Sustainable Tourism Quality in Rural Settings in Order to Sustainable Development
Case Study: Baghu Village, Kish Island, Iran

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INTRODUCTION

A high priority has been placed in Iran in recent years on developing non-oil sources of income and tourism has been identified as one important area of the economy for development. The development of niche types of tourism such as ecotourism or cultural tourism – both the subject of this paper - is clearly in line with the public policy objective of developing non-oil sources of income. Environmental protection is an obligation on the government under Principle 50 of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic. It is therefore appropriate to consider what role the country’s vast cultural heritage resource can play in ensuring more environmentally sustainable forms of tourism development. Since even ecotourism developments can have negative environmental consequences of development of other forms of low intensity tourism (including cultural tourism) must be an important element in Iran’s policy agenda in this area. The promotion of cultural tourism in Iran should aim therefore to build on the positive impacts while minimizing the negative ones. Policies for development of cultural tourism should also take into account the principles and objectives of sustainable development which are set out here within the context of tourism projects. Sustainable tourism in a rural setting is the subject of a growing literature, reflecting interest amongst academics and industry practitioners from both public and private sectors. There is some evidence of this trend in Iran where the government is attaching increasing importance to rural tourism and has launched several initiatives, but little research has been conducted there in general and within a local community context. The current study aims to help in filling this gap and has three main objectives of identifying the positive and negative impacts of tourism on a village and its resources as perceived by the villagers; examining the concerns and priorities of villagers related to tourism; and investigating the concept of sustainable rural tourism from the perspectives of residents and their willingness to participate. Attention is also given to the role of rural tourism as an economic development tool and the effectiveness and appropriateness of current government policies. The paper opens with a review of the literature which is followed by introductions to tourism in Iran and the study area in order to set the scene. The qualitative research methodology of semi-structured interviews are then described and the findings are discussed before a final conclusion.

2-Rural tourism:

Rural tourism can be broadly defined as tourism which takes place in rural areas, although the definition raises questions about what constitutes the

Keywords: Tourism, Rural Tourism, Sustainable development, Persian Gulf, Village.

ABSTRACT

Tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing industries in the world. It is an increasingly important source of income, employment and wealth in many countries. Rural international tourism now accounts for a larger share of foreign exchange receipts and export earnings than any other industry in the world. But, while tourism provides considerable economic benefits for many countries, regions and communities, its rapid expansion has also had detrimental environmental and social-cultural impacts. This paper discusses issues of sustainability and rural tourism and Using a qualitative research approach, it investigates the experiences of one particular village which is located nearby to Persian gulf already and popular with visitors and has features in official tourism development plans. The focus is on the reactions of residents and their perceptions of tourism impacts and formal policies. Findings indicate that villagers are concerned about the use of local natural and cultural resources for tourism purposes, recognizing negative consequences which seem to them to outweigh the positive effects that finally can lead strategies to bring in sustainable development policies.

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latter. Notions of rural may be socially constructed and differ by country and culture. However, certain common attributes can be discerned of low population densities and only a small proportion of land given over to the built environment, creating an impression of space. There is an implication that social structures will be more traditional, the natural landscape will be prominent and that access could be difficult [1]. Agriculture is likely to be practiced, but not necessarily and rural tourism and farm tourism are not always synonymous. Definitional ambiguities about rural areas and rural tourism persist [2] and both are multi-faceted concepts open to a degree of interpretation. A destination’s geography and general circumstances will shape understanding in a manner suggested by comparison of the scenery and leisure opportunities found in the Scottish Highlands and Australian outback. Oppermann claims that academic inquiry about rural tourism dates from the 1950s, making reference to an early publication by Ager which describes tourism in Alpine regions and the advantages it can bring to farmers. Benefits include additional income, job creation and a reduction in rural depopulation. Subsequent studies in the 1960s and 1970s focused on positive economic impacts, although attention was given to socio-cultural and environmental outcomes. The mounting significance of rural tourism is reflected in the dedication of a special issue of the Journal of Sustainable Tourism to the topic in 1994 which was recalled by Sharpley and Roberts [3] a decade later. More recently, it has been observed that rural tourism can be a catalyst for socio-economic development and regeneration [3], especially valuable in places where traditional agricultural activities are in decline [4]. In addition, rural tourism is promoted; [15]. Its rewards are pursued in destinations at very different stages of development, not least the world’s poorest countries [5]. At the same time, there are reservations about the disappointing financial returns accruing from certain types of rural tourism and damage to the physical and cultural landscapes [6]. Theories of sustainability have increasingly informed the debate about rural tourism [7], encouraged by the Rio Earth Summit’s 12 key principles of sustainable development and the Agenda 21 goals. Proponents conclude that a sustainable approach is essential and Lane maintains that the four main reasons for adopting sustainable management systems are to conserve sensitive areas; balance the demands of conservation and development; stimulate community-based economic growth; and preserve the intrinsic features of the rural areas. Stakeholder identification and involvement is agreed to be critical [8] and a number of studies explore sustainability imperatives from the point of view of rural communities The authors have discovered that locals will generally accept and back tourism if it yields socio-cultural and socioeconomic benefits and the environment is protected. There is evidence of both good practice and success [9] and bad practice and failure pertaining to sustainable development. Nevertheless, sustainable rural tourism has been hailed as a possible solution to some of the many challenges confronting countryside and peripheral areas. Neglect extends to Iran were an additional problem in broader understanding is that most tourism research is published in Persian. Nevertheless, matters of sustainable rural tourism there merit analysis in view of Iran’s distinctive characteristics and recent initiatives which are outlined in the next section.

