

Rural Tourism Development Strategies Using SWOT analysis: Case studyRahmani Seryasat M.^{a,*}, Hajari B.^b, Karimian T.^c and Hajilo M.^b^a. Department of Management, Takestan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Takestan, Iran^b. M.A. Students in Geography and Rural Planning Faculty, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran^c. M. A. Students in Geography and Tourism Planning Faculty, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran*Corresponding author: ma.rahmani@ut.ac.ir

Abstract: Tourism and tourism economy is nowadays is one of main pillars of world business. Additionally, many policymakers and planners of development indicate tourism industry as principal pillar of sustainable development. With this regard, rural tourism is also accounted for a component for tourism industry which can play an effective role in regional development and as a result, national development and diversification of national economy by appropriate and systematic planning, identification of advantages and limitations of rural tourism. Therefore, many questions arises which potentials and advantages are in rural tourism and strategies in order to develop tourism resulted in rural and national development. For this, the study has dealt with presenting strategies and guidelines to develop tourism within Ghasran District of Shemiranat city, Tehran, Iran, using a survey, field studies and Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis. Empirical analysis in the study area shows that vulnerability threshold for rural areas can be extremely high due to openness to tourists and requires review and present appropriate policies in order to remove the limitations and to apply relative advantages.

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1. Introduction

The demand and tendency for tourism is rapidly increasing around the world with different incentives to business, recreation and pilgrimage. Rising incomes, increased leisure times, new life attitudes, and the need for international calls and etc. require making significant develops in tourism. What significantly important is in this study is that tourism, with all types and forms, is going to be transferred to first pioneering of global economy. In this regard, a significant contribution is also allocated to rural tourism as one of the most important forms of tourism [1].

Although twentieth century has come to end, rural development is encountered with various problems and challenges because previous strategies had no longer been successful in rural development and they were not at all able to deal with problems such as poverty, employment, health, security and environmental sustainability. These has caused that rural development is again considered in recent years and government theorists, planners and implementers seek new solutions and strategies to decline problems involved in mentioned areas. One of these strategies implemented recently in most countries of the world, even with positive effects in some of these countries, is tourism development in rural areas with required potentials for. Rural tourism is valuable source of employment and income and can be an important tool for socioeconomic development in rural communities [2].

According the above, in order to improve development performance in rural areas, especially the study area which has been for a long time leisure focus of Tehran metropolitan inhabitants due to structural, ecological and environmental advantages, it is increasingly felt the requirement for utilization of appropriate solutions and strategies for rural tourism with regard to environmental conditions and properties beside ecological (natural and artificial) attractions and products of each area.

Considering the above and understanding that identifying tourism potentials and limitations of rural area can have a constructive effect on appropriate tourism planning and solving their problems, it has been tried in this study to answer some questions: what are potentials and limitations of tourism development?; what solutions and strategies are there for tourism development that can be resulted in rural and national development? In addition, it has been dealt with the investigation and analysis of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats from the viewpoints of participants and beneficiaries in rural tourism development. Finally, appropriate solutions and strategies are presented using SWOT analysis for optimum, effective utilization of strengths and opportunities and removing weaknesses and threats in order to achieve tourism and rural development.

2. Theories

“Tourism” is a French word rooted in “Tour”. Tour means rotational motion, travel, trip and circulation [4]. With sociological perspective,

tourism is a set of interactions which are created by tourist living in temporary residence faced with native inhabitancy. According to Morgan Roth, tourism exactly is that “passengers are away from their residences to meet their personal, vital and cultural needs in the form of customers of economic and cultural goods [5]”.

In the competitions held by World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) to obtain a general definition of tourism, following definition was selected among candidates: “tourism is a set of displacements of humans and activities. These changes are themselves resulted from realization of demands which make humans to displace and are in everybody in the form of potentials with different intensities and weaknesses [11]”.

Rural tourism was appeared as a recreational, social and economic activity in Europe, especially U.K., in the second half of 18th century. It consisted of not only attractions, facilities and recreational activities but also requires providing services for tourists. By the way, rural tourism can be defined as total activities and services undertaken by governments, people and farmers for recreation, tourist attraction and relaxation and also by tourists within rural areas. Also, tourism flow is defined for tourists who reside in a village or around rural areas for leisure and obtain information to know living conditions and environment of the local village [8].

