



Explanation the tourism role in social sustainability of Ghaemshahr Township Villages

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ABSTRACT

As an effective tool, tourism affects the base of rural economy, so it plays crucial role in the social sustainability of villages. This study was conducted to explore the role of tourism in social sustainability of Ghaemshahr Township villages. This study is an applied research used descriptive-analytical method of study. The needed data were obtained through documentary and survey studies. Population of study included all villagers (N = 17216), which 375 of them were selected as sample of study using Cochran formula. The variables of study had quantitative and qualitative nature. Likert scale was used to collect the data and SPSS software was used to analyze the collected data. T-test was also used to ensure the normal distribution of the data. Then, correlation and regression and parametric statistical tests such as Pearson correlation test were used. Findings of this study revealed that tourism has an impact on increasing social gap, increasing crime and illegal activities, reducing social cohesion among residents, improving recreational facilities, enhancing tourism facilities and services, enhancing the quality of life of villagers, and promoting the local culture.

Key words: tourism, social sustainability, sustainable tourism, rural areas, villages of Ghaemshahr Township

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INTRODUCTION

Within the desired framework to develop rural areas, characterized as rural sustainability, rural development is based on the general and systemic approach involving fundamental dimensions, forming the rural development system and creating balanced link between them (Taherkhani et al, 217: 2008). Given the definitions and themes of sustainable development, the main elements of this development include economic development, social welfare, environmental quality and desired governance. In this regard, as the Sustainable Development Commission states, sustainable development dimensions include social, economic, and environmental characteristics, indicating a balanced and integrated concept in a single framework in which there is an interaction among the elements (Rural Development Planning Office 14: 2007). The role of social sustainability is very significant in realizing the rural development goals in the sustainable development process. Social system sustainability means to enhance the quality of life and to develop human resources and finally the capability of local communities to overcome internal challenges and to response to external changes and to manage protecting of value. Accordingly, the social goals of sustainable development have been emphasized broadly in themes such as equal opportunities (inter-generation and intra-generation), empowerment, enhanced

quality of life, dignity and human rights, reduced poverty, cultural diversity, social solidarity, social involvement, building institutional capacity, social security, accountability, social welfare, and spatial belonging. Emphasizing on world experiences, it appears that there are various reasons for creation of unsustainability in its environmental dimensions in natural resources mismanagement. Economic unsustainability manifested at the level of rural communities in the form of lack of economic balance, inequality, unemployment have been due to lack of attention to social dimensions and lack of sustainable institution in villages (Poortaheri et al, 2011: 3). At present, majority of countries are moving economically toward high-profitable and low costly economy. In this regard, they have paid special attention to tourism and each of them has tried to attract more tourists (Mahallati, 2001: 302). One of the tourism dimensions that can improve the domestic tourism is rural tourism. Focusing on rural tourism, particularly in countries living in third world, is regarded an essential, since rural areas have been neglected or less attention has been paid on them in the process of development, industrialization, and rapid growth of urban development in these countries. This problem has resulted in deprivation of villages and their economic poverty and increased immigration from rural areas to cities (Jomepour, 2006: 2). Rural tourism development can lead into employment in the village, lack of immigration to cities, and improving the livelihood of villagers (Saeedi, 2011: 90). Providing new opportunities in many villages, rural tourism is considered as a means that revives rural communities and

makes them to survive in these residences (Eftekhari&Mahdavi, 2006: 8). The present study aims to answer the main question of what is role of tourism in the social sustainability of rural areas of Ghaemshahr.

