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Expected Economic Impacts of Agro-Tourism Development in Rural Areas of Tehran Province (Case Study of Pakdasht County)

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Abstract

This study determined the situation of rural tourism and agro-tourism in Tehran Province as well as the expected economic impacts of agro-tourism development on it. In this research, we used documental research method and field research based on questionnaires and face-to-face interview. It was found out that despite different tourist attractions in rural areas of Tehran Province, tourist arrival to the rural areas was only due to natural attractions. Almost all counties have agricultural tourist attractions, but no comprehensive and coherent programs have been implemented for the development of agro-tourism in the region. It was revealed that one job can be created in exchange for the arrival of nearly 133 Agro-tourists, that tourists in their rural trips are more willing to buy agricultural products and homemade processed foods as compared to handicrafts and other goods, that in rural trips, agro-tourists will spend more money for their purchases than other rural tourists, and that agro-tourists earn much more benefit on their purchasing as compared to rural tourists. Based on the results, the most important expected economic impacts of agro-tourism development in Tehran Province include the increase in agro-tourist arrivals to the rural regions, the increase in job creation, the improvement of rural economy and much more agro-tourism revenue in rural areas as compared to other fields of rural tourism.

Keywords:

Agro-tourism, Economic impacts, Rural development, Rural economy, Rural tourism

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INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, all those involved in rural development accept the positive economic impacts of rural tourism on rural regions. Taking into account the different types of rural tourism and given the touristic potential of each area, we can improve or create the suitable type in each district.

Although Iran is ranked the tenth in the world concerning natural resources and tourism attractions, the statistics released over the past years by the World Tourism Organization show that there has been a very slow trend regarding the number of tourists traveling to Iran.

Tehran Province has an urban population of about 12,500,000 and 1051 villages. Most of the villages are located in mountainous areas with a very pleasant weather and many potential tourist attractions. Tehran Province is regarded as one of the provinces that enjoy a suitable position to plan and create rural tourism. However, it still lacks a compiled and sustainable plan.

Over recent years, only a few villages of Tehran Province were selected as pilot tourism villages based on their available potentialities rather than their actual and hidden potentialities in order to implement future tourism plans. However, we still lack a compiled and sustainable plan in this field; only some well-weathered rural regions adjacent to Tehran are spontaneously arranged to be as the tourist sites. Nonetheless, such actions have seriously damaged the local environment because of the lack of planning and insufficient monitoring.

Agro-tourism is one of the rural tourism types that can be created in the most of the rural areas. It will be attractive for urban families, young people, and children and even the elderly people who live in megacities like Tehran.

Agro-tourism includes travelling and resting in rural areas. This method of relaxation for visitors, tourists and, especially, citizens provide the opportunity to obtain information about agriculture management, become familiar with producing agricultural productions, eat and purchase fresh and healthy agricultural products and natural foods, and enjoy entertainment in unusual circumstances.

Some counties in Tehran Province have low tourist arrivals. They do not have strong natural, historical, cultural or other tourism attractions. Nonetheless, almost all counties of the province have good potential for agricultural attractions.

Agro-tourism can be developed in this province through recognizing the potentials of agriculture in each county and planning, agricultural tourism in accordance with the potentials of each area. The present study focused on the Pakdasht County as a good choice for agro-tourism and forecasted its economic impacts on the county based on research findings. Therefore, the present study addresses the development of agro tourism in Tehran province due to rural development.

Literature review

Pear Largos believes that tourism is referred to traveling in order to enjoy and entertain, and tourist is a person who travels in his/her delight and pleasure. Arthur Buman defines tourism as a collection of trips, which are arranged for relaxation, recreation, business or job activities (Rezvani, 1993).

Rural tourism is a complex, multifaceted activity. It is not just farm-based tourism. It includes farm-based holidays but also comprises special interest nature holidays and ecotourism, walking, climbing and riding holidays, adventure, sport and health tourism, hunting and angling, educational travel, arts and heritage tourism, and, in some areas, ethnic tourism (OECD,1994).

Rural tourism can cover agricultural tourism, green tourism and indigenous or homegrown tourism (Armaghan, 2008). Also, "Rural tourism is a mild form of sustainable tourism development and multi-activity in the rural region" to a broad one such as "a range of activities, services and amenities provided by farmers and rural people to attract tourists to their areas in order to generate extra income for their businesses" (Gannon,1994).

