

Rural Tourism Development through Rural Cooperatives

Fariborz Aref & Sarjit S Gill

Department of Social and Development Science, Faculty of Human Ecology

Putra University, Malaysia

fariborzaref@yahoo.com , sarjit@putra.upm.edu.my

Abstract: The concept of rural tourism has become important around the world. It is thought that rural tourism can revitalize the conventional concepts and views on tourism, and bring in a new dimension in the sustainable development. It has been realized that local communities based tourism can play a fundamental role in poverty alleviation in rural areas. This paper used qualitative approaches to illustrate development of rural tourism through rural cooperatives. The study also attempted to highlight the barriers of rural tourism in Iran. This article looks at how rural cooperatives can develop the rural tourism in rural area at the case study Iran. This research draws from our scientific experience in a variety of disciplines namely; rural cooperatives, tourism development and community development. [Nature and Science. 2009; 7(10): 68-73]. (ISSN: 1545-0740).

Keywords: Rural tourism, rural cooperatives, tourism development

1. Introduction

World Tourism Organization (WTO) used rural tourism concept for defining that tourism product "that gives to visitors a personalized contact, a taste of physical and human environment of countryside and as far as possible, allow them to participate in the activities, traditions and lifestyles of local people." According to WTO it is considered that take part from rural tourism a wide range of activities like: climbing, riding, adventure tourism, educational travel, sport and health tourism, arts and heritage tourism (Negrusa et al., 2007). Oppermann (1997) saw rural tourism as tourism that occurs in nonurban settings where human activity is present (Beeton, 2006). Negrusa et al (2007) defines rural tourism as that form of tourism offered by people from rural areas, with accommodation on small-scale and with the implication of important components of their rural activities and customs of life. Tourism it appears to be developing an elitist bias as broadening of its social base with participation from all sections of the society is clearly not visible. The important role of participatory and community based organizations like cooperatives in promoting tourism has yet to be recognized. As a result, the concepts like "sustainable tourism", "poverty reduction through tourism", 'community tourism', etc. which can be best implemented through participatory institutions have yet to be popularized in a big way (Verma, 2008). Rural tourism development has become a top priority of the economic agenda of all the countries. It is not unusual to hear that rural areas of Iran are underdeveloped in text of tourism.

Hence this paper suggested development of rural cooperatives for the tourism development in rural areas.

2. Rural Tourism

There are a variety of terms used to describe tourism in rural areas, including farm tourism, agritourism, soft tourism and even ecotourism (Beeton, 2006). According to the Organization of Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD), rural tourism is defined as tourism taking place in the countryside (Reichel et al., 2000). Rural tourism is located in agricultural landscapes and is characterized by enjoyment of a tamed nature or highly modified landscape. It is about the land uses and human cultures that the interaction between humans and the land have created. It positions agriculture and farms as the foundation upon which the attraction is built (Knowd, 2001). Any form of tourism that showcases the rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations, thereby benefiting the local community economically and socially as well as enabling interaction between the tourists and the locals for a more enriching tourism experience can be termed as rural tourism. Rural tourism is essentially an activity which takes place in the countryside. It is multi-faceted and may entail farm/agricultural tourism, cultural tourism, nature tourism, adventure tourism, and eco-tourism. As against conventional tourism, rural tourism has certain typical characteristics like; it is an experience oriented, the locations are sparsely populated, it is predominantly in the natural environment, it meshes with seasonality and local

events and is based on preservation of culture, heritage and traditions. Rural tourism has many potential benefits for rural areas (Frederick, 1992). Rural tourism can be an important source of jobs for local communities. Tourism can be an important force for developing disadvantaged rural areas. In particular, rural communities with few other options for development may perceive that tourism represents a panacea for growth. While tourism can certainly be an important component of a sound development plan, this is not always the case. Bontron and Lasnier (1997)

note that the rural tourism impact varies greatly among rural regions and depends on a host of factors including work force characteristics and seasonality issues. Figure 1 presents one way of viewing the complex nature of rural regions and tourism's role by mapping the links between elements and issues. The map serves its purpose in illustrating the relationship between tourism and rural regions. The community is central to this process, and in many ways cannot be separated from any of the elements on the map.

