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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Residents Attitudes Towards Effective Factors In Development And Underdevelopment Of Tourism In Ajabshir County, Eastern Azarbaijan, Iran

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Abstract

This research focuses on resident's attitudes towards effective factors in development and underdevelopment of tourism and presentation of appropriate tourist attraction strategies in Ajabshir County. For achieving the research objectives, data were collected through a questionnaire distributed among residents and an Exploratory Factor Analysis using Principal Component Analysis and Linear Regression Model was carried out. The results reveal that the lack of necessary planning in the field of tourism, destruction of tourist attractions due to lack of conservation, lack of skilled human resources and Lack of information in familiarity with tourism areas, are as the most important tourism underdevelopment factors, and pleasant weather, beautiful and marvelous nature, travel motivation from the surrounding counties, are as the most important tourism development factors and prevention from destruction of tourist attractions and providing plannings in the field of tourism are as a starting point of tourism development and tourist attraction strategies (TAS).

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1. Introduction

Tourism has long been considered an effective vehicle of development (Sharpley, 2003: 246) and it has been identified as an effective way to revitalize the economy of a destination, whether rural or urban (Chen et al. 2010). But the success of any tourism development project is threatened to the extent that the development is planned and constructed without the knowledge and support of the local residents (Yoon et al, 2001: 364). So tourism can develop and grow when local residents have a positive attitude toward it and when they see their role in the process of the tourism development (Ambroz, 2008: 64). Long term planning in tourism is associated with the reactions of local residents to it. At the point when a tourism destination is born, the quality of the life of the local residents goes through radical changes, which are not necessarily negative. It is true that there can be more people around, traffic can become difficult, crime rates can increase, and the pollution of all environment resources is possible. Additionally, tourism brings changes that affect traditional way of life, family relations, the nature of the local structures functioning and many not predictable problems (Puczko and Ratz 2000: 458).

Iran is the eighteenth largest country in the world in terms of area. It is located in Southwestern Asia and covers the land area of more than 1,648,000 km². It has a population of over seventy million. Throughout history, Iran has been of geostrategic importance because of its central location in Eurasia. It occupies an important position in the world economy due to its large reserves of petroleum and natural gas. The country possesses one of the world's oldest continuous major civilizations, with historical and urban settlements date back to more than 5000 BCE (Mohammadi et al, 2010). Iran is one of the most attractive countries to visit. It has been included among 10 top countries regarding historical tourism attraction, and considering the variety of geographical diversity it has been

among 5 top countries and due to owning a variety of handicrafts it has been placed among 3 top countries in the world (Mohammadi et al, 2012).

Eastern Azarbaijan is one of the 31 Provinces of Iran with centrality of Tabriz (Ministry of Interior, 2014), with a population of over 3,724,000 people (Statistical Center of Iran, 2014), a vast metropolis of 200 tourist attractions, has a leading role in attracting tourists; old houses and museums, ancient bathrooms, historical schools, ancient gardens, and Tabriz Bazaar are among these attractions (Tourism organization of Eastern Azarbaijan, 2014).

Ajabshir County as a one of 21 Counties of Eastern Azarbaijan, with a population of 66,746 (Statistical Center of Iran, 2014), that located at 95 km in Southwest of Tabriz and Southeast of Urmia Lake (figure 1). According to the findings its said that Ajabshir and its countryside are remains of the historic town "Shiz" the biggest city of Azerbaijan in the Parthian (247 BC – 224 AD) and Samanid Empire period that the length of the city from west to east gate was 10 km. From natural and historical - cultural tourist attractions of Ajabshir we can point to Shirlu Mosque (Grand Mosque), Zahhak Castle, Ancient Caves, Gale Chai Valley, Rahmanloo Port and etc. (Ministry of Interior, Ajabshir, 2014). But what that make Ajabshir as a tourist attraction county is its military garrison.

Unfortunately Iran and our study area still has not reached its proper position in tourism development despite its rich historical heritage and natural attractions and since the success of tourism development in the first step based on residents attitudes towards it, so in this study we examine the residents attitudes towards effective factors in development and underdevelopment of tourism in Ajabshir county.

2. Literature Review

The principle that tourism planning and development should involve the broader community is now widely accepted and endorsed (Ap & Crompton: 1989, Ap: 1990, Brayley et al: 1990, Eraqi: 2007). Tourism relies heavily upon the goodwill of the local residents as their support is necessary for the development's successful operation, especially for the sustainability of a destination (Chen et al: 2010).

