

Investigation Challenges and Development of Rural Tourism - Case study of Rural Semnan Province, Iran

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is an important income source for many countries, specially in underdeveloped countries where majority of people face hardships as immigration to cities, low employment, low agricultural productivity level, absence of infrastructures for entertainment and services. A great number of rural residential areas in Semnan Province, IRAN have many tourist attraction potentials for their geographical advantages like landscapes, ancient buildings and traditions. Thus, can satisfy the need for relaxation, getting acquainted with cultures, and enjoying natural beauties specially in the intact rural places. Semnan Province has a diversity of rural residential areas and tourist attraction sites, and the most attractive sites, which enjoy a higher potential for tourism. Present study is based upon investigating the challenges and developmental issues of rural tourism of Semnan Provenance of Iran.

KEY WORDS: *Tourism, Rural Tourism, Development, Challenges, Guidelines, Villages, Semnan Province, Organizations Responsible Tourism, Rural Development.*

Introduction

Tourism is considered the largest and the most diversified industry in the world. Many countries take a reasonable advantage of this dynamic industry as a major source for income, employment, private sector growth, and infrastructure development. People go on trips for a wide variety of reasons. The increasing growth of tourism has occurred in a rather short period of time; the fact which demands a considerable attention. Many people who previously thought of travelling as an impossible reality now can afford it. Building guest houses, recreation centres in different spots help gather great budgets for large cities which compete to build such centres beside airports and rural areas. Services provided by travelling agencies and those involved in tourism industry and also facilities granted by state tourist offices and finally an advanced technology make healthy, safe peaceful and an enjoyable trips for the potential tourists. (Parsayian & Aarabi, 2004). People go to places for different reasons: temporary change of location, relaxation, recreation, getting acquainted with traditions and spending the leisure time. Present paper is based on Semnan Province displays features which any tourist and traveller can experience within a fairly short period of time. While in the northern parts, it's cold and breezy, in the south and there's a warm and desert climate suitable for those who have a taste for such places (Fallah Tabar, 2008).

Nowadays, rural tourism has turned into a leading economic activity and studies show a positive relationship between developing rural tourism and an increase in income. It can be a suitable way to enhance economic advantage and employment. . Considering the potentials for rural tourism, Semnan Province can act to enhance its economy and rural economy as well. Today, the importance of tourism and the necessity of conducting research on it because of significant economic, and social, and cultural roles that it can play known for

everyone. It has turned into one of the most important factors to create wealth, job, dynamism, moving people, and national assets. (Moshabaki & Malek Akhlagh, 2004). In any country, the entrance of tourists corresponds with income enhancement and economic opportunities through which economic activities occur in different sectors (Maddah, 2008).

Purpose of the study:

Of the most important objectives of rural tourism is to increase the villager's income, and the employment of rural families. Purposes of the study with a higher importance are as follows:

- Reaching the means of increasing the rate of rural tourists in Semnan Province.
- Recognizing the capabilities and potentials of rural tourism in Semnan Province.
- The tourists' familiarity with tourist attractions in Semnan Province.
- Training individuals for giving service to rural tourism.
- Preparing individuals for establishing and managing rural small industries.
- Preparing individuals to contribute in making decisions on developing rural tourism industry
- Training individuals in developing opportunities and guidelines to enhance rural tourism.

Theoretical Studies

Rural local residents have an undeniable right and the gains and losses of planning and development in their living places where the people practiced a symbiosis with their environment. As a result, contribution of the society in tourism as a necessary part in the development of sustained tourism specially in rural tourism. The main objective of basic research in this field was to offer guidelines for which the tourism industry and the society can enjoy bilateral benefits in this long-term contribution. The development and growth of rural tourism correspond with social and economic modifications in rural areas. In European rural areas, tourism is an important and new method of enhancing employment and creating capital with the bi-product of breaking rural social isolation and refilling these areas with the lost population. In other words, it is a solution to the many problems that farmers face around the world. Enhancing rural tourism activities which cover a wide range of activities in such places bears many benefits which can lead to rural development. Damages done to the rural environments upon their arrival of the tourists make the tourism industry officials think of a better supervision and control like those exercised for other tourist service stations. However the idea of the relative control or supervision comes in contrast with the real meaning of rural tourism. The motivation behind most rural is to escape limitations and the urban routine life and the regulations opposite to the free will and voluntary entertainment. Nevertheless, organizing the tourists is a crucial part in the procedures of rural tourism management. (Taj, 2004).