The role of tourism in developing rural regions can be summarized as follows:

Reviving and reorganizing local economic activities and improving life quality, providing

extra income along with agricultural, industrial, and service sectors, creating a possibility of making new social interactions, producing opportunities for re-evaluation of the heritage and its symbols, natural resources, and rural places identity, assisting social, environmental and economic sustainability, raising the economic value of nutritional products quality, unused buildings, and unique landscapes and cultures. Buttler and Clark believe that rural tourism is not necessarily a magic solution in rural regions, but at least it can cause the income generation and distribution in a weak economic situation in rural regions (Hall and Page, 2002).

Agro-tourism refers to resting in rural areas, living a rural lifestyle for some days, becoming familiar with the culture and traditions, and engaging in agricultural activities (United Nations, 2008).

The concept of agro-tourism is a direct expansion of ecotourism, which encourages visitors to experience agricultural life; agro-tourism is gathering strong support from small communities as rural people have realized the benefits of sustainable development brought about by similar forms of nature travel. Visitors have the opportunity to work in the fields with real farmers (Ecotour, 2007).

According to Schilling *et al.* (2007), agro-tourism allows farmers to generate additional income from farm assets (e.g. land and equipment) that may be underutilized or idle for long periods. It enables farmers to diversify product lines and markets and affords farmers the opportunity to receive feedback from consumers regarding preferences for farm products and services. In addition, it provides a venue for educating children (and adults) about the state's agrarian heritage, food production, and resource stewardship. It strengthens public support for farm retention and economic development policies.

Also based on Bernardo *et al.* (2004):

From the perspective of the agricultural industry, agro-tourism is perceived to be a means of

- Expanding farm operations,
- Improving farm revenue streams,
- Increasing the long-term sustainability of

farm businesses,

- Increasing awareness of local agricultural products, and

- Creating new on-farm revenue streams to family members who might otherwise have to work off the farm.

From a rural community and region perspective, agro-tourism is viewed as an opportunity for

- Generating additional direct revenue for local businesses,

- Stimulating the upgrade of local facilities and services, and

- Helping diversify and stabilize the local economy

Agro-tourism makes the possibility to diversify the economy and business of the rural population and increases their income by tourist attraction.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research was conducted based on documentary research method and field research based on questionnaire as well as a face-to-face interview. The statistical methods of the survey are based on two groups of the tourists. After collecting the data, the number of frequencies and statistical averaging were used. The population included 246 tourists who had a short trip to rural areas of Shemiran, Damavand and Firoozkooch counties and 45 tourists who had a short trip to rural areas of Pakdasht County. The status of Tehran Province in tourist attractions and rural tourist arrivals. We explored Tehran Province in terms of tourist attractions. Undoubtedly, three items consisting of natural, historical, cultural and agro-tourist attractions are the most important items for rural tourism development in the reign. Therefore, we studied the status of these three items in all counties. The map of Tehran province to differentiate the studied townships We also examined rural tourist arrivals to each county (Table 1).

Almost in all counties, one or two items were at good or very good levels. Agro-tourism attractions in Damavand, Pakdasht, Varamin and Shahriar were found to be at a very good level and Rey, Shemiran, Tehran, Pishva, Eslamshahr, Ghods,

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The map of Tehran Province to differentiate the studied townships

Table 1: The status of Tehran Province in terms of tourism attractions and rural tourist arrivals

	Historical and cultural attractions	Natural attractions	Agro-tourism attractions	Rural tourist arrivals
Damavand	++	+++	+++	+++
Shahriar	+++	++	+++	++
Varamin	+++	+	+++	+
Shemiran	++	+++	++	+++
Tehran	+++	+	++	+
Rey	+++	+	++	++
Pishva	+++	+	++	-
Ghods	+++	+	++	-
Firoozkooh	+	+++	+	+++
Malard	++	+	++	-
Pakdasht	-	+	+++	-
Baharestan	-	+	++	-
Robotkarim	-	+	++	-
Eslamshahr	-	+	++	-

Source: (Iranpedia, 2015), (Roostanet, 2015), (Iracities, 2015), and village councils

We evaluated the items as follow: Very good: +++ Good: ++ Satisfactory: + Weak: -

Baharestan, Robotkarim, and Malard were at a good level. Firoozkooh is in the satisfactory range.

Table 1, show that most counties were at a very good or good level of Agro-tourism attraction.

According to Table 1, the counties were ranked in terms of tourist attractions and tourist arrivals (Table 2).

Correlation between tourist arrivals, existing natural, cultural and historical, and agro-tourism attractions in selected counties

Three following figures are derived from Tables 1 and 2.

