The Development Strategies of Rural Tourism with the Goal of Sustainable Development

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, various factors such as the decline in agriculture, low level of income and employment, growing rate of unemployment, the immigration of younger generation and people with higher education out of rural communities has endangered the texture and structure of rural areas. Hence, the development of rural tourism can be considered as one of the most effective strategies for the aim of the economic and social revitalization of rural areas as well as the maintenance of texture and structure of such regions. In other words, rural tourism can be viewed as a novel trend in tourism industry emerging since 50s onwards. To date, through careful and scientific planning as well as the identification of rural tourism potentials and limitations, rural tourism industry (as a strategy) can play a substantial role in the development and diversification of the regional economy. In this article, via a cross-sectional method as well as the study of documents and library supplies, the researcher has attempted not only to define the concepts of rural tourism and sustainable development but also investigate the role of rural tourism as one of the strategies of sustainable development. Thus, the whole process of research in the present article is based upon the positive impacts of ecotourism in the process of rural development. It has also been determined that in case of absence of meticulous and constructive planning in addition to appropriate mechanism, there will also be the emergence of multiple negative effects.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, despite the attainment of considerable advances by mankind, the rural development has still encountered numerous issues and challenges since the previous strategies in the field of rural development has been neither successful nor able to solve issues such as poverty, employment, sanitation, food security and environmental sustainability [6]. Although miscellaneous strategies have been offered for the enhancement of deprived rural areas and regions, all have failed to enhance the conditions of deprived areas which were left out of changes and development trends. Thus, one of the strategies enhanced to reinforce the deprived areas capable of development is the expansion and development of tourism in areas where there is required potential for tourism development.

Through reliance on its economic features and impacts, tourism industry can mainly play a quite influential role in the dynamic of economically various parts of local communities thus leading to enhancement of rural and underdeveloped areas (Heidari, 2008, p. 34). Plus, on the condition that this industry is well-planned and managed, it could create or trigger a development trend and sustainability in rural communities in all economic, sociocultural subcategories as well as the tourism itself. In spite of that, rural tourism can be considered as a complicated process which has many common grounds with other sections of the society and economy. Hence, in the planning process, there are various consequences required to be taken into consideration in order to hinder the negative after effects and boost the positive impacts of economic, social and environmental factors. What is more, the rural tourism is inclusive of various fields of activities such as resorts (accommodation), events, festivals, sports, and other different pastimes occurred in the rural area. Through rural tourism, the rural economy which is reliant on land can have another extra source of income. People’s tendency towards local cultures and customs along with avoiding the pressures of technological life can be enumerated as primary reasons of the enhancement in rural tourism. Moreover, other factors such as the enhancement of rural areas for tourism activities, the increase of ecological awareness, the increase of a number of tourists and their interest to rural countryside, advances in transportation system and communication are among factors of tourism.
development. Accordingly, as already discussed, the development of tourism in rural areas can play a substantial role in the diversification of its economy and paves the ground for sustainable enhancement of rural areas. Additionally, it can be seen as means for the growth of national economy via overcoming unachieved ideas and improving the living standards of local community.

Statement of the problem:
In the contemporary world, the most basic thought towards tourism is an economy-oriented outlook [13]. In other words, tourism is viewed as one of the basic sources of income and employment throughout world. Similarly, Maynard Keynes, J. 2003 as a popular English economist claimed that economic growth which arises from investment itself can create employment and income in the future. He believes that economic growth occurs when the proportion of injected money to economy is more than leakage rate. Based on the above point, in order to enhance the rural area in terms of structure, ecology and atmosphere for recreation, it is an increasingly substantial need to utilize appropriate approaches and strategies for the rural tourism development according to the ecological characteristics and conditions, and attractions as well as environmental products (natural and anthropologic). With the consideration of the above mentioned views and the perception of tourism potentials and limitations which can have a constructive influence on proper planning in the rural tourism, removal of problems and their issues, it is plausible to divide the general principles of rural tourism in the following subcategories:

1- Recreation: the expansion of pastime among rural tourists had better be based on activities which are expressive of the area and its beauty, culture, history and its wild life.
2- Development: the development should reinforce the maintenance of environment and recreational targets thus taking a better use of historical phenomena to supplement the income out of agricultural lands which can be achieved through the restoration of derelict lands and creation of new opportunities for local access.
3- Rural economy: the role of investment in the rural tourism is to support its economy. Yet it should occur in sparsely populated areas to prevent dense population, erosion of natural resources and their excessive use.
4- Environment: those enjoying a high profit in rural tourism should be involved in its maintenance and enhance its quality via political and practical supports from environment along with the implementation of policies and recreational plans.
5- Marketing: publicity and information about tourism should deepen the understanding of people so that optimal utilization of the rural area leads to pleasure and enjoyment [25].
6- Planning: the management and planning of the new enhancement of tourism should be in harmony with the panorama and able to expand it wherever possible.

Significance of the Study:
Over the past few decades, the notion of sustainability in tourism industry is one of the most fundamental yet controversial concepts in the expansion of tourism and is thus considered as a framework for realization of socioeconomic development trends, and the management of natural sources and tourism throughout the world. However, due to the problematic and complicated instinct of such concept as well as the operationalization and progress measurement towards sustainability in tourism industry, it is necessary to apply comprehensive and meticulous indicators and measures to gauge the sustainability of tourism and pave the way for the development of sustainable tourism. In the meantime, because of the status quo of rural tourism in Iran and also the young rural tourism destinations, it is vital and strategic to access a proper constellation of indicators for sustainable development of rural tourism for the assessment of the future pathway. By and large, the required attention to rural development could be due to the following causes: 1 - Agricultural Development 2 - Optimum distribution of population 3 – the utilization of production capacity 4 – the restoration of production capacity 5 – the restoration of the country’s economy 6 - social justice, poverty alleviation and social constraints.

In the meantime, development has certain conditions including:
1. High and stable proportions of domestic investments 2. The investment of considerable amount of their savings in technology industries rather than labour-saving technologies 3. a relatively low rate of population growth.

The necessity and importance of rural development in Iran is quite clear based on the status, significance and the role of rural communities as well as the problems and issues facing the community along with the conditions of the country. In this regard, tourism should be realized as an effective approach for economic development and help rural communities to organize and explain the structure and functions of rural tourism along with their guidance to achieve their growth and development of local communities. In this case, the growth and economic diversification of rural communities will be achieved.

Concepts and Definitions:
Tourists: the term “Tour” is taken from “Tornus” in Latin meaning circle. The word “Tour” refers to a circular movement in which a person moves from one place and after moving a while comes back to the same
location. Initially the word tourist was published in Oxford English Dictionary and referred to someone who visited different places for pleasure or learning [28]. In broad terms, tourist is a person who is going to have temporary pleasure, business and visit of relatives not permanently for more than a day and less than a year outside the domain of one’s work and life [27].

Tourism:

The term tourism was first mentioned in the British magazine named sporting magazine in 1811. At that time, such a term was used for travelling to visit historical sites and landscapes pleasurably (Mahalati, 2004, p. 3). Although there have been various definitions for tourism, to date “World Tourism Organization” which is dependent on United Nations and acts as a universal reference with regard to tourism issues and policies, has attempted to standardize the terminologies and classifications of tourism all over the world. In this regard, in 1991, such an organization has provided a sound definition of tourism in “International Conference on Travel and Tourism Statistics” held in Canada: “tourism is a constellation of recreational activities held for people in places different from their normal places for less than a year for pleasure, business and other travelling goals” [8].

