



Factors Affecting Rural Tourism Cluster Development (Case Study: Ashtaran Village, Touyserkan County)

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Abstract

Purpose- Villages are full of new and undiscovered opportunities that can be explored in a timely manner to create opportunities and new businesses for the villagers. In this regard, those approaches are sustainable that, due to changes in technology and the market, constantly assess market and technological needs and provide a more appropriate employment model. To this end, development through business clusters has recently been considered by economic and industrial policies.

Design/methodology/approach- The main purpose of the study was to investigate factors affecting rural tourism cluster development via a quantitative approach. The statistical population consisted of two groups of experts in Hamadan province with 21 individuals and 360 rural households. A total of 185 rural households were randomly selected using the Krejcie and Morgan table. This research was an applied research that investigated the contribution of each independent variable in explaining the dependent variable (rural tourism cluster development) using structural equation modeling through Smart PLS6 software.

Findings- The results showed that in the structural model of research, the highest effect ($\beta=0.420$) belonged to institutions on rural tourism development and the relationship was positive and significant. In total, 56 percent of the dependent variable of tourism development in Ashtaran village is explained by four factors: institutions, tourism infrastructure, economic capacities and tourism services.

Key words- Tourism cluster, Rural tourism, Rural employment, Rural development, Touyserkan County.

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1. Introduction

One of the major goals of development in most countries is to reduce unemployment and create new employment opportunities.

Today, the issue of employment is not just an economic issue or a country-specific one, but almost all societies are dealing with the problem of unemployment and this issue in some way is affecting all aspects of life including social, cultural, economic and even political and security aspects (Rezvani, 2009). Scientists and development experts argue that job problems and unemployment in rural areas are more complex and widespread because they have resulted in widespread poverty, increase in inequality, unemployment, migration, urban displacement, and so on (Hezarjeribi, 2006). Some scholars have even considered rural development to be a priority for urban development; they believe that the ultimate solution to the problem of unemployment in cities is to improve the rural environment (Todaro, 1989). Villages are full of new and undiscovered opportunities that can be explored in a timely manner to create opportunities and new businesses for the villagers. In this regard, those approaches are sustainable that, due to changes in technology and the market, constantly assess market and technological needs and provide a more appropriate employment model (Evans & Rauch, 1999; Onetti, Zucchella, Jones, & McDougall-Covin, 2012; Toro-Jarrín, Ponce-Jaramillo, & Güemes-Castorena, 2016; Trigkas, Anastopoulos, Papadopoulos, & Lazaridou, 2020). To this end, development through business clusters has recently been considered by economic and industrial policies (Bergman & Feser, 2020; Cottineau & Arcaute, 2020; Pereira, Temouri, & Patel, 2019; Sarkar, Yap, Vaidyanathan, & Agasty, 2020; Wang, 2020; Wilson & Popp, 2017; Zhang & Warner, 2017). Porter (1998) identifies clusters as organizations such as government training centers and other educational, research institutions (such as universities, standards regulators, vocational training providers, and business associations) that provide information, research and technology support.

The United Nations Industrial Development Organization defines clusters as the geographical and sectoral focus of manufacturing and service

activities that produce and sell a range of related and complementary products and services. The geographical focus creates economy of scales in a particular manufacturing sector and accelerates the development of technical, management and financial services (UNIDO, 2003). Clusters provide a good basis for forming partnerships between individuals and public and private organizations in an area and promoting local production, innovation and collective learning (Breschi & Malerba, 2005; Innocenti, Capone, & Lazzeretti, 2020; Kamath, 2020; Saebi & Foss, 2015; Stock & Watson, 2010). These clusters can gain better to competitive markets because of better access to skills, shared services, physical and scientific infrastructure, networking, marketing, manufacturing systems, innovation and financial resources (Baden-Fuller & Haefliger, 2013; Balabanis, Theodosiou, & Katsikea, 2004; Mills, Reynolds, & Reamer, 2008; Najib & Kiminami, 2011). As a competitive tool for networking, therefore, clusters not only facilitate regional development strategies but also enable them to compete in global markets (Berg, Thuesen, Ernstsén, & Jensen, 2019; Brachert, Titze, & Kubis, 2011; Kujala, Arto, Aaltonen, & Turkulainen, 2010; Mihajlovic, 2014). The results of various studies show that clusters are especially important in creating employment and can be a good model for sustainable rural employment through collective productivity, specialized labor division, collective collaboration, interactive learning and other things that are needed to become more competitive (Das, 2020; Drummond & Snowball, 2019; Hsueh & Lin, 2020; Ivolga, Lazareva, Dashkova, & Takhumova, 2020; Koroleva & Kurnikova, 2020; Lee, Wall, & Kovacs, 2015; Luo, 2019; Novani, Putro, & Hermawan, 2015; Odinokova, 2019; Pereira & Caetano, 2015; Thornton, Henneberg, & Naudé, 2013). Tourism cluster as a cluster-based development approach is a useful framework and set of processes that can enable regions to redefine how they address economic issues, moving away from narrowly focused projects and programs to more systematic and integrated strategies where responsibilities for action lie with all stakeholders in the economy (Gollub, Hosier, & Woo, 2003).