Correlation between natural attractions and tourist arrivals

Figure 1 shows a positive correlation between

tourist arrivals and existing natural attractions in rural areas. The number of tourist arrivals is higher in the counties with high existing range of natural attractions.

The horizontal axis in this figure include the prioritized counties in terms of natural tourist attractions. Number one has the most natural attractions and number 14 has the least. The vertical axis represents the tourist arrival. Based on Figure 1, tourist arrival in counties with more natural attractions is more than other counties.

Correlation between tourist arrivals and existing historical and cultural attractions

Based on Figure 2, there is no significant correlation between existing historical and cultural

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Table 2: Ranking of the counties of Tehran Province based on tourism attractions and tourist arrivals

County	Damavand	Shahriar	Varamin	Shemiran	Tehran	Rey	Pishva	Ghods	Firoozkooh	Malard	Pakdasht	Baharestan	Robatkarim	Eslamshahr
Total tourist attractions ranking	1	1	2	2	3	3	3	3	4	4	5	6	6	6
Rural	1	2	3	1	3	2	4	4	1	4	4	4	4	4
Agro- Tourism Attractions	Very good	Very good	Very good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Good	Satisfactory	Good	Very good	Good	Good	Good

attractions and tourist arrivals.

The horizontal axis in this figure include the prioritized counties in terms of historical and cultural tourist attractions. Number one, has the most historical and cultural attractions and number 14 has the least. The vertical axis represents the tourist arrival. Based on Figure 2, the counties with more historical and cultural attractions do not have more tourist arrival and there is not any correlation between these attractions and tourist arrival.

Correlation between tourist arrivals and existing agricultural attractions

Figure 3 reveals no significant correlation between existing agricultural attractions and tourist arrivals.

In this figure, the horizontal axis includes the prioritized counties in terms of existing agricultural tourist attractions. Number one has the most agricultural attractions and number 14 has the least. The vertical axis shows the tourist arrival. Based on Figure 3, the counties with more

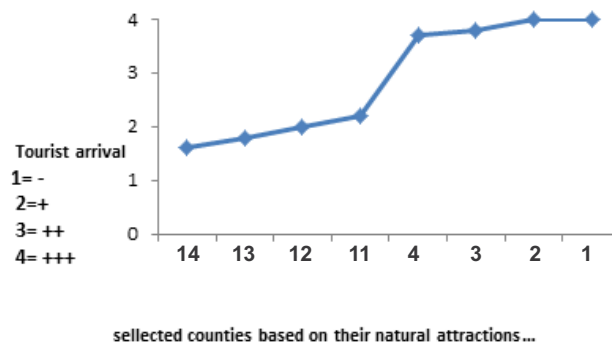


Figure 1: Correlation between tourist arrivals and existing natural attractions in the selected counties

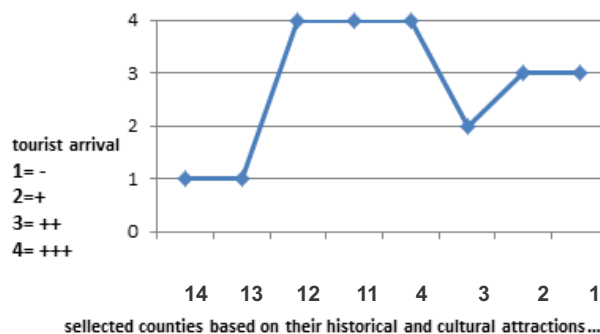


Figure 2: Correlation between tourist arrivals and existing historical and cultural attractions in the selected counties

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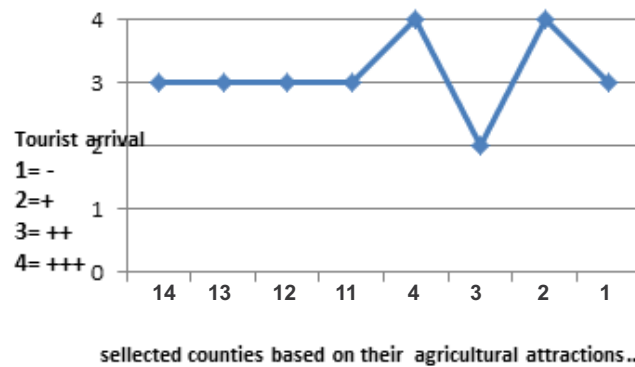


Figure 3: Correlation between tourist arrivals and existing agricultural attractions in the selected counties

agricultural attractions do not have more tourist arrival and there is not any correlation between these attractions and tourist arrival.