3- Tourism in Iran:

Iran is one of the largest nations in the Middle East with a land area of around 1.65 million square kilometers and a population in excess of 75 million. Known as Persia until 1935, the country has a history dating back over 7000 years. A rich heritage is revealed by the inclusion of 13 cultural sites on UNESCO’s World Heritage list [10] and nine examples in a World Intangible Heritage compendium The ancient Zoroastrian religion originated in Iran and there are also places of religious significance to Shia Muslims which have become centers of pilgrimage [14]. The physical geography encompasses two mountain ranges, a high plateau with large salt flats and vast sand deserts, fertile plains and Caspian Sea and Persian Gulf coastlines. There is a correspondingly wide variety in climate, from arid to subtropical, and in flora and fauna.

Politically and socially, the 1979 revolution was a turning point and led to the establishment of the Islamic Republic which is a theocratic state governed by Islamic principles and Shariah law. Religion is this all-pervasive and determines how life is lived in a patriarchal society where women are expected to be submissive. There is evidence of tourism in Iran since ancient times, but modern efforts at development began 75 years ago with the founding of the Jalbe-Sayahan Bureau in the Ministry of the Interior.

Iran’s history and geography give rise to a wealth of actual and potential visitor attractions and activities encompassing skiing, mountaineering, trekking and beach holidays. The appeal of the environment is recognized and there is a National Committee of Ecotourism which seeks to both promote and preserve nature. However, just over three million international arrivals were recorded in 2010 [12] and the lower figure indicates unfulfilled promise. Impediments to tourism and its growth are the rigid social code, visa restrictions, deficiencies in accommodation and transport and insufficient marketing.

Iran suffers from an unfavorable destination image, at least amongst major generators, linked to the revolution and 1980–1989 war with Iraq. Negative associations are reinforced by sanctions imposed against Iran because of its nuclear program,
ongoing tensions with the western powers and regional instability [13].

Primary inbound markets are neighboring countries such as Iraq, Turkey, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Afghanistan. Most other tourists are from the rest of the Middle East and Central and South Asia [12]. Vacationers engage in culture and nature-based tours as well as study trips [14] and many Iranians living abroad return to visit friends and relatives or for pilgrimage. There is a substantial domestic demand and an estimated seven million trips were made in 2010, but total spending by nationals is much lower than that of travelers from overseas.

The economic significance of tourism is appreciated within the government and seen as a means of diversification, reducing the heavy dependence on the oil industry. Tourism is the responsibility of Iran's Cultural Heritage, Handicraft and Tourism Organization formed in 2004. A target has been set of 20 million tourists by 2025 after completion of the 20 Year Outlook of the Country general development plan, launched in 2005. A budget of US$85 million was allocated to developing tourism and provincial governments were required to invest 5% of their civil funds in tourism infrastructure. Promotion is being extended beyond the Middle East region and to enhanced products, but cultural sensitivities exist and the preference is for foreign visitors with knowledge and understanding about Islam. Citizens may perhaps be more tolerant of outsiders, although the strength of religious feeling appears to influence attitudes.