The study of resident attitudes and perceptions of the generalized impacts of tourism has gained increased importance in recent years (Allen et al: 1988, Allen et al: 1993, Soutar & McLeod: 1993, Johnson et al: 1994, McCool & Martin: 1994) and numerous studies of perceptions toward either tourism in general or to a specific tourist destination have been conducted. However, most of them have focused on resident's perceptions and attitudes (Murphy: 1985, Pizam & Milman: 1986, Liu & Var: 1986, Allen et al: 1988, Perdue et al: 1990, Williams & Lawson: 2001, Gursoy et al: 2002, Ko & Stewart: 2002, Andriotis & Vaughan: 2003, Page & Hall: 2003, Gursoy & Rutherford: 2004, Andereck et al: 2005).

Residents' attitudes toward tourism development have been extensively examined from social, economic, and environmental perspectives. Some researchers describe residents' attitudes toward tourism impacts (Perdue et al: 1990, McGehee & Andereck: 2004). Several studies have investigated the relationship between locations/activities of tourism development and residents' attitudes (Harrill: 2004, Tyrell & Spaulding: 1984) in other hand number of studies have indicated that the longer residents have lived in a community, the more negative they are towards tourism development (Allen et al: 1988; Liu & Var: 1986; Sheldon & Var: 1984).

Although those previous case studies have tested residents attitudes towards different aspect of tourism, none of them was conducted in community where tourism is not yet flourishing and there is almost no research that has included residents attitudes towards effective factors in development and underdevelopment of tourism.

Based on this theoretical review, several key research questions are addressed in this study:

1. What is the most important factors in tourism development of Ajabshir?
2. What is the most important factors in tourism underdevelopment of Ajabshir?
3. What can be considered as the starting point of tourism development and tourist attraction strategies (TAS) in Ajabshir?

3. Methodology

The empirical study was carried out by means of a self-instructed questionnaire, applied along February and March of 2014. These 250 questionnaires were randomly applied to public in Ajabshir County.

The perceived effective factors in development and underdevelopment of tourism were measured by 32 factor items embodying both the development and underdevelopment factors of tourism that 16 factor items are internal (Strengths and Weaknesses) and 16 factor items are external (Opportunities and Threats). A five-point Likert Scale was used as the response format for these 32 factor items with assigned values ranging from 1 "strongly disagree" to 5 "strongly agree".

There are two main stages of statistical data analysis in the report. The first stage entails the reduction of the data through the application of PCA to the set of assessed sections, that in order to achieve this, an Exploratory Factor Analysis using Principal Component Analysis, was carried out. Cronbachs Alpha reliability test was performed to further stabilize the questionnaire and Kaiser's (1974) overall measure of sampling adequacy indicating that the data are appropriate for the Principal Components Model, Values of 0.6 and above are required for a good factor analysis (Wang et al. 2006).

Regression Model was estimated in the second stage in order to assess the relationship between the dependent variables (development and underdevelopment tourism factors) and independent variables proposed by the factor analysis.

4. Results

Two hundred and ten usable questionnaires were returned for a response rate of 84 percent. There was a roughly even distribution of men and women with 51.9 percent for men and 48.1 percent for women. Educational levels were distributed, with 20.0 percent possessing an elementary, 29.0 percent possessing a high school diploma, 16.7 percent having an associate degree, 21.4 percent holding a college degree, and 12.9 percent earning a graduate degree.

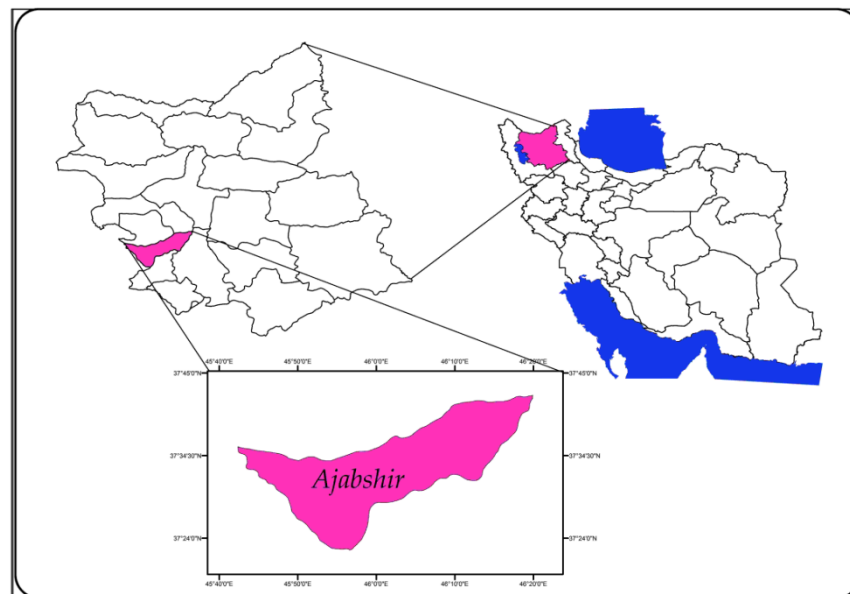


Figure 1. The map of studying area.