Despite the importance of different business clusters, especially in rural areas, no scientific and comprehensive effort has been made to explain

tourism business clusters in Iranian villages. Hamadan province is one of the provinces with many tourism opportunities in its villages in different fields for employment that can provide the necessary livelihoods and added value for the villagers in a targeted economic chain. But despite such capabilities, most youth and rural residents in the province have no proper jobs and this has led to their migration to the surrounding cities. Due to the abundance of tourism resources and attractions, especially in the rural and natural areas of the province, also the low utilization of these capacities and on the other hand less need for investment resources, the rural tourism cluster was selected as the focus of this study. There are 22 tourism target villages in Hamadan province, and among those, Ashtaran village was selected. The main reason for the village's selection by the research group was that there had been no research in the area of tourism cluster so far, and in fact, there was an untapped field of research. In addition, the village of Ashtaran in the lowlands of Alborz and the protected area of Khan Gormez, the historical castle of Hamzeh Khan in the village, the presence of pristine landscapes that dazzle the eyes of every tourist, the texture and beautiful architecture of the village, often made of stones, and being located on the beautiful and ancient road of Ganjnameh in Hamadan has been another reason for choosing the village of Ashtaran as the target population in this study. Therefore, this research seeks to find scientific answers to the following questions:

What socio-economic resources and potential are needed to create tourism clusters in the village of Ashtaran? What are the infrastructure measures and plans for the development of tourism in the village of Ashtaran? What individuals, institutions

and organizations can be identified to support the development of rural tourism clusters? What are the tourism services needed to create tourism clusters in the village of Ashtaran?

2. Research Theoretical Literature

The overall structure of a tourism cluster consists of four units. They include tourism service providers, material suppliers, tourists, various support systems (Nordin, 2003). The well-known theory of Porter's cluster diamond presents the four components of an effective industrial cluster, consist of (1) firm strategy, structure, and rivalry, (2) demand conditions, (3) supporting industries, and (4) input conditions.

According to Gollub and his colleagues (2003), despite continuing change and dynamic nature of a tourism cluster, it can be mapped out as economic input foundation level, suppliers, and final exports (tourism destinations). The supplier level in tourism consists of three levels of providers supporting the visitor experience: 1) Primary level: This level of suppliers consists of the accommodations, restaurants, and retail stores that are part of the visit to the destination or event. 2) Secondary level: This level comprises suppliers that are intermediaries between the visitor and the destination: inbound travel agents and tour operators, transport providers (air carriers, car, tour and local bus). 3) Tertiary level: This level includes the suppliers who support the infrastructure of the destinations and primary and secondary level suppliers. These include management and accounting, facility and equipment maintenance, marketing and reservations systems, working capital (lines of credit), furnishings, food services, catering and entertainment services (Fig. 1).

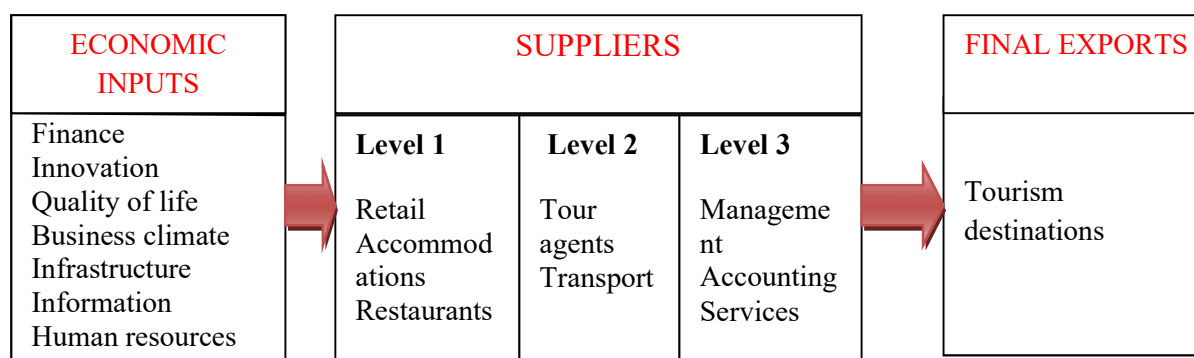


Fig 1. A tourism cluster structure

(Source: Gollub et al. 2003)

Rural areas have become attractive places for tourists due to their high diversity in cultural fields, traditions, customs and natural resources (Rezvani & Mansourian, 2018). The approach of developing tourism clusters as an economic and social system seeks to integrate all the opportunities and resources in one geographical place to create job and income for a rural place (Miller & Gibson, 2005). Harris, William, & Griffin (2012) describe the social and economic role of rural tourism as follows: this type of tourism supports rural families, and to a greater extent, their communities; it helps their economies; maintaining local employment is another goal and provides incentives to preserve traditions, and communicates citizens with the villagers.

