

Evaluating the Capabilities and Capacities of Rural Tourism Development in Chelav of Amol

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ABSTRACT

Today, tourism and the tourism economy has become one of the main pillars of the business world. Therefore, many development planners and policymakers believe that tourism industry is the main pillar of sustainable development. In this context, rural tourism is also part of the tourism industry which can be systematically planned and have an appropriate role in the development of these areas and therefore is responsible for national development and diversification of the national economy. Since the Chelav area of Amol has a historical background due to being in the path of capital, it is one of rural tourist destinations in the Mazandaran province. The present study seeks to identify the potential of this type of tourism in the region. Descriptive research method was used and to collect data we used field studies and questionnaire. The research population was 100 person of experts and in charge persons of the area and using Morgan table 80 samples were randomly selected and were subject to direct questioning. The data collected is tested using SPSS statistical software package and One - Sample T Test analysis and hypotheses are tested. Based on gained results of this research the Chelav Area has the required capability to become one of the tourism destinations and despite the negative impacts of tourists' presence in the area, tourism can promote the economic, social, and cultural aspects of villages in the region.

KEYWORD: Tourism Development, Rural Tourism, Chelav of Amol, Sang Chal

1. INTRODUCTION

Plentiful tourism development started from nineteenth century. Every day, many countries are trying to benefit from this industry. Although various definitions of tourism is provided, it shows numerous interpretations about this phenomena. But tourism is the world's largest service industry in various fields and Iran is one of most attractive countries based on its numerous cultural and natural attractions.

With rapid and stunning technological advances, the development of mental disorders in cities is a consequent and brought a tendency for urban residents for rural tourism. And urban residents try to escape from the challenges of urban issues and spending their leisure time for rural travels. The tourists who are called rural tourists are benefited from the natural environment and cultural attractions of the village. Despite the attention of urban tourists to rural areas, rural development programs and the development of rural tourism is facing a lot of different issues. It seems that the past strategies are not successful in the field of rural development and in recent years, rural development has been of interest to planners (Eftekhari and Mahdavi 2010:31).

Therefore, the importance of rural tourism as part of the overall tourism market is dependent on tourism resources, infrastructure, market access, and availability of other types of tourism products in each country. Even if rural tourism is minor in the tourism market in many countries, it is very important for development of rural areas. Thus, its multi-dimensional effect in the rural areas in which the whole rural life method is the key tourism attraction, is very high (Rezvani 2009, 30). Therefore, rural tourism that it known to be an alternative approaches to achieving sustainable rural development, due to the increasing destruction of villages and agricultural decline, we try to provide new strategies to revitalize rural areas through the creation of supplement or alter the activity of these regions due to natural and human resources (Rezaei & Ranjbaran 2010).

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Since the potential of tourism development in rural areas is very broad but unfortunately, so far, this attraction is not known and introduced and the necessary utilization of them had not been taken. Tourism in Rural Development planning process is very important. So especially in rural development programs and local initiatives, this shall be considered more than before. On the other hand, considering the fact that tourism can create a lot of jobs for women and unskilled labor, thus it can help women's empowerment and poverty reduction (Dehghan 2003).

Influx of tourists into the villages is to be continued and strengthened when the infrastructure and institutional factors, in addition to natural and human factors are provided. Therefore, flow of tourism is depended on tourism infrastructure, and the tourism development is depended on participation of local people, support of public sector and private investment (Vixens 2009). However, rural tourism is not the ultimate solution for all the problems of rural areas, but the important functions of rural tourism is development in areas with potential of rural tourism (Eftekhari & Ghaderi 2006: 25). Besides relative advantages of tourism, rural tourism may have important economic effects including preventing the migration of rural residences, job creation for surplus labor force, diversification of the rural economy with other sectors of the economy, raising the incomes of rural households and creating demand for agricultural products and crafts (Saghayy 2003: 3).

In this regard, the villiages of Chelav District of Amol have some environmental and ecological features, and a variety of attractions, and it has great potential for tourism development. That can be used to develop tourism, and providing context and environment for sustainable development of the region's villages. The main issue of this research is lack of knowledge about tourism capacity and capability of Chelav region and planning for the development of this area. In this research we are trying to answer the main question of this research:

- Is Chelav of Amol capable of providing necessities to become a tourist destination?

