



The Role of Protected Area Tourism in Sustainable Rural Development (A Qualitative Study: The Khartouran Region)

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Abstract:

Purpose- Protected Area Tourism, despite its economic potential, can pose threats to natural resources and disrupt the balance of rural regions if not properly managed. This study aims to propose strategies for achieving sustainable rural development through tourism while simultaneously conserving environmental values in the Khartouran protected area. The village of Qaleh Bala in Shahrud was selected as the case study.

Design/methodology/approach- This research employed a qualitative approach using thematic analysis based on nine semi-structured interviews with tourism stakeholders. Participants were selected through purposive sampling until theoretical saturation was reached. Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework, and the process was conducted using MAXQDA software.

Findings- The results reveal that the impacts of tourism on rural development fall into three dimensions: economic, sociocultural, and environmental. Economically, tourism has contributed to diversifying the local economy, creating jobs, and increasing income. However, it has also raised the cost of living, generated unstable employment, and intensified the village's economic dependency on nearby cities. In the sociocultural dimension, interactions between tourists and residents have revived handicrafts, strengthened local identity, and enhanced social interactions. Yet, they have also led to cultural clashes, lifestyle changes, and the weakening of traditional values. Environmentally, tourism has raised ecological awareness and reduced pressure on natural resources by decreasing reliance on agriculture and livestock. Nevertheless, the high volume of tourists has increased stress on water and soil resources, resulting in ecosystem degradation. For sustainable management of tourism in protected areas, effective strategies include developing comprehensive plans, educating local communities and tourists, enforcing strict environmental regulations, improving sustainable infrastructure, promoting ecotourism, diversifying rural livelihoods, and ensuring continuous monitoring of tourism activities.

Originality / Value- By adopting a qualitative approach and focusing on one of Iran's most ecologically sensitive regions, this study provides an in-depth, multidimensional analysis of tourism impacts in protected areas. Its innovation lies in simultaneously identifying both the positive and negative effects of tourism across economic, sociocultural, and environmental dimensions and in offering realistic, context-specific management strategies to foster sustainable rural development within the framework of environmental conservation.

Keywords- Sustainable tourism, Responsible tourism, Ecotourism, Tourism impacts, Local community participation, Khartouran National Park.

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How to cite this article:

Hosseini, S. A., Ghaderi, E. Nowrozzadeh, B., & Moussavi Neghabi, S. M. (2025). The role of protected area tourism in sustainable rural development (A qualitative study: The Khartouran Region). *Journal of Research & Rural Planning*, 14(2), 39-60.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.22067/jrrp.v14i2.2409-1110>

Date:

Received: 13-05-2025

Revised: 14-06-2025

Accepted: 28-08-2025

Available Online: 28-08-2025

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1. Introduction

In recent years, tourism in protected areas has emerged as a prominent branch of ecotourism, attracting increasing scholarly and policy attention (Pérez-Calderón et al., 2024).

Anchored in the dual objectives of conserving natural resources and enhancing the livelihoods of local communities, this form of tourism has become a strategic pillar in rural development and environmental conservation agendas worldwide (Sezerel & Karagoz, 2023). Protected areas—encompassing ecologically valuable ecosystems and pristine natural heritage—offer significant potential for visitor attraction. However, rural communities located in or adjacent to these areas frequently face persistent challenges, including unemployment, outmigration, economic instability, and resource depletion (Soltani Moqadas & Taleshi, 2020). In this context, well-managed tourism has the potential to function as an integrated strategy, simultaneously generating economic opportunities and fostering conservation outcomes (Mohammadimehr et al., 2022). Conversely, poorly planned or inadequately regulated tourism development can place excessive pressure on fragile ecosystems, leading to environmental degradation and socio-economic disruption (Rezaei, 2019).