Hamedan Province is one of the few geographical areas that has attracted tourists, scholars and those interested in culture and monuments from all over the world, with about 1,800 buildings and historical sites, as well as beautiful nature and tourist attractions. The same number of special talents is enough to make Hamadan a great pole for the tourism industry in Iran. In recent years, 22 villages in the province of Hamadan have been introduced as tourism target villages with the registration of the Organization of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism. Wonderful old villages have a lot to say with the architecture, crafts, and culture of their people in the heart of the beautiful countryside. It should be noted that the existence of some of the above factors in the village is sufficient to determine the value of its texture and not all indicators need to be present.

Tourism, as a diverse entrepreneur, and generative industry, encompasses a wide range of employment opportunities. Tourism employs women, youth, and also low-educated people and creates an environment for participation and empowerment for vulnerable groups. Also, given the lower barriers and inputs, tourism provides investment opportunities for small business creation and employment (Telfer & Sharpley, 2015). Winters, Corral, and Mora (2013) point out the benefits of tourism economy in poverty alleviation in disadvantaged and local areas and believe that there is a widespread consensus on tourism potential for poverty alleviation, especially in developing countries. Many developing countries actually have natural, cultural and historical resources that, with proper

coordination and planning, can generate employment and income for local people at the core of a lucrative and sustainable tourism industry. According to García-Villaverde, Elche, and Martínez-Pérez (2020), social capital is effective in developing tourism clusters. Therefore, one of the factors in strengthening and improving tourism clusters is the interaction of the managers of such businesses with the market and the changes that occur in the market. Fernando and Long (2012) identify factors affecting tourism clusters including internal resources, support systems, public and private organizations and institutions, demand conditions, innovation and technology factors, and destination position. Jackson and Murphy (2006) on the role of clusters in regional tourism clusters in Australia have stated that the successful regions economically are more inclined to cluster development and lack of strong local leadership and weak linkages between firms are cluster development barriers. Finally, it has been concluded that business clusters are very suitable for use in regional areas. In a study, Castillo, Garone, Maffioli, and Salazar (2015) examined the impact of tourism policy on employment in Argentina. Their results show that the implementation of tourism development policy in Salta province increased tourism jobs by 11 percent each year, and in general between 2003 and 2013 had an impact of 112 percent.

In Iran, there have been many studies on the impacts of rural tourism so far, but few studies have been conducted on tourism clusters. Below are some of the most important of them. In a research about identifying and analyzing tourism cluster in Shiraz city, Hajimohammad-Amini, Tawallaei, and Farjad (2013) argue that partnership relationships between tourism cluster units are regarded as a key feature of successful tourism clusters. Barmaki (2013) identified agricultural and horticultural clusters, food production and beverages, livestock, poultry, silkworm and honeybee breeding and hunting as the economic pioneer clusters in Hamadan province. The results of Kazemi-Esfa (2015) research showed that factors such as investment, human resources training, management and planning, encouragement of the private sector to cooperate, employment and publicity were important factors in the development of rural tourism. The results of Erjaie, Moradnejadi, Salavarzi, and Ghasemi (2016) showed that

handicrafts had the highest priority to develop non-agricultural clusters and it is the most suitable option for tourism clustering. After that, the processing industries were second priority, and the small size enterprises were third priority.

According to [Talanah \(2016\)](#) research, there is a good geographical focus for the development of tourism clusters in the city of Sari, but there is a weak inter-agency cooperation relationship. Due to the weakness of the relations and problems found in tourism service centers, tourism cluster implementation is essential for the development of these centers. Based on the two models of Electric and Pralong [Jafari and Hosseini \(2018\)](#) estimated tourism value of the Hamadan tourism target villages in four appearance beauty, scientific, cultural-historical and socio-economic criteria. Based on both the Electric and Pralong models the villages of Varkaneh, Simin, Barfjin, Gashai, Abaro, Malhamdareh, Haidarah and Ashtran had higher scores respectively; the most important potential in this regard was the better tourism infrastructure than other target villages. The results of [Ahmadi, Cheraghi, and Soltani \(2018\)](#) study show that the factors of infrastructure, local capabilities, policy making and publicity have led to the formation of ecotourism development in rural areas of Zanjan city of Sohrain plain. The results of [Nikraftar and Nosratifar \(2018\)](#) showed that in Alborz province,

entrepreneurship opportunities are prioritized along with natural and recreational attractions, followed by ecotourism, souvenirs and handicrafts. Ecotourism roads and rural houses with details of rural life are among the most important opportunities identified to launch a business in the field of rural tourism. The results of [Sharifzadeh, Abdollahzadeh, Jivar, and Diwsalar \(2019\)](#) showed that the consequences of the formation agricultural industrial clusters in the villages resulted in the extraction of six factors: (1) promoting agricultural economic development, (2) promoting social development, (3) increasing production capacity in agriculture, (4) promoting and developing agricultural entrepreneurship, (5) the development of the agricultural market, and (6) the development of human capital in the agricultural sector.