Research Objectives

- Knowing and understanding the features and capabilities for development of rural tourism planning this development in Chelav Area
- To know the factors affecting the development of rural tourism in the Chelav region
- To provide systematic and rational approaches to enforcement authorities and policy makers in the field of tourism to organize the rural tourism in rural area

Research Hypothesis

- It looks like that Chelav has the capabilities necessary to become a tourist destination.

Theoretical Research

Rural tourism is a multi-faceted activity is not only include agriculture tourism, but also it is including ecotourism, interest in nature, hiking, climbing, sports tourism, adventure and so on (Acka, 2006). Considering rural tourism from developed since 1950s and in the early decades of 1960s and 1970s it was considered more in the fields of rural tourism economy for farmers and local communities (Soltani, 2008: 30). Sustainable approach toward rural tourism has been accepted by many researchers who are more concerned about preserving the environment and the economy. To be efficient and potentially sustainable, tourism shall be match with the multiplicity and diversity of applications and requirements that understand in rural areas. In this regard, tourism development requires attention to coordination between the economic, social and environmental condition to ensure the maintenance of existing relations and implementation of comprehensive program to monitor that uses the various indicators of stability and in this way it can provide a full range of objectives related to sustainable development in rural areas (Rezvani 2008: 149). For a long time, tourism is studied as a factor in socio-economic development of rural areas and specially the European enhanced tourism for making economic changes in the sounders of villages, so that in many countries the rural tourism receives fundamental encouragements (Sharply, 2002: 234). The villages and its inhabitances are related to tourism industry from 2 perspectives. One is that rural environments are spaces and places for recreation and holiday of tourists, especially domestic tourists; and on the other hand, their products ranging from food and rural crafts are offered to tourists and it helps them for economic of their livelihood (Rezvani 2007: 105). Each village's tourism potential is more depend on the assets geographical, quality of monuments and landscapes and freshness of local culture. Therefore, deepening and valuing these factors, as well as converting them to elements of supply, promotion policies, maintenance of traditions, expertise, customs, landscape and rural environment, the attractiveness of the region and its potential durability shall be guaranteed and these factors and elements of village will become a real tourism product and its applicants are the surge of domestic and foreign tourists (Soltani, 2008: 33). Rural tourism is part of the tourism market and it is a source of employment and income, and it can be an important tool for economic - social and ecological development in the rural communities (Eftekhari, 2002: 26). Generally, rural planning success depends on the country's macro-planning perspective. And rural planning should be a goal and a subset of the overall planning of the country (Taghdisi Zanjani, 2007: 191).