Owing to its direct engagement with both natural environments and resident communities, tourism in protected areas can produce substantial economic benefits while also generating complex environmental and socio-cultural repercussions (Talebifard et al., 2021). Although prior studies have examined specific economic and environmental impacts of such tourism (Jehan et al., 2023; Majewski, 2024), they have often neglected the dynamic interrelationships among these impacts and their collective influence on the sustainability of host communities. Moreover, the interaction between tourists and host populations—central to the sustainable tourism paradigm—can produce both beneficial and adverse effects on rural development trajectories (Mtapuri et al., 2022). Despite its importance, the social and cultural dimensions of these interactions remain underexplored in the context of protected areas (Thapa et al., 2022). Given the multi-layered nature of these interactions, further empirical

investigation is required to understand their implications for long-term sustainability.

Addressing these gaps, the present study examines the impacts of tourism in protected areas on sustainable rural development through a holistic, multi-dimensional lens. The research focuses on the Khar Turan Protected Area, located in Semnan Province, Iran—one of the country's largest and most biodiverse conservation zones, renowned for its rich assemblage of plant and animal species. The village of Ghaleh Bala in Shahrud County, situated within this protected area, was selected as the case study site due to its direct exposure to tourism-related changes. The study's primary aim is to identify and critically analyze the economic, socio-cultural, and environmental consequences of protected area tourism for rural sustainability, and to propose context-specific strategies for its effective and sustainable management. Employing thematic analysis of in-depth interviews with tour guides, residents, and sector experts, this research seeks to provide a comprehensive, evidence-based understanding of tourism's role in shaping the future of rural communities in ecologically sensitive landscapes.

2. Research Theoretical Literature

2.1. Tourism in Protected Areas

The global tourism industry, with its rapid and sustained growth, has become a cornerstone of economic development and employment generation in many countries (Hosseini et al., 2024; Movahedi & Amiri, 2023). Its diversification into multiple forms—cultural, nature-based, historical, sports, health, and film tourism—reflects its ability to respond to diverse visitor motivations and destination attributes (Afshardoost & Eshaghi, 2020; Moussavi Neghabi et al., 2021). Among these, ecotourism has gained particular prominence as a form of tourism that emphasizes environmental protection and sustainable development. Ecotourism aims to conserve natural resources while simultaneously raising awareness among tourists and local communities about the ecological and cultural value of ecosystems (Xu et al., 2023).

A significant subset of ecotourism is protected area tourism, defined by visitors' interest in experiencing and observing distinctive species and ecosystems within their natural habitats (Zhang et al., 2022). The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) defines protected

areas as “terrestrial and/or marine zones designated for the protection and maintenance of biodiversity and natural resources, managed through legal or other effective means.” These areas are recognized as possessing high conservation value and are intended to safeguard and restore native vegetation and wildlife habitats (Satumanatpan et al., 2014). However, their ecological sensitivity and biological uniqueness necessitate careful and adaptive management to prevent habitat degradation and biodiversity loss (Sobhani et al., 2022).

Tourism is now one of the most common uses of protected areas, offering opportunities to connect visitors with conservation goals and to promote sustainable development. It is widely acknowledged as a mechanism for enhancing public awareness of natural heritage and mobilizing support for conservation efforts (Gross et al., 2023). Yet, if left unmanaged, rapid growth in protected area visitation can exert unsustainable pressure on natural resources, contribute to habitat destruction, and undermine the ecological integrity of these fragile landscapes (Piñeiro-Chousa et al., 2021). These risks highlight the importance of sustainable management frameworks that balance visitor use with the long-term conservation of biodiversity.

2.2. Rural Development and the Role of Tourism

Rural development is inherently multidimensional, encompassing improvements across economic, social, and environmental dimensions to enhance residents' quality of life (Abrishami et al., 2020). In many resource-rich countries, tourism has been positioned as a central driver of rural development. Through job creation, income diversification, and the stimulation of local enterprises, tourism can play a pivotal role in revitalizing rural economies (Madani, 2022). However, the sustainability of these outcomes remains a central challenge. As defined in the Brundtland framework, sustainability refers to meeting present needs without compromising the capacity of future generations to meet their own (Ruggerio, 2021). In tourism, this translates into the delicate balancing of economic, socio-cultural, and environmental benefits. Consequently, rural tourism development strategies must ensure that economic returns not only benefit local communities but also reinforce the preservation of indigenous culture and the

protection of natural capital (Zargham & Asadzarch, 2024).