Most of the relationships between tourism businesses are poor and unorganized. Mashhad's high turnover of tourism facilities and recognition of Mashhad in terms of providing catering services nationwide, were some of the strengths and low interaction, lack of tourism finance centers were some of the weaknesses of Mashhad's tourism sector ([Soltani & Bostan, 2018](#)). Based on the theoretical background of the research conducted about tourism clusters, the conceptual model of this research is presented as follows.

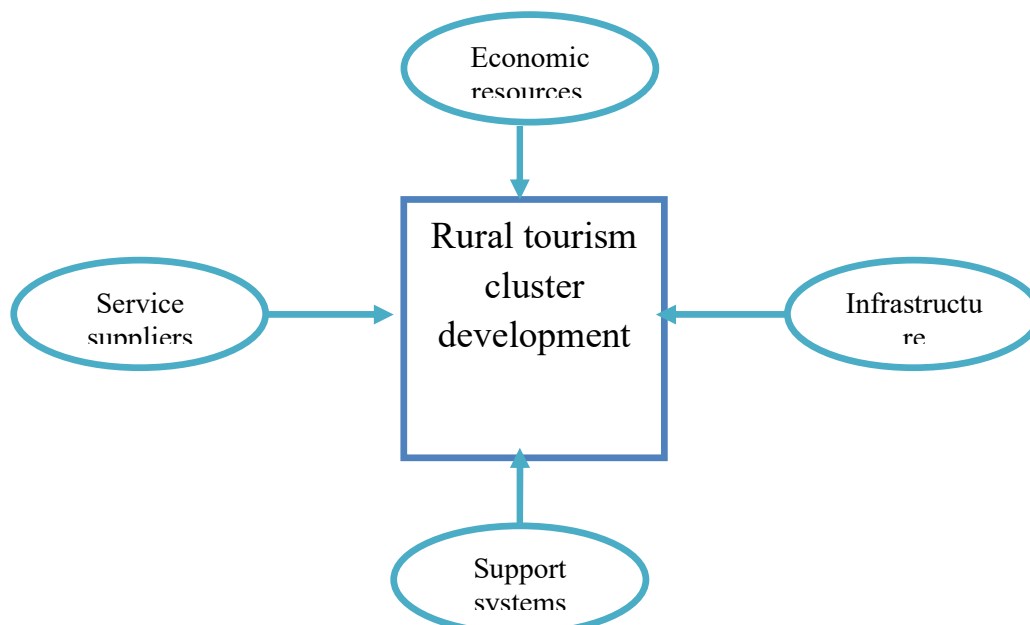


Fig 2. Conceptual model of rural tourism cluster development

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Geographical Scope of the Research

Village of Ashtaran is located around 20 km of Tuyserkan city in south slopes of Alvand Mountains and northern slopes of Khan Gormes in Hamadan province, in the central part of Khorramrud sector. The village of Ashtaran connects to neighboring cities in three main ways. The village topography is relatively rugged and mountainous over 1810 meters above sea level.

The population of the village in 2006 was about 1328 people in 365 households, which decreased by 254 persons to 1074 in 362 households in 2016 (Statistical Yearbook, 2016). The main job of the villagers is the agriculture and horticulture and the main garden products of this village are plums, apricots, almonds, grapes and apples. Wheat and barley farms are the next ranks of agricultural products in this village (Statistical Office of Economic Planning Deputy of Hamadan Province, 2016).