WTO (1996) indicated main rural tourism functions a) to increase economic capacity of rural communities to innovate and develop human resources by attracting investments in these areas and diversification of economic structure and functions of rural communities and b) to bring rural communities out of economic, social and cultural isolation and to connect the economy of rural areas with regional, national and international economy with regard to increasing globalization processes. In this study,

positive effects of tourism are expressed separately. The effects are classified in three a) economic b) social and c) environmental classes [6].

Expenses resulting from tourism are injected in the form of income into the respective area economy such that when a tourist spends money within rural area, it will cause to create income for other person, some income of which is consumed and the remaining is saved. Therefore, spending a special amount of expenses by a person during relatively significant amount of successive times has its initial effect on rural area [1]. Rural tourism causes to increase rural income via providing services and products for tourists, trying to utilize talents and resources, exploring the potentials for earnings by means of rural handicrafts growth, attracting investments and working on within rural area. By the way, it results in economic balance accompanied by accelerating cash flows in the area. With regard to side effects of tourism on economy, employment problem is very important which can diversify aerial economy in addition to prevention of deleterious cultural, social effects resulted from. For these, rural tourism industry is very useful, one of most important advantages of which may be no need for skilled labor and using novice or semi-skilled labor for the industry services beside temporary or permanent employment for rural residents [9]. Tourism can make important social and cultural changes in host villages, social progress and development via income distribution, employment and poverty decline and finally create public health and welfare [7]. Thus, in addition to deep cultural and mental effects, tourism and displacement of people are considered as bridges connecting humans, countries and (in smaller scales) villages and provide the requirements for reinforcing social ties of nations [2]. As a result, according to the incentives of tourists from traveling, rural tourism is classified in 5 varieties, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Varieties of rural tourism [3]

Varieties	Considerations
Eco tourism	Generally is in equilibrium with ecological attractions.
Cultural tourism	It is in relationship with culture, history, archaeological and cultural heritages of rural people.
Indigenous tourism	It is a variety of tourism which in addition to interaction with natural attractions (e.g. rivers, mountains and etc.) is related to lives and social norms of people which are themselves in interaction with above attractions.
Village tourism	In this variety, tourists live in village families and participate in rural social and economic activities.
Agricultural tourism	Tourists interact without negative effects on host ecosystems or participate in traditional agricultural activities.

There has been undertaken researches about rural tourism (using SWOT analysis) refer a number.

Daneshmehr H. et al. (2011) have investigated the effects of ecotourism on rural development using SWOT analysis. The results showed that in their

study area, “beautiful and unique landscapes of the village” component was strength beside “gardens and green areas”, “no government planning and investment” component was main weakness in the area, “more attention to planning and funding by authorities” component was the most important external opportunity and finally “lack of management knowledgeable about ecotourism issues” component was the main threat.

Also, in another research undertaken by Khatoonabadi and Rastghalam (2011), it has been devoted to assessment of 4 pillars of rural tourism using SWOT analysis: case study in targeted villages of Chahar-Mahal-Va-Bakhtiari Province. The results showed that the rate 57.69 for limitations (including weaknesses and threats) is higher than rate 55.33 for advantages (strengths and opportunities). Although “establishment of tourism centers elsewhere” component was recognized as the most important threat, this component, because of inappropriate tourism infrastructures such as access roads, residential places and recreational facilities and also misunderstanding of tourists of rural tourism in the studied villages, causes to “mitigate vulnerabilities and also reduce the destruction of beautiful landscapes and untouched nature” as the most important strength of rural tourism development [10].

3. Methodology

In order to achieve research issues, analytical-descriptive method was initially applied. In this stage with regard to data and information available from documental and library investigations attractions,

facilities, services and generally speaking tourism position in the area have been dealt with. Next, SWOT analysis was implemented to analyze findings and determine appropriate strategies. For this, internal (strengths and weaknesses) and external (threats and opportunities) environments were studied and a list of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats was provided in a tabular SWOT framework, analysis and investigation of which the priorities were specified. In order to remove or decline threats and weaknesses, strengths and opportunities were studied. Finally, appropriate strategies for tourism development were provided based on analyses in the studied area [12 and 13].