Review of literature

In a study entitled tourism role in development of rural areas in Europe, Macleod, DV L and Gillespie, S.A (2010) concluded that tourism leaves positive and negative effect on rural areas of Europe environmentally, socially, economically, and culturally. The present article evaluates the long-term sustainability of tourism in Europe, and it resolves the problems such as local policies to achieve sustainable tourism. In a study entitled rural tourism as a strategy for economic and social development in 2012 in Romania, Bogana stated that tourism sustainable development in rural areas demanded the ability to develop tourism resources and creating the relationship between various sectors based on a unique and single method. Chuang Shu Tzu (2013) examined the impact of rural tourism from the viewpoint of host community in Taiwan. Investigating two main tourism models in Taiwan, he concluded that these models are different in terms of the social, economic, cultural, and environmental impacts. Zand&Nouri examined the role of tourism in the sustainable development of Kermanshah villages. They concluded that villages have tourism potentials, but these resources are not used properly. However, if tourism is developed and problems are resolved, sustainable development would be achieved, leading to increased economic profit. Shang and Aantestis (2014) investigated rural tourism and social sustainability. They concluded that tourism development leads to increased human control over his life, and this development has no conflict with the value factors influenced accordingly, and it improves the community’s social identity. Ghafari et al (2009) examined the role of tourism in social and economic development of Saman Village in Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari province. They concluded that there is a significant correlation between employment, increased revenue, reduced immigration of residents and tourism. ShariatPanahi et al (2009) studied the role of tourism in sustainable rural development (case study: Lavasan village in Lavasanat district). They concluded that sustainable rural tourism leads to revival of local and traditional cultures of villages and encouraged collective activity of villagers, increased rural incomes, and decreased immigration of villages. Mohammad ZadehLarijani (2011) investigated tourism role in the sustainable social economic development of villages in Iran and reported that one of the best strategies to help countries to overcome social, economic, and environmental problems and to achieve social and geographical justice is paying more attention is of officials and people to rural tourism development, as it results in sustainable development in the village. Zarafshani et al (2012) evaluated sustainable rural tourism in Saman village of Shahrkord. They reported that tourism development in the studied area has four major outcomes, including production of income, creation of environmental problems, and cultural development, and reduced social capital. Arghan et al (2015) investigated the tourism role in social-economic development of rural areas in a

case study of Sahulan Cave and its impact on the villages of the areas. They found a significant correlation among increased number of tourists, tourism boom, and an improvement in the social and economic indicators. Nematollahi et al (2016) evaluated the sustainability of rural destinations in line with development of rural tourism with moderating the destination image in the Derak district of Shiraz city. They reported that economic and environmental level is lower than the desired level and the social level is higher than desired level. Social sustainability indicator had the highest effect on rural tourism and destination image had a positive and significant impact on economic sustainability. However, it had no impact on social sustainability. Additionally, destination image had a reverse effect on environmental sustainability.

Theoretical principles

Rural sustainability should include all domains of change and it should include three principles of spirituality, including environmental sustainability, cultural and social sustainability, and economic sustainability to direct improper living conditions toward better material and spiritual conditions (Badri, 2009: 193). Accordingly, sustainable rural development is a sustainable process involving economic, social, cultural and environmental changes to enhance the long-term welfare and prosperity of all community. It is in fact a multi-dimensional process looking for integrating the economic, social, cultural and environmental goals. Hence, rural sustainability involves playing attention to social, economic, cultural and environmental dimensions simultaneous and integrating these dimensions to enhance the level of livelihoods and welfare of rural people (Azkia, 2010: 3).

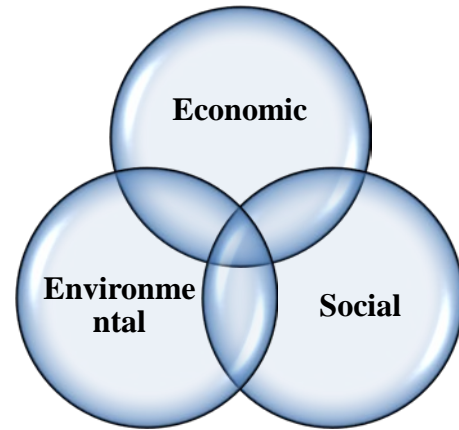


Figure 1: three main principles of sustainable development in an integrated model