Table 1. Characteristics of respondents.

Variable		Frequency	percent
Gender	Male	109	51.9
	Female	101	48.1

Education	Elementary	42	20.0
	High school	61	29.0
	Associate degree	35	16.7
	College degree	45	21.4
	Graduate degree	27	12.9

N=210

The reduction of the 8 effective internal factors (Strengths) in tourism development into two factors, together accounting for 60.79 % of the total variance (KMO= 0.73) was obtained through PCA with Normalized Varimax Rotation (Table 2). Pleasant weather and beautiful and marvelous nature, such as Sari Su (twin yellow springs) (figure 2) are as the most important strengths in tourism development. This indicates that ecotourism is the dominant tourism in Ajabshir.

Table 2. Development Factors (Strengths).

First Factor	Factor Load	Mean
Sports and recreation attractions	0.712	3.59
Beautiful and marvelous nature	0.836	4.44
Pleasant weather	0.845	4.39
Geographical location	0.631	3.97
Cultural and historical monuments	0.643	3.71
Investment attraction	0.793	3.59
Infrastructure and transportation	0.763	3.56
Proximity to Urmia Lake	0.73	3.81

Reliability Cronbachs Alpha: 78%

Significance level: ($p < 0.01$) Eigenvalues: (1)

Figure 2. Beautiful and marvelous nature A. Pleasant weather B

It should be noted that since "Proximity to Urmia Lake" for the Ajabshir County until a few years ago was as a basis for attracting tourists due to its water treatment, enjoyment from nature and perspectives and etc., so this factor has been placed among the effective internal factors in tourism development. But unfortunately in recent years, climate change, traditional and low irrigation efficiency, inconsistency of cropping pattern with regional crisis, evacuation of underground water and loss of equilibrium between underground and surface waters, irresponsible expansion of constructions such as dams and Shahid Kalantari overpass bridge, excessive transfer of surface/underground water for industrial/agricultural uses, mismanagement of water resources during critical conditions and in general disrespect to the water share of Urmia Lake intensified the crisis and leads to drying Urmia Lake as the largest Iran's territorial inside lake and as the second largest saltwater lake in the world. In this circumstances, region climate will becomes as tropical weather with salty winds and regional ecosystem will be changed (figure 3), that this will be as a threat to tourism development in studying area.



Figure 3. Urmia Lake before and after draying A. Salty winds B

The reduction of the 8 effective external factors (Opportunities) in tourism development into one factors, accounting for 61.77% of the total variance (KMO= 0.87) was obtained through PCA with Normalized Varimax Rotation (Table 3).

Table 3. Development Factors (Opportunities).

Second Factor	Factor Load	Mean
Possibility of widening and expansion of communication networks	0.775	3.89
Using expertise in the tourism sector	0.847	4.05
Preparation and implementation of conservation programs in tourism regions	0.831	3.98
Attracting private sector investment in tourism	0.839	4.01
Employment and income generation	0.799	4.06
Ajabshir location on Tabriz-Maragheh railway	0.644	4.05
Tourism products diversifying	0.675	3.98
Travel motivation from the surrounding counties	0.853	4.08

Reliability Cronbachs Alpha: 91% Significance level: ($p < 0.01$)

Eigenvalues: (1)

The results show that travel motivation from the surrounding counties is the most important tourism development opportunity in Ajabshir County. Since cities like Bonab and Malekan, have less tourism attractions compared with Ajabshir, Ajabshir County is destination of different tourists especially ecotourism and geographical origin of tourists during the peak tourism times reaches to cities more far such as Tabriz.

In order to analysis that “The pleasant weather, beautiful nature and travel motivation from the surrounding counties are significantly associated to the tourism development” Multiple Linear Regression used in Enter Method. The correlation ($R=0.803$) suggests a high positive relationship between variables and the value of R^2 shows how much the independent variables explain the variance of the dependent variable (tourism development factors), that the independent variables explain 64% of the variance of tourism development factors in Ajabshir. Also std. error of the estimate is ability of regression model to prediction (5.74). According to table 4, there is a remarkable distance between regression and residual which indicates validity of the model explanation to variances of independent variables. The F value (124.713) indicates that using the model is significant ($Sig < 0.05$) and there is relationship between dependent and independents variables. Among the independents variables “Travel motivation from the surrounding counties” and “Beautiful and marvelous nature” respectively get the highest and lowest value of coefficients. Also the t values reflects the importance of these variables, as the value of the significance level less than (0.05) indicating the linear relationship.

Table 4. Regression analysis of the relationship between variables.

