

Original Article

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Examining the role of urban managers in the flourishing of urban tourism: a case study: Zahedan City

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Abstract

Urban managers, as the most important decision-making agents in urban affairs, play a very prominent role in the urban structure. In the field of tourism, urban managers can take a practical step towards the flourishing of urban tourism by providing suitable infrastructure. This research has been conducted to examine the role of urban managers in the flourishing of urban tourism in Zahedan city. The present research is applied in terms of purpose, and descriptive-analytical in terms of execution method. The statistical population of the research consisted of citizens of Zahedan city. Using Cochran's formula, 384 people were selected as the sample by simple random sampling. To analyze the research data and information, a one-sample t-test and multiple regression analysis were applied. The results of the one-sample t-test showed that the indicators of strategic planning and policymaking, with an average of 3.066, infrastructure development and investment, with an average of 3.089, urban marketing and branding, with an average of 3.078, and monitoring, evaluation, and continuous improvement, with an average of 3.084, are in a suitable status. Also, the flourishing of urban tourism with an average of 2.902 in Zahedan city is in an unfavorable status. The results of regression analysis showed that the urban marketing and branding indicator, with a beta coefficient of 0.366, the infrastructure development and investment indicator with a beta coefficient of 0.307, the strategic planning and policymaking indicator with a beta coefficient of 0.256, and the monitoring, evaluation, and continuous improvement indicator with a beta coefficient of 0.211 affect the flourishing of urban tourism.

Keywords

Place branding
Tourism infrastructure
Tourism/urban flourishing
Zahedan city
Urban tourism
Urban management

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1. Introduction

Currently, tourism, as a widespread economic activity and also as one of the fastest-growing industries, has a significant impact on the prosperity of local and national economies (Balideh & Taghavaei, 2024). In this situation, among the main destinations of tourists are cities, and urban tourism is one of the types of tourism where people who are interested in cultural, historical, and religious attractions spend part of their time in these places (Cong et al., 2025). Urban tourism is the interaction between the tourist and the host and the production of tourism space in relation to travel to urban areas with diverse motivations, visiting attractions, and using education and services related to tourism, which has different effects on urban space and the economy (Delavari et al., 2025). Urban tourism is one of the most vibrant forms of tourism. In other words, various factors, including innovation in technology, rapid economic growth, increased competition between urban destinations, changing work and lifestyle patterns, and increased income of some segments of society, have led to the rapid growth and development of urban tourism (Balideh & Taghavaei, 2024).

Accordingly, development specialists and urban planners believe that tourism can bring positive economic benefits to urban communities (Paddison & Hall, 2024). In fact, citing various development perspectives, urban spaces can be effective in the comprehensive development of space from various aspects, including in the tourism sector (Gharghi Shafi'i et al., 2025). Meanwhile, one of the main factors that can play a role in the planning and development of urban tourism is flourishing. The flourishing of urban tourism is one of the most persistent and important tools for achieving urban flourishing (Nasiri Hendeh Khaleh et al., 2025). Tourism is recognized as one of the fundamental industries for development and a primary source of income, employment, and capital creation, especially in less developed countries (Rabbani et al., 2025). The flourishing of urban tourism has an inseparable connection with the quality of life and urban development. Development that is realized based on civil participation, responsiveness to current problems, optimization of resources, and providing the necessary capacities and potentials for the future (Soleimani Moghaddam et al., 2024). Therefore, urban tourism has become an important topic and activity in urban management and sustainable development of cities (Milano et al., 2024). In fact, this urban activity has

created spatial changes and extensive land uses for cities. Meanwhile, the unique characteristics of cities have distinguished urban tourists from other tourist groups. Also, urban tourism plays an important role in urban cultural flows and the adaptation of cities to the process of globalization. Therefore, this type of tourism is considered a spatial change factor for cities (Balideh & Taghavaei, 2025).

Considering this point, tourism flourishing of tourism has become an important topic for many urban managers and officials, which requires evaluating the competitive environment, defining and setting goals, judging between different options in the field of investment and planning, and creating an appropriate social and business structure for tourism products (Hansen et al., 2024). Accordingly, urban tourism management must be dynamic, act with an open mind, and be aware of fundamental and constant developments in tourism to help the flourishing of tourism in cities (Bahari & Mohammadi, 2023).

In general, achieving welfare and ensuring the happiness of citizens is the primary concern of governments and urban managers. Therefore, governments and urban managers are always looking for optimal solutions to earn more income and welfare in cities. Cities go through ups and downs on the path to the flourishing of urban tourism. Sometimes the emergence of some trends helps their flourishing, and sometimes some problems set back their flourishing. Therefore, it is necessary to examine the role of urban managers in the flourishing of urban tourism in tourist-receptive cities. The increasing development of urbanization in recent years in the country and the resulting problems and issues have led to the increasing need for citizens to spend leisure and recreation time in cities. Urban tourism plays an essential role in urban development, as cities have a very high potential to attract tourists. Zahedan city, due to its strategic position as the eastern gateway of the country and having pristine cultural and historical potentials, has a special place to become an important hub of urban tourism. Realizing these potentials requires an active, strategic, and efficient urban management that can provide the necessary infrastructure, brand the city's image, and coherently guide development processes. However, objective observation and existing evidence show that urban tourism in Zahedan, despite its potential capacities, has not been able to reach the desired level of flourishing and gain the expected economic and social status. This failure to achieve the goals raises the

central question of this research: To what extent has the performance of various dimensions of the role of urban managers (including strategic planning, infrastructure development, marketing, and monitoring) as a determining factor played a role in this gap between the existing potential and the actual flourishing of urban tourism in Zahedan? Examining this role, especially in comparison with the perceived level of task implementation by managers, is necessary for formulating operational policies and reforming management processes in order to direct resources and efforts towards removing the main obstacles.

