

## Investigating the Role of the Museum Ecolodges in the Development of Sustainable Tourism (Case Study: Puppet & Toy Museum Guesthouse in Kashan)

**Atefeh Sadooghi,**

Master in Tourism, Department of Museum and Tourism; Art University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran; atefhsadoghy@yahoo.com

**Neda Torabi Farsani** 

Associate Professor in tourism, Department of Museum and Tourism; Art University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran (Corresponding Author); n.torabi@au.ac.ir

**Marzieh Hekmat**

Assistant Professor at Department of Museum and Tourism; Art University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran; m.hekmat@au.ac.ir

**Homa Moazzen Jamshidi**

Assistant Professor at Department of Economics and Entrepreneurship, Art University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran; h.moazzenjamshidi@au.ac.ir

Received: 19/02/2024

Accepted: 25/05/2024

### Introduction

Nowadays, sustainability is one of the most important issues in the world; as a result, the theme for the World Tourism Day in 2023 was "tourism and green investment". Museum ecolodge and museum hotel can play a great role in realizing this theme and the sustainable development of tourism.

International Council of Museums (ICOM) presented a new definition of a museum and put forth the concept of sustainability. According to the ICOM definition at the Prague conference in 2022, a museum is a non-profit and permanent institution at the service of the community that researches, collects, preserves, interprets, and displays tangible and intangible heritage. Museums that are open, accessible, and inclusive to the public promote diversity and sustainability (Dolák, 2022: 1-97). In recent years, the emergence of new museums is an important factor in the cultural, social and economic prosperity of societies.

One of the sustainable and new forms of museums that have emerged in the last decade are museum ecolodge and museum hotel (Göküz et al., 2022: 170-171; Zitzlsperger, 2016: 11-20). This form of museums increases the duration of visit and stay at the destination, which is one of the principles of sustainable development of tourism. Puppet and Toy Museum Guesthouse of Kashan, which dates back to 150 years ago and belongs to the Qajar period, is an example of this type of museums which selected as case study.

### **Research Method**

This research pursues two objectives: 1) to identify the activities of Puppet and Toy Museum Guesthouse in Kashan that have led to the sustainability of economic, social, and environmental dimensions; 2) to investigate the level of satisfaction of domestic tourists, regarding the sustainable activities of Puppet & Toy Museum Guesthouse; in order to achieve the above goals, the qualitative - quantitative methods have been used. In the first stage, data was collected through in-depth and face-to-face interviews. The sample size was 5 people (1 museum founder and researcher, 1 museum director, and 3 museum guides/curators), and the criteria for selecting these people was their activity and work experience in the field of the museum and in the residence museum. In the second step, based on the results obtained from the interviews, a questionnaire was designed to assess the level of domestic tourists' satisfaction with the sustainable activities of Puppet and Toy Museum Guesthouse, and the data were analyzed through SPSS tools (one-sample t-test).

### **Research Findings**

The results of the qualitative analysis illustrated that the museum ecolodge had a significant role in minimizing the negative impact of tourism in the destination. Twenty-nine open codes for the social dimension. Twenty open codes for the cultural dimension; eight open codes for the economic dimension, and nineteen open codes were identified for the environmental dimension. In the second step, based on the results obtained from the interviews, a questionnaire was designed to assess the level of domestic tourists' satisfaction with the sustainable activities of Puppet and Toy Museum Guesthouse, and the results of data analysis with the help of one sample T-test, revealed their high satisfaction.

### **Conclusion**

Museum ecolodge emerged as a new concept in the field of sustainable tourism. By combining cultural heritage with eco-friendly practices, these accommodations will bring a unique and comprehensive experience to tourists while promoting responsible tourism. The benefits of museum ecolodges go beyond environmental protection and include economic empowerment, cultural heritage preservation, and social development. As the demand for sustainable tourism continues to grow, museum ecolodges will play an important role in shaping the future of travel. As tourists seek meaningful and authentic experiences, museum ecolodges create a bridge between the past and the future and enable visitors to preserve the past while building a better future for future generations. Several suggestions can be considered for the development of the museum ecolodges. At first, governments and tourism authorities should provide incentives and support for the development of museum ecolodges, including financial incentives, tax reduction, and simplification of licensing procedures, these supports can help overcome the challenges of initial investment and encourage the creation of more museum ecolodges. Also, cooperation between museums, cultural organizations, and ecotourism should be strengthened. Joint projects such as exhibitions, workshops, and cultural festivals can enhance the experience of visitors and tourists and promote the preservation of cultural heritage.

In addition, educational programs and awareness campaigns should be launched to educate tourists about the benefits and importance of sustainable tourism. By increasing awareness and fostering a sense of responsibility among tourists, it is possible to increase the demand for sustainable accommodations such as museum ecolodges. Tourists should be encouraged to choose environmentally friendly options and support sustainable practices in their travel choices. As the world increasingly emphasizes the importance of sustainable development, the demand for museum residences is likely to increase in the future.

The case study in the present research was Puppet and Toy Museum Guesthouse located in Kashan, Isfahan, Iran. The results of the qualitative data analysis illustrated that this museum ecolodge is a national-historical monument which renovated and restored and is used as a residence building from a cultural perspective (preserving heritage, memories and identity) is sustainable. Moreover, from the environmental perspective, renovation and recycling and restoration, use of traditional architecture that leads to optimal consumption of cooling and heating energy, policies aimed at reducing plastic waste production, reducing paper consumption are also sustainable. In addition, through activities such as the presentation and display of toys and puppets, belonging to the Qajar era, dolls of the world exhibition, performance rituals by guides, it can be said that Puppet and Toy Museum Guesthouse from the cultural aspect is sustainable. Lastly, Museum ecolodge by attracting cultural tourism, by helping employment and local income from the economic aspect, as well as by creating a sense of place, fulfilling social responsibility, and community participation from the social dimension establishes the pillars of sustainability in museums.

**Keywords:** sustainable development, sustainable tourism, museum ecolodge, green museum, museum hotel.