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## The Role of Tourism in Economic and Social Changes of Target Villages of Golestan Province

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### 1. Introduction

Given its role in decreasing poverty, today tourism is known as an important factor in the development of villages and rural areas. As compared with other economic sectors, tourism has a number of advantages; it is known as a panacea for economy a solution for improving life quality in distant areas, motivation for the revitalization of settlements, a factor in improving the living conditions of rural communities, and a catalyst for, economic and social reconstruction and development. The present study investigates the effects of tourism on the development of rural areas in Golestan Province with its numerous natural, cultural and historical sites.

### 2. Theoretical Background

Understanding the impacts of tourism on economic and social aspects varies among the residents. In general, understanding the effects of tourism can be explained in terms of different theories:

**Social exchange theory** is a basic framework for all methods and approaches. It is based on how the host community assesses the benefits and costs assumed for tourism.

**Tourism life cycle theory:** The development process of rural tourism is dependent on special patterns and processes. In brief, life cycle is a theory in which case the major belief is that the sale of a product is slow initially, but then it experiences a fast growth until it becomes stable and finally collapses. In this theory, assessment takes place over time.

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**Doxycycline resentment Index:** According to this index, the developmental process leads to apathy and resentment of host community over time. If the capacity is not observed, then hostility emerges. At this stage, the plans become relatively therapeutic in nature.

#### **Discriminating approach**

According to the discriminating approach, the difference in understanding the effects or attitude toward tourists is dependent on the number of people with jobs related to tourism. In fact, analysis of the impact of tourism on rural residents can be explained in terms of a discriminating approach. This means those who operate in line with the needs of tourists have a more positive attitude towards tourists. Basically, those who are active in business and service sector have a more positive and supporting attitude to tourists in comparison with residents and officials of the public sector. Consequently, the increase of positive outcomes of tourism will positively affect the attitude of local people toward tourism, which finally results in the increase of their involvement in tourism activities and development. Given that rural workers are active in various economic sectors, and that rural activities are still based on agriculture, discriminating approach is used as the theoretical foundation of the present study.

### **3. Method**

The present study is of a cross-sectional study in which the necessary information is collected via library search and field practices. The population of the study involves heads of households living in 13 target villages in Golestan Province. To this end, 384 participants were selected Cochran formula as the sample size. Data were collected using Excel and SPSS softwares and were analyzed using chi-square tests, U-Mann Whitney, and Kruskal-Wallis tests.

### **4. Findings and Results**

To understand the economic impact of tourism development on the target villages, change of the jobs among the rural household heads were examined; it was found that as tourism improved, 15% of the number of workers in the agricultural sector decreased and the number of service jobs increased. However, based on discriminating approach and the differences of understanding the impacts of tourism, it was found that rural workers in service and industry sector enjoy more benefits due to the fact that they are more exposed to tourists. Therefore, they attributed a more positive role to tourism in improving economic and social indicators as compared with other agricultural workers and government employees.

### **5. Conclusion and Suggestions**

According to the findings of the field studies, the role of tourism in making economic changes has been viewed as positive and constructive, and it has also caused as shift in the job orientation of people from agriculture to service and

industry sector, which consequently has increased their job variety and income. However, it also followed negative impacts of inflation. In addition, it triggers agricultural land use change. Although tourism development has caused a number of changes from social aspects and has been effective in raising awareness, interaction, and cultural integration (familiarity with other cultures), and further participation of women in rural communities, villagers still believe that it has failed to play a role in making rural expatriate workers return to their villages. According to discriminating approach, the results have significant differences among the occupational groups. In other words, workers of industry and the private sector services had a more positive idea on the role of tourism from economic and social aspects as compared with other occupational groups. For the purpose of tourism development, accelerating the improvement of access has been suggested as the most important problem of the villagers in question.

**Keywords:** Social and economic impact, Discriminating approach, Tourism target villages, Golestan Province.

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