2. Theoretical and experimental background

Wong (2015), in his study titled "A framework for city prosperity index," explained the relationship between indicators, analysis, and policy, stating that to achieve urban sustainability and prosperity within a coherent framework, a comprehensive approach is needed to integrate productivity, infrastructure, quality of life, equity and social inclusion, and the environment. Furthermore, it is necessary to emphasize a hierarchical approach in understanding and analyzing the current situation and policymaking based on it. Arimah (2016), in a study titled "Identifying drivers of prosperity in African cities," found that economic growth, facilitating urban mobility, ensuring greater access to health and education, increasing safety and security, guiding urban growth, improving environmental quality, improving housing conditions, and reducing inequalities within cities are among the drivers of prosperity in African cities. Akonwaal et al. (2023) in a study titled "City prosperity index as a tool for urban regeneration: A case study of Abadan, Nigeria" concluded that the city of Abadan lacks social cohesion and has a weak civic identity, and experiences varying degrees of security threats as well as poor mobility as a result of the low standard of living of the people. Wang (2023), in a study titled "Constructing China's common prosperity index: An empirical analysis based on the DEMATEL-AHP method," concluded that in recent years, China has effectively achieved high-quality and sustainable development, but problems such as significant gaps between urban and rural areas and income persist.

Balideh and Taghvaei (2024), in their research, evaluated the status of tourism destination prosperity based on the prosperity index from the perspective of experts in Isfahan city. The results of that research showed that the prosperity status of regions 3, 5, and 6 of Isfahan is better than that of other regions of the

city. Regions 4 and 9 have an average status, and regions 11, 13, and 14 of this city have an unfavorable status in terms of the urban tourism prosperity index. Finally, based on the status and needs of each region, suggestions were made to improve its prosperity. Balideh and Taghvaei (2024), in their research, explained the indicators of the urban tourism prosperity model. The results of that research showed that the presented model has an acceptable fit. In this regard, the highest average variance obtained was for the "socio-cultural" indicator (0.81), and the lowest value was related to the "economic" indicator (0.41). Godarzi and Nasiri Berm Alvan (2024) in a study investigated the effective driving forces on urban prosperity with a future studies approach in Behbahan city. The results of that research showed that indicators of employment status, creating investment platforms, economic conditions, and economic power are related to the productivity dimension and indicate the importance of this dimension of prosperity. Also, indicators of social equality, employment, and participation of women, and economic equality are related to the dimension of justice and social participation, and indicators of housing quality and satisfaction with public security are related to the quality of life dimension of city prosperity. Balideh and Taghvaei (2025), in a study, identified strategies for tourism flourishing in cities located in mountainous environments, a case study of Hamadan city. The results of that research showed that the best strategy for tourism development in Hamadan city is the WT strategy. In fact, Hamadan city, in relation to urban tourism development, should have a defensive (WT) strategy. The priority of operational strategies in the field of urban tourism flourishing in Hamadan should be using the capacities of the private sector to improve the infrastructure and services needed for the tourism sector.

3. Theoretical foundations

In the current situation, tourism is considered one of the effective factors in expanding relations between nations and is a creator of job opportunities in the economic sector and socio-cultural interactions (Shakib et al., 2025). Tourism, as a global socio-economic phenomenon, finds itself in a uniquely important position where the challenges of sustainability and their adaptation to the changing dynamics of the market and consumer preferences demand a comprehensive approach in which tourism's flourishing gains significant importance (Ordóñez-

Martínez et al., 2024). With the comprehensive progress of human society, today, previous views and theories regarding cities and the tourism industry have also undergone change and transformation. Following this transformation, the potential that tourism and its countless positive consequences in economic, social, and environmental fields can direct cities towards tourism competition instead of industrial competition and replace industrial cities with tourism cities (Esmaeili Mahyari et al., 2023).

One of the important issues that has received much attention in cities today is urban prosperity. In this regard, the United Nations Human Settlements Committee introduces prosperity as an interaction of productivity, infrastructure, quality of life, equity, environmental sustainability, and governance. According to them, each of the six proposed dimensions is measurable and helps form the City Prosperity Index (CPI) for classifying cities in developed and developing countries (Balideh & Taghvaei, 2025). Since the early twentieth century, prosperity has been narrowly defined as material wealth, and increasing economic growth has been the policy priority of governments seeking to increase prosperity. The Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) for the city of Boston (MA) defines prosperity as a fully integrated and rational regional economy that provides opportunities for life and wealth creation for all residents (Balideh & Taghvaei, 2024).

Urban prosperity is one of the latest efforts to measure and define life satisfaction. In addition to what was stated, prosperity is a more complex concept that cannot be depicted with simple indicators that only examine people's financial income or the number of their personal cars (Godarzi & Nasiri in Alwan, 2024). In fact, urban prosperity is a comprehensive and unified approach that follows a path beyond sustainable urban development (Stossel et al., 2015). On the other hand, tourism flourishing as one of the dimensions of urban prosperity plays a vital role in cities achieving prosperity. Urban tourism flourishing means that the city becomes a magnetic destination that people love to see. At the same time, this volume of tourist presence benefits the city and its citizens and improves their quality of life (Kakavand et al., 2025). Urban tourism flourishing means a situation where a city not only attracts a significant number of tourists but also does so in a sustainable, beneficial, and high-quality manner for all parties (tourists, local residents, and the city itself) (Habibpour et al., 2024). Infrastructure is very important for urban tourism

flourishing and is considered the foundation of city development and progress. Living standards are enhanced with appropriate infrastructure such as water, sewage, roads, information and communication technology, and improved production, communications, and transportation. Advanced cities will upgrade the rank and quality of their infrastructure to compete and attract investment in the global economy. Conversely, poor infrastructure is a significant obstacle to development, leading to reduced living standards and preventing the city from attracting tourists (Tahmasnejad et al., 2024).

