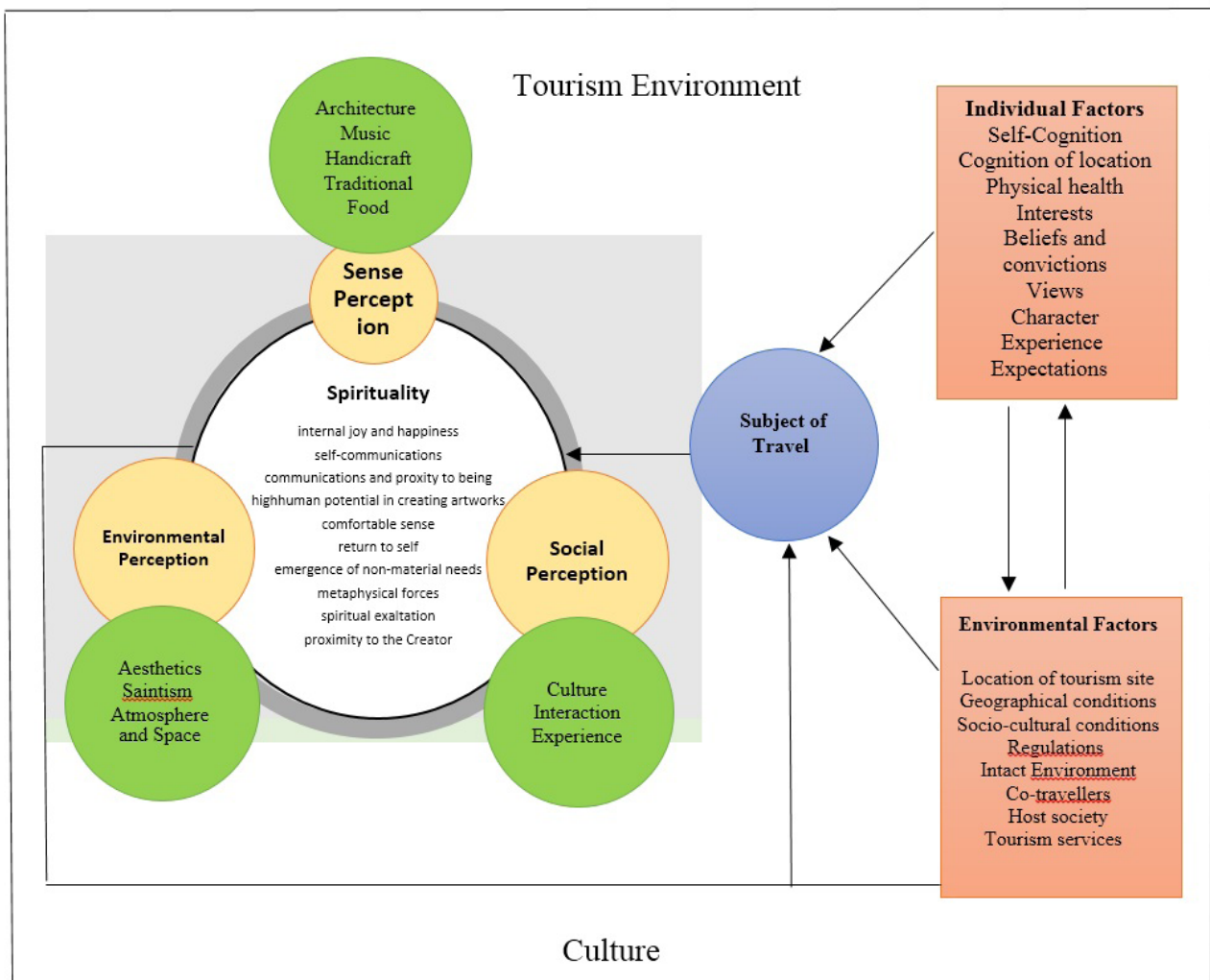


Fig. 7. Framework of cultural tourists' perception of travel to Naqsh-e Jahan Square in Isfahan with focus on spirituality. Source: Authors.

influence of individual and environmental factors and the objective of travelling to a cultural site. When a tourist travels to Naqsh-e Jahan Square in Isfahan, every cognition and perception is based on spiritual themes. The conceptual framework of spirituality takes shape based on their inward view: return to oneself, return to past and imagining ancestors, artists, and historical periods. Attention to the present time, differences between the past and present, the view of ancestors in creating artworks and architecture in light of their extraordinary capabilities are manifestations of self-cognition, joy and happiness, sense of proximity, and communications, and an inner call invites the tourist to return to his own nature. All such thoughts and mentalities are in the context of cognition related to the spiritual foundations of human being that emerge

in the tourist's mind. Individual factors like personal interests, physical health, level of self-cognition, cognition of location, individual experience, expectations before travel, beliefs and convictions and one's impression of life are among elements influencing perception. Furthermore, environmental conditions including the geographical, social and cultural location of a tourism site, governing regulations, and the non-manipulation of the environment are among environmental elements influencing cognition and perception. These elements intertwined with the objective and the subject of travel can generally influence sense, social and environmental perceptions of the tourist as well as spirituality, and lead the tourist towards a different perception quality.

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