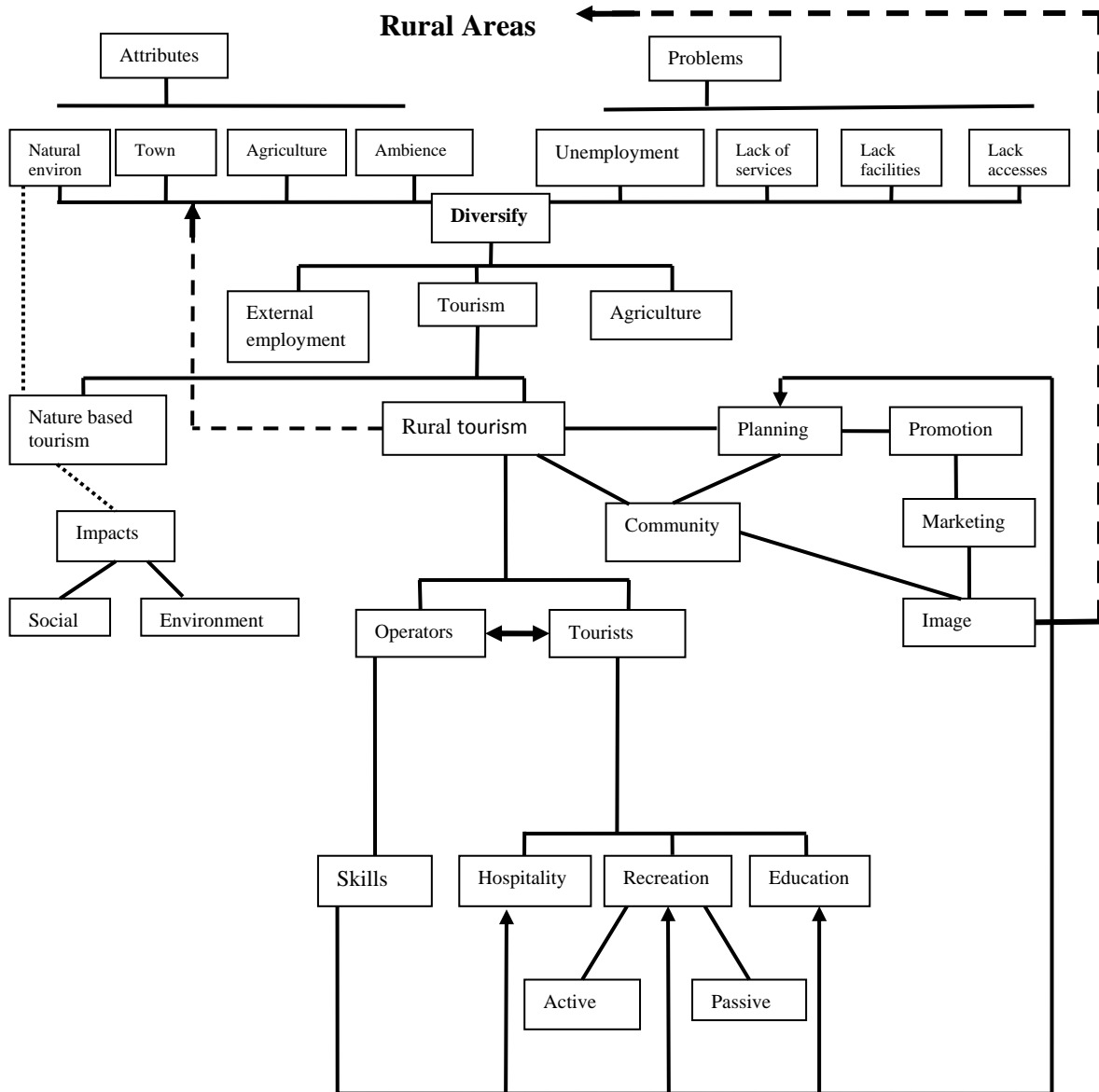


Figure 1: Rural tourism. Adopted from Beeton (2006, p. 143)