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

- 1) Toulayi et al (2013) in a study entitled “review the capabilities and strategies of rural tourism development in the Kahak district of city of Qom” investigated lack of necessary infrastructure, including places of accommodation, catering, recreation and management weaknesses in the field of tourism development. They noted that the presence of tourists in the region increased environmental damage due to inadequate infrastructure and lack of investment in this area. In addition, investment in this area to use the positive potentials of rural environment to enhance the development of rural environment.
- 2) Rezvani & Moradi (2012) provided a study entitled “The feasibility of tourism development through a systematic approach in rural area of edge of Mighan desert “. They stated that because of the lack of knowledge among tourists and the lack of marketing and advertising, tourism demand in the current situation in the region is very low. Tourism also offers elements from the perspective of households and local authorities, including indicators of attractions, transport, infrastructure and services, sales promotion and participation is at good level. But unlike other indicators, data was assessed as weak. However, rural area of this district has internal potential attractions and external opportunities for development of tourism. Therefore, through planning and integral management of tourism including advertising and marketing and development of tourism infrastructure, equipment and services, we can increase demand for tourism development in the rural area and use internal strengths and external opportunities for tourism development and to make adequate use of them.
- 3) Panad et al (2012) provided a study entitled “rural development, the basic strategy for rural tourism: case study: Village of Tees”. They indicated that Village of Tees is one of potential and capable areas for tourism in Chabahar District that receives many tourists every year but due to the lack of systematic planning and management weakness and confusion, opportunities in the area in field of tourism and its economic and social revitalization, are not used properly. Historical attractions and natural and pristine landscapes of countryside have been changed and destroyed.
- 4) Saghayi & Javanbakht (2012) in their research entitled “Feasibility of rural tourism in North Khorasan: Case Study: Esfidan Region” stated that Esfidan village tourism product is in the medium level and in the discovery phase and to complete the product, some shortcomings, especially in hospitality services should be corrected. It is also necessary that the regional tourism marketing strategy will be founded on the natural beauty and nature of district and its market in the first place will be the region and secondly on a national scale. Therefore, through an international scale, it can provide the possibility of attracting tourists.
- 5) Popzan (2010) provided a research entitled “Limitations and problems of rural tourism using basic theory in the area of Harir Village in Kermanshah Province” and stated that the problems of Harir Village in field of rural tourism are as follows: lack of infrastructure and facilities, lack of understanding of the villagers and officials about rural tourism, pale of cultural attractions in rural areas, the lack of accurate and timely information network, lack of adequate government support, the lack of detailed information and statistics on climate change.
- 6) Khani (1388) provided a study entitled “investigation the effects of coastal tourism, based on the survey of rural households of Langrood city” and they reached to conclusion that the personal benefit of residents, especially the economic benefits of tourism is influencing their understanding; However, the effects of social, cultural and environmental tourism in rural communities is not a cause for satisfaction.
- 7) Mirzayi (2009) provided a study entitled “The impact of rural tourism development on employment in Uramanat of Kermanshah” and according to research, rural tourism in the region provides seasonal employment especially in the spring and has attracted other economic sectors’ workers, especially agriculture workers towards itself.
- 8) Taghavi (2006) in another study investigated the status of tourism in regional parts of Shapur of Dehdasht and concluded that despite the economic, social, cultural and physical environment in the study area, the role of tourism in the region has not been impressive and it can be one of the main strategies for the development and expansion of the industry in terms of cultural and social practices of province, and it can be effective. Among geographical items, sea and seashore is the most effective factors in tourism attraction.
- 9) Shokri (2005) in a study entitled “Role of tourism in the sustainable rural development: case study Oscoo Mahaleh Village, city of Amol” stated that Oscoo Mahaleh Village has a lot of tourism potentials and based on the context of study, it is one of unique villages of Amol based on natural aspect (forests, mountains, rivers, springs) and culture (holy shrines and the culture and customs) and it has high potential for tourism attraction. But unfortunately, among the entire rich tourism attractions of this village, only one shrine (Imamzadeh Abdollah) is taken into consideration and other places are remained inattention. Because the

demand and needs of tourists at different levels relative to the services offered in rural areas is very high and the imbalance does not lead to sustainable development of rural tourism. The most fundamental problem in accelerating the rural tourism activities are including geographic isolation of tourists and concentration of activities, tourism facilities and accessories in the west part of village that cannot meet the needs of huge number of tourists.

- 10) Bauld (2007) in his study examines the feasibility of ecotourism development near Macoma Cave and consolidation of rural culture in Makoxi of Chile and then concluded that ecotourism may be a strategy for maintaining natural ecosystems and consolidate culture of rural areas in order to provide foreign exchange and job creation for local residents and development of indigenous cultures.
- 11) Morad Nezhadi et al (2003) in their study entitled "tourism and rural development" investigated the effect of tourism development on rural development and introduced tourism as one of the important economic factors in Iran that is considered in recent years. The results of this research indicated that tourism may have different effects on development, including different jobs and a wide range of employment so that all of the unskilled workers or skilled experts may have a job in this field.
- 12) Sharifzade & Moradinezhad (2002) in their study entitled "sustainable development of rural tourism" mentioned that with the development of rural tourism, economic activity and creation of jobs in rural areas will be provided. This jobs are more of service sector and may be created directly or indirectly. Including transportation, hospitality, counseling and guidance, organization and marketing, handicrafts and rural items. These researchers also concluded that one of the most important functions of rural tourism is creating new jobs in rural area, therefore it will solve the unemployment issue and it will decrease the migration of the rural population to the metropolitan area and the amount of marginalization in the cities. In addition, slow transition of unemployed work forces (hidden or obvious) from agricultural sector that is the reason of decrease in production in this sector, will be done toward service sectors. This will create more new jobs.