A growing body of empirical research has explored the implications of tourism for sustainable rural development, identifying both positive and negative outcomes (Hu et al., 2025). In the Iranian context, studies highlight that the primary positive effects include, economically, the creation of employment opportunities and enhanced income levels, and socially, the strengthening of community participation, safeguarding intangible cultural heritage, fostering place attachment, maintaining traditions, and improving education and awareness (Dehghani et al., 2024; Eskandari Shahraki et al., 2023). Parallel findings from international studies suggest that rural tourism is a vital strategy for economic regeneration, the creation of recreational spaces, the preservation of indigenous cultures, and environmental protection (Tang & Xu, 2023).

Despite these benefits, the negative externalities of rural tourism are equally well-documented. These include environmental degradation, increased waste generation, and overcrowding, all of which—if inadequately managed—can lead to resource depletion, ecological stress, and a deterioration in local residents' quality of life (Khademhosseini et al., 2024; Sorrell & Plante, 2021). This duality underscores the need for context-sensitive tourism planning that maximizes positive outcomes while mitigating risks, ensuring that rural tourism functions as a genuine pathway toward sustainable development.

2.3. Research Background

Protected area tourism, as one of the prominent forms of nature-based tourism, has consistently faced the dual challenge of fostering local economic development while conserving natural resources. Numerous studies have examined this interplay. For instance, Parvaresh and Beyrami Bastam (2020), using a multi-criteria decision-making approach in the Geno region, emphasized the necessity of zoning, community participation, and continuous monitoring to achieve sustainable tourism. Similarly, Sobhani et al. (2019) identified carrying capacity as a vital tool for managing visitor numbers and preventing resource degradation in the Alvand protected hunting zone. Other research, such as Sobhani et al. (2024) and Mododi Arkhudi et al. (2021), explored the negative impacts of nature-based tourism in

protected areas, including land-use change, vegetation degradation, and increased poaching, while also proposing management strategies to mitigate these effects. In a case study of the Touran Protected Area, [Behravesht et al. \(2020\)](#) highlighted the pivotal role of biodiversity in ecotourism development, while pointing to tourists' low levels of awareness and the pressing need for planning and education. Within the Khartouran region itself, studies have shown that tourists' environmental attitudes and knowledge significantly shape their conservation behaviors. Nonetheless, limited local awareness and weak management infrastructure remain key challenges for the sustainable development of tourism in this region ([Najjarzadeh et al., 2018](#)).

At the international level, [Bhammar et al. \(2021\)](#) proposed a comprehensive framework for the green recovery of protected area tourism in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, underscoring the link between biodiversity conservation and local economic benefits. [Stojanović et al. \(2024\)](#), employing the Prism of Sustainability (PoS) model in Serbia, examined how natural and socio-cultural factors influence visitor and resident satisfaction, emphasizing the importance of cultural motivations alongside natural attractions.

In another significant contribution, [Pegler et al. \(2025\)](#) systematically reviewed the literature on Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) as a tool for predicting and managing tourism impacts in protected areas, positioning it as a critical complement to existing planning models. Conversely, [Pérez-Calderón et al. \(2024\)](#) demonstrated that overly stringent regulations in Spanish national parks can restrict tourism development and undermine local quality of life, whereas geoparks—due to their greater flexibility—provide a more balanced interpretation of sustainable development.

From a tourism branding perspective, [Tajer and Demir \(2024\)](#), applying multi-criteria decision-making methods (AHP and BWM) in Golestan National Park, identified strategies for branding ecotourism in Iran's protected areas. Their findings indicated that protected natural features and ecological values are pivotal determinants of a sustainable tourism brand.