4. Study area

Rudbar of Ghasran District located on northern half of metropolitan Tehran is one of two districts of Shemiranat city of Tehran which is limited at North to Mazandaran Province and Cloon-Bastak Mountains, at West to Shahrestanak and Shemiranat Mountains, at South to Shemiran and at West to Lavasanat. Capabilities including natural landscapes, good weather and easy access make this area one of the most important and attractive tourism areas in Tehran Province and attract many non-native people, especially in summer, at holidays and weekends. According to latest national divisions, the studied area includes an urban point and 22 rural points (16 villages with 50 or more households) with total 18685 populations reported in 2012, 55.2% of which are people resident in rural points. Figure 1 shows boundaries of the studied area.

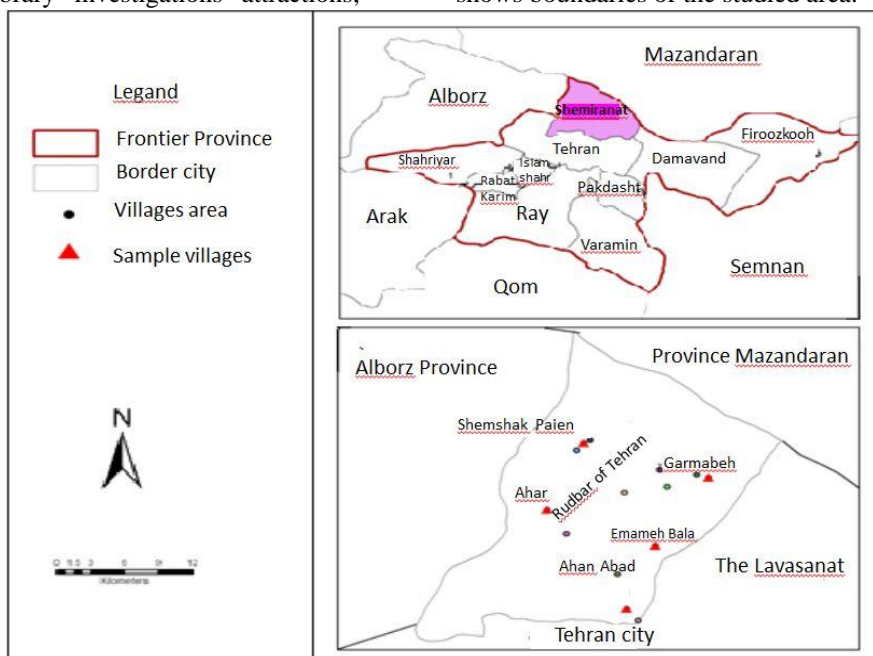


Figure 1: Studied area boundaries

5. Analysis

5.1 Internal factors effective on tourism in Rudbar of Ghasran district

The purpose of this stage is to assess internal environment of the studied area in order to recognize facilities or strengths and bottlenecks or weaknesses. Available strategies, functions and resources investigated in this section are presented in Table 3 as strengths and weaknesses according to rural development (economic, social, cultural, environmental, ecological and institutional) dimensions.

Table 2: Determination of strategies in SWOT analysis

Matrix SWOT	Strengths S	Weaknesses W
Opportunities O	Strategies SO	Strategies WO
Threats T	Strategies ST	Strategies WT

Table 3: The matrix for internal factors

Dimensions	Strengths	Weaknesses
economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Prosperity in agriculture and gardening; appropriate market for the sale of agricultural products to tourists; - Proneness for investment and tourism planning in order to use its natural, cultural and human resources as a major hub around Tehran inside the country 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of planning and public investment in this area; - Lack of government policies, plans and funding in the area; - Lack of willingness of people to investment in tourism sector
sociocultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relatively appropriate knowledge and education of people in the area beside good cooperation; - Customs, local culture and scenic locations; - High spirit of hospitality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inappropriate and inadequate facilities of accommodation, welfare and health services; - Improper distribution of tourists in different seasons; - Conflict and difference between culture of tourists and rural people; - Lack of skilled and trained forces in the village
environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Close proximity to population and urban centers including Tehran and other cities; - High peaks and heights for sports and entertainments such as skiing, mountaineering and walking; - Variety of attractions and untouched natural, leisure resources; - Possession of pleasant weather in most months of the year; - Quiet environment, without any noise, especially for citizens for fun and relaxation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of tourism infrastructures (such as roads and sewage); - Inadequate equipment and recreational, sport facilities
institutional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Believe in employment from authorities by tourism development as one of the most important infrastructures for developing villages 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Unfamiliarity with the villagers and their training in dealing with tourists