Table1: goals of sustainable development, tourism development and rural development

goals of sustainable development	Rural tourism development	rural development
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Environment protection -Balanced combination of economy and environment in the process of decision-making -Optimal using of environmental resources -Respect for the rights of future generations in using resources -simultaneously expansion of economic, environmental, and social growth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -development of agricultural and improvement of handicrafts -Increasing the rural participation -Improving the quality of life -Improving the social welfare -Satisfaction of the villagers -Human, food and cultural security -Decreasing rural immigration -Protecting the local culture of villagers -Employment in village -Increasing the income of rural households -Optimal and efficient use of local resources -Properly use of unused resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Increasing the production of agricultural products -Development of rural job opportunities -meeting the needs of villagers -Improving rural productivity and income -Reducing poverty, increasing rural welfare -Development of rural involvement -Providing job and food security -Transferring public resources to rural areas -Improving rural infrastructure -Reducing rural immigration -Strengthening the position of the village in the national and regional economy -Paying attention to local culture and history
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Source: MoradiMasihi et al, 2014

Sustainable rural tourism aims to regulate the relationships between the host society, tourism destination, and the tourists, since these relationships can be constructive, dynamic and destructive, and it is looking for moderating the pressure and the crisis between these elements in order to minimize environmental and cultural damage and bring satisfaction for visitors and contribute to economic growth. Through participation in employment and generating the income, tourism can revive the economy of local communities. It can also contribute to the strengthening of local culture, and create a change in environmental protection by restoration of the natural environment (Rezvani, 2007: 55). The key reason for paying attention to tourism development is overcoming low level of income and providing new job opportunities and social developments in rural community. In social dimensions, rural tourism, as a tool for employment and economic development at the region level, can also provide hope to reduce the poverty and to increase employment, especially in low-income areas (MoradiMasihi and Ghasemi, 2014: 113). Rural tourism plays key role as a powerful and complementary activity in employment and increasing the rural income. Most of developed countries strengthen this industry to empower their economies. The point plays key role in in realizing this ability is planning and making this process purposeful, since rural tourism is unplanned in most of non-developed countries and it has not achieved its mission despite increasing the number of tourism. Therefore, new attitude and development is required in structure of rural tourism, otherwise, unplanned tourism will result in social, economic, and environmental harms in rural settlements (Rezvani&Safae, 2005: 114). Generally, there three views are suggested for relationship between tourism and rural development. The first view considers tourism as a strategy for rural development. Based on the second view, tourism is considered as a policy to

reconstruct rural settlements. Based on the third view, rural tourism is considered as a tool for sustainable development (Badri et al, 2009: 4). Experts believe that rural development

and tourism development are sub-sections of main and comprehensive pattern of development, and they have followed similar intellectual development course. Therefore, the concept of tourism cannot be considered separate from its wider context, namely development. Tourism and rural

development is in fact two interrelated factors, which development of each of them has a positive impact on the other. Given positive and different impacts of rural tourism, communities are looking for using rural tourism opportunities from various aspects and using it as a tool to achieve rural development. The below table illustrates three scenarios of development, rural development, and tourism development over the passage of time (Ganbari et al, 2013: 10).

Table 2: the course of evolution in theories of rural development, tourism development, and sustainable development

Tourism development	Rural development	Development t	Time order
Biased view	Population and technology model	Modernization	1950-1960
prudent view	Political economy and land changes	Dependency development	1960-1970
Constitutive view	agricultural development	Alternative development	1980
knowledge-based view	Sustainable livelihood	Sustainable Development	1991 up to this day

Source: Shen, 2008: 51

METHODOLOGY

The current study is applied in terms of objective and correlational type of descriptive-analytic study in terms of nature of the method. Required data were collected using documentary sources and survey studies. Out of 122 villages of Ghaemshahr Township, 20 villages having rural tourism were identified that through survey studies by researchers and they were selected to be investigated. Considering the large size of the population (N = 17216), Cochran method was used to determine the sample size, which 375 villagers were selected as samples accordingly. Statistical methods were used to analyze the data. In the descriptive statistics section, frequency distribution tables, bar charts, mean and standard deviation were used. In the inferential statistics section, Pearson correlation coefficient and regression tests, independent two-

sample t-test were used. Performing k-s test and ensuring the normal distribution of the data, regression parameter was used at 95% confidence interval to confirm the main hypothesis. SPSS software was used to process the data, Excel software was used to draw tables, and ARC GIS software was used to draw the maps in this study.