There are various views and theories regarding the flourishing of urban tourism, each of which in some way believes in the growth and expansion of urban tourism. The tourism destination life cycle theory believes that a tourism destination, just like a product, has a life cycle that includes various stages, such as exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation, and finally either rejuvenation or decline. For flourishing, urban managers must constantly identify the position of their city in this life cycle. If the city is in the stagnation stage, it must be "rejuvenated" with innovation and new programs. If it is in development, they must be careful that excessive and unplanned growth does not lead to decline. Flourishing is actually maintaining the city in the stages of sustainable development and consolidation (Banerjee & Tyagi, 2024).

According to the theory of tourism sustainability, genuine flourishing is not possible without sustainability. A city that only seeks to attract tourists disregard of environmental capacities and the tolerance of the local community will sooner or later face serious problems (resource depletion, resident dissatisfaction, cultural destruction) and its "flourishing" will be temporary and unstable (Ibrahim et al., 2021). The destination management theory emphasizes the importance of integrated and coordinated management for a tourism destination, meaning there must be a responsible entity or organization that brings together all stakeholders (government, private, and local community) and guides development and marketing programs. According to this view, without strong and integrated management, each sector may go its own way, and resources are wasted. Flourishing requires strong leadership and coordination among all key players to create synergy (Nugroho et al., 2021). The destination competitiveness theory focuses on factors that make a destination more attractive than its competitors.

These factors can include the quality of attractions, infrastructure, prices, marketing, service quality, etc. According to this view, for flourishing, cities must constantly evaluate their strengths and weaknesses and, by benchmarking from the best and innovating, increase their competitive advantage. High competitiveness means attracting a larger share of the tourism market (Mikulić et al., 2024). Urban tourism flourishing is linked to creativity. A creative city creates new attractions, holds innovative events, and designs urban spaces in a way that is inspiring for both residents and tourists. This creativity itself increases tourism attractiveness (Nugroho et al., 2021).

The presented theories provide urban managers with a roadmap to enable more precise and sustainable planning through a deeper understanding of tourism dynamics. Urban tourism flourishing is the result of the intelligent combination of these theories in practice:

- Managing the destination life cycle,
- Ensuring sustainability in all dimensions,
- Establishing an integrated and strong management,
- Focusing on creating unique experiences,
- Increasing competitiveness,
- Nurturing urban creativity (Banerjee & Tyagi, 2024).

Since the second half of the 20th century and after World War II, following structural and fundamental transformations in the world's economic, social, and political conditions, theoretical studies and applied research in the field of urban management and planning have seriously compelled urban affairs experts and specialists towards a noticeable shift towards democratic urban systems and an approach to city management from micro to macro levels (ShahMohammadian, 2018). Urban management can be considered as a set of interactions between formal institutions of urban administration and informal actors of civil society with a social and cultural scope that influences the formation and administration of the city (Khayat-e-Kleiber et al., 2024). Urban tourism flourishing is a multifaceted phenomenon whose realization requires integrated and active management by urban institutions. In the literature of tourism

management and urban planning, the role of urban managers is traditionally divided into four key dimensions (Hansen et al., 2024), each encompassing a set of tasks and strategies:

1. Urban marketing and branding

From a theoretical perspective, urban marketing goes beyond mere advertising and includes destination product management. This domain is based on consumer cognition, attitude, and behavior models, and its goal is to create a sustainable distinction in the minds of target audiences. Theorists emphasize the necessity of developing a unique urban identity and using integrated marketing communication tools to convey this identity (Szmytkie et al., 2024).

2. Infrastructure development and investment

This dimension is formed based on theories of regional spatial and economic development. In tourism literature, infrastructure includes not only physical elements such as transportation and public facilities but also environmental quality and basic services. The multiplier effect theory shows that targeted investment in urban infrastructure leads to increased attractiveness, reduced operational costs for private investors, and ultimately, enhanced capacity for attracting tourists (Adedoyin et al., 2021).

3. Strategic planning and policymaking

Theories related to this dimension are mainly focused on the strategic management of public organizations. Urban strategic planning requires defining a shared vision, setting long-term goals, and formulating policies aligned with the city's competitive advantages (Hansen et al., 2024).

4. Monitoring, evaluation, and continuous improvement

This section emphasizes the control loop and organizational learning. The success of tourism policies depends on the existence of an efficient system for data collection, performance evaluation against key performance indicators, and timely implementation of corrections. Total quality and performance management theories provide frameworks that require urban managers to consider tourism as a dynamic process and constantly strive to optimize it (Hansen et al., 2024).