5.2 External factors effective on tourism in Rudbar of Ghasran district

The purpose of this section is to investigate the effects of external environment in the studied area in order to recognize threats and opportunities

involved in Rudbar of Ghasran district with regard to tourism. Based on previous studies and researches on condition of areas around the study area, all threats and opportunities are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4: The matrix for external factors

Dimensions	Opportunities	Threats
economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase incentives of private sectors for investment in the village; - Paying more attention to planning and investment in tourism sector; - Providing appropriate facilities to attract domestic and foreign tourists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No government licenses and facilities for development of services and tourism in the area; - Increasing land prices and creating the exchange

sociocultural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Create and increase motivation for travel to the area and availability to the largest centers of population in the country (Tehran and Karaj) - More investment in health and social services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Loss of traditional and indigenous culture of the people by tourists; - Increased interest and incentive of tourists to travel to other nearby recreation areas; - Excessive population density of the area and overcrowding in comparison with competing areas in the future; - Increase in social crimes by tourist entrance relative to the past
environmental	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Relatively many points for tourism and tourism activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Loss of vegetation, trees, gardens and rural farms; - Pollution of water, soil and climate resources of the area relative to competing areas
institutional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Support of public organizations and institutions of rural development in light of employment and income; - Availability to various government and non-government organizations in Tehran and Rudbar of Ghasran in order to present and support different services and facilities for villages; - Availability to specialists in adjacent to the area. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of management knowledgeable about tourism issues; - No government licenses and facilities for development of services and tourism in the area

5.3 SWOT analysis

Based on Table 5, 9 internal strengths and 6 external opportunities are specified in Rudbar o Ghasran against 9 internal weaknesses and 6 external opportunities, respectively.

Table 5: SWOT matrix

Opportunities (O)	Threats (T)
O1- increase incentives of private sector for investment	T1- no licenses and facilities provided by the government
O2- increasing government attention to planning and investment	T2- loss of vegetation, gardens and agricultural lands
O3- availability to major population centers of the country	T3- increase willingness and incentive of tourists to travel into places
O4- support of respective institutions and organizations	T4- increase social crimes by tourists respect to the past
O5- increasing motivation for travel and leisure	T5- loss of traditional and local culture
O6- availability to experienced and skilled labors	T6- improvement of facilities and services in recreational areas
Strengths (S)	Weaknesses (W)
S1- beautiful and unique landscapes	W1- inadequate health and service facilities
S2- investment diversification	W2- inappropriate environmental infrastructures
S3- availability to heights and peaks for sports and recreation	W3- inappropriate welfare facilities
S4- affordable access to the areas	W4- no willingness to invest in the area
S5- traditions and local, rich, indigenous culture	W5- improper distribution of tourists during different seasons
S6- proximity to the capital (Tehran)	W6- no government planning and investment
S7- relatively appropriate education among the community	W7- unfamiliarity with interactions and behaviors
S8- a quiet environment without any noises	W8- inadequate tourism activities
S9- authorities believe in employment in the area	W9- lack of trained and experienced labor force

In this section, it has been additionally tried to assess main advantages and limitations by questionnaire in order to prioritize options based on authorities, tourists and public view point such that in addition to obtain participatory results, logical, quantitative and systematic results can be achieved. Therefore, prioritization was undertaken according to the results, calculations and viewpoints, as shown in Table 6. It indicates aggregate weightings, average priorities and relative weights for each of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats from three group viewpoints. It should be noted that in this study, the issues have been investigated in four economic, social, cultural and ecological classes beside 5 intensities (very high, high, medium, low and very low). Now, according to Table 6, following are SWOT analyses for three participant classes:

1. **Authorities:** SWOT analysis shows that from viewpoint of authorities, “beautiful and unique landscapes” component is the most important internal strength by avg. priority 4.23 while “traditional and local customs and culture” has the lowest importance with avg. priority 3.82 in tourism development. Also, “availability to the population center of the country” is the most important external opportunity by avg. priority 4.90 while “support of respective institutions and organizations” has lowest importance of external opportunities with avg. priority 3.99. With regard to weaknesses, authorities believed that “no government planning and investment” is the most important internal weakness by avg. priority 4.50 while “unfamiliarity with interactions and behaviors of tourists” has the lowest priority of 3.21 among various tourism weaknesses. In addition, “loss of vegetation and trees, gardens and agricultural farms” is considered the most important external threat with avg. priority 3.91 against tourism development.
2. **The public:** SWOT analysis shows that from public viewpoint, “beautiful and unique landscapes” is the most important internal

strength (5.40) against “quiet environment without any noise” (3.21) as the least for tourism development in the area. Also, “no government planning and investment” (4.50) is the most important and “unfamiliarity with interactions and behaviors of tourists” has the least importance among internal weaknesses.

With regard to external opportunities, the public believe that “availability to population center of the country” is the most important (4.90) external opportunity while “support of respective institutions and organizations” with the least importance (3.99) for tourism development.

In addition, they believe that “loss of vegetation, gardens and agricultural farms” is the most important external threat against tourism development. In contrary, “no licenses facilities provided by the government” has the lowest priority (3.15) among external threats.

3. **Tourists:** With regard to SWOT matrix, it can be said that from viewpoint of tourists, beautiful and unique landscape is the most important (6.83) internal strength while relatively appropriate knowledge and education of people in the area with the least importance (3.52) of internal strength in tourism development. Additionally, from viewpoint of tourists, no government planning and investment is the most important (6.15) internal weakness against unfamiliarity with interactions and behaviors (4.50) as the lowest priority among internal weaknesses. With regard to external opportunities, tourists believe that availability to main centers of population in the country is the most important external opportunity (5.81) and support of respective institutions and organizations (4.89) with the least importance in tourism development. Also, they believe that loss of vegetation, gardens and agricultural farms is the most important external threat (3.91) against tourism development.

Table 6: SWOT matrix (priorities based on three viewpoints)

SWOT	Public			Authorities			Tourists		
	aggregate	average	priority	aggregate	average	priority	aggregate	average	priority
Strengths (S)									
S1	540	5.40	1	78	5.83	1	695	6.83	1
S2	366	3.66	6	71	5.16	2	625	4.26	3
S3	385	3.85	4	69	5.08	4	635	4.34	2

S4	418	4.18	3	66	4.83	5	555	3.68	7
S5	515	5.15	2	50	3.82	9	595	4.01	4
S6	360	3.60	7	70	5.10	3	540	3.56	8
S7	375	3.75	5	61	3.88	7	535	3.52	9
S8	321	3.21	9	65	4.50	6	565	3.77	6
S9	352	3.52	8	55	3.90	8	590	3.98	5
Weaknesses (W)									
W1	485	4.85	7	66	4.83	1	625	4.30	2
W2	480	4.80	8	54	3.83	6	616	4.22	3
W3	522	5.22	5	58	4.16	2	635	4.38	1
W4	508	5.08	6	49	3.41	8	502	3.28	9
W5	527	5.27	4	52	3.66	7	520	3.43	8
W6	615	6.15	1	56	4	4	531	3.52	6
W7	450	4.50	9	48	3.33	9	526	3.49	7
W8	581	5.81	3	55	3.91	5	597	4.07	4
W9	592	5.92	2	57	4.08	3	582	3.94	5
Opportunities (O)									
O1	437	4.37	6	79	5.16	3	576	4.89	6
O2	466	4.66	3	78	5.08	4	613	5.21	4
O3	490	4.90	1	76	5	5	684	5.81	1
O4	399	3.99	6	75	4.75	6	594	5.06	5
O5	419	4.19	5	83	5.83	1	674	5.70	3
O6	479	4.79	2	80	5.41	2	585	4.96	2
Threats (T)									
T1	315	3.15	6	31	2.20	5	450	2.89	3
T2	391	3.91	1	48	2.81	1	4.25	2.64	5
T3	379	3.79	2	39	2.10	3	580	3.90	1
T4	365	3.65	3	37	1.93	4	445	2.83	4
T5	325	3.25	5	35	1.76	6	415	2.56	6
T6	348	3.48	6	43	2.42	2	564	2.97	2