3. Methodology

The research was performed as a qualitative library in which the researcher had to refer to relevant and related sources. Sources that we used to collect needed information about Iran in order to write this article were the Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization, rural cooperatives, State Planning Organization, official websites of tourism Iran, as well as relevant literature and articles about the tourism. Likewise, we have used a number of articles and official websites of the various world known organizations, such as United Nations Environment Programme, World Tourism Organization, and World Trade and Tourism Council.

4. Rural Tourism in Iran

The rural cooperatives in Iran in the recent years have diversified themselves into various areas of socio-economic activities. The failure of the government sector and various limitations of the private sector have compelled the policy-makers to pin their faiths on the cooperative system. For certain activities/areas, the success of which is based on the ability of the grassroots institutions to tackle them with their participatory and people-based approach, the cooperatives are considered to have an advantage over other organizations. For example, in Iran the rural cooperatives are considered most effective organizations in the field of rural Agriculture. Similarly, because of their vast network and reach, the rural cooperatives are considered best promoters for agriculture in Iran. Rural tourism is often considered an economic alternative for rural areas facing decreasing profits and requiring a second or third economic footing (Verma, 2008). However, like other tourism activities, rural tourism results in a full range of environmental impacts (Kuo, 2008). Rural tourism in Iran doesn't have a long history because of insufficient infrastructure and preparation. Iran definitely has the great potential for tourism especially rural and ecotourism. The only problem and difficulty are in attracting the tourists. Unspoiled nature, varied picturesque landscapes, a thousand-year-old cultural and architectural heritage, a profusion of leisure opportunities and recreation, closeness to the urban centres as well as the authentic character and rural charm, all these are the most important factors for development of rural tourism in Iran. However there are some other steps that should

be taken, because Iran isn't ready for welcome rural tourists yet: Attractions (for example development of rural tourism around a heritage site), rural infrastructure, accessibility (roads, transportation) and Building rural capacity for tourism development

There is a still more budget needed for rural areas. Rural tourism has some advantages in rural areas in Iran, for example, it provides employment for local residents and prevents their immigration to cities. Currently young people leave countryside and go to big cities to study or work. Usually they never come back to their homelands. Some of the reasons for failure of these efforts are as follows: The role of the rural cooperatives in this industry is not defined, socio-cultural and political barriers, and lack of human and economic resources.

5. Barriers of Rural Tourism

Understanding barriers of rural tourism is important when a community is getting organized for involvement in tourism activities. This understanding can help individuals, community and organizations more effectively impact the tourism policy-making process. Further, it is important for government to understand that rural areas also face barriers that can hinder its progress in responding and recognizing the priorities of local communities in Iran. Overcoming the barriers to tourism development presents a challenge to both communities and government, and will serve to facilitate the policy making process. There are several literatures that directly deal with the barriers of tourism development through local communities particularly in third world countries. Rural tourism in Iran has several barriers that cannot develop. Roads and accommodation infrastructures were cited as the two main barriers for growing rural tourism in our case study. In the long-term, developing accommodation, sealing the road, and providing other services like cafes and shops are essential to fulfill the tourism potential of Iran, and attract a broader range of visitors to stay in the region overnight. Besides The rural cooperatives in Iran yet have not to recognize the importance of tourism despite the rapid growth of tourism sector in the world. Following are the main barriers:

- Inability to analyze the changing socio-economic dimensions of rural tourism in Iran, and demarcate the areas in which

rural cooperatives have a strategic advantage over other forms of organizations.