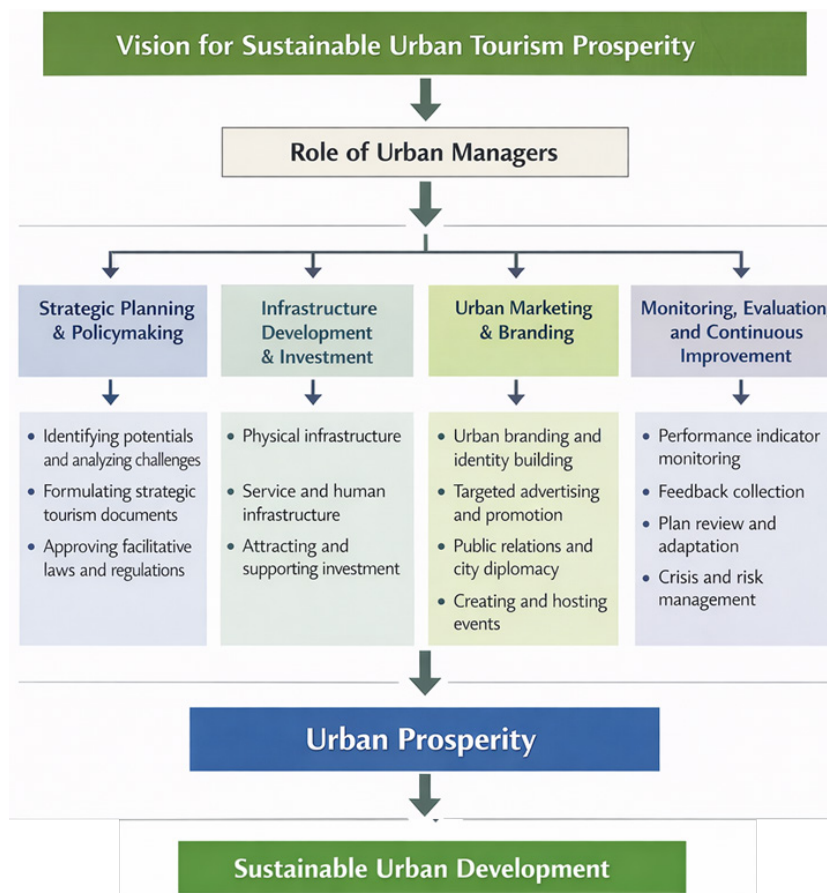


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the research

4. Methodology

The present research is applied in terms of purpose, and descriptive-analytical in terms of execution method. This research was conducted with a quantitative approach and a descriptive survey method. The statistical population of the study consisted of citizens of Zahedan city, who numbered 587,530 according to the 2016 census. The sample size was determined as 384 people using Cochran's formula. For selecting this sample, cluster sampling was applied. Zahedan city was divided into five central districts, and then, proportional to the population share of each district, sampling was conducted. In total, 400 questionnaires were distributed, and after review, 16 cases were removed due to incompleteness or invalid responses, leaving the final sample size at 384 people. This process resulted in a response rate of 96%. To collect research information and data, in

addition to the library method, a researcher-made questionnaire was applied. This questionnaire included two main components: urban managers with four variables, 14 indicators, and 39 items (Table 1), and urban tourism flourishing with five indicators and 21 items (Table 2). The validity of the tool was assessed through content and face validity by professors, and its reliability was confirmed by Cronbach's alpha (urban managers: 0.83; tourism flourishing: 0.82). Data were analyzed using SPSS software, first with a one-sample t-test and then with multiple regression analysis to measure the impact of the role of urban managers on urban tourism flourishing. It is noteworthy that due to possible limitations, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were not performed, and the adequacy of the tool was evaluated only based on content validity and Cronbach's alpha reliability.

Table 1. Variables, indicators, and items of urban managers

Variable	Indicator	Item
Strategic planning and policymaking	Identifying potentials and analyzing challenges	Identifying existing attractions (historical, natural, cultural, modern); analyzing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats; reviewing global tourism trends and tourist expectations.
	Formulating a strategic tourism document	Defining vision, mission, and macro and micro objectives; prioritizing development projects and plans; formulating supportive policies (financial, legal) for the private sector and investors.
	Approving facilitative laws and regulations	Creating legal frameworks for investment and development, standardizing tourism services, and regulations related to heritage and environmental preservation.
Infrastructure development and investment	Physical infrastructure	Transportation network (airport, metro, roads, terminals); accommodations (hotels, guesthouses, ecolodges); recreational and cultural centers (museums, galleries, parks, conference halls); service systems (water, electricity, sewage, communications).
	Service and human infrastructure	Establishing tourist information and guidance centers, training specialized and multilingual human resources, and enhancing security and emergency services.
	Attracting and supporting investment	Creating financial and legal incentives for domestic and foreign investors; simplifying administrative processes and licensing.
Urban marketing and branding	Urban branding and identity creation	Defining competitive advantages and unique city features; designing attractive logos, slogans, and visual packages.
	Targeted advertising and promotion	Participating in international exhibitions and specialized events, utilizing digital media and social networks, and cooperating with tour operators and travel agencies.
	Public relations and urban diplomacy	Inviting influencers and reputable media for visits; establishing connections with international tourism organizations.
	Creating and hosting events	Holding cultural, artistic, sports, and seasonal festivals; supporting national and international conferences and conventions.
Monitoring, evaluation, and continuous improvement	Monitoring performance indicators	Number of tourists (domestic and international), length of stay, and tourist expenditure; tourist and citizen satisfaction; job creation and revenues from tourism.
	Collecting feedback	Surveying tourists and residents, reviewing complaints and suggestions, and analyzing statistical data and reports.
	Reviewing and adapting programs	Identifying new weaknesses and opportunities; revising strategies and policies; innovating and updating attractions and services.
	Crisis and risk management	Planning for confronting natural or unexpected crises; reducing the potential negative effects of tourism on the city and its citizens.

Table 2. Indicators and items of tourism flourishing

Indicator	Item
Economic	Level of investment in tourism infrastructure; tourism's share of GDP; employment generation in the tourism sector; average expenditure per tourist; revenue from tourism; number of incoming tourists.
Socio-cultural	Satisfaction of local residents with tourism; preservation of cultural and natural heritage; cultural diversity and interactions; community access to tourism facilities.
Environmental	Waste management; water and energy consumption; air and water quality; biodiversity protection.
Managerial and infrastructural	Quality of transportation infrastructure; security of tourists; supportive policymaking and regulations; level of destination marketing and branding; quality of accommodation and hospitality facilities.
Technological and innovative	Use of technology in marketing and service delivery; innovation in tourism products.

4.1. Introduction of the studied area

Zahedan city, the center of Zahedan County and Sistan and Baluchestan province, is located in eastern Iran near the border of Iran with Afghanistan and Pakistan. In terms of geographical location, the city is situated at 60°51'25" East longitude and 29°30'45" North latitude. The elevation of Zahedan city is 1,378 meters above sea level. This city is considered one of the most

important administrative, political, commercial, and military centers in southeastern Iran and has a history of approximately one hundred years. In the new spatial divisions, Zahedan city includes five districts, 55 areas, and 110 neighborhoods (Ebrahimzadeh & Nayeri, 2018, p. 10). The population of this city in 2016 was 587,530 people (Statistical Center of Iran, 2016).

