

A Review on Rural Tourism Problems in Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province: Case StudyTaghi Karimian^a, Majid Rahmani Seryasat^b, Mahdi Hajilo^c^a M. A. Students in Geography and Tourism Planning Faculty, University of Tehran, Tehran, Iran^b Department of Management, Takestan branch, Islamic Azad University, Takestan, Iran^c M.A. Students in Geography and Rural Planning Faculty, University of Tehran, Tehran, Irant.karimian@ut.ac.ir

Abstract: Tourism industry is an integrated process consisted of physical space and human society, new forms of which are resulted from the changes in values and attitudes regarding human life, state-of-the-art technology, explosive growth in data types and political forces. Rural tourism is one of its forms with special considerations. This study is aimed to investigate rural tourism problems in Atashgah Village located in Lordegan City, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province. The methodology for this study is of analytic descriptive. The study shows that in the study area, there are infrastructural, social and economic problems with tourism need special considerations. Consequently, there has been proposed some strategies to develop tourism activities in the area.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, following some global developments, many rural areas in the developing countries have encountered with critical changes in social, political and economic foundations resulted in increasing rural evacuations, decline in agricultural products and on the other hand rapid growth in urbanization accompanied by its problems. Therefore, it is required to be provided new strategies with this

regard to utilize systematically and rationally potential capabilities of the places. Aligned with this, tourism industry development in rural areas was taken into consideration as a new strategy for policymakers, political authorities and local communities.

The term rural tourism is repeatedly and alternatively applied instead of terms such as green tourism, native tourism, natural tourism and country tourism [15].

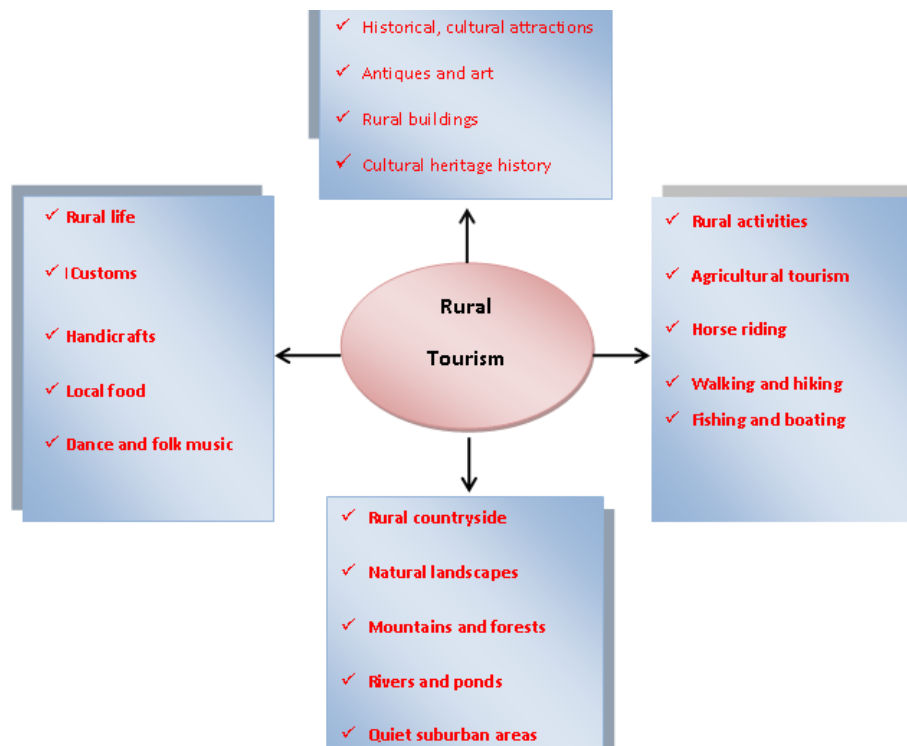


Figure 1: Rural tourism (Source: authors)

Villages and their residents are related to tourism industry into two dimensions: one is that rural environment is accounted for bungalow places and appropriate for leisure tourists and the other is that their products including food and handicrafts are supplied for tourists and this helps subsistence economy of the villagers [10].