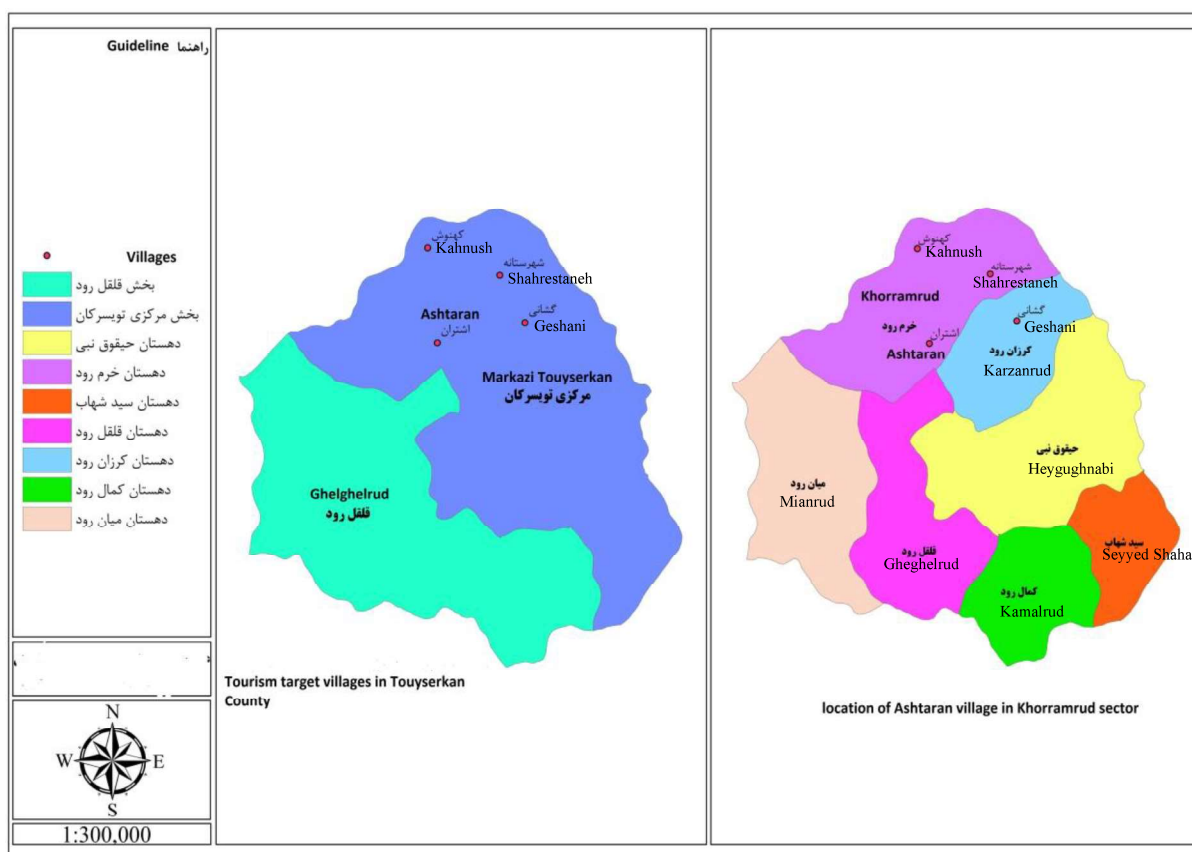


Fig 3. Location of Ashtaran village in Tuyserkan county and Khorramrud sector

3.2. Methodology

This research was an applied research aimed at investigating the factors affecting rural tourism cluster. The statistical population of the study consisted of two groups including experts on rural tourism in Hamedan province (21 people) and 360 villagers from Ashtaran village. The experts were selected without sampling but the villagers were randomly selected using Krejcie and Morgan table leading to a group of 185 individuals as the sample. The data collection method was designed using library research and documents; also,

brainstorming sessions with experts were conducted with the aim of designing questionnaires for tourism cluster in Ashtaran village. In the data analysis section, structural equation modeling (SEM) with PLS6 software was used to determine the contribution of each independent variable in explaining the variance of the dependent variable (rural tourism cluster development). Tables 1 to 5 show the observed and latent variables (dependent and independent variables) used in the development of rural tourism clusters.

Table 1. Independent variables (Economic factors)

(Source: Research finding, 2019)

Economic factors	Code	Economic factors	Code
Existence of mineral water in the highlands of Khan Gormaz	X9	Rangeland potentials in the southern slopes of Alvand	X20
Potential of medicinal plants' production	X10	Breeding of livestock and poultry in industrial form	X21
Potential of extraction granite and silica	X11	Seasonal rivers of Khorramrud and Kondar	X22
Potential to create an industrial complex	X12	Mountaineering potential in the altitudes of Alousan, Ghezel Arsalan and Khan Gormas	X23
Carpet weaving	X13	The potential of cycling	X24
Morvar weaving	X14	Home business tourism	X25
Sofa and Inlay	X15	Historic castle and castle bath	X26
Gilim (Rug)	X16	Mushroom cultivation	X27
Processing industries on grapes, walnuts, plums	X17	Aquaculture	X28
Processing industries on dairy products	X18	Producing of organic products	X29
Agricultural potentials	X19		

Table 2. Independent variables (Infrastructure factors)

(Source: Research finding, 2019)

Infrastructure factors	Code	Infrastructure factors	Code
Art-cultural potentials such as music, art, celebrations, and beliefs	X30	Supporting the supply of products in local and regional markets	X46
Existence of Imamzadeh Ibrahim and Imamzadeh Taherben Ali	X31	Strengthening home businesses in the various areas of the handicraft and processing industries	X47
Branding of Ashtaran village products	X32	Insurance of agricultural and horticultural products	X48
Research potentials in the field of tourism according to antiquity, architecture and pristine nature	X33	Accountability of county officials in implementing rural projects	X50
Forming a New Government Policy entitled "Co-operative Village"	X43	Educating the villagers in various forms	X51
Financial troubleshooting and banking facilities, especially guarantees	X44	Culture building through local and national media	X52
Organizing production processing and marketing of products	X45		

Table 3. Independent variables (Service factors)

(Source: Research finding, 2019)

Service Factors	Code	Service Factors	Code
Ecotourism start ups	X64	Introducing the culture and history of the village	X70
Launch Local Marketplace	X65	Nature Tour	X71
Launching home and family business factories	X66	traditional restaurant	X72
Launch of public services (parking, restroom, dining room)	X67	Traditional and local exhibitions	X73
Launching recreational facilities	X68	Introducing the architecture of the village	X74
Preparation of village skilled and unskilled labor force certificate	X69	Launching the museum	X75

Table 4: Independent variables (Organizational factors)

(Source: Research finding, 2019)