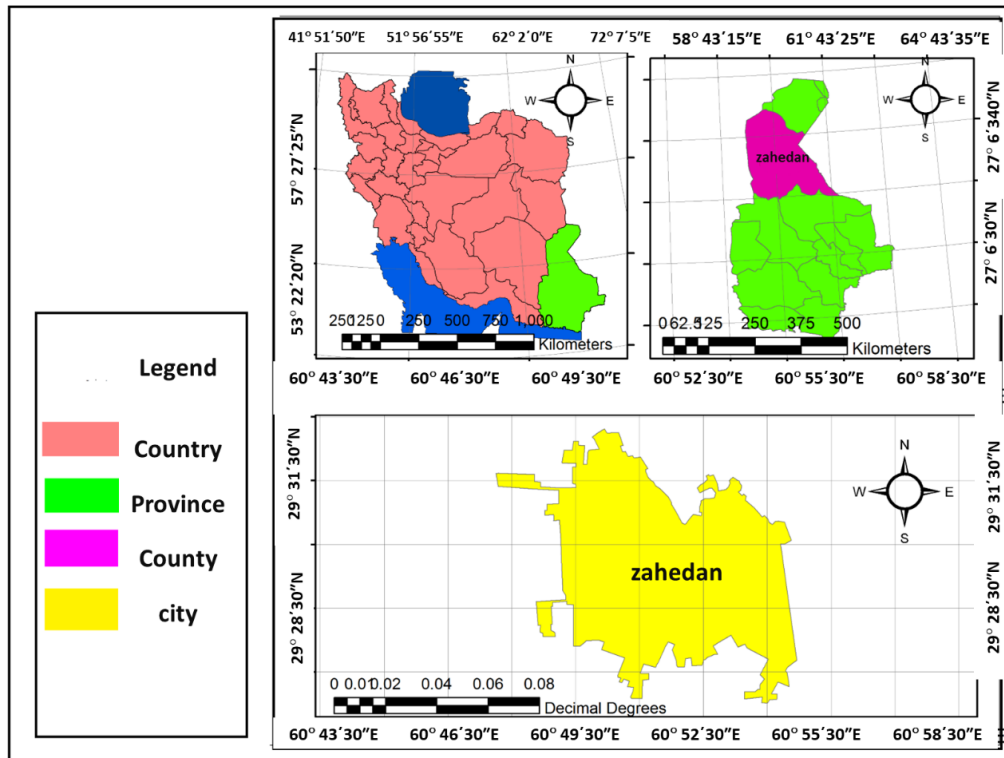


Figure 2. Map of the political location of Zahedan city

5. Results and findings

The research findings have been examined as descriptive and inferential findings. Accordingly, the results of descriptive findings indicate that 53% of respondents were men and 47% were women. In terms of marital status, 66% of respondents were married, and the remaining 34% were single. In terms of age, 19% of respondents were in the 20-30 age group, 34% in the 31-40 age group, 21% in the 41-50 age group, 16% in the 51-60 age group, and 10% in the over 60 age group. The results of respondents' education showed that 16% had an education below a high school diploma, 20% had a high school diploma, 13% had an associate degree, 32% had a bachelor's degree, and 19% had a master's degree or higher. Additionally, in terms of employment, 25% were employees, 12% were students, 8% were retired, 12%

were homemakers, 30% were self-employed, and 13% were in other occupational groups.

5.1. Examination of urban managers' actions towards urban tourism flourishing

A one-sample t-test was used to examine the actions of urban managers towards urban tourism flourishing in Zahedan city. In this test, the number 3 was considered the desired mean, and the obtained results were measured based on it. If the obtained mean is greater than 3, the obtained significance level is less than 0.05, and both the upper and lower limits are positive, it indicates practical actions by urban managers towards urban tourism flourishing. If the obtained mean is less than 3, the obtained significance level is less than 0.05, and both the upper and lower limits are negative, it indicates ineffective actions by

urban managers towards urban tourism flourishing. Subsequently, each research variable is examined separately.

5.2. Strategic planning and policymaking

The results of examining strategic planning and policymaking actions by urban managers towards tourism flourishing in Zahedan city, using a one-sample t-test, showed that the obtained significance level for all items is less than the significance level of 0.05. Out of the nine items examined, the mean for six items was greater than the desired mean (3), and the mean

for three items was estimated to be less than the desired mean. The item “regulations related to heritage and environmental preservation” with a mean of 3.187 had the highest mean, and the item “reviewing global tourism trends and tourist expectations” with a mean of 2.875 had the lowest mean. Overall, strategic planning and policymaking, with a mean of 3.066, considering the obtained significance level and the upper and lower limits, which are both positive, was evaluated as appropriate (Table 3).

Table 3. Actions of strategic planning and policymaking towards urban tourism flourishing using a one-sample t-test

Item	t-statistic	Numerical mean	Significance level	Mean difference	Desirability of the tested number = 3	
					95% Confidence interval	
					Upper limit	Lower limit
Identifying existing attractions	8.688	3.119	0.000	0.119	0.232	0.065
Analyzing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats	-4.445	2.907	0.000	-0.093	-0.032	-0.154
Reviewing global tourism trends and tourist expectations	-5.334	2.875	0.000	-0.125	-0.069	-0.221
Defining vision, mission, and macro and micro objectives	8.898	3.132	0.000	0.132	0.229	0.060
Prioritizing development projects and plans	9.556	3.175	0.003	0.175	0.265	0.104
Formulating supportive policies (financial, legal) for the private sector and investors	-4.443	2.890	0.000	-0.110	-0.051	-0.167
Creating legal frameworks for investment and development	9.479	3.165	0.000	0.165	0.238	0.098
Standardizing tourism services	9.132	3.142	0.000	0.142	0.188	0.067
Regulations related to heritage and environmental preservation	9.998	3.187	0.000	0.187	0.260	0.110
Total (Strategic planning and policymaking)	8.776	3.066	0.000	0.066	0.112	0.034