Thus, rural tourism as an ultra-structural function can be developed and promoted through participation with and dependency on other economic and cultural sectors in the society. This, in turn, plays significant role in village development and growth, accordingly, national development in the country (Fig. 1).

2. Theories

2.1 Definitions and concepts

History, culture, lifestyle and language of each nation have woven together as a comprehensive source, knowing of which is better achieved only through direct observation. Without knowing these different versions in different societies the culture will no doubt be retarded, if decayed at all [11]. Therefore, tourism in an environment where the fates of cultures are interdependent is an extensive cultural conversation in which tourists are precursors for consistent growth of the cultures with together and is considered as a tool for their understandings [9]. Following this discussions, rural tourism was appeared as a social, economic and cultural activity in Europe, especially U. K., in the second half of 18th century. With this regard, rural tourism current is considered as a context for the tourists who reside in or around a village for relaxation or leisure and obtain information about lifestyle and local environmental conditions of the village [8].

Rural tourism is a part of tourism market place and a source for income and employment. It can be indicate as an important tool for economic, ecological and social development of rural communities such that in many countries, this is related to agricultural policies and is upgraded as a strategy for environment and traditional rural culture conservations [7].

3. Rural tourism attractions

For Pierre Larousse [12], tourism is to travel for leisure and entertainment and the tourist is a person who travels for his/her happiness and enjoyment. Incentives that cause to make a person to travel as a tourist for long distances and reside in or around a village for a short time are very extensive. The most important and principle attraction for rural tourism has been traditionally the village itself [13]. Attractions which make tourists attracted for villages can be expressed as the following: natural and morphological conditions; lifestyles; cultural customs; local

handicrafts; environmental attractions; native livestock; scarce plants (herbicides) [14].

3.1 Rural tourism: a strategy for rural development

In various cases, tourism industry has been accounted for a strategy for development of rural areas. This study, because of increasing destruction of villages and changes in agriculture uses, is endeavored to propose applicable strategies to create income and increase welfare for residents in rural areas through complement activities within validation of tourist and tourism attractions. These strategies will be presented during two approaches [2]:

1. Rural tourism as a complement for rural activities;
2. Evolution of less developed rural areas.

4. History

4.1 International studies

Among initial ideas about rural tourism for an extensive concept is of Richard and Julia Sharply (1997) [3]. They in their book *"Introduction for Rural Development"* described to a large extent rural tourism concept, its scopes and how to plan tourism in rural areas, investigated rural tourism development as an important part of the tourism as a whole and emphasized on the role of tourism in social and economic development and rural reconstruction.

In a study by C. Ashley (2000) [4], "Tourism Effects on Rural Lifestyles", a comprehensive scope of tourism effects on lifestyles of villagers resident in different parts of Namibia was investigated and it was tried to achieve two purposes:

1. Having concentrated on lifestyle, a useful landscape of tourism was provided to upgrade local advantages.
2. How to increase the influences and tourism diagrams among villagers was considered.

In a paper, *"Tourism Development in Estonia: Attractions, Sustainability and Rural development"* by Time Andrin (2000), the factors effective on tourism development in Estonia has been investigated since its independency. In this study, integrated rural development and contemporary symbolic tourism, its sustainability, advantages and usefulness of tourism development and also its social, environmental and economic influences have been portrayed.

4.2 National studies

While tourism, especially rural tourism, has been traditionally considered in Iran and because it's different cultural and natural attractions are still gone ahead, scientific accurate studies has been no longer implemented in Iran, especially in local and regional level, until recent years. In this section, it has been

tried to present few studies conducted on some dimensions of rural tourism.

In a paper by Abolghasem Sharifzadeh and Homayoon Moradinejad (2003) [5], "*Sustainable Development and Rural Tourism*", it has been investigated different dimensions of rural tourism and emphasized the role tourism playing social, economic sustainable development of rural areas. Also, they in this paper emphasized that rural tourism can play significant role in human resources development and diversity of agriculture sector and economic development besides new opportunities with regard to other economic sectors.