Organizational factors	Code	Organizational factors	Code
Ability to attract financial support from governmental organization	X53	Ability to raise funds through the county or provincial governorate	X59
Ability to attract financial support from private agencies	X54	Ability to raise funds through the universities	X60
The ability to get funds from international organizations	X55	Ability to raise funds through the banks	X61
The ability to get funds from cooperatives and unions	X56	Ability to raise funds through the neighbors	X62
Ability to get funds through the Tourism and Cultural Heritage Organization	X57	Ability to raise funds from relatives and friends	X63
Ability to get funds through agricultural Jihad Organization	X58		

Table 5: Dependent variables (Tourism development factors)

(Source: Research finding, 2019)

Tourism development factors	Code	Tourism development factors	Code
Management and protection of rural resources (water and energy)	X34	Agricultural development programs	X38
protection and effective utilization of ecological resources	X35	Implementation of research projects	X39
Development of greenhouse cultivation	X36	Providing financial and banking facilities	X40
Encouraging people to invest in the village	X37	Investment in the development of small-scale enterprises	X41

4. Research Findings

Descriptive results: Findings showed that the mean age of the rural people was 37.47 years with a standard deviation of 16.96. The youngest was 17 and the highest was 77. 80.3 percent of the respondents were men and the rest were women. 55.7 percent were married and 44.3 percent were single. Regarding the level of education, the findings indicated that the highest frequency (31.1 percent) belonged to those with a high school diploma and the lowest frequency (8.2 percent) to illiterate people. Also, 19.7 percent had primary education, 19.7 percent had secondary education, and 21.3 percent had university education. The main job of the majority of those samples was “agriculture” with 42.7 percent; 14.2 percent were self-employed; 26.5 percent were workers and 16.5 percent were students.

4.1. Tourism Development Measurement Model of Ashtaran Village

In analyzing the measurement model, it is necessary to examine the internal reliability, external reliability, convergent validity and divergent validity. The reliability of each of the variables in the model is determined by the factor loadings of each index. The relevant value of each factor loadings of the variables should be greater than or equal to 0.5 (Falkner & Miller, 1992). The results for factor loadings are shown in [Figure 4](#).

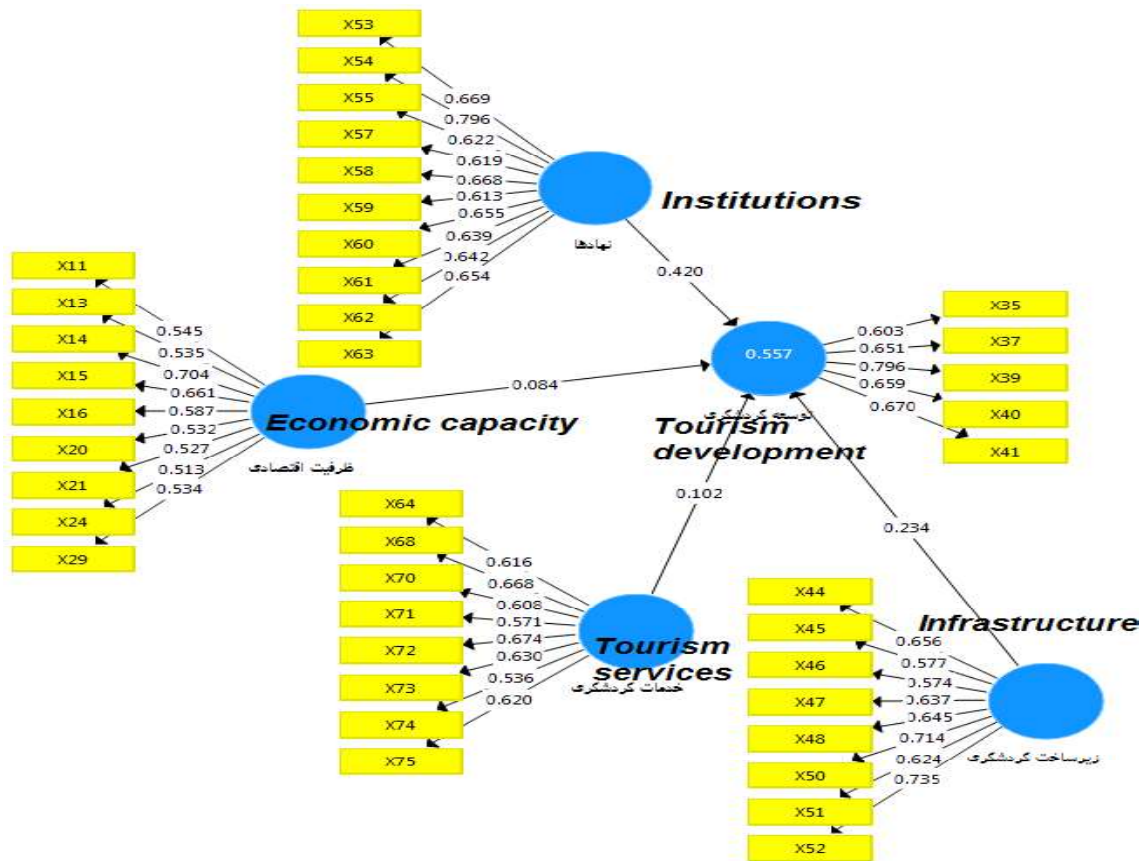


Fig 4. Research measurement model and factor loads after removing some observed variables
(Source: Research finding, 2019)