- Lack of policy research in this field which can provide definite indicators for future.
- Inability to strategically link the rural cooperatives with the rural tourism in those cities in which tourism is in a boom. For example, in Esfahan and Shiraz, tourism has emerged as a big force. But, the rural cooperatives have not yet to come up in this field.
- Inability of the cooperatives to extend their areas of operations or activities in the field of rural tourism.
- Weak advocacy for rural tourism development is also a big hindrance. Holding of Advocacy conferences by the cooperatives in the area of cooperative tourism can set the ball rolling in a big way and create a conducive atmosphere for rural tourism development (Verma, 2008).

Bushell & Eagles (2007, p. 154) also states tourism as a phenomenon of affluent contemporary societies is a particularly difficult concept in local communities in developing countries to grasp. In this sense tourism development may be more difficult than other activities. Shortcomings are similar to those local communities, but a few factors tend to be more pronounced among local area:

- Lack of formal education and appropriate managerial training
- Lack of foreign language skills
- Different ways of dealing with hygiene, litter, maintenance of infrastructure
- Limited knowledge of food preparation for foreigners, including catering to dietary, nutritional and culinary tastes
- Lack of decision making and planning skills concerning the possible consequences of tourism, coupled with limited ability to control tourism, unpredictable political climates, and long-term funding uncertainty (Bushell & Eagles, 2007, p. 154).

As consequence, rural tourism facilities and services may be unacceptable for international tourists. Hence building capacity through rural cooperatives is necessary for stakeholders involved in tourism in local communities (Bushell & Eagles, 2007). However, due to lack of awareness, this is not being done at present.

Similarly, lack of development of cooperatives in the field of cooperative tourism is also a sign of weak advocacy. There is also lack of documentation of few successful models of cooperative tourism in the Region.

6. Rural cooperatives for rural tourism

The rural cooperative has worked in Iran After land reform in 1963. Today there are more than 10000 rural cooperative. However, their ability of these cooperatives is limited and the Iran government is still not doing considering rural tourism as one of the development factors for rural area. This paper attempted to outline the concept of rural tourism development in relation to rural cooperatives. Rural cooperatives have been cited as a goal in rural participation for rural development processes. Aref (2009) in his study recommended establishing tourism cooperatives to support the local people for investment in tourism development. According to his findings, the level of organizational capacity in tourism development in Iran is weak. Hence establishment of tourism cooperatives in Iran can boost tourism development. From this analytic perspective, rural cooperatives can be an effect on rural tourism development through three major capacity levels ; community, organizational and individual levels (Daniela, 2002). For rural tourism development the organizational level refers to a tourism organization; community context refers to informal groups bounded geographically; and individual context refers to people. In the organizational level, rural cooperatives can contribute to the rural tourism development through empowering the tourism organizational (Daniela, 2002). The individual level leads to community empowerment in the rural tourism development process through empowerment rural people. The individual level in this process plays out repeatedly, increased individual power toward rural tourism development. In considering the application of rural cooperatives in tourism development, the role of the rural leaders deserves consideration (Aref & Ma'rof, 2009). A leader frequently plays the importance role in these processes. Important goals of leaders with respect to rural cooperatives in tourism development would include facilitating; encourage participants, encouraging learning, and developing local skills in rural areas.

Figure 2 illustrates a conceptual model for how rural cooperatives can be an effect on three levels of community. The figure indicates overall

interaction between rural cooperatives and rural tourism development. Three community capacities level to have a vital role in this process. Through this model rural cooperative must play an active role in promoting tourism in

the rural area through establishing strong networks with the tourism organizations, and fostering collaboration local people in this way (Verma, 2008).