In a Ph.D. dissertation by Esmail Ghaderi (2004) [6], "Tourism and Sustainable Rural Development", in addition to respond the question whether rural tourism plays a role and influences on rural sustainable development, it has been investigated viewpoints within different literature around the world about tourism, rural development. It has been investigated different effects of tourism on rural residential in different countries using analytic descriptive method and library data collection.

Finally, dimensions of these effects on rural development were studied. In this part, considering the studies proposes three critical attitudes with regard to tourism and rural development:

1. Tourism as a tool for rural development;
2. Tourism as a policy for reconstruction of rural residential;
3. Tourism as a mean for sustainable rural development.

5. Methodology

The methodology in this study is a combination of descriptive analytic methods and case study method to increase the accuracy. It is descriptive because using library and field data, it has been devoted to past and present conditions and it is analytic because it investigates and considers the relationship among the variables and finally, case study for increasing accuracy. The studied village was selected as a sample and data collection and questionnaire completion was conducted. The questionnaires were distributed separately by tourism experts, tourists and local public and the results were investigated.

6. Study area

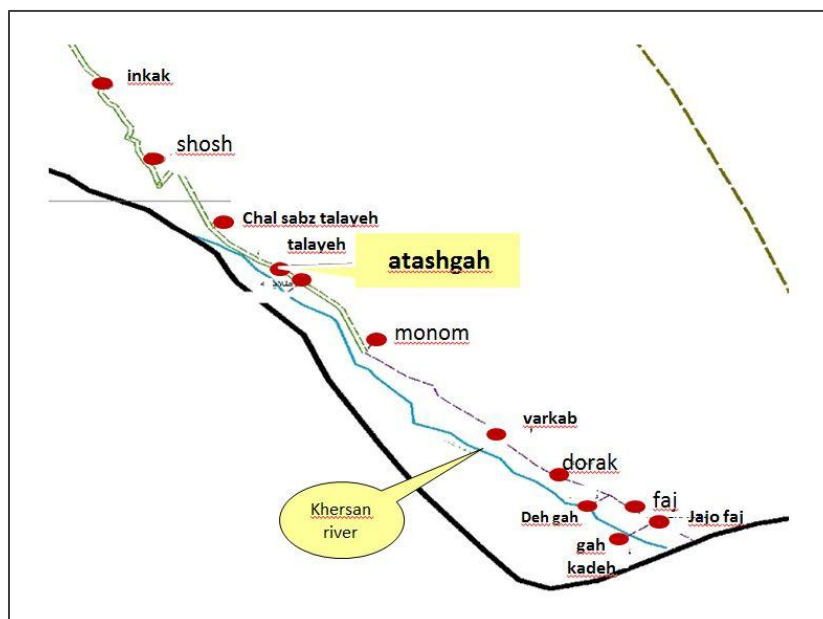


Figure 2: Study Area

The study area was located in 50km far from southeast Lordegan city of Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province on northeastern Zagros range fault at $50^{\circ}28'25''$ in longitude and $31^{\circ}14'50''$ in latitude. This area is located on Zagros faults with thick sequence of sedimentary rocks (Fig. 2).

Atashgah waterfall is located in 40km away from Lordegan city after Milas and Sardasht-e-Shoosh villages in Atashgah village. The village with a very ancient history is a narrow valley with

beautiful and pristine natural features. Within the valley, a roaring river flows surrounded by lime stones and gypsums beside old trees such as walnut, oak and ash. High steep and ups and downs along the river make various local waterfalls aligned with 3km long. While weather is temperate to warm, it is very cool within the valley and provides some relaxation for human body. In 200m away, two relatively large waterfalls represented which host far and close travellers at weekends, beside natural beautiful

elements such as valley, meadow and suitable climate

provide green vegetation for leisure and hiking [1].

