The Key Effective Factors on Sustainable Development of Tourism in Rural Areas through a Scenario-based Approach (Case Study: Mazandaran Province)

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Extended Abstract
1. Introduction

Today, tourism is known as one of the largest, most diverse industries in the world; its rapid growth has brought about numerous social, economic, and environmental changes. As a result, it is now transformed into an important area of study among scholars. Tourism plays a significant role in encouraging investments in infrastructure, generating income for the government, and creating direct and indirect jobs worldwide. Given its multidimensional nature, not only this industry meets the needs of tourists, but also leads to a number of major changes in the host society along with providing considerable benefits in social, economic, and environmental dimensions in line with meeting the living requirements of urban and regional societies.

2. Theoretical Framework

Nowadays, the tourism phenomenon is considered one of the most dynamic human activities and its economic, social, cultural, and environmental impacts has offered a large number of transformations in the today's world. It plays a significant role in regional development as well; accordingly, the industry is now known as one of the important approaches to development across societies. Additionally, development is regarded as one of the advanced economic, social, cultural, and political principles in the world. Subsequently, given the significance of the subject, the purpose behind laying out various scenarios in the tourism industry is to obtain a correct understanding of effective strategies in the future in line with tourism growth rather than enhancing the ability to adequately predict the future. The concept of futurism is borne out of shortcomings in various bodies of knowledge such as prediction, policymaking, and strategic management to respond to particular challenges. Futurist activities often reveal the inadequacies of policymaking systems and current management in confronting the society's main challenges. These activities can demonstrate the inherent contradiction between the society's main long-term issues and policymakers' short-term timeframe.

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3. Method

The present study was conducted with applied purposes, based on new methods in future studies as well as analytical and exploratory research; to this aim, a mixture of quantitative and qualitative models were employed. The qualitative data were collected using open questionnaires, interviews, and document examinations; quantitative data were collected as numerical data, through weighting Delphi questionnaires. MICMAC and Morphol softwares were used to analyze the indices and variables. MICMAC is a software designed for carrying out heavy interaction matrix calculations and facilitating structural analyses. In this software, first the variables and components are identified in the area in question; then, they are placed in a matrix such as effect analysis followed by indicating the extent of relation between these variables and the related areas by experts. The variables of the rows are effective. Accordingly, the order of data variables in rows, the extent of effectiveness, and columns' variable datasets would demonstrate the extent of influence. The extent of number relations is evaluated between 0-3 where 0, 1, 2, and 3 mean no effect, weak effect, medium effect, and high effect, respectively. Therefore, given x number of known variables, an x*x matrix is obtained. In addition, Morphol software examines the systems being studied based upon the interaction analysis method. Moreover, this software also shows the effectiveness and influence matrices and the direct and indirect relation network between factors which is a mutual capability with the MICMAC software. Since the method used for drawing scenarios was based upon the comments of experts, total population of this study included the experts, administrators and specialists in the area of tourism is Mazandaran Province. To this aim, 40 available individuals including Mazandaran University professors, researchers, Tourism Research Center of Jahad-e-Daneshgahi with tourism-related activities, experts of Mazandaran Cultural Heritage. Handicrafts, and Tourism Organization (The administration, Deputy and Library of Mazandaran Museum) were taken into account.

4. Results and Discussion

According to the findings, 8 macro variables affecting the improvement of rural tourism in the province were identified and their extents of effectiveness and influence were determined using MICMAC. Then, using the comments of experts, a set of hypothecs were laid out for each variable followed by an evaluation of relations between variable hypotheses. Ultimately, the final scenarios were compiled via Morphol. These scenarios involved 4 levels of critical, intermediate, desirable, and satisfactory. Consequently, there were two scenarios, the first of which was identified as the most probable and most resistant scenario against possible changes (positive and negative) with an inertia of 50.12. Having three intermediate states, this scenario is indicative of the medium state of effective factors in improving rural tourism across the region. With an inertia value of 50, the second scenario is highly stable and sustainable similar to the first one; nevertheless, it only involved changes in hypotheses with respect to those related to the specialized management driver. In this scenario, the number of disaster scenarios was more than those of the previous scenario by a factor of 1, i.e. one less desirable scenario. As a result, this scenario involves more critical

circumstances compared to the first one. Thus, considering the analyses data of the study, explaining the scenarios can greatly contribute to rural tourism development in Mazandaran Province.

5. Conclusion

This study was an attempt to offer and edit a set of scenarios to improve the future of rural tourism in Mazandaran Province through a scenario-based approach, using administrative-institutional, economic, planning, natural, and social variables. Accordingly, given the comments of experts and assigning scores in MICMAC cross-sectional matrix, 8 macro effective variables in rural tourism development were identified and two scenarios were introduced. Results of data analysis showed that the first scenario was the best one which can be recommended to explain rural tourism development in Mazandaran Province. The following recommendations are also offered in line with said goal:

- Serious attention should be paid to the effective divers behind rural tourism development by Tourism administrators of Mazandaran province and increasing the investment credits from the private sector with respect to the profit generation of the tourism industry as a desirable scenario;
- Planning in line with increasing employment and income generation from regional tourism as a desirable scenario;
- Enhancing and improving sustainable development management systems in tourism and proving the managers and local population with various instructions at economic, social, and environmental levels;

Keywords: Sustainable Development, Tourism, Scenario-based, Mazandaran Province

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