3.METHOD OF RESEARCH

Based on research objectives, this research is applied and due to data collection method, it is descriptive. The population of this research is all officials, experts, members of local councils, authorities and responsible officials of Rural District of Chelav that are 100 persons. In order to determine the sample size, we used Krejcie and Morgan table and 80 samples were selected using random sampling. The study was a descriptive – analytical research and based on the nature and the subject and the purposes for which it is defined, it is an applied research. Since we used questionnaire for data collection, therefore it can be considered as a survey research. The research population was 100 person of experts and in charge persons of the area and using Morgan table 80 samples were randomly selected and were subject to direct questioning. The data collected is tested using SPSS statistical software package and One - Sample T Test analysis and hypotheses are tested. The research variables are effects of factors such as "behavior of native inhabitants of the villages, a suitable place and quiet environment to relax and rest and relaxation and leisure, providing local products such as dairy, rural, mountain vegetables, local fruits and so on, customs, and traditional local cultures and religious ceremonies, relatively good health facilities, proper social security for travelers accommodation in places of a visit, availability of high mountains and peaks for sports and recreation such as hiking, trekking, camping, skiing and so on that are considered as effective factors on tourism attraction in the area.

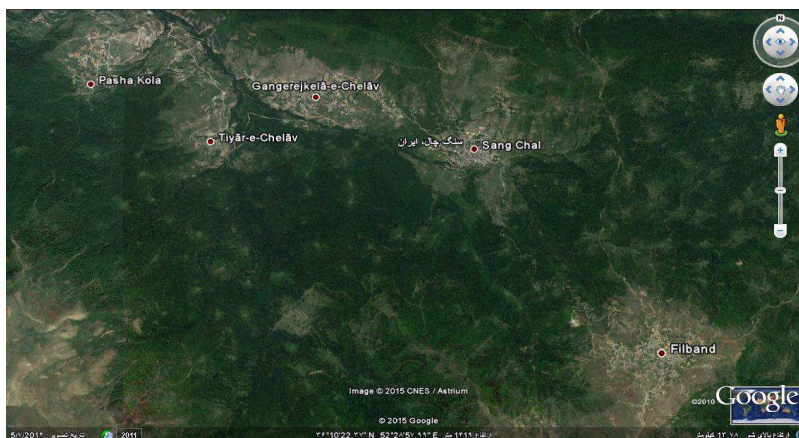




Figure 1&2- Chelav Village and its geographical location toward Amol City and Caspian Sea based on Google Map Satellite Pictures (2014)



Figure 3&4- access to the rural area of Sangchal based on Google Map Satellite Pictures (2014)

4. Scope of Research

Chelav District is a part of central area of Amol City that is located in an intermountain area of wetlands and forest. Based on locals, this district has 7 villages including Paryameh, Pashakola, Najarkola, Tiar, Gangraj Kola, Cham Bon and Zarkhuni. The villages of Filband, Sangchal, Gatkola, Dive, Kordneshin, Lehash and Alimestan are next to the abovementioned villages but they are a part of upper Chelav District.

The entire area of Chelav District reaches to Dashtsar from north, to Bahrsetagh from south, to Filband and West Bandpey of Babol from east and to Haraz River and Litkooch Village from west. The geographical location of mentioned 7 villages based on estimates on topography maps (1/50000 Shahzeid) is between 36.9 to 36.14 latitude of north and between 52.22 to 52.29 of north longitude and the area of this district is 95 km². Based on The catchment area, the total area of Chelav is 13303 hectares, of which about 85 hectares are rural area, 8264 hectares of forest, and 3898 hectares of pasture and 1056 hectares of farms. The height of this area, especially Chelav Village is between 800 to 3200 m from sea surface and its distance to Amol is 40 km.

5.Descriptive Research Findings

In this research, frequency of male samples and female samples is respectively 87.5% and 12.5%. About the age of respondents, this research showed that more than 57.5% of them are more than 50 years old and this shows that the population is relatively familiar with the subject of research.

2- The results indicated that more than half of participants of this research (52.5%) have bachelor’s degree or higher and 15% of them have associate’s degree, 25% high school diploma and only 7.5 percent are less educated.

