

Analysis of the Sustainability of Tourism Development in Rural Areas (Case Study: Central District of Damavand County)

Saeed Reza Akbarian Ronizi*

Assistant professor of geography, Faculty of Humanities, University of Shiraz, Shiraz, Iran

Mohammad Reza Rezvani

Professor of geography, Faculty of Geography; and Member of Center of Excellence in Rural Planning, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

The sustainability approach to development issues and its application to rural tourism have been adopted by many scholars concerning conservation of economy and environment. It is believed that tourism and recreation industry is increasingly becoming as an important component of the structure of rural communities and it thus indirectly considers rural sustainability. Tourism development in rural areas has implications and its undesirable impacts can lead to unsustainable natural and human ecosystems in these areas. Thus, it is impossible to develop tourism activities disregarding sustainability issues. In this respect, it is noteworthy that tourism development requires assessment of sustainability level and analysis of the factors effective on sustainability and unsustainability of tourism and, in turn, requires a holistic and comprehensive approach. Hence, sustainable development of tourism is a holistic and integrated strategy arising in response to ineffectiveness of previous strategies and it is nowadays admitted as a fundamental approach to tourism development. In this paper, we, accordingly, suppose that sustainable development of tourism as our basic approach, consider assessment of sustainability of tourism in rural areas of the central district of Damavand county in a mountainous area in north of Iran.

Methodology

This research is practical in scope and is descriptive and analytical in its method. The required data has been gathered by using library and field study methods with questionnaires as its basic tool. In this survey, we selected 6 villages as study sample and measures in this selection were villages with at least 50 households, numbers of populations, local administrations and spatial locations of villages. Statistical population is including local residents, local managers and tourists. In questionnaire method, we selected 180 householders (10 percent of total household population), 18 local managers (3 local managers or members of village council in every village) and 180 tourists as our sample size. We selected the indices and indicators of tourism sustainability using Delphi method and according to view points of scholars and specialists. In order to analyze the data, we also

* E-mail: akbarian@shirazu.ac.ir

used both statistical methods (descriptive and inferential statistics) and non-statistical methods including sustainability barometer and sustainability radar.

Results and discussion

The results obtained about sustainability of tourism using barometer method in terms of the two macro-systems of human welfare and ecosystem welfare show that the score for the index of human welfare is 0.404 and ecosystem welfare is 0.338. It is suggested that in this research, the economic and sociocultural indices are bigger than environmental ones due to inappropriate impacts of tourism on environmental resources and their incurred pollutions. The score of sustainability of tourism for each village show that for human welfare index, the most and the least scores are respectively corresponded to Mosha and Hesar-e-Paein villages and for ecosystem welfare index, the most and the least scores are respectively corresponded in Ainehvarzan and Hesar-e-Paein villages. In general, the sustainable tourism in villages of Mosha, Sarbandan and Ainehvarzan has an average level, Hesar-e-Paein has a low level and Meray and Hesar-e-Paein villages have an unstable level. The results show that in terms of sustainability status, there are significant differences between our case study villages. In this respect, it was known that distances of the villages from Tehran metropolis, their numbers of populations and the number of tourists are the factors influencing the levels of sustainability of tourism. In the conditions, the more the distance from Tehran, the more are the number of tourists and the more the sustainability of tourism in the villages.

Conclusion

Sustainable development of tourism is a new approach which introduced in the late 1980s in response to ineffectiveness of all previous approaches to tourism. It is nowadays one of the prominent approaches attracted related specialists and planners. In this respect, undesirable impacts of tourism in rural areas have led to arising sustainable approach to rural tourism and explaining sustainability level and effective factors of tourism sustainability.. Thus, in this paper, we aimed at assessing tourism sustainability status in rural areas of central district of Damavand County. The results of the research showed that sustainability of studied villages is in a weak level. Investigation of sustainability status by each of indices suggested that sustainability levels of all the indices are under the average level. The indices including income, investment and host community satisfaction have the most sustainability score and that the index of land resources has the least sustainability level. It can be concluded that tourism development has, to some extent, sacrificed natural landscapes, wildlife and natural resources for constructions, land use, excessive resources, and exploitation by residents and uncontrolled constructions. In general, this study showed that there is no due attention paid to sustainability of tourism and there is a long road before to the sustainable tourism. It is thus necessary to take concrete measures in order to achieve sustainable tourism.

Keywords: Damavand County, rural tourism, sustainability barometer, sustainable development.