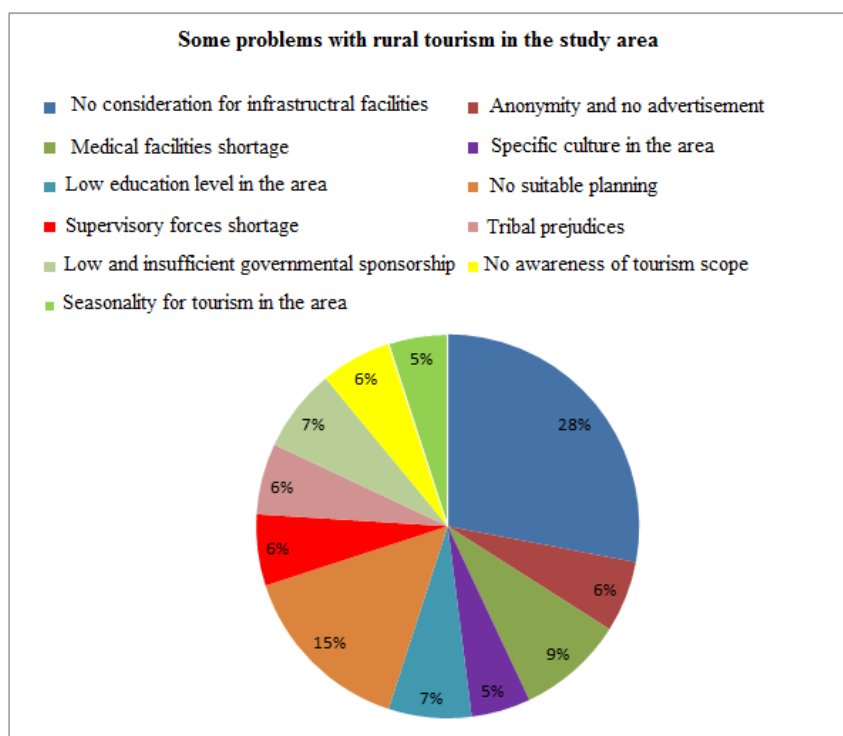


Figure 3: Problems with rural tourism (source: authors)

7. Findings

Considering the questionnaires distributed among experts, tourists and local public, the results in Figure 1 were achieved. 28% of tourists indicated no consideration for infrastructural facilities as one of principle problems with Atashgah village and 15% indicated no suitable planning as well as low and insufficient governmental sponsorship. Other observed in the figure has relatively identical proportion for rural tourism problems in the area (Fig. 3).

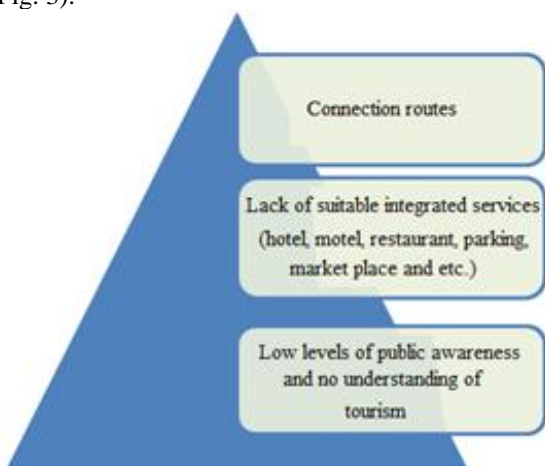


Figure 4: Reasons for no return of tourists to the study area

In the interviews with the study area tourists about the reasons for low second visit of the waterfalls and Atashgah village, above three reasons were considered as the main for no more returns to Atashgah. Of course, most emphasize was on inappropriate and dangerous connection availability route for the area. It should be considered that some parts of the route are still dusty such that in the winter, because of rainfalls, it is possible to fall rocks and the availability is just possible with livestock (Fig. 4).