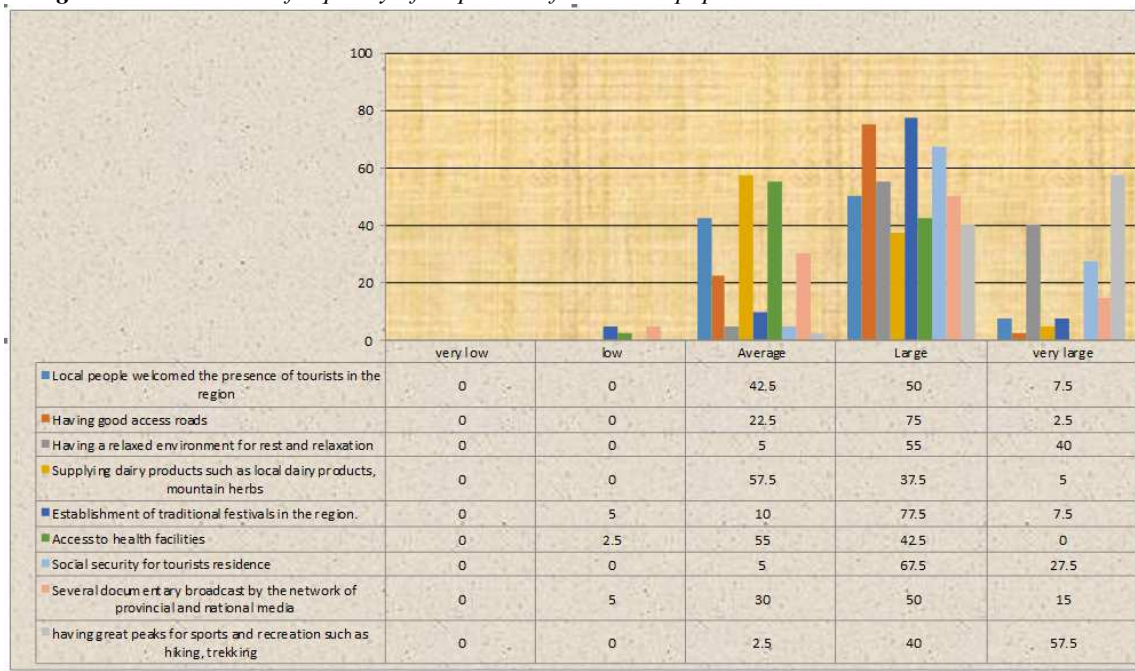
3- the results of investigating the jobs and responsibility of samples indicated that most of them (35%) are state employees, 27.5% are the members of councils, 17.5% are students, 12.5% are self-employed and only 2.5% of the participants were governors and housewives.

4- More than 2/3 (82.5%) of the respondents were familiar with the area for more than 20 years and only 17.5% of them were familiar with the area for less than 20 years.

5- The capabilities of Chelav district to become a tourism destination was very much based on 62.5% of the respondents and 37.5% of them evaluated it is high. The most important fact is that none of the participants in this study evaluated the capabilities of Chelav district to become a tourism destination as average.

6- Based on the data inserted to table and diagram no. 2, the capabilities of villages of Chelav Rural District based on the point of view of the participants in inquiry in all cases except in very limited cases are evaluated of moderate to high. In this regard, having special and local traditions and holding local festivals in this rural district was evaluated as highest potential by 75% of the participants and availability of high peaks for sports and recreation such as hiking, trekking and skiing had the lowest potential with 2.5%.

Diagram 1. Number and frequency of responses of statistical population to the main research variables.