The economic strategies in the regional development require a small commerce perspective for the rural tourism. In a Two dimensional model, rural tourism is like a tile within a mosaic pattern. It helps consider a spot as a category to a regional planning, taking the regional system at the head category in order for hierarchical allocations to become equal as far as tourist attraction activities are concerned. (Ziari, 2002)

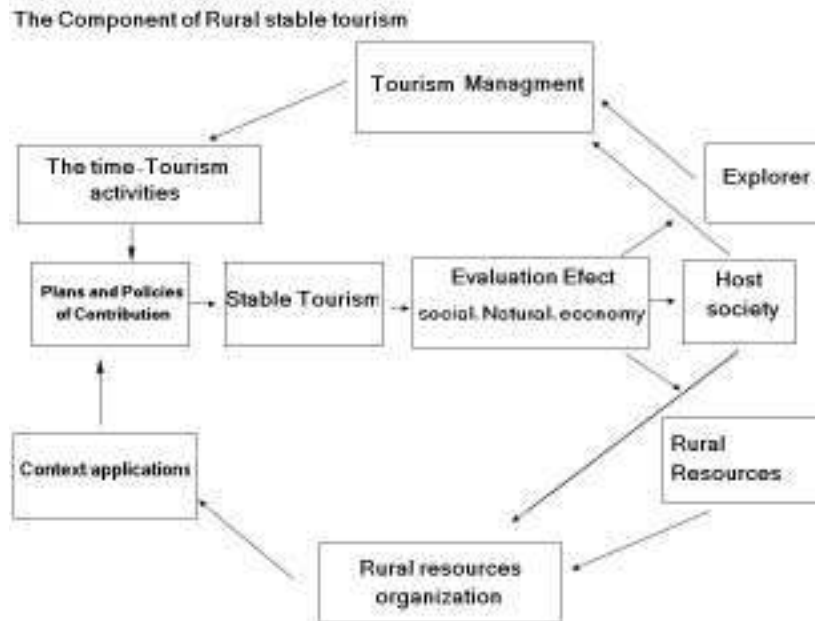
The supply of rural tourism products corresponds with tourism demands in a region and the demand depends on the good value, services, and facilities. The direction of rural tourism demands is a variable which depends on domestic and international tourists visits. (Gharah Nejad, 2008). Rural tourism development has always been a valuable, growing economic strategy, and an advantage of low risks and costs and considering that resources are available, costs are low and plans are smaller compared to other tourism plans (Projects). It helps to economic growth, create variety and stability in employment, dynamism in commerce and industries, creating opportunities to larger incomes in multiple activities,