In terms of environmental consequences, [Ramaano \(2024\)](#) investigated the relationship between ecotourism activities and climate change in South

Africa, showing that if sustainability principles are neglected, such activities may exacerbate environmental and climatic deterioration. However, when properly managed, they can significantly contribute to sustainable development goals. In a longitudinal study in an Iranian village, [Rastegar et al. \(2024\)](#) found that while residents' general environmental attitudes remained largely unchanged over time, their perspectives on protected area management improved significantly. The study also identified a persistent gap between environmental attitudes and actual behaviors.

Stakeholder analysis and community engagement have also been central to several studies. For example, [Drage et al. \(2024\)](#), through a qualitative study in Denali National Park, Alaska, revealed that the rapid growth of air tourism created management challenges both within the park and in nearby gateway communities, thereby necessitating regional-level planning. Likewise, [Esparza-Huamanchumo et al. \(2024\)](#), in a study in Peru, highlighted weak entrepreneurship and the lack of business management tools among local stakeholders as barriers to sustainable ecotourism management. With regard to private management, [Denny et al. \(2024\)](#) demonstrated that delegating protected area management in Africa to private non-governmental organizations improved wildlife conservation and tourism growth, though it also raised concerns about community security in conflict-prone regions.

2.4. Synthesis of Previous Research and the Position of the Present Study

A review of the existing literature indicates that extensive research has been conducted on protected area tourism, examining aspects such as the economic and environmental impacts of tourism ([Majewski, 2024](#); [Ramaano, 2024](#)), the role of community and stakeholder participation in sustainable development ([Esparza-Huamanchumo et al., 2024](#); [Liburd et al., 2024](#)), institutional and management challenges ([Denny et al., 2024](#); [Drage et al., 2024](#)), and the development of decision-making models and frameworks for tourism planning ([Pegler et al., 2025](#); [Tajer & Demir, 2024](#)). Research in Iran ([Rastegar et al., 2024](#)) and in other regions with similar ecological and social features has also examined community attitudes toward conservation and tourism.

Despite these valuable contributions, several important research gaps remain:

- Many studies adopt macro-level, policy-oriented, or quantitative approaches, with fewer addressing the qualitative, experiential, and multi-stakeholder dimensions of tourism within specific geographical contexts.
- In Iran, protected area tourism research has primarily focused on modeling capacities or ecological functions, with limited attention to the actual interplay between tourism development, environmental conservation, and local livelihoods in specific protected areas.
- Notably, the Khartouran Protected Area—despite its exceptional biodiversity and rich cultural and natural assets—has been largely overlooked in the literature on sustainable tourism development. To date, no comprehensive study has centered on the lived experiences and perceptions of local actors in this region.

Overall, the reviewed literature underscores that sustainable tourism in protected areas requires an integrated, participatory, and community-centered approach. While theoretical and empirical progress has been made, clear gaps persist in qualitative analyses of stakeholder perceptions, participation, and lived experiences, particularly in the Iranian context.

Against this backdrop, the present study adopts a qualitative, stakeholder-centered approach, drawing on the lived experiences of local communities and the expertise of environmental and tourism specialists. By focusing on the unique ecological and socio-cultural characteristics of the Khartouran Protected Area, this research seeks to generate new insights into the opportunities, challenges, and requirements of sustainable tourism development in Iran's protected areas. Furthermore, it aims to propose policy and practical recommendations for a localized model of

sustainable tourism that simultaneously conserves natural resources and strengthens the social and economic capital of local communities.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Geographical Scope of the Research

One of the most valuable regions in Iran for ecotourism (nature-based tourism) is the Khartouran or Touran National Park. According to the classification of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), a national park falls under Category II of protected areas, defined as: “a large natural area designated to protect ecological processes at a large scale, along with characteristic species and ecosystems, while also providing opportunities for environmental education, scientific research, and environmentally compatible recreation” (Dudley, 2008). Within this category, public use—including responsible and controlled tourism—is permitted, provided that such activities do not compromise conservation objectives. As such, tourism activities in these areas are not contradictory to conservation but are considered integral to protective management programs, particularly when conducted with local community participation and within the framework of sustainable development strategies.