Rural tourism and its prospects have inspired official interest, partly in response to the problems of rural areas and their urgent need for economic revival. Iran has a sizeable rural population which represents approximately 29% of the total and lives in 64,000 villages where principal sources of income are agriculture, fishing and animal husbandry. Standards of living are generally low and conditions encourage outward migration and rural depopulation; these have adverse economic and social consequences which it is believed tourism can help to reverse. Optimism is not unfounded as Iran's rural areas have much to offer visitors. They are home to aboriginal ethnic groups, lending an individual character to many villages. Making use of these resources, the government has attempted to develop rural tourism which is regarded as a tool in poverty reduction and employment generation. Rural tourism has become a priority in national tourism policies and was highlighted in Iran's Tourism Development and Management Master Plan (1998–2000) as well as other short, medium and longer term strategies which profess a commitment to sustainable development. A Rural Tourism Steering Committee under the auspices of ICHTO was established in 2004, comprising representatives from various government agencies. The RTSC subsequently chose over 400 villages as rural tourism destinations of high potential and ICHTO started to prepare three stages ‘rural tourism strategy-structural plans’ for 300 of the 400 villages, the remainder to be assessed in the future. The plans cost around US$5. 2 million and were essentially feasibility studies which included a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) analyses of village attractions and facilities.

However, endeavors to employ tourism as a catalyst for rural economic development have not always been welcomed or proved as beneficial as anticipated. Following the identification of villages, authorities and private sector tour operators and travel agents commenced advertising without ensuring that a satisfactory infrastructure was in place. Communities were rarely consulted and concerns were raised amongst residents and non-governmental organizations about the implications of increased tourism. The consultancy firms which drew up the plans were more accustomed to dealing with urban planning and conclusions and recommendations were sometimes derived from desk research alone. Valuable and finite natural and cultural resources have been damaged and villagers gained little financially in return. Inadequate planning is thus threatening the sustainability of rural tourism, challenging arguments that tourism has the capacity to make a significant positive contribution to local societies and economies [15].

4-Sustainable Tourism Development:

It is an unfortunate fact that the notions of both ecotourism and cultural tourism have been abused by the tourism industry, often inappropriately exploited as a marketing gimmick without a full commitment to (or understanding of) their true meaning. Of course, this has a positive side since it shows that there is increasing customer interest in such niche forms of tourism and this is a force that can be exploited for the good. For this reason, it is necessary for us here to examine cultural tourism first in terms of the broader concept of sustainable tourism that can be measured against international standards of sustainability. Agenda 21, for example, called for the promotion of environmentally sound and culturally sensitive tourism programs as a strategy for the sustainable development of urban settlements. In turn, the Habitat Agenda called for the conservation and rehabilitation of historical and cultural heritage in accordance with the sustainable use of natural and man-made resources. Significantly for the subject of this paper, all of these focus on the potential of sustainable tourism to contribute to the sustainable development of urban areas and the sustainable exploitation of cultural as well as natural resources. This, then, brings the focus clearly onto the cultural heritage fabric as an important resource for achieving sustainability of tourism development. Boniface in her paper places emphasis on a particularly
significant factor in relation to cultural tourism, particularly with reference to a country such as Iran with an uneven pattern of development that heritage tourism has an important potential for regeneration of peripheral areas. She proposes certain guidelines as to how this positive developmental outcome can be achieved and maximized.

The World Summit on Sustainable Development (‘WSSD’) in 2002 called on governments to engage in the ongoing work under the Convention on Biological Diversity (1992) on the sustainable use of biological diversity, including on sustainable tourism, as a cross cutting issue relevant to different ecosystems, sectors and thematic areas. In this way, sustainable tourism development has been promoted by the WSSD7 as a means of protecting biological diversity while also promoting urban development.8 The main objective as stated here is to increase the benefits of tourism resources for the population in host communities while maintaining the cultural and environmental integrity of the host communities and enhancing the protection of ecologically sensitive areas and natural heritages. This would include actions at all levels:

- Enhance partnerships with both private and public sectors
- Enhance stakeholder cooperation in tourism development and heritage preservation, in order to improve the protection of the environment, natural resources and cultural heritage
- Provide technical assistance to developing countries and countries with economies in transition to support sustainable tourism business development
- Investment and tourism awareness programs, to improve domestic tourism, and to stimulate entrepreneurial development
- Assist host communities to manage visits to their tourism attractions for their maximum benefit

While minimizing negative impacts on and risks for their traditions, culture and environment. As noted above, three types of sustainability are significant for achieving sustainable tourism development. The first of these is ecological sustainability that requires that non-renewable resources (in which much of the cultural heritage may be included) are not used faster than they can be replaced and that renewable resources are not used faster than they can be replenished. The second is social and cultural sustainability that ensures development is compatible with the culture and values of local people and strengthens their sense of community identity. The third is economic sustainability that ensures development is economically efficient and resources should be managed in such a way that they can remain viable to support future generations. From the above, we can derive the principle that the management of all resources should be achieved in such a way as to fulfill economic, social and aesthetic needs while, at the same time, maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes and biological diversity.