5.3. Infrastructure development and investment

The results of examining infrastructure development and investment actions by urban managers towards tourism flourishing in Zahedan city, using a one-sample t-test, showed that the obtained significance level for all items is less than the significance level of 0.05. Out of the nine items examined, the mean for five items was greater than the desired mean (3), and the mean for four items was estimated to be less than the

desired mean. The item “enhancing security and emergency services” with a mean of 3.254 had the highest mean, and the item “establishing tourist information and guidance centers” with a mean of 2.866 had the lowest mean. Overall, infrastructure development and investment, with a mean of 3.089, considering the obtained significance level and the upper and lower limits, which are both positive, was evaluated as appropriate (Table 4).

Table 4. Actions of infrastructure development and investment towards urban tourism flourishing using a one-sample t-test

Desirability of the tested number = 3						
Item	t-statistic	Numerical mean	Significance level	Mean difference	95% Confidence interval	
					Upper limit	Lower limit
Transportation network (airport, metro, roads, and terminals)	9.112	3.214	0.000	0.214	0.312	0.134
Accommodations (hotels, guesthouses, and ecolodges)	10.221	3.198	0.000	0.198	0.302	0.115
Recreational and cultural centers (museums, galleries, parks, and conference halls)	-4.556	2.893	0.000	-0.107	-0.056	-0.176
Service systems (water, electricity, sewage, and communications)	11.665	3.243	0.000	0.243	0.328	0.176
Establishing tourist information and guidance centers	-5.554	2.866	0.003	-0.134	-0.050	-0.209
Training specialized and multilingual human resources	-4.223	2.898	0.000	-0.102	-0.049	-0.165
Enhancing security and emergency services	11.776	3.254	0.000	0.254	0.340	0.187
Creating financial and legal incentives for domestic and foreign investors	-4.556	2.894	0.004	-0.106	-0.056	-0.176
Simplifying administrative processes and licensing	11.667	3.239	0.000	0.239	0.317	0.143
Total (Infrastructure development and investment)	9.889	3.089	0.000	0.089	0.121	0.044

5.4. Urban marketing and branding

The results of examining urban marketing and branding actions by urban managers towards tourism flourishing in Zahedan city, using a one-sample t-test, showed that the obtained significance level for all items is less than the significance level of 0.05. Out of the nine items examined, the mean for seven items was greater than the desired mean (3), and the mean for two items was estimated to be less than the desired mean. The

item “using digital media and social networks” with a mean of 3.155 had the highest mean, and the item “participating in international exhibitions and specialized events” with a mean of 2.89 had the lowest mean. Overall, urban marketing and branding, with a mean of 3.078, considering the obtained significance level and the upper and lower limits, which are both positive, was evaluated as appropriate (Table 5).

Table 5. Actions of urban marketing and branding towards urban tourism flourishing using a one-sample t-test

Desirability of the tested number = 3						
Item	t-statistic	Numerical mean	Significance level	Mean difference	95% Confidence interval	
					Upper limit	Lower limit
Defining competitive advantages and unique city features	9.334	3.117	0.000	0.117	0.209	0.062
Designing attractive logos, slogans, and visual packages	9.556	3.134	0.000	0.134	0.229	0.076
Participating in international exhibitions and specialized events	-5.445	2.889	0.000	-0.111	-0.198	0.053
Using digital media and social networks	11.112	3.155	0.000	0.155	0.240	0.089
Cooperating with tour operators and travel agencies	8.889	3.103	0.001	0.103	0.178	0.050

Desirability of the tested number = 3						
Item	t-statistic	Numerical mean	Significance level	Mean difference	95% Confidence interval	
					Upper limit	Lower limit
Inviting influencers and reputable media for visits	-4.565	2.897	0.000	-0.103	-0.047	-0.167
Establishing connections with international tourism organizations	9.487	3.121	0.004	0.121	0.230	0.074
Holding cultural, artistic, sports, and seasonal festivals	9.787	3.147	0.000	0.147	0.239	0.087
Supporting national and international conferences and conventions	9.669	3.139	0.000	0.139	0.231	0.083
Total (Urban marketing and branding)	8.908	3.078	0.000	0.078	0.340	0.031

5.5. Monitoring, evaluation, and continuous improvement

The results of examining monitoring, evaluation, and continuous improvement actions by urban managers towards tourism flourishing in Zahedan city using a one-sample t-test showed that the obtained significance level for all items is less than the significance level of 0.05. Out of the 12 items examined, the mean for nine items was greater than the desired mean (3), and the mean for three items was estimated

to be less than the desired mean. The item “reducing potential negative effects of tourism on the city and its citizens” with a mean of 3.175 had the highest mean, and the item “reviewing complaints and suggestions” with a mean of 2.846 had the lowest mean. Overall, monitoring, evaluation, and continuous improvement, with a mean of 3.084, considering the obtained significance level and the upper and lower limits, which are both positive, was evaluated as appropriate (Table 6).