Studied area

Range of study

Ghaemshahr Township is located in the central part of Mazandaran province between 36 ° 21' 50 " and 36° 38' 12" north latitude and 52 ° 43' 06" and 53 ° 03' 43" east longitude from Greenwich Meridian. It is limited Juibar city from north, Sari city from east, Savadkuh from south, and Babylon from west. Having 458.5 km2, it covers approximately 1.9% of the total area of Mazandaran province. Based on statistics released in 2011, it has 2 urban points (Ghaemshahr&Arthe), 1 central district, 5 rural districts, and 122 villages.

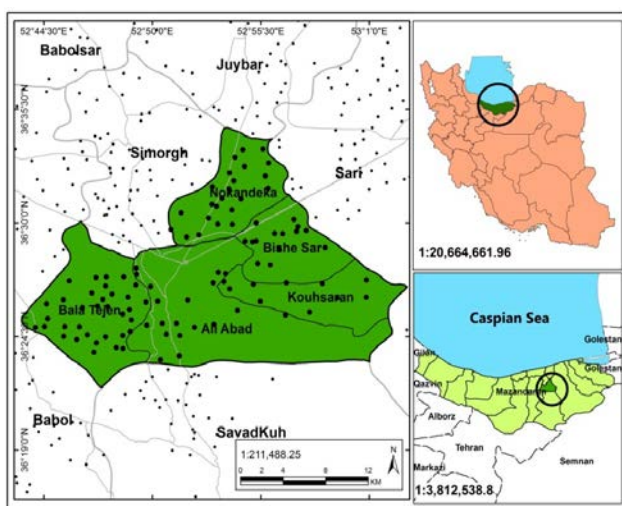


Figure 2: studied area location in national divisions

FINDINGS

Descriptive findings

Considering frequency distribution of villagers participated in this study in terms of gender, it was found that 74.3% of them were male and 25.7% of them were female. The highest age group of them (43.1%) belonged to age group of 31-40 years and the lowest age group of them related to age group of 61 years and older. In terms of education level, 11.3% of them had elementary and secondary education, 43.3% of them had high school and associate level of education, and 50.4% of them had bachelor and higher level of education (master and Ph.D.). Most of them (48%) were self-employed, and 20.3% of them were employee, and 17.1% of them were worker. According to findings of Table 3, most of respondents were male and the minimum and maximum age of respondents was 21 and 61, respectively. The most frequent level of education was bachelor, and most of them were self-employed.

Table 3: personal and general characteristics of respondents

Description		Villagers	
		f	%
Gender	Female	95	25.7

	Male	274	74.3
Age	21-30	24	6.5
	31-40	159	43.1
	41-50	97	26.3
	51-60	67	18.1
	61 and higher	22	6
Education	Elementary	3	8
	Secondary	12	3.3
	High school	133	36
	Associate	27	7.3
	Bachelor	128	34.7
	Master	37	10
	PhD	21	5.7
Job	Confounding data	8	2.2
	Worker	63	17.1
	employee	74	20.3
	Farmer	30	8.1
	Retired	19	5.1
	Self-employed	179	48.2
	other	4	1.2

Source: research findings, 2016

To examine the social status of them, 26 items were used. Increased crime and illegal activities included 5 items, reduced social cohesion among residents included 4 items, quality of life and promoting the local culture included 4 items, improving facilities and recreational and cultural services included 3 items, and increased social gap had 3 items.

Table 4: Description of social indicators affecting rural tourism among villagers

Social indicators	N	Confounding data	Mean	SD
Increased social gap	367	2	3.885	1.031
Increased crime and illegal activities	367	2	3.215	1.282
Reduced social cohesion among residents	367	2	3.547	1.317
Improving recreational facilities and services	369	0	4.127	1.166
Improving tourism facilities and services	369	0	4.059	0.812
Increased quality of life among villagers	369	0	4.436	1.014
Promoting local culture	369	0	3.355	1.353

Source: research findings, 2016

The results of Table (4) regarding the distribution of social indicators affecting rural tourism among the villagers participated in this study revealed that mean effect each of the social sustainability variables is higher than the theoretical mean (3). Thus, descriptive analysis of data suggests the effect of tourism development in rural areas on the social indicators. Frequencies of each of social sustainability components classified according to the Likert scale were examined and mean rank of these components was obtained.