As is evident in Table 2, most counties, including Pakdasht, Varamin, Eslamshahr and Baharestan with good or very good range of agro-tourism attractions are in the low range of tourist arrivals. It shows that the situation of agro-tourism in Tehran Province is not satisfactory.

Some counties have low potential of natural, historical and cultural attractions, but high agricultural attractions that can be a suitable context for tourist arrival. For example, there are many greenhouses in Pakdasht, and Robotkarim has many grape gardens and nearly 50,000 tons of different kinds of grapes are annually produced in this county. There are large amounts of stone fruit gardens in Shahriar annually producing

about 55,000 tons of peaches and apricots, and Eslamshahr has a wide range of vegetable cultivation annually producing about 70,000 tons of vegetables. These are likely to be the best choices for Agro-tourism and rural tourism development.

Pakdasht County as a good choice for Agro-tourism development

According to the findings, rural tourism in Tehran Province is only based on natural attractions in rural areas. It was shown that all counties in Tehran Province have at least one or two of three tourist attraction types (natural, historical, cultural, and agricultural attractions).

Pakdasht County is one of Tehran Province counties with an area of 610 km² and the population of nearly 240,000. This county has no rich sources of natural, historical, and cultural attrac-

Table 3: Tourists' spending on a short trip to rural areas of Shemiran, Damavand and Firoozkooh counties

Total number of tourists = 246	Travel by personal car	Travel by public transport	Travel with tours	Average total spending of all categories
	90 people	32 people	124 people	
The average cost for transportation (1000 IRR) ¹	385	340	425	399
The average spending on food (1000 IRR)	310	320	295	304
The average cost for purchase (1000 IRR)	355	220	340	329
The average cost for each group (1000 IRR)	1050	880	1060	1032
Types of items purchased and their percentage	Homemade processed foods 54	Agricultural products 3	Small handicrafts 36	Other 7

¹ \$1=32000 IRR

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Table 4: Tourists' spending in a short trip to rural areas of Pakdasht County

Total number of tourists = 45	Travel by personal car	Travel by public transport	Travel with tours	Average total spending of all categories
	35 people	10 people	0	
The average cost for transportation (1000 IRR)	320	350	0	320
The average spending on food (1000 IRR)	290	320	0	290
The average cost for purchase (1000 IRR)	1360	830	0	1240
The average cost for each group (1000 IRR)	1970	1500	0	1850
Types of items purchased and their percentage	Flowers and agricultural products 74	Gardening accessories 4	Homemade processed foods 9	Other 3

tions, but all its villages have greenhouses for producing cut flowers, root flowers and agricultural products. In this county, almost 1 billion pieces of cut flowers and large amount of root flowers are annually produced. It has a very appropriate potential, for agro-tourism development with many arenas of attractions for urban people. Besides, near the spring many of urban people buy different kinds of flowers for cultivating in their home gardens. If this county had good facilities for rural tourism, it would attract a good number of tourists to do their shopping.

Expected economic impacts of increasing the tourist arrivals in the county

Currently, tourist arrivals in this county are at a very low level. If rural tourist arrivals are increased in this county, a higher degree of rural tourism and rural development will be attained. Undoubtedly, the first step to attain rural development is to access a rich economic source in the region. Rural tourism is one of the best ways of accessing this important asset.

How much does spend a tourist during a short trip to rural areas in Tehran province?

To this end, 246 tourists were surveyed in touristy areas in Tehran Province and then, 45 tourists in Pakdasht were surveyed. At first, a field study was carried out among tourists using questionnaires in the top three tourist accepting counties. The results are presented in Table 3.

Based on previous findings, these three counties have the highest tourist arrivals because of their natural attractions. According to the Table 3, the average total spending of all categories is 1,032,000 IRR. If the 50% of transportation cost is subtracted (because it is spent in departure city), 832.5 thousand IRR will be left approximately corresponding to \$25.

The items, mostly purchased by tourists are household products and small handicrafts.

Then, we did a similar study in Pakdasht County but due to the low number of tourists, 45 tourists were interviewed and asked to fill the questionnaire in three trips to the county whose results are shown in Table 4.

According to the findings, Pakdasht is one of the lowest tourist accepting counties in Tehran Province. Based on Table 4, it is destination for no tours implying that tourist tours are inactive or much less active in this county. The items, mostly purchased are cut flowers, root-flowers, greenhouse agricultural products and gardening accessories. In addition, tourists' spending on shopping in Pakdasht is higher than other tourists. It can be concluded that tourists welcome agricultural products. The average total spending of all categories is 1850 thousand IRR. If the 50% of transportation cost is subtracted (because it is spent in departure city), 1690 thousand IRR will be left. It is approximately equal to 50\$. It is nearly twice as great as tourist spending in other areas.

