Analyzing the Role of Tourism in Sustainable Regional Development and Rating Factors Affecting it Using F-ANP: A Case Study of Maragheh County

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Extended Abstract

1- Introduction
The consequences of the industrial revolution, urbanism, development of routes and transportation networks, international relations, usage of new technologies, and the pursuant increased leisure time and security, all have led to the ever-growing expansion of tourism and have placed it at the center of humans’ attention. However, the expansion of tourism in developing countries necessitates meticulous, effective planning to lessen its negative effect as much as possible. To this end, a major approach in planning, in general, and in tourism planning, in particular, is that of sustainable development. Hence, in the present study, regardless of the prevalence of various tourism approaches such as economic, geographical, mass-oriented, etc., the approach of sustainable development in tourism is considered. The aim was to study and analyze the role of tourism in various aspects of Maragheh’s sustainable regional development and to rate the factors affecting it, using the opinion of experts, elites, and locals.

2- Theoretical Framework
Various points of view have considered diverse effects and consequences of tourism in different regions. Some have emphasized its economic effects, while others have highlighted its social effects. Expansion of tourism in a region can have numerous results and outcomes in different sectors, from various aspects. The analysis of the effects of tourism from various viewpoints, as a collective whole and in line with sustainable regional development, has been materialized in economic, socio-cultural, environmental, and political aspects producing a multifaceted approach.

3- Methodology
Using a descriptive-analytical approach and utilizing the new method of F-ANP, the present study investigates the role of tourism and rates its influential factors in sustainable regional development. The data was gathered through library method (using Persian, non-Persian books, and magazines), field study, and questionnaires.

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Questionnaires were distributed among four groups of locals, authorities, specialists, and experts (university professors). Using Cochran’s formula, a sample size of 384 people for a confidence level of 95 percent with an estimation error of 0.05 percent was chosen. In the end, in order to increase the accuracy of the study, 400 questionnaires were prepared. To assess the validity of the questionnaire, following the initial analyses and assessments and comparisons with the previous literature, the questionnaire was revised and its validity was confirmed by the specialists and experts. To assess the reliability, questionnaire’s Cronbach’s alpha was measured. To analyze the data and test the hypotheses, regression analysis and t-test in SPSS were used. Moreover, to rate the factors from the perspective of elites, specialists and locals F-ANP was utilized.

4- Findings and Discussion

The findings indicated that the development of tourism has been influential in the socio-cultural development of Maragheh County, and a linear relationship between the two variables of development of tourism and socio-cultural development was confirmed (the linear regression for tourism and social development showed that a one-unit increase in the independent variable changes the dependent variable by 0.56 units). From an economic perspective, tourism has had a positive effect on the county and the development of tourism has improved the economic situation of the region (a beta of 0.36 confirmed the significance of the relationship between the two variables). From an environmental perspective, contrary to expectation, not only hasn’t tourism resulted in destruction, but the findings indicated that it has increased sensitivity to the environment and that the development of tourism has led to the preservation and recovery of the resources (the coefficient of determination for the two variables is 43 percent, meaning that development of tourism predicts 43 percent of the variation in the dependent variable, i.e., environment). A higher-than-three mean in the t-test also confirms this relationship. Synthesis of the findings of factor analysis and F-ANP for rating the factors shows that improved quality of the environment, expansion of health facilities and welfare services, increased sensitivity to the environment, increased income, improved infrastructure, and increased value of the lands, respectively, are major influential factors prompted by the development of tourism in Maragheh County from the perspective of specialists, experts, and locals alike.

5- Conclusions and Suggestions

The findings of the study can help policy makers in the adoption of targeted policies, with the goal of improving regional development. The study investigated the role of tourism in the sustainable development of Maragheh and found that development of tourism has influenced all three aspects of sustainable development in the region. Furthermore, considering the results of the analyses, and in order to amplify the influence of tourism on the sustainable development of the region, we put forward several suggestions to address this issue of paramount importance from several aspects: first, creation of a website or a blog to introduce tourist attractions of the region; second, training a specific group of skilled and trained people to advertise the
county’s showplaces, particularly to visiting tourists. Accommodations (hotels and inns) and amenities are among the other problems which necessitate a good relationship between the private and public sectors, so that individual, institutional, and non-governmental cooperatives’ investments can be used to establish the required accommodations and amenities for tourists and attract more visitors.

**Key words:** Tourism, Sustainable development, Region, F-ANP, Maragheh county

**References (in Persian)**

**References (in English)**


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