Table 5: Frequency and mean rank of social sustainability components of rural areas among villagers

Item	Frequency percentage					Total percentage	Mean rank
	Very low	Low	Moderate	High	Very high		
Increased social gap	2.3	15.6	5.4	46.3	29.8	100	3.8
Increased crime and illegal activities	13.0	7.6	20.4	31.9	26.6	100	3.5
Reduced social cohesion among residents	0.3	37.9	3.3	23.0	35.0	100	3.5
Improving recreational facilities and services	6.8	3.0	3.8	40.7	45.8	100	4.3
Improving tourism facilities and services	2.7	2.2	0.8	72.9	21.4	100	4.8
Increased quality of life among villagers	4.1	1.3	6.5	21.7	66.4	100	4.5
Promoting local culture	13.5	10.1	3.0	64.2	9.2	100	4.1

Source: research findings, 2016

Findings of Table (5) illustrate that tourism development affects social sustainability in investigated rural areas significantly. From the viewpoint of villagers living in these areas, it improved tourism facilities and services by mean rank of 4.8, increased quality of life of rural residents with mean rank of 4.5, and improved welfare and recreational facilities with mean rank of 4.3.

Analytical findings

Hypothesis: There is a correlation between tourism development in the studied area and social sustainability.

Table (6) shows that regression coefficient is 0.592 and its corrected square suggests that 47.6% of the dispersion observed in the sustainability of "social indicators" in rural areas (increased social gap, increased crime and illegal activities, reduced social cohesion among residents, improving recreational and welfare facilities, improving tourism facilities and services, increasing the quality of life of rural residents and promoting local culture) are justified by rural tourism development. Then, to explain the relationship between the two variables, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used.

Table 6: The regression coefficient statistics

Corrected square R	R square	R
0.476	0.592	0.639

Findings of Table (7) report the analysis of variance and evaluate the total significance. As calculated significance level (Sig = 0) is less than 0.05, the regression model is significant and the hypothesis stated above is confirmed. It means that tourism development in rural areas has a significant correlation with social indicator from viewpoint of rural residents participated in this study.

Table 7: results of analysis of variance and regression statistics

Source of variations	SS Sum of squares	Df	MS Sum of squares	F Statistic	Sig (Significance value)
Regression	2119.382	7	302.769	11.469	0.000
Residual	8896.093	337	26.398		
Total	11015.475	344			

examine the social status, 26 items were used. Increased crime and illegal activities included 5 items, reduced social cohesion among residents included 4 items, quality of life and promoting the local culture included 4 items, improving facilities and recreational and cultural services included 3 items, and increased social gap had 3 items. Items were combined with each other to better understanding of social status and 7 variables and indicators were determined. Investigations revealed that tourism development in the studied area has different social outcomes. These outcomes in terms of importance include increased crime illegal activities, increased social gap, reduced social cohesion, improved and tourism facilities and services, improved welfare and recreational facilities, promoting local culture and improved quality of life. Standard impact coefficient (Beta) suggests direction and severity of impact of each of the variables on increasing the social gap, increasing crime and illegal activities, reducing social cohesion among residents, improving welfare and recreational facilities, improving and tourism facilities and services, increasing the quality of life of rural people, and promoting the local culture on the sustainability of social indicators. Accordingly, from the viewpoint of villagers, the impact of tourism on increasing crime and illegal activities with beta of 0.158 was the strongest predictor in this regard. In addition, from the viewpoint of villagers, tourism does not impact on the quality of life of villagers, and with beta of -0.245, it is the weakest predictor in this regard.

Table 8: Findings of regression coefficients of predicting variables

Predicting factors	Non-standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	sig
	B	Deviation error	Beta		
Constant coefficient	49.571	2.393	-	20.719	0.00
Increased social gap	0.532	0.273	0.096	1.949	0.52
Increased crime and illegal activities	0.706	0.228	0.158	3.099	0.002
Reduced social cohesion among residents	0.259	0.217	0.060	1.194	0.223
Improving recreational facilities and services	-0.323	0.241	-0.068	-1.338	0.182
Improving tourism facilities and services	0.135	0.343	0.020	0.394	0.694
Increased quality of life among villagers	-1.357	0.281	-0.245	-4.827	0.00
Expanding local culture	-1.005	0.214	-0.240	-4.705	0.00

