

Examining the Role of Tourism in Development and Reconstruction of Rural Regions (Kharghan Area, Owj City)

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Received: 8 August 2016

Accepted: 16 April 2017

Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

Rural tourism is one of the most important subcategories of tourism. In a developing country such as Iran, a large portion of its total population, i.e. 28%, reside in rural areas. Subsequently, rural tourism can play a significant role in reducing the socioeconomic challenges in rural areas including migration to the cities, the low income, the low occupation rate and the low productivity in agriculture, lack of proper developmental, welfare, and service infrastructures, etc.

2 Theoretical Framework

Tourism involves a set of activities which are related to the short-term, temporary movement of people to destinations outside their living and working environments (Burkart et al., 1974). The primary feature of such activities is that they take place in a short time with no overnight stops at the destination (Vanhove, 2005). The associated activities are valuable sources to diversify various opportunities for the income generation, occupation, and the promotion of new economic activities alongside agriculture; thus, it is a substantial opportunity for the development of rural regions. There are a number of different insights and strategies posed with respect to the importance of tourism including (a) rural tourism as a development strategy, and (b) rural tourism as a policy to reconstruct rural settlements. In the former, it is believed that tourism could be of significant economic impact and can slowly diminish the process of rural evacuation and migration to the cities. In the latter, tourism is regarded as the main part of a rural reconstruction, even in regions where no considerable boom is observed in tourist activities since past. The advocates of this theory believe that they are capable of reducing rural producers' overreliance on agriculture by exploiting them in newer economic opportunities so as to compete against globalized marketing (Ghaderi, 2003).

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3. Method

The present applied study is conducted using the descriptive-analytical approach. Data collection was done using questionnaires and observation. The total population of the study includes more than 2177 households living in Vali'asr Hesar village. 249 cases were selected using Cochran's formula where $p = 70$, $q = 30$, and $D = 0.05$ being calculated with 95% confidence level. Households at each village were selected through simple random sampling to comply with the equal opportunity principle. The reliability of the data was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. According to Table 3, the data are satisfactory. The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics such as Friedman's test, multivariable regression, and path analysis in SPSS. EQS software was also used to provide fitness for the path analysis model.

4. Results and Discussion

Tourism and its related activities have currently occupy a significant position in the economy of various countries. It is considered as the third most profitable section in regional and national economies in terms of income generation and job opportunities following important sectors such as petroleum, petrochemical industries, and auto manufacturing. Hence, the present study was conducted to examine the role of tourism in the development and reconstruction of rural regions. It was shown that the highest average ratings, i.e. 3.78 and 2.59, belonged to the physical and economic dimensions of the examined rural area, respectively. On the other hand, the examination of the regression fitness model showed the positive impact of tourists in rural development and reconstruction as 0.64. Among the four indices of tourism examined in sample villages, economic and environmental index components with values of 0.374 and 0.247 respectively have the highest and lowest impacts on rural development and reconstruction according to the tourists.

5. Conclusion

According to the results of Friedman's test, the mean differences through the perspective of respondents were reported to be completely significant at the alpha level of 0.01. Meanwhile, the highest rating average with values of 3.78 and 2.59 belonged to the physical and economic dimensions of the examined total regions, respectively. Furthermore, the regression fitness model showed the positive impact of tourists on rural development and reconstruction with the value of 0.64. Among the four indices of tourism examined in sample villages, economic and environmental index components with values of 0.374 and 0.247 have the highest and lowest impacts on the rural development and reconstruction, respectively. Based on the findings of the path analysis, the highest and lowest total impacts on rural development and reconstruction belong to economic and environmental dimensions with values of 0.448 and 0.301, respectively. In addition, the path analysis was found to be of proper fitness considering the output obtained from EQS. Subsequently, given its impacts on various economic, sociocultural, environmental, and physical dimensions of rural areas, it is recommended to

employ rural tourism in the villages under examination as a strategy to develop and reconstruct adjacent villages where there is a lack of attention.

Keywords: Tourism, Reconstruction, Rural development, Kharghan Area, Owj City

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How to cite this article:

Mahmoodi, H., Rajabi, M., & Roumiani, A. (2019). Examining the role of tourism in development and reconstruction of rural regions (Kharghan area, Owj city). *Journal of Geography and Regional Development*, 16(2), 1-26.

URL <http://jgrd.um.ac.ir/index.php/geography/article/view/52885>