In any country, such as Iran, that wishes to build up substantially its tourism industry (both domestic and international) ensuring the sustainability of the tourism model is vital for the protection and on which tourism depends (see: World Tourism Organization, 2001 and 2003). Some relevant goals of sustainable tourism include the following.

- Building awareness of the contribution that appropriate forms of tourism can make both to the environment and the economy.
- Improving the quality of life for the local community.
- Providing the visitor with a high quality experience. Some further necessary conditions for ensuring the sustainability of tourism development projects are:
  - Effective cooperation between government bodies (and other organizations) with responsibility for areas related to sustainable tourism (environment, cultural heritage and tourism, transport, economy etc.)
  - Protection of and maintaining the quality of the resource base, i.e. the cultural and natural environment
  - Reduction in the environmental impact of tourism
  - Good inventorying and monitoring systems for tourism activities that affect the resource base. There is, however, the danger for developing economies of an over-dependency on tourism as an engine for development with little attention being given to other sectors of the economy. This is problematic for a variety of economic, social and political factors can have strong negative impacts on tourism demand and thus tourism development can be rendered essentially non-sustainable over a broad canvas. For this reason, sustainable development objectives are often of most relevance to local and small-scale tourism development projects. The question as to how truly sustainable tourism development can be achieved and how the approach can be applied to the context of Iran will have implications inter alia for policy- and decision-making processes, institutional frameworks, planning and management, legislation and regulations.

A fundamental premise of sustainable tourism is that the tourist sector should be planned and managed so as to bring long-term economic benefits and contribute to poverty reduction, while at the same time, resource conservation and cultural preservation.

It remains a major challenge to the tourism industry to apply existing knowledge relating to sustainability more effectively to the planning and development of the tourism infrastructure. It is necessary to adopt monitoring, planning and management techniques to local requirements, guided by an understanding of the conditions, needs and development prospects of these.
Iran has been preparing a national plan to assure the long-term sustainable tourism development, in compliance with governmental policies and strategies and the relevant Five-Year Development Plan. The Iran Touring and Tourism Organization (ITTO) is the governmental body mainly responsible for this work. A comprehensive study of past activities has been carried out, the ITTO Research Centre has been reorganized and working groups have been established in accordance with the requirements of the plan. An advisory committee comprising experts from universities, the ITTO and other related organizations has been set up. It is intended to carry out an awareness campaign in order to reach the same level of understanding in provincial areas.

5-Methodology:

Primary and secondary data were needed to satisfy the study objectives and thus assembled. Secondary data were collected from published sources within and outside Iran, including official reports and plans. Semi-structured face to face interviews with household and people that visiting or working with a theme, Hades was chosen as the most appropriate method of gathering primary information. Such a technique encourages an open discussion of a topic, yet allows comparisons to be made of the responses. A sample of some households of the total in Baghu village, was selected by systematic random.. In conformity with this technique, the population was listed in random order.. Four research assistants with a tourism background undertook the fieldwork and an additional three translated the recorded material into English. The interviews were based on 10 questions about rural tourism related principally to the economic, socio-cultural and environmental impacts of tourism in the village. Opinions were also solicited about the role of women in tourism, government support in developing tourism in the village and understanding and perceived barriers to sustainable tourism development. Respondents were prompted to elaborate on their views after answering the initial question. Data were then analyzed thematically in alignment with the key themes. Qualitative thematic analysis is widely used in social science research, not least tourism, and appropriate for the current exercise which is concerned with the personal reflections and thoughts of respondents. Limitations are, however, acknowledged and include the possibility that respondents did not speak freely about certain matters deemed sensitive. The sample was also dominated by males and women were not always permitted to respond, even though they sometimes headed the household.

Case study: Baghu village, Kish island, Iran:

Baghu village is only old village of kish island which is located in the southwest. Nowadays the village is fertile except for a few family farmer. There are piles of varieties of native trees in the lush region where an old hornbeam trees are beautifully dramatic. In order to exploit this valiant old village park, 60 acres of land area in this region is constructed (Figure 1).