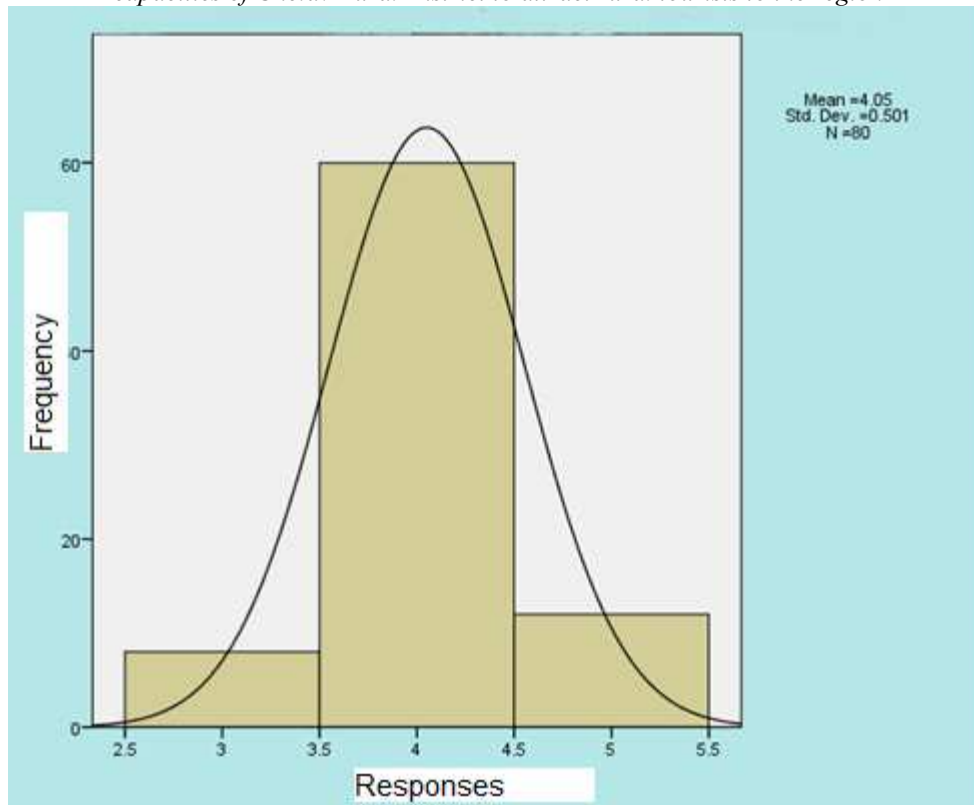


**Hypothesis Testing, Analysis of the Findings:
Checking the Normality of Variables:**

*Table 1 - Results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test to Check the Normality of Data Distribution
One sample Komogorov- Smirnov Test*

hypothesis	Dependent Variable	Independent Variables								
Indexes										
	Existence of high mountains and peaks for sports and recreation such as hiking, trekking	Broadcasting documentaries about the introduction of regional rural tourism attractions	Proper social security for accommodation of travelers	Proper facilities for health care in the area	Customs and local culture and traditional habits	Supplying dairy products such as local dairy products, mountain herbs	Having a quiet environment to relax and relaxation	Proper access road to the villages of area	Acceptance of tourists by local residences	Proper capabilities and capacities in Chelav Rural District for tourism attraction
N	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80	80
Normal Mean	4.62	3.65	3.80	4.35	3.48	3.88	3.40	4.22	3.75	4.55
Parameter's Standard Deviation	0.487	0.618	0.461	0.576	0.595	0.603	0.542	0.527	0.771	0.549
Most Extreme Absolute	0.404	0.289	0.443	0.328	0.363	0.432	0.345	0.390	0.277	0.369
difference										
Positive	0.275	0.278	0.307	0.328	0.363	0.343	0.345	0.390	0.223	0.267
Negative	-0.404	-0.289	-0.443	-0.270	-0.236	-0.432	-0.291	-0.285	-0.277	-0.369
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z	3.616	2.588	3.960	2.937	3.244	3.865	3.084	3.491	2.478	3.299
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

Diagram 2- Distribution of the frequency of statistical population responses to the capabilities and capacities and capacities of Chelav Rural District to attract rural tourists to the region



As it can be seen in the table 1, Z value of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for all variables of hypotheses are less than the z of table and the significant levels was lesser than the allowable error (0.05), therefore, difference distribution of the data for all of the hypotheses with the normally distributed data was not significant therefore the distribution of the data of hypotheses cannot be assumed a normal distribution of data. So to test the main hypothesis the non-parametric binomial test was used.

Research Hypothesis

- It seems that the capabilities and capacities of Chelav Rural District are suitable for tourism attractions. (H1)
- It seems that the capabilities and capacities of Chelav Rural District are not suitable for tourism attractions (H0)
-

Table 2 - Binomial Test Results to Compare the Frequency of Responses that are Below Average with the Above Average Responses on the capabilities and capacities of Chelav Rural District for tourism attractions"