creating new markets for agricultural products and enhance a basis for the regional economy. One of the most important features of rural tourism economy is the motivation that the private sector has for investment in tourism because it is small, varied and simple. It is a rather important field in rural development which can build up opportunities and facilities specially for employment and regional income and play a crucial role in reviving and rebuilding rural regions. The role and importance of tourism In the process of rural development has been proved in many countries. At the present time tourism is considered an industry with the potential stability. Attractions, facilities, and capabilities of tourism development in rural regions are diverse and varied, but unfortunately they have not been properly exploited. In the fourth phase of the national development plan and the 20-year prospect rural tourism has not received due attention. Besides, in "the national development plan and tourism and management" the concept of rural tourism or tourism development in the rural areas have not been properly dealt with. (Papli Yazdi, 2007). Considering the importance of tourism in the process of rural development planning, it is of paramount importance to take it into account in rural planning and plans. For the purpose of playing the positive role of tourism in the process of rural development, paying attention to environment management, local contribution, firm laws, marketing and realistic plannings in tourism seems necessary. (Rezvani, 2005) Rural tourism is an important means of enhancing employment and income and can help social and economic development of rural societies (Sharpely, 2001). It also takes account of the people who must have access to the villages, which makes it possible to get benefits to the local people. Therefore, having access must be in balance with other rural needs and a long-term protection of rural resources. (Shsrpley, 2001). Due to globalization, the development of tourism in rural areas has been increasingly important, because there really no such concepts as traditional culture, lifestyles, and folklores, and therefore these concepts are going to be colorless and invisible. The geographical aspect of development takes into account the logical use of environmental resources. In fact to people are required to make logical use of environmental resources and air in their free time. Reaching a good development in rural tourism means considering such factors as appropriate organizational structure, planning for and training human force, setting regulations for tourism and raising capital. To gain a stable development in tourism industry there's a crucial need of a synthesized management and coordination between state and private sector. Research shows that the motivation behind visiting the rural areas goes more to psychological features such as makeup, peace, freedom, and rural traditions which are in contrast to the urban modern life. Developing the tourism industry has an inseparable link with a number of organizations and state and non-state organizations. Therefore, any objective sitting, strategies, guidelines, and other plans must be executed with the cooperation of other organizations.

Tourism must be managed as a system because without a systematic perspective there is no due account of all the aspects. The inputs and outputs interactive together and finally showed their impact on the whole society.

In Europe as a whole three critical issues in the development of rural tourism have been recognized. first although visitors are attracted to rural areas by their distinctive regional social and cultural heritage landscape qualities and perceived cleaner environment these very qualities may be threatened by the impacts of tourism and recreational activity. Second training for rural tourism provision is often not available or not taken up to assist improvement in the quality and appropriateness of rural tourism products. Third rural tourism products can be relatively isolated and in most cases will benefit from collaboration and networking in promotion and marketing. (Derek Hall, 2004). Rural tourism is largely a domestic phenomenon with a disparate nature across countries and continents. (Shunli Gao, 2009). There is an urgent need to create sustainability of the reconstruction and development program. The tourism industry more than any other industry can provide sturdy effective and sustainable legs for the RDP to walk on. (Briedenhann, 2004). Improving

the scale of tourism came about by several different types of change. The simplest was more visitors attracted to an existing attraction that was being marketed better and benefiting from the general increase of tourism in the area. (Gordon Clark, 2007). Consumption of rural energy in developing countries constitutes the majority of their total energy usage at the national level. (Zhou, 1996). Many rural areas in developing countries are also major tourism attractions. Uncontrolled growth of tourism puts additional pressure on precious local resources such as fuel wood a primary source of fuel energy consumed in the lodging and food businesses located in rural and remote tourism destinations. (Sanjay Nepal, 2008). The extensive growth of tourism in the late 1960s stressed a need planning. (Saarinen, 2008). Ecotourism ventures should, in theory, try to empower local communities. This empowerment can occur in a variety of ways, such as actively participating in the ecotourism process, maintaining control over the ecotourism venture and creating an experience where there are culturally appropriate decision-making mechanisms. (Zanotti, 2008). In Spain rural houses were developed as a strategy for the survival of small family farms and today they play an important role in the social and economic development of rural destinations. (Isabel Pilar, 2009). More attention should be given to facilitating coordination and partnership arrangements at the regional subregional and local scales to create new products and infrastructure avoid erosive competition and positive competition. (Mary Cawley, 2007). In the increasingly competitive tourism industry destination image is considered to be crucial in the decision making process of tourists. Place promotion is the deliberate use of publicity and specific images of a place to a target audience with the intention of influencing attitudes. (Velvet Nelson, 2005). Creating the needed data to properly inform the selection of tourism policies and programs to advance a region, development requires an understanding of (1) the demand for tourism within a region. (Mark. S. Rosentraub, 2009). The most common measure of tourism, socio cultural impact is the ratio of visitors to the local population. a more rigorous indicator of stay-over visitors times the average length of stay divided by the population times. (Jerome. I. McElroy, 2003)



Materials and Methods:

The present study makes use of library and field research because tourism is a wide range concept, which needs travelling all over the Province in order to better discover instances of

culture and tourist spots for the purpose of planning. In addition, the domestic and foreign books, articles and magazines as well as statistics and Internet sites were used to gather information. For the field research, observation, interview, designing and filling out of questionnaires were used for the targets villages and tourism organizations. The questioners were than distributed among the target population and data was gathered. The research method is a goal based procedure to find an answer to a question or a solution to a problem. In this study, we tried to find the answers to our questions using library and field research. Two different questioners were used for data collections which were distributed to the tourists and through rural residents. The data gathered in field research were cross checked with the realities of the place. Also effort was made to directly investigate the facilities. In this a study we investigated the sources and references on tourism. Also with turned to the relevant organizations to interact with them to get information.

Research Population

The research population falls into two categories. The first group is the villagers of Semnan Province who are the residents of shahrood, damqan, semnan, and garmsar. Some sample villages were chosen out of these towns, which were the most attractive to the visitors, as many as 32. The second group is the tourist organizations all over Semnan Province to which the questionnaires were distributed including: The organization of cultural heritage, artcraft and tourism of semnan province and cities semnan, management and planning organization, rural cooperation organization, the rural sewage organization, agricultural organization, the Islamic revolution of housing foundation administration of culture and Islamic guidance, state government, local government, district office, the natural resources organization, keeping environment life organization, metrology organization, broadcasting organization, the company of travelling and tourism services, tourism guest-house, rural Islamic councils

Research hypotheses

The hypotheses related to the villages with high tourism potentials

Hypothesis One: Providing information enhances the development of rural tourism

Advertisements, the authorities' attention to the villages, as well as holding meetings and fairs for the rural products all have significant roles in attracting tourists and visitors to these areas. Based on this hypothesis, 15.1% checked the "very much" box, 31% the much, 34.6% average, 17.3% little, and 2% very little.

providing information					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1.00	8	1.8	2.0	2.0
	2.00	71	15.6	17.3	19.3
	3.00	142	31.2	34.6	53.9
	4.00	127	27.9	31.0	84.9
	5.00	62	13.6	15.1	100.0
Total		455	100.0		

Hypothesis Two: Facilities can enhance the development of rural tourism.

The following factors were effective to attract tourists:

The present rural facilities such as: electricity, water, school, stores, mosque, infirmaries, communication centres, Internet, banks, needed facilities for tourists, accommodations and guest-house, villas, having quite place, vocational and residential places for organization, private and governmental investment, people income and rural nearness to city centre is important in tourism development. Based on this hypothesis, 15.7% checked the "very much" box, 30.7% the much, 36.8% average, 16.1% little, and 0.7% very little.

Facilities					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1.00	3	.7	.7	.7
	2.00	66	14.5	16.1	16.8
	3.00	151	33.2	36.8	53.7
	4.00	126	27.7	30.7	84.4
	5.00	64	14.1	15.7	100.0
Total		455	100.0		

Hypothesis Three: Natural factors can help develop rural tourism.

Natural factors such as the location of the villages, fountains and mineral warm water, readers and waterfalls, mountainous areas, access to the climate of the villages, snowfall villages, villages as the second house for the visitors, and unique landscapes have all been effective in developing rural tourism. Based on this hypothesis, 13.4% chose "very much", 35.4% much, 36.1% average, 14.6% little, and 0.5% very little.

Natural factors					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1.00	2	.4	.5	.5
	2.00	60	13.2	14.6	15.1
	3.00	148	32.5	36.1	51.2
	4.00	145	31.9	35.4	86.6
	5.00	55	12.1	13.4	100.0
Total		455	100.0		

Hypothesis Four : Rural infrastructures is effective in developing rural tourism

Rural infrastructures include: transportation roads, organizational and institutional plannings, and state attention to investors, easy local access and the development of small rural industry. In this hypothesis, 12.7% chose the very much, 35.8% much, 33.9% average, 17.1% little, and 0.5% very little.