Rural Development:

One of the biggest qualms of the governments, policy makers and development planners in the contemporary century is the issue of rural development thus a harmony development to prevent the concentration of capital in one area, and hinder the heterogeneous growth of the society. In other words, rural development can be seen as economically efficient and lucrative, socially fair, culturally congruent with the given society, and ecologically sustainable [4]. In fact, a series of the following reasons has necessitated the focus and attention to rural development prior to civil development: the role of villages in economic, social and political developments locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally as well as the consequences of rural underdevelopments such as widespread poverty, increasing injustice, rapid growth of population, unemployment, immigration, and living in the slum etc. [3]. Therefore, rural development as an integral part of national development is so valuable and precious with the aim of poverty reduction, malnutrition elimination, development of job opportunities, improvement of productivity and income, the increase of agricultural products, the enhancement of self-reliance, social security, and the transfer of public resources to rural regions [2]. Hence, various countries are browsing unique strategies by which they are able to enhance such developments. In the processes of rural development, one of the aspects in need of careful attention is the sustainable development of rural areas. Such concept is a process which extends the opportunities and facilities of mankind, raises his abilities and primarily aims at imparting a real sense of enjoyment and improving one’s life quality. Due to the population explosion all over the world and its relevant concerns, development particularly of sustainable rural kind is viewed as a significant issue for whole developing countries in particular Iran where large number of resources and pillars of development are located in more than seven thousand villages [18]. In such rural places, sustainable development requires adequate income for villagers as an income source factor. One of the fundamental strategies with the aim of income generation for villagers, and their stay in rural areas is placing attention on tourism industry so that rural areas will be taken out of isolation.

Rural Tourism:

Rural tourism includes a number of activities and different aspects of tourism in various rural places which also has positive and negative effects on the rural ecology (natural and human) [21]. In other words, it is a form of tourism in the rural nature which provides unique opportunities for the integration of rural development, resource management, and protected areas in the majority of world. Such creative tourism not only promotes the survival of environment, be directly lucrative for local communities and works as a positive and constructive experience for tourists, it is also a form of sustainable tourism dependent on rural zone. Tourism plays a fundamental function in the local and global economy of countries in a way that it can develop culture and nature, plays a crucial role in the changes in critical resources, and causes optimum increase in potentials of a country [30]. Figure 1 is representative of rural tourism and its subscales:

![Image of rural tourism subscales]

Fig. 1: Tourism industry and its subscales.
Sustainable Development of Tourism:

The notion of sustainable development is a concept that has been provided in recent years in sociology literature and there are also various definitions distinct from each other. The most prevalent definition of sustainability refers to Bratland Commission i.e. “developments providing the requirements of present generation without damage to capabilities of future generation”. What is more, within the framework of sustainable development, it is highly emphasized to keep sustainability in all economic, social and environmental dimensions. Plus, it is believed that without sustainability and balance in whole aspects of society it would be far unlikely to reach a sustainable development. Accordingly, development is viewed as a system whose major members are people, resources and the country. The appropriate compound of all these ingredients will occur according to participation and in a frame of social and organizational system as well as proper space for access to development [15]. The concept of sustainable development in tourism was introduced in 2002. Sustainable tourism development is the expansion of tourism industry, absorption of tourists to a particular area via available resources in a way that it is not only responsive to economic, cultural, and legal needs of the society as well as the tourists’ expectations, but also provides the cultural unity and identity, environmental health, and economic equilibrium of destinations and guests in a balanced and optimum level. Sustainable development of tourism is like a charter whose various aspects form the economic, social, cultural, political, and geographical zones as well as the requirements and expectations of tourists and local people [16]. All such things are indicative of a strong relationship between rural tourism and sustainable development thus one of the basic strategies to enhance rural areas is attention to this type of tourism in order to remove isolation from villages and create a balanced development in countries. In the meantime, rural tourism leads to the perpetuation of authentic and indigenous culture. The most considerable point in villages, nomads and tribes is that each of them has myths, stories, rituals, traditions and beliefs a combination of which forms a matchless anthropological museum. To put it differently, each of the nomads’ tents or rural houses, their ceremonies and festivals can be viewed as a live museum that depicts the relationship between three elements of human, nature ad culture all together [17].