Table 6. Actions of monitoring, evaluation, and continuous improvement towards urban tourism flourishing using a one-sample t-test

Desirability of the tested number = 3						
Item	t-statistic	Numerical mean	Significance level	Mean difference	95% Confidence interval	
					Upper limit	Lower limit
Number of tourists (domestic and international)	9.778	3.165	0.000	0.165	0.254	0.102
Length of stay and tourist expenditure	9.332	3.145	0.000	0.145	0.217	0.087
Tourist and citizen satisfaction	11.887	3.219	0.000	0.219	0.320	0.132
Job creation and revenues from tourism	8.667	3.115	0.000	0.115	0.189	0.065
Surveying tourists and residents	-4.334	2.893	0.000	-0.107	-0.054	-0.176
Reviewing complaints and suggestions	-5.667	2.884	0.000	-0.116	-0.064	-0.189
Analyzing statistical data and reports	-3.334	2.901	0.000	-0.099	-0.044	-0.156
Identifying new weaknesses and opportunities	8.667	3.149	0.000	0.149	0.198	0.076
Revising strategies and policies	7.154	3.098	0.000	0.098	0.155	0.043
Innovating and updating attractions and services	7.665	3.140	0.000	0.140	0.212	0.089
Planning for confronting natural or unexpected crises	8.276	3.127	0.003	0.127	0.178	0.052
Reducing the potential negative effects of tourism on the city and its citizens	9.898	3.175	0.000	0.175	0.243	0.107
Total (Monitoring, evaluation, and continuous improvement)	8.558	3.084	0.000	0.084	0.123	0.033

5.6. Examination of the status of urban tourism flourishing in Zahedan city

A one-sample t-test was used to examine the status of urban tourism flourishing in Zahedan city. The results showed that the obtained significance level is less than the significance level of 0.05. Therefore, the results are generalizable to the statistical population. Out of the five indicators examined, the results showed that the status of 3 indicators is unfavorable, and the status of 2 indicators is favorable. The economic indicator, with

a mean of 2.845, the environmental indicator, with a mean of 2.812, and the technology and innovation indicator, with a mean of 2.729, are in an unfavorable status. The socio-cultural indicator, with a mean of 3.112, and the managerial and infrastructural indicator, with a mean of 3.098, are in a favorable status. Overall, urban tourism is flourishing with a mean of 2.902, considering the obtained significance level and the upper and lower limits, which are both negative, was evaluated as unfavorable (Table 7).

Table 7. Examination of the status of tourism flourishing in Zahedan city using a one-sample t-test

Indicator	t-statistic	Numerical mean	Significance level	Mean difference	Desirability of the tested number = 3	
					95% Confidence interval	
					Upper limit	Lower limit
Economic	-4.556	2.807	0.000	-0.193	-0.112	-0.256
Socio-cultural	8.778	3.112	0.000	0.112	0.176	0.065
Environmental	-4.665	2.800	0.000	-0.200	-0.109	-0.288
Managerial and infrastructural	7.660	3.098	0.000	0.098	0.159	0.043
Technological and innovative	-5.556	2.729	0.000	-0.131	-0.078	-0.160
Total (Urban tourism flourishing)	-4.223	2.909	0.000	-0.091	-0.044	-0.138

5.7. Examination of the effects of the role of urban managers on the flourishing of urban tourism flourishing

Multiple regression analysis was applied to examine the effects of the role of urban managers on the flourishing of urban tourism in Zahedan city. Here, the role of urban managers is the independent variable, and the flourishing of urban tourism is the dependent variable. The multiple correlation coefficient value is

0.753, indicating the correlation between the independent and dependent variables. The coefficient of determination is 0.567. The adjusted coefficient of determination value is 0.722, indicating that the independent variables explain 72% of the changes in the dependent variable, and the remaining changes, equal to 28% and known as the error variance, are influenced by variables outside the model (Table 8).

Table 8. Analysis of variance of the effects of the role of urban managers on the flourishing of urban tourism flourishing

Standard error	Adjusted coefficient of determination	Coefficient of determination	Multiple correlation coefficient
0.068	0.722	0.734	0.857

As can be seen, the regression sum of squares is much higher than the residual sum of squares. Given the high F-value, which is significant at the 0.01 error level,

it can be stated that the model has high explanatory power in explaining the dependent variables (Table 9).

Table 9. Analysis of variance based on the existence of a linear relationship of the effects of the role of urban managers on the flourishing of urban tourism flourishing

Component	Sum of squares	Degrees of freedom	Mean squares	F-statistic	Significance level
Regression effect	8.441	4	45.110	14.370	0.000
Residual	1.113	379	0.298		
Total	9.554	383			

The results indicate that the significance level for all variables is less than 0.01, which shows that the obtained results are generalizable to the statistical population. The results showed that the urban marketing and branding indicator, with a beta coefficient of 0.366, has the most significant impact on urban tourism flourishing in Zahedan city. Also, the infrastructure development and investment indicator, with a beta coefficient of 0.307, the strategic planning

and policymaking indicator, with a beta coefficient of 0.256, and the monitoring, evaluation, and continuous improvement indicator, with a beta coefficient of 0.211, affect urban tourism flourishing. Therefore, according to the obtained results, it can be said that urban managers play an influential role in urban tourism flourishing, and the more prominent the role of managers, the more suitable urban tourism flourishing will be (Table 10).

Table 10. Regression coefficient of the effects of the role of urban managers on the flourishing of urban tourism flourishing

Variables	Standardized coefficient	Unstandardized coefficient	T	Significance level	
	BETA	Std. Error	B		
Constant	-	0.074	0.286	2.367	0.067
Monitoring, evaluation, and improvement	0.211	0.018	0.166	9.220	0.000
Urban marketing and branding	0.366	0.011	0.302	27.456	0.000
Infrastructure development and investment	0.307	0.013	0.261	20.080	0.000
Strategic planning and policymaking	0.256	0.016	0.202	12.630	0.000