Rural infrastructures					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1.00	2	.4	.5	.5
	2.00	70	15.4	17.1	17.6
	3.00	139	30.5	33.9	51.5
	4.00	147	32.3	35.8	87.3
	5.00	52	11.4	12.7	100.0
Total		455	100.0		

Hypothesis Five: Cultural factors have been affecting in developing rural tourism

Cultural factors include: religious places and holy shrines, rural historical and archaeology monuments, traditions, Islamic councils, greeting style of villagers, and special occasions such as mourning, weddings and people's beliefs. It's necessary to point that these traditions are becoming rarer and less important because of the emigration to the cities and because the letters are becoming empty of population. Based on this hypothesis, 15.6% chose very much, 26.6% much, 42.7% average, 14.4% little, and 0.7% very little.

Cultural factors					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1.00	3	.7	.7	.7
	2.00	59	13.0	14.4	15.1
	3.00	175	38.5	42.7	57.8
	4.00	109	24.0	26.6	84.4
	5.00	64	14.1	15.6	100.0
Total		455	100.0		

The hypotheses related to the organizations responsible for tourism.

Hypothesis One: The development of rural tourism has been effecting in increasing the income for villagers.

Instances of high rural income include: narrowing the gap among the families, more public afford, and higher village land price. According to the hypothesis, 17.1% chose very much, 27.3% much, 35.9% average, 18.2% little and 1.5% little.

income					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1.00	6	1.3	1.5	1.5
	2.00	75	16.5	18.2	19.8
	3.00	147	32.3	35.9	55.6
	4.00	112	24.6	27.3	82.9
	5.00	70	15.4	17.1	100.0
Total		455	100.0		

Hypothesis Two : The development of rural tourism is effective in developing villages.

Rural development could come true due to the following factors: proving rural education, rural security, enhancing linking roads, and building residential places. Based on this hypothesis, 11.7% chose very much, 32% much, 36.1% average, 18.7% little, and 1.5% very little.

developing					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1.00	6	1.3	1.5	1.5
	2.00	77	16.9	18.7	20.2
	3.00	148	32.5	36.1	56.3
	4.00	131	28.8	32.0	88.3
	5.00	48	10.5	11.7	100.0
Total					
		455	100.0		

Hypothesis Three: The development of rural tourism is affecting in decreasing emigrations.

The following factors contributed to a decrease in emigrations: higher motivation in staying in the villages, higher motivation of the young people to stay in the villages because of parental help. Based on the hypothesis, 14.2% chose very much, 29% much, 35.6% average, 19.5% little, and 1.7% very little.

decreasing emigrations					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1.00	7	1.5	1.7	1.7
	2.00	80	17.6	19.5	21.2
	3.00	146	32.1	35.6	56.8
	4.00	119	26.2	29.0	85.9
	5.00	58	12.7	14.2	100.0
Total					
		455	100.0		

Hypothesis Four : The development of rural tourism is effective in increasing rural employment.

Less unemployment, employment of the young people and employment of the women were instances of the increased rural employment. Based on the hypothesis, 12.7% chose very much, 31.7% much, 35.4% average 18.7% little, and 1.5% very little.

employment					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1.00	6	1.3	1.5	1.5
	2.00	77	16.9	18.7	20.2
	3.00	145	31.9	35.4	55.6
	4.00	130	28.6	31.7	87.3
	5.00	52	11.4	12.7	100.0
Total		455	100.0		

Hypothesis Five : The development of rural tourism is effective in developing the cultural aspect of the villages.

The factors of enhancing the cultural aspects of the villages include the following: people contribution, changing perspectives of villages, the increase in the cultural level, public awareness and introducing the rural traditions. Based on the hypothesis, 12.3% chose very much, 25.1% much, 36.3% average, 22.2% little, and 4.1% very little.

the cultural aspect					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1.00	17	3.7	4.1	4.1
	2.00	91	20.0	22.2	26.3
	3.00	149	32.7	36.3	62.7
	4.00	103	22.6	25.1	87.8
	5.00	50	11.0	12.3	100.0
Total		455	100.0		

Challenges Facing Rural Tourism in Semnan Province (IRAN)