The Touran Protected Area, covering 1,464,992 hectares, is the largest protected area in Iran. It is located in the southern part of Meyami County, Semnan Province. The name *Touran* derives from a village situated at the center of the protected area and bears no relation to the term *Turan* used for the arid and semi-arid steppes of Central Asia east of the Caspian Sea (Karami & AMeri, 2003). The general location of Touran National Park is illustrated in Figure 1.

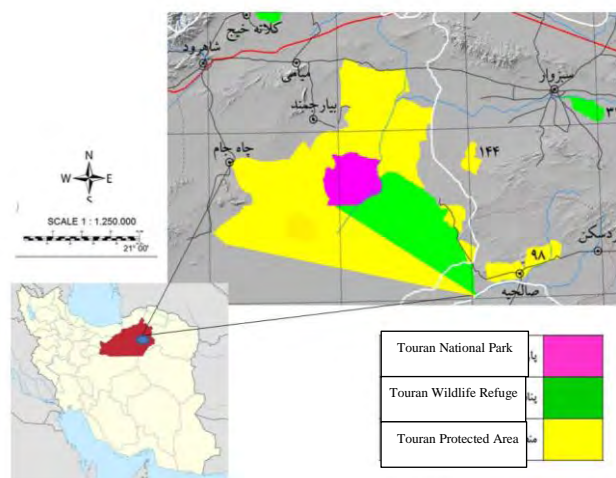


Figure 1. General map of the Touran Protected Area

Vegetation and Wildlife of the Khartouran Protected Area- The Khartouran Protected Area is recognized as one of the most important biosphere reserves in both Iran and the world. With an area exceeding 1,400,000 hectares, it holds particular significance due to its biodiversity, pristine desert and semi-desert ecosystems, and the presence of rare plant and animal species (Khosrogerdi et al., 2025).

Vegetation in the region consists of a diverse range of shrubs, bushes, and rangeland plants adapted to its arid and semi-arid climate. Dominant plant species include *Haloxylon*, *Calligonum*, *Tamarix*, *Salsola*, and various types of grasses. This vegetation plays a critical role in soil protection, wildlife nourishment, and reduction of wind erosion (Kermani et al., 2022).

In terms of wildlife, Khartouran serves as a vital habitat for rare and endangered species such as the Asiatic cheetah, Persian onager, goitered gazelle, leopard, caracal, and sand cat. Additionally, bird species such as the Iranian ground jay, houbara

bustard, and golden eagle are also observed in this region (Yousefi et al., 2023).

The unique natural features and biodiversity of Khartouran make it one of Iran's most important environmental hotspots, highlighting the necessity for careful management of human activities, including tourism. Therefore, due to the high conservation value of this protected area, responsible and participatory tourism planning aimed at protecting its vegetation and wildlife is imperative (Behravesht et al., 2020).

The most scenic, temperate, and accessible village in proximity to the park is Qaleh Bala, often referred to as the "gateway to Touran's wildlife." Located on the northeastern edge of Khartouran, the village is built on a mountainside in a style reminiscent of Masuleh. Administratively, Qaleh Bala belongs to the Biarjemand District of Shahrud County, situated 140 kilometers southeast of the county center. Its location relative to the town of Biarjemand is shown in Figure 2.