Fig. 1: Baghu village location and views.
The Baghu village named based on 100 years old woman named Mama BAGHU that from the Portuguese landing in the island have lived in this village. One of Interesting place of the village is a mosque that made by vernacular architecture by local masons, in this rural area, basics of any business and tourism hub for many travelers there remains a strange cult place. To expand recreational facilities and green space development and utilization of natural beauty on the island BAGHU village that is susceptible to dirt, "Deliran Park," with an area of 60 hectares, is located in this region.

Up to the last investigation about the environment and life quality, there are some results showed that because of this village situated in the island, this place can be a one of attraction points for tourism.

6. Findings and discussion:

1. Social and cultural impacts:

The social and cultural impacts of tourism are distinguishable, but are often considered together as the ‘people’ impacts which arise from interactions between residents and visitors. Such contact may precipitate changes in the everyday life, traditions, values, norms and identities of destination residents. Survey respondents cited favorable socio-cultural impacts of tourism in the village, although stances tended to be more positive when the locals felt that they were profiting financially from tourists. The rapid growth of an art and crafts market brought about by tourist demand was welcomed as was the awakening amongst residents of the importance of preserving the rural heritage which had been in danger of vanishing a decade ago. Villagers enjoyed meeting new people and practicing their language skills and appreciated some of the village amenities which owed their origin to tourists. An advantage for several was the chances offered to women due to the fact that most tourism enterprises were family-based and small scale. Women had once been confined to agricultural labor and the making of handicrafts, but tourism development afforded other opportunities; this could enhance their status in society and lead to a degree of emancipation. Male household heads were asked if they did or would allow females of their family to be employed in tourism and 45% replied in the affirmative; 50% said they would refuse and 35% maintained it would depend on the job. Almost one third of households already had females working directly or indirectly in tourism. Men opposed to the idea adhered to the traditional belief that a woman's place was at home, looking after the house and family. Nevertheless, the extent of female involvement and its acceptance supports the findings of Devedzic that rural tourism can modify gender roles and relationships within communities, giving women greater independence and a stronger sense of identity. However, a range of negative socio-cultural impacts were also identified in the interviews. There were instances of resentment, antagonism, dishonesty and alienation in the relationship between the community and tourists and tour operators.

Villagers described unprecedented alterations in society and ways of life which were partly, but not totally, attributed to the presence of tourists. It was felt that young people paid little or no heed to their ancestral culture and aspired to an urban lifestyle whereas older members of the community were keen to protect traditions. One household had commented how the Younger generation in the village has changed their lifestyles. They are interested to consume non-local foods and drinks, wear nontraditional fashions, and they desire to indulge in the same form of entertainment as tourists. We are a strictly traditional and religious society so that tourism had an adverse impact upon the social fabric. The authenticity of the culture and cultural representations marketed to tourists is a topic of debate worldwide and MacCannell writes of the phenomenon of staged authenticity. Tourists are thereby denied access to the original and consequently become victims of exploitation by the tourism industry, alongside residents who may or may not collude in the process. In Baghu, a majority of respondents were of the view that the commercialization of tangible and intangible culture. Ceremonies, events, activities, art and handicrafts had been adapted to satisfy visitor expectations. Some respondents deplored handicraft fakery and one pointed out Nowadays the quality of local handicrafts has been decreased due to high demand for such products. Locals who are involved in this business reduced the quality and increased the price to suit the needs of customers.

Several asserted that food items such as honey, dried fruits and dairy goods were deteriorating in standard while prices charged to both villagers and visitors were rising (Figure 2).

2. Economic impacts:

Nearly all respondents believed that tourism generated income and employment, constituted a market for local products and helped to diversify the economy. Despite doubts by some individuals about the propriety of women's greater prominence resulting from rural tourism, it was agreed that they had become the main breadwinner in certain households. Money was earned by females from the making and sale of handicrafts and cooked foods and operating home-stay accommodation. Economic rewards for the locals were, however, comparatively small and it was calculated that less than 10% of village residents depended on tourism for their livelihoods. Any employment was seasonal and poorly paid. National tour operators and travel agents
were thought to gain the most as tourists came primarily from towns and bought packages for businesses there. Service providers such as transportation companies were also often based outside the locality and overnight tourists were rare.

Fig. 2: Traditional crafts made by women.