6. Conclusion

This research was conducted to analyze the depth of the impact of the dimensions of the role of urban managers on the gap between existing potentials and actual tourism flourishing in Zahedan city, and reached a key paradox. The results define the performance of managers as a necessary enabling factor, but insufficient. Despite citizens' evaluation of their performance in basic dimensions such as planning, infrastructure development, and monitoring at an "appropriate" level, the overall status of tourism flourishing remains in the unfavorable range. This fundamental contradiction emphasizes that merely providing the operational and structural requirements of urban management does not, by itself, guarantee success in the macro goals of tourism development, and there is a deep gap between "the ability to do the work" and "achieving the strategic result." The analyses decisively showed that despite all managerial

dimensions having a positive impact on flourishing urban tourism, this impact was significantly more substantial and decisive in the realm of urban marketing and branding. This fundamental finding indicates that the main structural weakness in transforming Zahedan's potential capacities into actual attractions is concentrated in the area of the way the city is introduced and imaged. In other words, while management in the infrastructure area may have reached a level of sufficiency, the executive strategies for creating differentiation and gaining a competitive advantage in the tourism market through active branding are still at an unfavorable level. Therefore, the central answer to the research question is that the performance of managers, especially in the area of communication strategies and branding, has played the most determining role in maintaining this unfavorable gap; a matter that requires an urgent revision in the operational priorities

of managers, with a complete focus on active, creative, and targeted tools for shaping the place image of Zahedan.

The results of the research findings showed that the status of urban tourism flourishing in Zahedan city is unfavorable, and these results are consistent with the findings of Balideh and Taghvaei (2024), which showed that the status of tourism flourishing in regions 11, 13, and 14 of Isfahan city is unfavorable. Reviewing the results of previous studies showed that so far, no study has examined the role of urban managers in urban tourism flourishing, and the conducted studies have only evaluated the indicators of urban tourism flourishing in some studies, making this study novel in this regard. The results of Trang et al.'s (2023) findings indicated that the status of Da Nang city, Vietnam, in terms of urban prosperity indicators is at an average level, which is not consistent with the findings of this research, which evaluated the status of urban tourism flourishing as unfavorable.

The results of the present study also show that the level of urban tourism flourishing in Zahedan city is in an unfavorable status. This status, compared to the experiences and studies conducted in successful cities worldwide, indicates a significant gap in managerial, infrastructural, and social dimensions.

At the global level, examples of successful urban management in tourism development, such as Barcelona, Istanbul, Singapore, and Dublin, show that urban tourism growth is directly related to the capability and innovation of urban managers in planning and policymaking. In these cities, policymakers, by creating strategic visions for urban tourism, improving infrastructure, attracting investment, and employing new technologies, have been able to make tourism one of the main pillars of the economy and cultural identity. In contrast, in Zahedan, the results indicate that urban managers still lack a coherent and program-oriented view of urban tourism. Lack of coordination among local institutions, weakness in urban marketing and branding, and the absence of a comprehensive tourism plan have caused the city's cultural and ethnic capacities, especially Balochi culture and art, to be less utilized in the urban development process.

In foreign studies, the role of urban managers is defined beyond a service function. For example, in the experience of Berlin and Amsterdam, municipalities are not only in charge of urban affairs but are also managers of tourism innovation and social participation. By creating participatory structures and

supporting tourism startups, they provide the ground for the city's economic and cultural sustainability. However, in Zahedan, the decision-making structure is still top-down, and the participation of citizens and the private sector in tourism policymaking is evaluated as weak.

In the infrastructural dimension, the difference is also evident. Cities like Kuala Lumpur or Istanbul, by developing urban transportation networks, accommodation services, public spaces, and urban symbols, have been able to increase tourist satisfaction significantly. However, in Zahedan, infrastructural problems such as a lack of accommodation space, weak transportation access, and a lack of tourist information centers are considered the main obstacles to the flourishing of this industry. From a cultural perspective, foreign studies emphasize that urban tourism flourishing is sustainable when it is based on authentic cultural identity and interaction with the local community. In cities like Kyoto or Florence, urban managers pay special attention to preserving cultural heritage and enhancing the authentic experience of tourists. Such capacities also exist in Zahedan, but the lack of supportive policies and a specific responsible institution has prevented these advantages from being realized.

The key finding of this research makes it possible to determine the policy priorities of urban managers. Considering the effect size (beta coefficient):

The "urban marketing and branding" indicator has the largest share in explaining and predicting the flourishing of urban tourism. This indicates that currently, the main weakness is in the area of introducing, promoting, and creating a positive image of Zahedan city at the national and international levels, and investment in this area will have the highest return in the short term. In second place is the "infrastructure development and investment" indicator. This shows that improving the physical quality of the urban environment, transportation, and accommodation facilities is a vital factor and the second priority after marketing. At subsequent levels are "strategic planning and policymaking" and "monitoring, evaluation, and continuous improvement." Although the impact of these two indicators is less than the first two, their role in sustainability and ensuring the effectiveness of future actions cannot be ignored.

Urban managers of Zahedan should, in order to increase tourism flourishing, focus their main attention on strengthening marketing and branding strategies and, simultaneously, with attention to the substantial

impact of infrastructure, advance development-related projects with high speed and quality to create a positive correlation between managerial capacities and tangible tourism achievements.

Despite the presented results, this study has faced limitations that should be considered in interpreting the findings. The first limitation relates to the nature of the research, which is a case study. The findings are based on the experience and perception of citizens of Zahedan city, and direct generalization of the results to other Iranian metropolises requires caution. The second limitation is the predominantly qualitative nature of the performance evaluation. However, this approach helped in a deep understanding of the gaps. The lack of objective and comparative quantitative data (such as international tourism development indicators or precise performance data of related organizations) limited the possibility of accurately measuring the intensity of each factor. Moreover, there is a limitation in the range of measured variables. The present research focused on the four main dimensions of the role of managers, and other potential influential environmental, political, or macroeconomic factors that affect the city's tourism flourishing were not extensively included in the model. These overlooked factors could have played a role as confounding variables in fully explaining the performance gap.

Authors' Contributions

The percentage of authors' contribution in this article has been equal (each author 50%).

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Conflict of Interest

The authors have declared no conflict of interest.

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