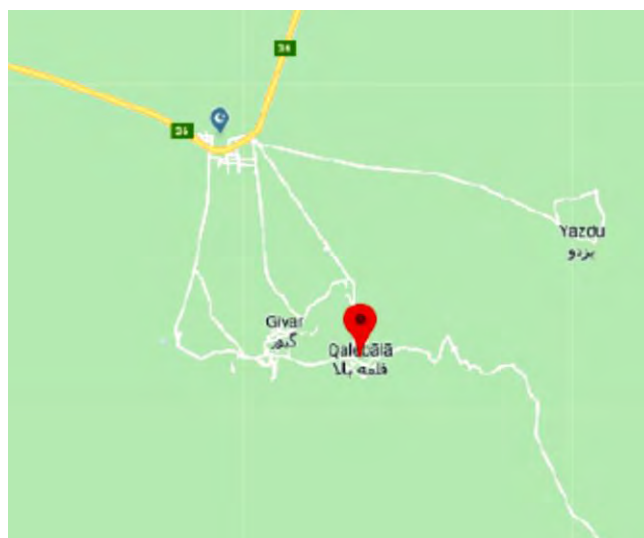


Figure 2. General map of Qaleh Bala village in southeastern Biarmend

3.2. Research Method

This research employed a qualitative approach based on thematic analysis, aiming to provide an in-depth understanding of stakeholders' experiences and perceptions of tourism impacts in protected areas. The study population included all stakeholders associated with tourism in Qaleh Bala village, located in the Khartouran Protected Area—specifically knowledgeable residents, tourists, local guides, experts from the Department of Environment, and tourism practitioners.

A purposive judgmental sampling technique was used, with sample size determined by the principle of theoretical saturation. Accordingly, interviews continued until no new categories or concepts emerged, and it was determined that additional interviews would not yield further insights (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Ultimately, nine semi-structured interviews were conducted, after which data repetition indicated that further interviews were unnecessary.

Data analysis followed the six-phase framework of Braun and Clarke (2006):

1. Familiarization with the data
2. Generating initial codes
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes (Figure 3).

The analyses were conducted using MAXQDA software, and a thematic network was constructed to illustrate the findings (Christou, 2022).

To ensure the validity and reliability of the qualitative data, several strategies were employed in addition to participant validation and peer debriefing. These included thick contextual description, maintaining an audit trail of the research process, and continuous researcher reflexivity. Moreover, the analysis included the consideration of negative cases to avoid one-sided interpretations and unwarranted generalizations (Nowell et al., 2017).

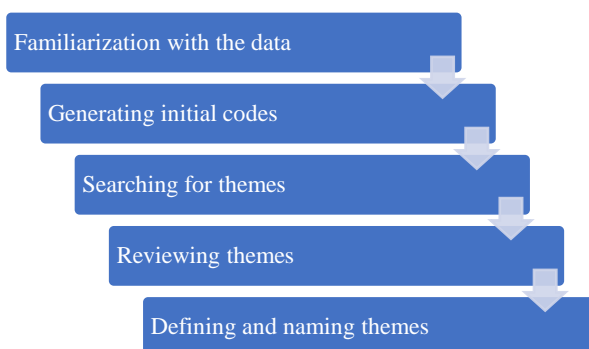


Figure 3. Thematic analysis procedure for interviews

4. Research Findings

This study was designed and implemented to answer the question: How can protected area tourism influence sustainable rural development in Qaleh Bala village, Shahrud?

The results of interview analysis revealed 87 initial codes. The word cloud derived from these codes,

presented in Figure 4, shows that the most frequent codes emerging from the data analysis were: diversification of the rural economy, job creation, increased household income, environmental awareness, and attention to local culture by the locals.



Figure 4. Word cloud of initial codes

The initial codes were further reviewed to identify broader themes. Through axial coding, conceptually related codes were grouped under overarching first-order themes. Some codes, however, remained as stand-alone codes, as they

could not be meaningfully aggregated into higher-order categories (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Table 1 presents the first-order themes resulting from the analysis of initial codes.

Table 1. First-order themes of the effects of protected area tourism on sustainable rural development in Qaleh Bala

First-order Themes	Initial Codes	Frequency
Inflation	Rising land and housing prices	2
	Increased consumer prices	1
	Higher local living costs	3
Wealth Creation	Sale of surplus rural products	1
	Growth in household income	7
Economic Diversification	Expansion of handicraft production (quantity)	1
	Growth in handicraft markets	1
	Improvement in handicraft quality	1
	Emergence of new economic groups	1
	Diversified rural economy	7
Job Creation	Seasonal and unstable jobs	3
	Stable employment opportunities	5
–	Economic-centered development	2
–	Economic dependence on urban centers	2
Cultural Revitalization	Valuing local traditions and culture	3
	Economic valorization of culture	1
	Cultural identity reinforcement	1
Conflict and Inequality	Reduced income disparities	1
	Perceived social inequality	1
Participation & Social Capital	Environmental responsibility	1
	Community security	2
	Improved local quality of life	2
	Local participation in decision-making	1
	Community engagement in security	1
Normative & Value Systems	Value conflicts between tourists and hosts	1