6. Strategies and solutions for rural tourism development

6.1 Offensive/competitive strategies (SO)

In offensive strategies concentrated on internal strengths and external opportunities, following strategies are proposed to utilize available priorities in order to develop rural tourism in Rudbar of Ghasran studied district:

1. More development in ecotourism and indigenous tourism because of relative advantages for developing rural tourism;
2. Optimum and efficient application of increased incentive to travel among citizens and also availability to metropolitan centers (Tehran and Karaj) in order to utilize the rural attractions and tourism products and create employment and earnings for the residents of studied villages;
3. Utilization and preparation of private sector supports for investments in tourism sector in the villages of the district
4. Identify and take advantage of attractions, products and other relative tourism advantages in the area in order to compete with other recreational areas;

5. Main focus of tourism activities on taking advantage of resources and available attractions without using landscapes, gardens, vegetation and etc. for earnings, employment and rural development.

6.2 Diversification strategies (ST)

The attention in diversification strategies is devoted to internal strengths and external threats. The followings are presented to provide some demands in Rudbar of Ghasran district:

1. Developing and equipping required facilities for the utilize impassible areas to be visited by tourists;
2. Diversification and developing advertisement programs to more introduce natural, human attractions and rural architecture within provincial centers and organizing seminars and exhibitions in universities and ICHTO;
3. Diversifying activities, facilities and tourism services in order to satisfy tourists and accordingly increase tourists for Rudbar of Ghasran district beside different classes of people in different activities;

4. Providing manuals with the aim of further guiding tourists;
5. Optimum appropriate capacity and density of population in order to decline stresses on vegetation and pastures.

6.3 Overview strategies (WO)

In these strategies, in addition to emphasize on internal weakness, it has been tried that taking advantages of external opportunities, constitutional proposals are presented to remove weaknesses in the district. By the way, following proposes are provided:

1. In addition to public and private investment in the area, improvement of environmental infrastructures and facilities;
2. Review the rural land rules and regulations in villages and tourist places of the area in order to utilize different parts for the public and tourists and also prevention of land speculations;
3. In addition to review public participations to develop, provide and implement designs and equip studied rural areas with facilities and tourist services, the need for take intensive activities by skilled labors and different institutions to develop and rehabilitate the areas.

6.4 Defensive strategies (WT)

In these strategies, it has been provided proposes to remove challenges and problems in Rudbar of Ghasran district against tourism development:

1. Educate and inform the public about interactions with tourists within the area;
2. Encourage people to participate in the development of infrastructures, various equipment and facilities for tourism;
3. Regulate special rules and regulations for optimal utilization of attractions and tourism products, prevention of destruction and pollution and loss of these resources in the area;
4. Seminars and settlements in “developing investment on rural tourism industry” by authorities and respective systems; also, invitation and encouragement of internal and external investors; creating special facilities and privileges to invest in constructing hotels, residential complexes, recreational facilities and etc.

7. Conclusions

Attracting culture and nature tourists is one of signals of human and capital flow from the center to around and of effective guidelines for rural tourism development. Therefore, considering field studies and theories, strengths and limitations were recognized in the area using SWOT analysis in order to present strategies and solutions for rural tourism

development and practical responses and appropriate strategies was provided for tourism development. Thus, conclusions can be divided into two dimensions, quantitative and qualitative:

1. The results of qualitative aspects for each one of internal and external factors are as follows:
 - a) In most rural areas, vulnerability level is high in cultural and environmental scopes for tourism development.
 - b) Advantages of rural areas are limited generally.
 - c) Redistribution and reallocation of the resources within studied areas are required considering limited opportunities and high weaknesses.
2. The results from quantitative findings are as follows:
 - a) Among strengths, unique and beautiful landscapes beside gardens and vegetation are accounted most important strengths, appropriate knowledge and education for villagers most unimportant.
 - b) Also, considering the results from weaknesses, inappropriate equipment and facilities, accommodations, welfare services and transportation are prioritized and participating the public and private and public sectors, these cases are removed as barriers for tourism development and as a result, will be improved.
 - c) In addition, among external opportunities, increased incentive to travel and availability to metropolitan Tehran can be most utilized for tourism development.
 - d) Among external threats, also, destruction of agricultural farms, rural lands and environment by tourists is considered the most important, for decline of which defensive strategies are provided.

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