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Table 5: Rural and Agro-tourists' profit in a short trip

Types of items purchased	Cut flowers & root flowers	Agricultural products (fruit & vegetables)	Gardening accessories	Home-made processed foods	Small handi-crafts	Other
The amount and percentage of purchases by tourists in Pakdasht	64% 794 (1000 IRR)	10% 124 (1000 IRR)	4% 49.6 (1000 IRR)	19% 235.6 (1000 IRR)	-	3% 37.2 (1000 IRR)
The amount and percentage of purchases by tourists in other counties	-	3% 9.9 (1000 IRR)	-	54% 177.7 (1000 IRR)	36% 118.4 (1000 IRR)	7% 23 (1000 IRR)
The approximate percentage of the price difference in city and rural area	64% 508 (1000 IRR)	35%	34%	23%	22%	-
Profit – per – tourist in Pakdasht	-	43.4 (1000 IRR)	16.9 (1000 IRR)	54.2 (1000 IRR)	-	0
Profit – per – tourist in other counties	-	3.5 (1000 IRR)	0 (1000 IRR)	40.9 (1000 IRR)	26 (1000 IRR)	0
Average profit – per - tourist in Pakdasht				622.5 (1000 IRR) (approximately \$19)		
Average profit – per - tourist in other counties				70.4 (1000 IRR) (approximately \$2)		

If we increase the number of tourist arrivals to this county up to 1,000,000 per year it will be $1000000 \times 50 = 50,000,000$ or 50m US\$ which is a significant income.

Increasing the income in a region can result in job creation. The cost of creating a service and an agriculture job in Iran is nearly \$6667 (Mehrnnews, 2012). Consequently, if this county gains 50m US\$ per year, it can create about 7500 jobs in a year. This is a significant amount of job creation in a county with a population of about 240,000.

Earned income of rural and Agro tourists

If a tourist trip is along with economic benefits beside fun, it will be much more favorable for tourists. Usually, the prices of goods at the farm or rural areas have significant differences in urban prices. So, we tried to compute the average benefit obtained by each rural and agro-tourist in his/her trip. Therefore, we collected the prices of goods purchased by tourists in rural areas and in the cities and then computed the results as presented in Table 5.

Accordingly, average income for Agro-tourists is much more than rural tourists' income. In fact, the cost of Agro-touristic trip is $1850 - 622.5 =$

1227.5 (1000 IRR) and the cost of the rural touristic trip is $1032 - 70.4 = 961.6$ (1000 IRR).

CONCLUSIONS

Rural tourism can be the best way for increasing the income and job creation in rural areas and one of the best ways to improve rural economy.

Among the different factors for tourism attractions in Tehran Province, only there is a positive correlation between tourist arrival and existing natural attractions in rural areas and there are not any positive correlations between tourist arrivals and other types of tourism attractions.

Some counties in Tehran Province do not have rich sources of natural, historical and cultural or other types of tourism attractions, but in agriculture, they are ideal for tourism. In such areas, we suggest to focus on the development of agricultural tourism.

Agro- tourism can be a good way for increasing the rural tourist arrivals in rural areas. Only with a coherent and comprehensive plan, we can develop the agricultural tourism.

Increased income for the tourism in a region will increase the tourism-related jobs automatically.

In many countries, tourism acts as an engine

for development through foreign exchange earnings and the creation of direct and indirect employment. Spending by tourists can benefit a wide range of sectors such as agriculture, handicrafts, transport and other services (UNWTO, 2010). Based on the results about agro-tourism development in Pakdasht County, it can be concluded that:

- With the arrival of nearly 133 Agro-tourists, one job can be created in Tehran Province.
- Beside the impact of agro-tourism benefits on job creation in rural regions, it can directly cause the agricultural improvement in rural regions.
- The economic impacts of agro-tourism development on Tehran Province can indirectly affect the different sectors such as transportation, handicrafts, different kinds of services, domestic processing industry of agricultural products and rural economy improvement.
- Tourists are more willing to buy agricultural products and homemade processed foods in their rural trips as compared to handicrafts and other goods.
- On rural trips, Agro-tourists will spend more money for their purchase than other rural tourists will.
- Agro tourists compared to rural tourists earn much more income on their purchasing.

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