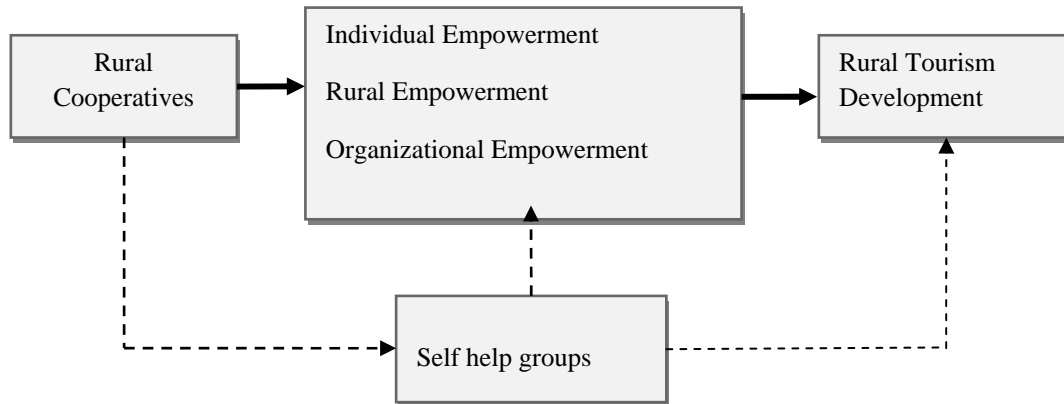


Figure 2: The interactions between rural cooperatives and rural tourism development

7. Conclusion

The main objective of the present paper is to determine status of the rural tourism in Iran. Rural tourism is considered to be a multi-dimensional activity essential to the local area not only rural areas in Iran, but all the nations of the world. However Iran has many potential in development of tourism especially rural tourism but development of rural tourism in Iran is still in its nascent stage. Iran has perfect opportunities to enhance its rural tourism. This paper showed a brief conception of rural tourism and its barriers in the rural areas of Iran. The main importance approaches which suggested in this study were development of rural cooperatives for rural tourism development. Thus rural cooperatives are a major critical success factor in rural tourism. Hence this study can be motivation for futures investigate in rural cooperatives for tourism development in the local areas in Iran.

References

- Aref, F. (2009). *Community capacity building in tourism development in local communities of Shiraz, Iran*. Putra, UPM, Selangor, Malaysia.
- Aref, F., & Ma'rof, R. (2009). Community capacity building for tourism development. *Journal of Human Ecology*, 27(1).

- Beeton, S. (2006). Community development through tourism. In: Landlink Press, Australia.
- Bontron, J., & Lasnier, N. (1997). eTourism: A Potential Source of Rural Employmen. In R. D. a. B. Bollman, J.M (Ed.), *Rural Employment: An International Perspective* (pp. 427-446.). Wallingford: CAB International.
- Bushell, R., & Eagles, P. (Eds.). (2007). *Tourism and Protected Areas: Benefits Beyond Boundaries*. London CAB International, UK.
- Daniela, B. R. (2002). *Capacity Building for Co-management of Wildlife in North America*. New York: Human Dimensions Research Unit Department of Natural Resources Cornell Universityo. Document Number)
- Frederick, M. (1992). *Tourism as a rural development tool: an exploration of the literature* (Vol. 22). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service.
- Knowd, I. (2001). Rural Tourism: Panacea and Paradox: Exploring the Phenomenon of Rural Tourism and Tourism's Interaction with Host Rural Communities. Retrieved 15, September, 2009

- Kuo, N.-W. (2008). Sustainable rural tourism development based on agricultural resources: the eco-inn initiative in Taiwan. *International Journal of Agricultural Resources, Governance and Ecology*, 7(3), 229 - 242
- Negrusa, A. L., Cosma, S. A., & Bota, M. (2007). Romanian rural tourism development a case study: rural tourism in Maramures. . *International Journal of Business Research*, July.
- Oppermann, M. (1997). Rural tourism in Germany: farm and rural tourism operators. In S. J. P. D. Getz (Ed.), *The business of rural tourism* (pp. 108–119). London: International Thomson Business Press.
- Reichel, A., Lowengart, O., & Milman, A. (2000). Rural tourism in Israel: service quality and orientation. *Tourism Management*, 21, 451-459.
- Verma, S. K. (2008). Cooperatives and Tourism : An Asian Perspective. Retrieved September, 5, 2009, from <http://www.ica.coop/tica/cartagenaverm a.pdf>

9/20/2009