Functions of Rural Tourism:

Although tourism can serve positive consequences, without methodical planning and meticulous supervision there is a possibility of critical damages to the body of villages. This sort of tourism can influence three substantial aspects, namely economic, socioeconomic and cultural dimensions. In the following, a list of positive impacts of rural tourism has been stated:

1- Entrepreneurship for youth and rural women, the development of small employment centres, the creation of numerous vacancies, and prevention from immigration
2- The participation of local people in the management and planning as well as participation in the development of national economy owing the potential to maintain and support the natural resources and ecology.
3- The injection of capitals into rural areas and the reduction of poverty via creating a channel for added value of local products, the growth and maintenance of handicrafts, leaving the single economy of rural areas, the increase and deformation of risky resources to efficient and lucrative resources and finally income distribution
4- More communication of rural communities with other diverse societies and cultures, the promotion of culture among local residents, the maintenance and perpetuation of cultural values and the identification of local identities
5- The increase of social capital and local communities’ welfare [17].

Tourism Management and Its Role In Rural Development:

Above all, tourism management is the responsibility of government at the international level upon which many things such as overall policies, the regulations of law, administrative arrangements, financial resources and the shares of public or private sector is determined. In some countries, such planning at such level is usually implemented by the semi-governmental, private or non-governmental sector. Hence, the rural tourism management and planning is a big responsibility of a large number of public and private organizations as well as rural councils which are directly and indirectly involved in tourism [7].

Rural Tourism Product:

In order that the expectations of tourists are provided, tourism related businesses are required to understand and respect the buying behaviour of tourists. To be competitive with other resorts, the rural tourism industries should provide the tourists with the basic facilities such as food and accommodation, tourism in fields. Farmers should also be able to diversify their agricultural products so that the value and asset of their products increases. This phenomenon results in the survival and development of forestry, hunting, fishing, fruit and olive farming in the Mediterranean countries. In all visits of tourists or their experiences, a series of various products or elements will be taken under consideration. Such elements are typically such as transportation, accommodation,
entertainment, attractions and retail facilities, and leisure and recreational facilities all of which are illustrative of tourism industry. In some cases, such elements will be provided as a package for the tourists by travel agents and tour operators, or alternatively, the tourists themselves might choose these packages. At any case, such elements and features are collectively a mix of activities and functions named tourism products. With regard to the tourism products, there are two methods: from one perspective, it might be examined from the viewpoint of tourism industry or tourism product providers in which the focus will be on issues and challenges of tourism sector. On the other hand, such theme can be discussed from the viewpoints of tourists. In this regard, the product of tourism involves all the tourists’ experiences [20].

Findings:
The investigation and research regarding rural tourism involves numerous issues and multiple subcategories, yet whatever has utmost value is the economy of rural tourism. In general, tourism industry to date is so valuable in the economy development of countries that economists called them invisible economy. However, it should not be forgotten that the rural development might cause similar effect and get effect on and from social and cultural structure of societies. On the whole, the rural tourism consequences can be mentioned as follows:

The positive and negative effects of tourism development (fig. 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative points</th>
<th>Positive points</th>
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<tr>
<td>The destruction &amp; trend change in rural wild life</td>
<td>Employment &amp; rural economical enhancement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Investment problem &amp; asset supplies in rural areas</td>
<td>Agricultural product sales-handicrafts</td>
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<td>Villagers concern of appearance</td>
<td>Utilization of unused natural resources</td>
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<td>Destruction &amp; degradation of plant ecosystem</td>
<td>Prevention of villages getting empty</td>
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<td>The increase of beggary among villagers</td>
<td>Adherence to traditional customs</td>
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<td>The increase of waste and environmental pollution</td>
<td>Reduction of rural migration</td>
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<td>Pattern changes of traditional child upbrinings</td>
<td>Changes in agricultural policies</td>
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<td>The destruction of rural lifestyle</td>
<td>Problem solution of surplus labour</td>
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<td>Limited experimental use in rural areas</td>
<td>Diversification of rural employment</td>
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<td>The loss of natural &amp; green space</td>
<td>The development of rural infrastructures</td>
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<td>High soil erosion</td>
<td>No reliance on agriculture</td>
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<td>Water contamination</td>
<td>Increase in cultural exchanges</td>
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<td>Independence of women</td>
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Conclusions and Recommendations:
Above all, the basic objective of rural tourism is increase in opportunities and decrease in threats. As soon as a chance is identified, it will be turned into profit and in case it is a threat and is not being avoided, it will turn into costs. There will no automatically derived benefit out of tourism unless there exists a well-adjusted planning and monitor. On the other hand, lack of meticulous and methodical planning or low quality implementation of rural tourism projects will have various negative impacts on the whole system [29]. In addition, to date, concentration on the attitudes and motivation of tourists travelling to a destination has utmost significance as a necessity for marketing and the planning of tourism development as well as a basis for the design of tourism related infrastructures. In the meantime, it should be stated that the most crucial problems facing developing countries particularly Iran are the growing expansion of rural immigration to urban areas, loss of income as well as farming decline, poverty, demographics changes of rural area in favour of urban regions, and the shift of rural society to consumer society. Apart from all the stated facts, due to necessary priority of rural development than national development, finding an appropriate solution is a crucial matter. Moreover, it is self-explanatory that sustainable development of rural tourism is known as a valuable section and improving economy which has low dangers and expenditures due to accessible sources, low price and small projects compared to other tourism projects [20].

In general, rural tourism results in economically positive impacts on the host societies. However, it is a need to attain adequate amount of understanding of resources and foundation of sustainable development through normative measures because the host society will undertake negative side-effects as a result of continuation of growing trend of destruction of natural resources, and finally the immigration of local residents and environmental degradation (Jafari & Hatami, 2013, p. 6).

The following points can be offered with regard to the developmental strategies which have an influential role in the development of sustainable tourism:
1- The creation and enforcement of infrastructures like pipe water, electricity, gas, and enhancement of network coverage.
2- The development and improvement of recreational facilities and utilities like accommodations, inns, dining halls, chapel, and foyers/lobbies.
3- Specialized and adequate training of guides.
4. The realization of attractions and miscellaneous products of urban tourism in various places along with their optimum and objective utilization for the creation of job opportunities and increase of income for urban residents.

5. The development of advertising plans for the introduction of natural and human attractions, unique cultural features, urban architecture and customs of each area based on environmental, cultural and social characteristics in addition to participation in festivals, exhibitions, and seminars actively.

6. The establishment of cheap inns and residential regions and rental houses for tourists’ accommodation.

7. The development and equipment of tourism routes, traffic signs, hard and fast regulations for tourists in those areas, the compilation of manuals for tourists as well as their training.

8. The delegation of administration in recreational facilities and residential areas to locals for participation, creation of income and job vacancies.

9. The creation of daily and weekly markets for urban handicrafts and other traditional agricultural products and cultural merchandise booths in the days and seasons of tourists.

10. Proper investment in the cultural sections and training of local people for participation in tourism along with the creation of suitable communication with tourists via holding training courses.

11. The implementation of extensive and suitable advertising along with the provision and distribution of advertising brochures.

12. The involvement of private sector and the compilation of appropriate governmental laws for the enhancement of investment motivation in private sector regarding the development of tourism industry.

13. The provision of necessary expenditure for the study and research of marketing.

14. Appropriate planning for the reduction of all costs for tourism via development of mass tourism and the offer of particular discounts.

15. Based on cultural, natural and historical attractions, and highly favourable geographic position in the field of rural tourism, it is recommendable to emphasize rural tourism as the main aspect of social and economic development of the area.

16. The provision of a comprehensive tourism master plan and later on the implementation of it via competent and efficient management.

17. The enhancement of tourism services through private investment and local participation.

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