We see almost more than 30 tourists coming every day; most of them are same-day visitors that will stay in island hotels. We have very minimum of benefits, a major portion of this benefit will go to travel agents and other service providers. Interviewers who were not directly involved in tourism criticized how any earnings were unevenly distributed within the village and concentrated amongst those supplying accommodation, catering and local transportation.

Non-beneficiaries felt that tourism had failed in its supposed function as a tool for poverty eradication and also delayed the addressing of fundamental structural inequalities.

With regard to outward migration, respondents conceded that a shrinking agricultural sector and fewer jobs in the village had prompted many younger residents to move to the towns. Amongst motivations were the search for employment and especially within government, education, enhanced marriage prospects and a better standard of living.

Some had left for a better situation on the island developed places or in other states to large cities such as Tehran as a capital to work temporarily as manual laborers and then remained after securing permanent posts. It did not seem to interviewees that tourism had a significant effect on slowing this pattern of migration, although it was recalled that some individuals had returned from urban centers in order to set up a tourism business. More than half of those with family members who had migrated said that these relatives would come back if suitable jobs were available in a thriving tourism industry backed by the authorities (Figure 3).

Fig. 3: Livestock industry and dairy products particularly Honey.

3. Environmental impacts:

Tourism was felt to have heightened villager awareness of the environment and its value and had led to the founding of a Baghu non-governmental organization dedicated to conservation. Nevertheless, without exception, respondents concurred that tourism had negative impacts on the environment. Erosion, degradation, littering, fire risks and vandalism were highlighted. The majority of
interviewees claimed that uncontrolled construction had occurred with undesirable consequences. In addition to physical damage, land and property prices had escalated. There were complaints that trees and stones had been illicitly used for building, depleting natural resources. However, it was noted that general development was to blame for much environmental destruction which was then exacerbated by tourism.

According to one respondent Traditionally, Baghu was famous for its high quality honey; unfortunately, this good industry is isolated and not developed for some reasons, so this petition will be minimized and mange by local people and will be not a plan for this industry’s future. Visitors were condemned for their irresponsible behavior in leaving rubbish at sites and tourist attractions which created a fetid smell in the village. The litter problem was made worse by the fact that there were no containers for garbage or formal method of collection (Figure 4).

![Fig. 4: Environmental damages.](image)

7. Conclusion:

The interviews revealed that villagers had an appreciation of the concept of sustainable rural tourism, but felt that it was not being practiced by either private industry or government or, indeed, fellow villagers. While recognizing some advantageous popularity with tourists had brought to the village and its population, these appeared to be offset by fears of harmful consequences. Economic rewards were perhaps the most welcome, followed by the stimulation of socio-cultural and natural heritage awareness and conservation. The manner in which traditional society and culture was at risk from tourism was, however, a primary concern alongside the over-burdening of the infrastructure and degradation of the fabric of the village and its physical environs. Unsurprisingly, vested interests exercised an influence and those who gained most from tourism were likely to be more enthusiastic in its support. There seemed to be some resentment within the community about inequalities in how the financial returns from tourism were shared. It is also worth noting that many respondents were keen to set up tourism businesses and critical of official failure to help them do so. Dissatisfaction with government and its tourism strategy was a dominant theme of discussions and there was a divergence between the aims of rural tourism projects and the manner in which execution had been attempted, stated goals proving elusive.

It may be that unrealistic objectives were set by policy makers and planners who had insufficient experience and expertise and that the expectations of the villagers about tourism's contribution to the economic and social revitalization were over-optimistic. Authorities appeared reluctant to communicate with local residents and take into account their needs, compounding any misunderstandings. It would seem therefore that tourism cannot be seen in Iran as a key driver of growth for rural economies and an economic activity approved by resident populations; rather, it is a supplementary source of income which assists in development while arousing strong criticism. Opposition and concern about tourism cannot be ignored and must be addressed if progress is to be made. While exhibiting interest in sustainable rural tourism, in common with governments worldwide, official policies for Iran’s villages formulated to date have been incomplete and not properly integrated into wider plans. Resources are being damaged and depleted and locals excluded in a way contradictory to the principles of sustainability. One of the challenges for the future is to reconcile divergent viewpoints and devise effective sustainable rural tourism projects which actively involve inhabitants. However, further research is necessary to compare and contrast the experiences of Baghu village with other similar kind villages. More thorough impact analyses can be conducted and interviews sought by authorities to better evaluate the dynamics of formal decision making. The results of such work would
help cast light on rural tourism in general and the distinctive destination of Iran in particular.

References