First-order Themes	Initial Codes	Frequency
Connectivity	Emergence of new social values	1
	Normative and cultural transformation	1
	Improved communication infrastructure	1
	Inter-village relations	1
	Urban-rural linkages	1
Demographic	Reduced rural-to-urban migration	2
	Balanced demographic structure	1
Environmental Culture	Environmental awareness	5
	Local environmental sensitivity	4
Pressure on Resources	Resource overexploitation	3
	Reduced agricultural and livestock pressure	1
	Biodiversity decline	2
	Environmental degradation	3
	Waste generation and pollution	5

Although one stage of analysis was conducted on the initial codes, it appeared that the first-order themes themselves could be abstracted to an even higher level. At this stage, the first-order themes were analyzed and ultimately reduced into three main themes:

1. Economic dimensions
2. Socio-cultural dimensions
3. Environmental dimensions

This abstraction is depicted in [Figure 5](#).

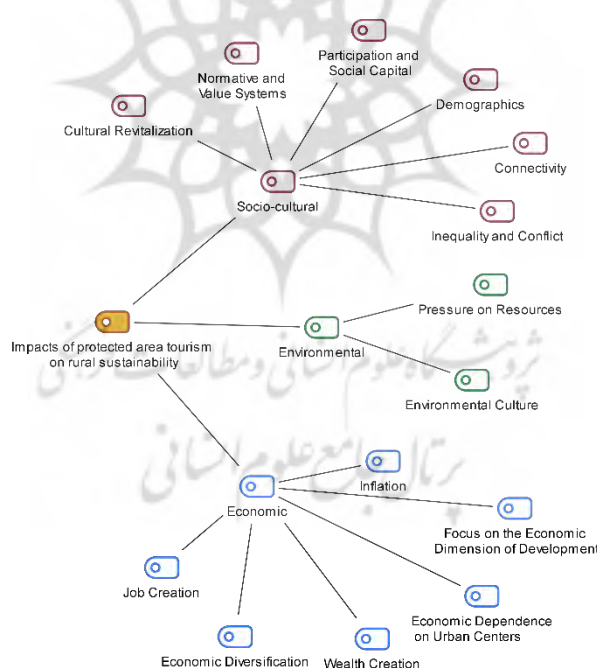


Figure 5. Second-level analysis of themes

It must be emphasized that the first-order and overarching themes were derived from the initial codes, meaning that interviews and textual sources

only revealed those codes, and the higher-order themes were generated through abstraction.