As shown in the figure 4, the values of the factor loadings associated with the observable variables (except for variables X12, X17, X18, X19, X22, X23, X25, X26, X27, X28, X30, X31, X32, X33, X34, X36, X38, X42, X43, X49, X56, X65, X66 و X67) are above 0.5 and therefore it can be said that the measurement model has a relatively good reliability in terms of the observable variables indices. It should be noted that the variables mentioned above due to the low load factor were removed from the equation and the measurement model of tourism development was conducted after the removal of these variables. The second criterion for the reliability of latent variables is the composite reliability (internal consistency) of the variables whose value must be greater than or equal to 0.7 (Nanley, 1978). The values obtained for this index

also indicate the acceptable reliability of the latent variables (Table 6).

The third criterion for examining the internal stability of the variables is convergent validity, which is analyzed by the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) criterion. This index represents the amount of variance a variable (latent variable) obtains from its indices. For this criterion, Fornell and Locker (1981) suggested values greater than 0.5. As shown in the table 6, the values of Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for the component of tourism development, tourism infrastructure and institutions are acceptable and average for the component of tourism services and economic capacity. Therefore, the measurement model has relatively good convergent validity.

Table 6. reliability and convergent validity (AVE) among the variables
(Source: Research finding, 2019)

Latent variable	Cronbach Alpha	composite reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Tourism Development	0.706	0.809	0.561
Tourism Services	0.768	0.830	0.481
Tourism Infrastructure	0.800	0.851	0.519
Economic Capacity	0.749	0.814	0.490
Institutions	0.855	0.884	0.535

To assess the divergent validity the square root of AVE is calculated. This value must be greater than the correlation value of other variables. In table 7, the main diameter values represent the second root of AVE and other values also show

the correlation between variables. As can be seen, the diagonal elements have values more than other values (values shown in column). It can be said that all the factors have good divergent validity (see Table 7).

Table 7. Divergent validity among the variables
(Source: Research finding, 2019)

Latent variable	Tourism Development	Tourism Services	Tourism Infrastructure	Economic Capacity	Institutions
Tourism Development	0.715				
Tourism Services	0.595	0.720			
Tourism Infrastructure	0.638	0.617	0.694		
Economic Capacity	0.556	0.470	0.551	0.702	
Institutions	0.679	0.648	0.647	0.574	0.660

Different models of goodness of fit were used to evaluate the fit of this model. Among the numerous indices that exist in this regard, the non-normalized fit index (NNFI), the normalized fit index (NFI), the goodness fit index (GFI), are all interpreted for good models ranging from 0.90 to

1, which in this study all items are above 0.9. Also, if the index of the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) is less than 0.8, it shows a good fit to the model, which is 0.63 in this study (Table 8).

Table 8. Fit indicators of measuring model of factors affecting rural tourism development
(Source: Research finding, 2019)

Index	Standard value	Calculated value
GFI	upper than 0.9	0.89
NFI	upper than 0.9	0.92
NNFI	upper than 0.9	0.91
RMSEA	Lower than 0.8	0.63

4.2. Analysis of Structural Model of Rural Tourism Development

In the following, the structural model of the research is analyzed. There are five latent variables in the model, and 67 observed variables. The variables of institutions, economic capacity, tourism services, and tourism infrastructure were

as independent variables, and tourism development as the dependent variable.

The coefficients of each path are also shown in Fig. 5. The coefficients are acceptable if the P-value is less than 0.05 and the factor loadings are more than 0.5. The results show that the coefficients of the whole paths are significant and therefore all the independent variables of the model have a significant relationship with tourism

development. In the structural model of research, the highest impact with beta coefficient of $\beta=0.420$ related to institutions on rural tourism development and the relationship was positive and significant. This result shows that if the trusted institutions are able to attract capital for tourism, they will have a significant role in the development of rural tourism.

Thereafter, the component of tourism infrastructure is ranked second with an impact factor of 0.24. This result means that tourism infrastructure has a positive and significant impact on the development of rural tourism. The tourism services component has the third priority in terms of impact priority with a factor of 0.102. It is concluded that tourism services have a positive and significant relationship with the dependent variable; in other words, these factors can play an important role in promoting rural tourism.

Economic Capacity is in fourth place with an impact factor of 0.04.

Overall, 56 percent of the dependent variable of tourism development in the village of Ashtaran is explained by four factors: institutions, tourism infrastructure, economic capacity, tourism services. The prediction power of the designed model is analyzed using the coefficient of determination (R^2) for the dependent variable. Chin (1998) set weak values of the coefficient of determination below 0.19, values ranging from 0.20 to 0.32 as moderate, values ranging from 0.33 to 0.66 as good and values above 0.67 as strong. With regard to this result that 56 percent of the variance in the dependent variable (tourism development) were explained by predict variables (i.e., institutions, economic potential, tourism, infrastructure, tourism), it can be concluded that the predicted power of structural model is enough and good.