Binomial Test

		Category	N	Observed Prop.	Test Prop.	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
It seems that the capabilities and capacities of Chelav Rural District are suitable for tourism attractions	Group 1	<= 4	30	.38	.50	.33 ^a
	Group 2	> 4	50	.62		
	Total		80	1.00		

a) Based on Z Approximation

Since the distribution of data was not normal in the hypothesis, therefore, to test the hypothesis the non-parametric binomial distribution was used. The provided results in table 2 shows that the frequency of “less than the average” responses was 30 items (38%); and the frequency of “more than average” responses were 50, or 62 percent. Given the significant level is less than 0.05, so the difference in frequency of two groups of response was significant at the 95% level. Thus, null hypothesis that it seems that the capabilities and capacities of Chelav Rural District are not suitable for tourism attractions is rejected and the opposite assumption (researcher’s hypothesis) will be accepted. The most important point in this research is to determine important and effective factors in the Chelav Rural District for investment and attraction of more tourists to this area. The results of Friedman analysis that its data is indicated in table 3 shows that among 9 considered factors, the most important capability based on idea of participants is “having suitable health care facilities in the area” with mean of 3.14 and the less important factor is “having high peaks and mountains for sports and recreational activities such as mountaineering, trekking and so on with a mean of 7.35.

Table 3- Friedman Rank Test Results for the Ability of Chelav to Become a Tourist Destination

Facilities	Mean	Average of Friedman Rank	K ²	Degrees of freedom	Significant Level
Acceptance of tourists by local residences	4.12	3	219.038	8	0.000
Proper access road to the villages of area	4.68	5			
Having a quiet environment to relax and relaxation	6.45	8			
Supplying dairy products such as local dairy products, mountain herbs	3.42	2			
Customs and local culture and traditional habits	5.09	6			
Proper facilities for health care in the area	3.14	1			
Proper social security for accommodation of travelers	6.24	7			
Broadcasting documentaries about the introduction of regional rural tourism attractions	4.51	4			
Existence of high mountains and peaks for sports and recreation such as hiking, trekking	7.35	9			

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Rural tourism is not a general solution for all the pains and problems of rural areas but it is one of the methods that can have very important economic effect and in a manner it can lead to slow down the drain of habitats, and assist for reducing rural migration. Tourism, as a strategy for rural development is a relatively new idea that if it has a proper planning; it can eliminate some of the problems of rural areas. Based on the definitions in terms of development in mind, the rural development can improve the economic and social life of the rural poor residences while it reserves the interests of future generations. But the important question is that what is the effect of this strong development on the nature and culture of rural area? Our experience suggests that the process of rural development that is provided in the definitions should always be associated with the preservation and promotion of rural culture. Notwithstanding, in the majority of rural development projects that are implemented without specific sensitivity of talents and special aspects of these areas will disturb the ecological balance and culture of rural areas. As always in the course of development, value and environmental aspects have been the victim of profit-oriented and progressive projects, therefore it is relevant in industrial development in rural areas we use resources that not only are not seeking the destruction of the environment and traditional area, but protect the gift of the rural community as the original investment. This is where the issue of rural development with a positive and constructive approach will lead to the development of rural tourism as positive and effective developments.

A large area of Mazandaran Province is the rural districts with high potential for tourism can reach to sustainable development based on rural tourism through performing projects and proper planning and overcome a large part of its privation. One of the most important advantages of tourism in this province is its country sides that in recent years, influenced by factors such as an increase in the average temperature, saturated plain areas, improving communication networks, highlands and pleasing climate; and untouched nature of the area received special attention of tourists.

Generally, it can be said that the most important conclusion of this research is that the lands of Chelav District of Amol are proper for tourism uses. Some researchers such as Shokri (2005) stated that the Iranian villages, especially in north of Iran have proper capacity for tourism attraction or Taghavi (2006) investigated the place of tourism industry in Belad Shapour Dasht District and came to conclusion that natural and cultural capabilities of tourism is high in the area but it does not benefited from income and development of tourism. The results of present study prove these points. This district has different tourism attractions such as religious shrines, unique natural landscapes, such as Chelav Valley, and Borjikala Waterfall and so on, together with its moderate climate in summer and its proximity to Amol and Haraz Road; therefore there is hope that through rural tourism, Chelav District can be promoted in economic, social and cultural aspects. Finally, it can be concluded that abundant natural attractions, rich culture and customs of the ancient villages in Iran and North Iran have a lot of charm for many travelers and citizens. And the same charm brings a lot of travelers to this destination from the farthest parts of Iran.

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