- Negative propaganda against tourism in Iran,
- Lack of research and training initiatives in the development of rural tourism in Semnan Province,
- Not enough national and provincial advertisement for attracting visitors,
- Not having infrastructures in rural tourism in the province,
- Lack of cooperation among the organizations for tourism in the province such as: the organizations for cultural heritage, handicrafts and tourism with the Islamic Republic housing foundation, agricultural organization, administration of culture and Islamic guidance of semnan province, state government, governorship, rural cooperation
- Not having trained employees in tourism throughout the province,
- Not enough financial support for developing and providing equipment for the rural tourist centres,

- Lack of residential facilities in rural areas,
- No private sector inclination to invest in tourism section,
- Disagreements on the laws and regulations for attracting tourists throughout the province,
- No solid health structures and networks for water, electricity, telephone, and the like throughout the rural spots,
- Lack of service centres,
- Cultural clash with the villages with tourist spots,
- Lack of a system for tourist management and I T in tourism,
- Not enough public transportation along with inappropriate roads to access the rural centres,
- No access to needed goods in the villages,
- Incomplete execution of the leading rural plans,
- Undesirable physical aspect of most villages,
- Villages being scattered throughout the province,
- Lack of attention to the creation of grounds for rural employment and removal of seasonal unemployment of the villagers,
- Lack of attention to the potential opportunities in the villages and designing plans to take advantage of them,
- Not enough appropriate structures and facilities throughout the villages,
- Not enough spare time facilities especially for the youth,
- Providing drinkable water network for the villagers and rural visitors,
- As for the villagers adjacent to the cities, people will have a spontaneous trip to the rural areas if there is no special plan to protect these areas, which leads to the destruction of the intact rural environment and endangers the Social Security through time. The side effect of such an incident is the environmental pollution and hygiene problems. Therefore, the government must have a plan to prevent the destruction of the natural environment.

Conclusion

Having various links with the neighbouring provinces of Tehran, Mazandaran, Golestan, Khorasan, and Isfahan, semnan province of Iran have always been important. Because of the many tourist spots throughout the province, more and more visitors come and spend their spare times and occasions every year. Because of having the natural landscapes and historical background, Semnan Province can turn into an important local and international tourist centre. Being on the cross section point of several other provinces, proximity to the capital, suitability of the roads, convenience, and a variety of spots of among the most important factors in the development of tourism in this province. Special geographical conditions and climate as well as status of topography, geography, and geomorphology signifies the unique potentials of Semnan Province in ecotourism. However, tourism and natural tourism specially (ecotourism) have not developed. If the potentials of tourism are rightfully exploited, there would be a possibility to enhance the poor villages which are the traditional protectors of their surroundings, besides having various regional and national advantages. Furthermore, ecotourism can bear positive and negative effects for the nature and the environment, which indicates the necessity for planning and supervising to remove the negative consequences and strengthen the positive effects on the environment. Nowadays urban and even rural life are affected by industrial revolution and the boosted population gave birth to many problems, so placing a high value on cultural treasures seems to be a must to strengthening human relations and establishing a peaceful life on the earth. The cultural relations among the nations which have taken place through the tourism industry and acquaintance with the cultural heritage can bear undesirable as well as

peaceful consequences. Therefore, preserving cultural values in any society or country must be a priority when designing national plans. The historical remnants, treasures and documents of high cultural values are supposed to be preserved and fairly protected to be passed on to the future generation. The rural environments have their own potential natural and human attractions. Organizing such environments not only helps develop tourism in the rural areas but also enhances rural activities of farming, husbandry, and local handicrafts. Because Semnan Province is located on the road to Imam Reza (a holy shrine), it can attract the religious Pilgrims as well. Internal ministry, state government, the organization of cultural heritage, artcraft and tourism of semnan province, administration of culture and Islamic guidance of semnan province, and other relevant organizations can contribute to a better traction of visitors to the Province, which demands principled planning, cooperation, and contribution of local residents and executive institutions in order for the province to play the role of an important tourist spot throughout the country.

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