Source: research findings, 2016

CONCLUSION

Objective of this study was to evaluate the role of tourism in social sustainability of rural areas in Ghaemshahr city. This research aims to use descriptive and inferential statistical methods to analyze the data. It refers first to descriptive findings. All 20 villages investigated in this study had a population of tourists during the years of 2016, 2011, and 2016, and the number of tourists follows an increasing trend. The highest number of participants was male and the highest level of education was high school. In addition, the highest number of participants was married, and they were native in terms of social belonging. In villagers group, the age range of participants was between 20 and 70 years. Occupation of most of the respondents was self-employed, employee, and worker, respectively. Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to examine the normal distribution of data. As data followed a normal distribution, parametric tests were selected. Findings of testing hypotheses of study in SPSS-24 software suggest that from the viewpoint of villagers expansion of tourism in rural areas has a significant correlation with changes in social indicators. Based on view of experts, tourism has both positive and negative impacts, so that results of t-test and regression correlation coefficient indicate that tourism in the studied area had positive and negative impacts from the viewpoint of villagers. Standard impact coefficient (Beta) suggests direction and severity of impact of each of the variables on increasing the social gap, increasing crime and illegal activities, reducing social cohesion among residents, improving welfare and recreational facilities, improving and tourism facilities and services, increasing the quality of life of rural people, and promoting the local culture on the sustainability of social

indicators. Accordingly, from the viewpoint of villagers, the impact of tourism on increasing crime and illegal activities with beta of 0.158 was the strongest predictor in this regard. In addition, from the viewpoint of villagers, tourism does not impact on the quality of life of villagers, and with beta of -0.245, it is the weakest predictor in this regard, so that investigations showed that tourism development caused an increase in social gap, increased crime and illegal activities, reduced social cohesion among residents of villages. As shown in studies conducted by Macleod et al (2010) and Buzarjomhuri (2014) and Nematollahi (2016), in addition to positive outcomes, tourism might result in some social instability such as negative social effects and the need for increased social awareness, and low impact of tourism on social indicators. Moreover, findings of the study revealed that tourism improved the welfare and recreational facilities, improved tourism facilities and services, and increased the quality of life of villagers, and the developed local culture in the villages. As Shang et al (2014), ShariatPanahi et al (2009) and Arghan et al (2015) showed, tourism can have positive social impacts, such as strengthened social identity, revived local and traditional culture, and improved social indicators. Based on findings of this study, some recommendations are provided for the formation of sustainable rural tourism and increasing its positive impacts and reducing its negative impacts of tourism:

-Tourism lacks a systematic and precise planning and it is based on supply and demand in Ghaemshahr city villages. Therefore, it is essential that tourism potentials of each area to be identified and classified accordingly. Then, they should be introduced and promoted so that tourists can identify their desired area based on their interest.

- It is recommended that eastern bypass of Ghaemshahr city to be implemented in order to provide better access to the villages of Kuhsaran and Bishesar, which have high potential for tourism. In addition, completing the four-line military road for easier access to the villages of Balatajan and Aliabad, located adjacent to the main road of Babol to Tehran, is recommended to supply traditional products of villagers to tourists visiting this road.

-Expanding the weekly bazars for selling the products of the villagers and introducing them at least in rural districts, since bazars are hold only in the Kutna Village, as center of Kuhsaran village at current. As it is welcomed well, it is necessary that it is expanded to other areas.

-In promoting the tourism, the preparation of different programs to introduce various tourist attractions, holding festivals, conferences, executing local music that has good history in the area, providing local food, and providing the conducted studies to officials to accelerate the process of planning are recommended.

- Due to limited number of residential centers, it is recommended that suitable and cheap residential centers to be developed for the well-being of tourists in the rural areas studied.

- Creating suitable recreational places around the Talar River in the villages located in proximity of this river and completely implementation of the Hadi Plan in villages of Dekla and Afraratakt and Chamrandeh in order to enhance the quality of access and infrastructure.

-Training and providing knowledge and awareness for local managers of villages to increase per capita of tourism, recreational, and welfare spaces and providing them for villagers to enhance the sense of hospitality.

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