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Std. Error
	.803	.645	.640	5.74810

ANOVA	Regression	Residual	F	Sig.
		12361.744	6806.370	124.713
Coefficients	Beta		t	Sig.
Pleasant weather	.221		4.386	.000
Beautiful and marvelous nature	.106		2.092	.038
travel motivation from around countries	.768		18.360	.000

Significance at the $p < .05$ level

The reduction of the 8 effective internal factors (Weaknesses) in tourism underdevelopment into one factors, accounting for 64.88 % of the total variance (KMO= 0.84) was obtained through PCA with Normalized Varimax Rotation (Table 5).

Lack of information in familiarity with the tourism areas is the most important weakness that leads to tourism underdevelopment in Ajabshir County. Since advertising and information in tourism field is an important matter and it's as a basis for tourists attraction, so it's necessary that tourism authorities in Ajabshir County pay more attention to this issue.

Table 5. Underdevelopment Factors (Weaknesses)

Third Factor	Factor Load	Mean
Poor management and lack of stability in management	0.761	3.63
Inappropriate routes	0.637	3.47
Ignoring the regional potentials	0.864	3.96
Lack of information in familiarity with the tourism areas	0.886	3.75
Lack of properly introduction of Attraction	0.861	3.9
Lack of suitable accommodation for tourists	0.876	3.91
Lack of traffic signals to tourists guidance	0.814	3.8
Improper distribution of tourists in different seasons	0.712	3.63

Reliability Cronbachs Alpha: 92% Significance level: ($p < 0.01$)

Eigenvalues: (1)

The reduction of the 8 effective external factors (Threats) in tourism underdevelopment into three factors, together accounting for 72.48 % of the total variance (KMO= 0.69) was obtained through PCA with Normalized Varimax Rotation. According table 6 lack of necessary planning in the field of tourism, destruction of tourist attractions due to lack of conservation and lack of skilled human resources are the most important threats that lead to tourism underdevelopment in Ajabshir County.

Table 6. Underdevelopment Factors (Threats).

Fourth Factor	Factor Load	Mean
Destruction of tourist attractions due to lack of conservation	0.839	4.29
Not using from tourism opportunities	0.739	4.31
Pollution of water resources, soil and environment	0.772	3.82
Destruction of agricultural land	0.746	3.96
High unemployment rate in the region	0.726	4.09
Lack of skilled human resources	0.821	4.24
High migration rate in the region	0.656	4.1
Lack of necessary planning in the field of tourism	0.91	4.5

Reliability Cronbachs Alpha: 83% Significance level: ($p < 0.01$)

Eigenvalues: (1)

In order to analysis that “The lack of information in familiarity with the tourism areas, lack of necessary planning in the field of tourism, destruction of tourist attractions due to lack of conservation and lack of skilled human resources are significantly associated to the tourism underdevelopment” Multiple Linear Regression used in Enter Method (table 7).

Table 7. Regression analysis of the relationship between variables.

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error
		.899	.809	.805
ANOVA	Regression	Residual	F	Sig.
	20933.666	4942.529	217.065	.000
Coefficients	Beta		t	Sig.
Lack of information in familiarity with the tourism areas	.286		7.228	.000
lack of necessary planning in the field of tourism	.111		2.996	.003
destruction of tourist attractions due to lack of conservation	.101		3.031	.003
lack of skilled human resources	.603		15.935	.000

Significance at the $p < .05$ level

The correlation ($R=0.899$) suggests a high positive relationship between variables and the value of R^2 shows how much the independent variables explain the variance of the dependent variable (tourism underdevelopment factors), that the independent variables explain 80% of the variance of tourism underdevelopment factors in Ajabshir. Also std. error of the estimate is ability of regression model to prediction (4.9). According to table 7, there is a remarkable distance between regression and residual which indicates validity of the model explanation to variances of independent variables. The F value (217.065) indicates that using the model is significant ($Sig < 0.05$) and there is relationship between dependent and independents variables. Among the independents variables “lack of skilled human resources” and “destruction of tourist attractions due to lack of conservation” respectively get the highest and lowest value of coefficients. Also the t values reflects the importance of these variables as the value of the significance level less than (0.05) indicating the linear relationship.

5. Conclusion

This paper examines the resident’s attitudes towards effective factors in development and underdevelopment of tourism and presentation of appropriate tourist attraction strategies in Ajabshir County. The research outcomes indicate that the lack of necessary planning in the field of tourism, destruction of tourist attractions due to lack of conservation, lack of skilled human resources and Lack of information in familiarity with tourism areas, are as the most important tourism underdevelopment factors, and pleasant weather, beautiful and marvelous nature, travel motivation from the surrounding counties, are as the most important tourism development factors.

Since among the four effective factors in development and underdevelopment of tourism, threats get the highest amount of variance 73.83 %, so paying attention to this factor should be in priority and with this approach prevention from destruction of tourist attractions and providing plannings in the field of tourism are as a starting point of tourism development and tourist attraction strategies (TAS) in Ajabshir.

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