Table 9. Path coefficients and the significance level in the model of rural tourism cluster development
(Source: Research finding, 2019)

Path	Path coefficient	Sig.	Result
Tourism Services--- Tourism Development	0.102	0.001	+
Tourism Infrastructure--- Tourism Development	0.234	0.001	+
Economic Capacity--- Tourism Development	0.084	0.044	+
Institutions--- Tourism Development	0.420	0.001	+

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In the structural model of the present study, among the factors influencing tourism development of Ashtaran village (i.e., institutions, economic potential, tourism, infrastructure, tourism services), the institutions component was the first to be influenced and from the viewpoint of respondents, plays the most important role in explaining the dependent variable (tourism development). This relationship is positive and meaningful and shows that if trusted institutions are able to attract capital for tourism, they will have a significant role in the development of rural tourism. Erjaie et al. (2016) also conclude in his study that the support of institutions, especially the government, has been an important factor in the success of industrial clusters in Guilan. Lee (2016), Wilson and Popp (2017), Soltani and Bostan (2018), and Kazemi Esfah (2015) also achieved similar results in their studies.

According to the coefficients, it can be concluded that the ability to attract capital from different institutions had the greatest role in the development of tourism cluster in Ashtaran village. This means that the more capital is attracted to tourism, the better its development. It is suggested that the support of various organizations, especially the municipality and the Cultural Heritage Organization, be used in order to raise awareness of tourism potentials and opportunities in the village of Ashtaran. For example, the use of city-wide advertising banners, catalogs, national media advertising, the introduction of the village through telegram channels, the establishment of tourism camps to familiarize with the village's native culture, holding various exhibitions nationally and internationally to identify rural capacities, are important to know more about Ashtaran village by various organizations and people as a target village. People and organizations awareness into the village makes it easier for them to invest in the

area and invest more money into the village's tourism cycle, which can be spent on tourism development. Another point in this regard is the various guidelines, regulations and bylaws issued by the authorities and institutions in support of tourism development in the villages, and lack of attention to these guidelines has made it difficult to implement them in practice. In this regard, it is suggested that, along with these supporting guidelines and regulations, their operational guarantees be considered. A monitoring committee, for example, could be formed with members from various tourism agencies, including the Jihad of Agriculture, the Provincial Government, the Tourism and Cultural Heritage Organization, the university, and the technical and professional organization, to oversee the proper implementation of resolutions. In addition, strategies such as supporting eco-tourism, providing low-cost facilities and supporting cooperatives and the establishment of rural micro-credit funds can be mentioned to raise funds.

The tourism infrastructure component is ranked second in terms of impact on the tourism cluster development. This result means that tourism infrastructure has a positive and significant impact on the development of rural tourism. This result is consistent with the studies by (Ahmadi et al., 2018; Jafari & Hosseini, 2018; Onetti et al., 2012; Pereira & Caetano, 2015; Pereira et al., 2019; Sharifzadeh et al., 2019; Talaneh, 2016). Among the variables of this component, culture building through local and national media, education of the villagers in various forms and monitoring and accountability of city and sector officials in the implementation of rural projects received the highest rating and from the respondents' point of view as the most important factor in tourism development. Considering the importance of having experienced and skilled human resources, it may be advisable to offer training classes for the villagers to familiarize them with tourism issues. A skilled human resource that is familiar with the ways of attracting tourists and knowing the languages of the world can better communicate with tourists and can provide the basis for tourism development in the village. As a result, the tourist is also more satisfied and this will make his/ her trip a repeat in the future.

The component of tourism services is ranked third in terms of impact priority. It can be concluded

from this finding that tourism services have a positive and significant relationship with the dependent variable, so providing high quality tourism services and, of course, reasonable prices can have a significant impact on tourism cluster development. In this regard, the establishment of cheap accommodation units with favorable services, the establishment of affordable accommodation units with affordable prices, the establishment of recreational and entertainment centers for the survival of tourists, the sale of handicrafts, as one of the most important economic opportunities in the village of Ashtran should be offered at favorable prices. Of course, it should be noted that in addition to the establishment of these centers and their equipment and support, they should be introduced to tourists. In this directions, establishing niche markets for the introduction of accommodation units, recreation and entertainment centers, and the sale of indigenous products, especially rural handicrafts, can be helpful.

The economic capacity component is ranked fourth in terms of impact compared to other factors and has a positive and significant relationship with tourism development. Ashtaran Village has much economic potential for attracting tourists and developing a sustainable tourism cluster, including mineral water in the highlands of Khan Gormas, potential of medicinal plants, potential of granite and silica mining, potential of industrial complexes, potential of handicrafts, and processing agro-food crops and livestock. The results showed that among these economic capacities, handicrafts and agro-processing industries have high potential and can be one of the main axes in tourism cluster development. Therefore, this study proposes that a specialized financial institution such as agricultural banks or tourism financial institutions specifically support the production activities related to these industries in the village in order to develop tourism clusters.

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