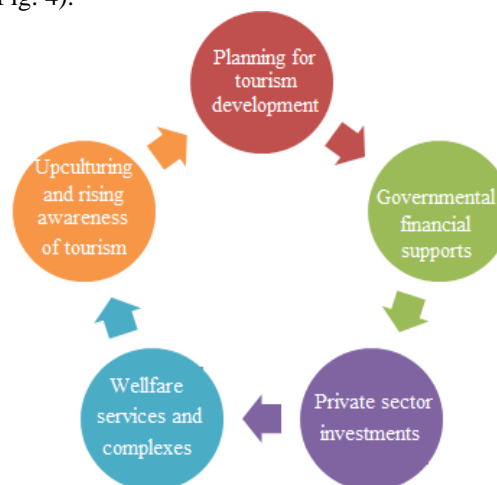


Figure 5: Proposed strategies by tourism experts for tourism development in the area (source: authors)

According to the interviews with tourism experts, they recognized tourism development in the area in short and long time planning with government supports and considerations as well as incentives for

private sector investment beside special notice for required infrastructure for tourism sector. Of course, they emphasized that constructing service and welfare complexes should have no damages for rural texture and cause no changes in tourist minds (Fig. 5).

Table 1: Classification of inappropriate implications of tourism for the host community (source: authors)

| Nature and ecosystem | Economy | Culture and society | Politics and bureaucracy |
|--|--|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Elimination of plant species; ▪ Ran some animal species; ▪ Hunting animal species; ▪ Disturbing wildlife; ▪ Extinction of some animals; ▪ Removing the landscapes; ▪ Development of environmental pollution; ▪ Environmental pollution and increase human wastes; ▪ Destruction of natural structures; ▪ Accelerate soil erosion; ▪ The loss of trees and forests surrounding the area; ▪ Pollution of water resources. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Increase in prices; ▪ High rates of lands; ▪ A barrier for better investment; ▪ Rising inflation and increasing costs; ▪ High costs of services; ▪ High expectations; ▪ Property and land speculation; ▪ Disturbing people living; ▪ Promoting a false culture of consumerism; ▪ Lower purchasing power of villagers; ▪ Obstruction of economic benefits by local entities; ▪ A gap between rural communities from income distribution as well as level and distribution of tourism | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Immigration; ▪ Increase in crime; ▪ Changing host community culture; ▪ Disturb social order and rural interactions; ▪ Increase in prostitution; ▪ Culture reluctance and promoting partial cultures from guest cultures; ▪ Social problems among villagers; ▪ Disturbing ethical codes of host community; ▪ Away from culture of native culture; ▪ Weaken adherence to local customs ▪ Lack of self-esteem; ▪ Imitations from tourists by youths and increasing urban luxury goods. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Stimulate host community to incite illegal actions within political scopes; ▪ Failure to perform administrative tasks; ▪ Insecurity in the area from aliens; ▪ Impose political demands of host community to guests from lack of awareness; ▪ Interaction of political entrenchments; ▪ Dividing the village by non-native staffs of public/private institutions. |

Tourism activities have adverse influences such as natural, economic-cultural, social and political implications on the host community which given long term negligence, can be converted to a crisis (Tab. 1).

8. Conclusions and proposes for the future

Rural tourism is one of different forms of sustainable development in which available rural resources are utilized. The results from current study illustrate rural tourism problems in Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari Province and especially Atashgah village with priorities as follows:

No consideration for infrastructural facilities devotes the most important (28%) problem in rural tourism in the study area which needs special notice. Then, no suitable programming is positioned by 15% of problems. Also, other problems are prioritized sanitation problems (9%), low education (7%) and supports by the government (7%), unanimity with tourism problems (6%), Special culture in the area (5%) and seasonality (5%). Also, negative effects and

implications on tourism were investigated in natural, economic, social and political phenomena in which the economic and natural one are the most important.

With regard to the results, followings are proposed:

- Taking consideration for infrastructures and providing services for tourists and construction of public sanitation, restaurant, hotel, motel and also tourist market place;
- Construction of appropriate connection routes and supervisory security forces to increase safety in the area;
- Construction of parking lots;
- Considering health and residence or public clinics to provide services for medical care and outpatients;
- Environment conservation and preventing cutting trees for warming or cooking by tourists;

- Establishment of guides and tour personnel to prevent body lesions for tourists;
- Presenting suitable advertisement to recognize the area in order to increase tourists and develop rural tourism.
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