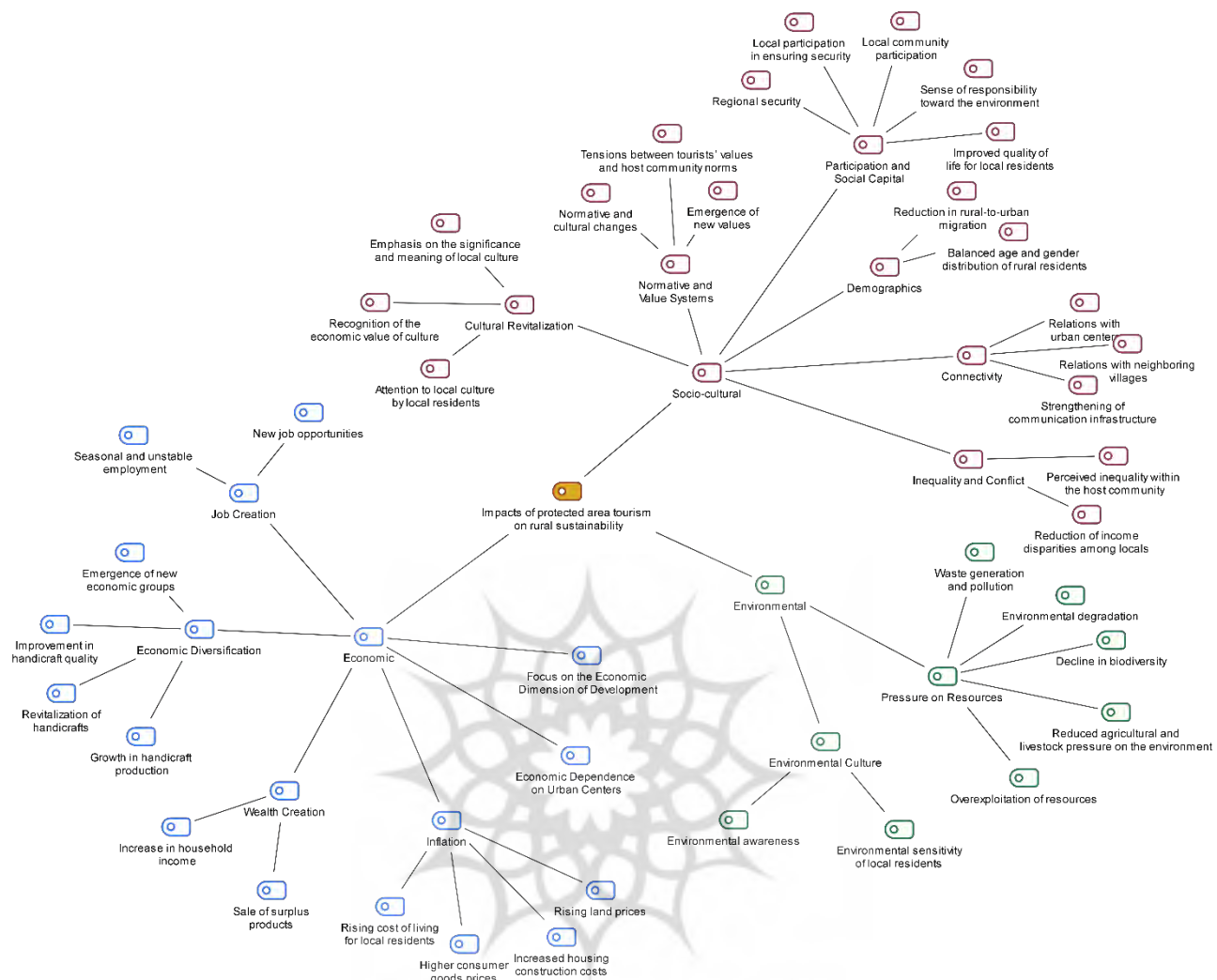


Figure 6. Thematic mapping of protected area tourism impacts on rural sustainability

4.1. Socio-Cultural Role

One of the three main themes concerning the effects of protected area tourism on sustainable rural development relates to socio-cultural impacts. Table 3 presents the conceptual statements of socio-cultural effects along with illustrative excerpts from analyzed interviews.

Table 3. Socio-cultural impacts of protected area tourism on rural sustainability

First-Order Themes / Initial Codes	Analyzed Interviews
Cultural Revitalization <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attention to local culture by local residents • Recognition of the economic value of culture • Emphasis on the significance and meaning of local culture 	<p>One notable outcome has been the growing awareness among local residents regarding their cultural and social heritage. This stems from the realization that such heritage can be both attractive to outsiders and a source of income. Some villagers previously assumed that valuable heritage was confined to cities and that rural areas lacked such assets; tourism has the potential to shift this perception. Rural tourism can strengthen local initiatives to more carefully preserve indigenous and regional values. When new jobs are created in rural areas and locals achieve better economic conditions, they increasingly value their cultural heritage and actively safeguard it. Many cultural elements that attract tourists are considered mundane by locals, who may overlook them. However, once tourists express interest, these same elements—whether part of traditional customs or daily life—gain renewed recognition and legitimacy among the community.</p>

First-Order Themes / Initial Codes	Analyzed Interviews
Inequality and Conflict <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction of income disparities among locals Perceived inequality within the host community 	<p>The wealth creation and rising incomes of local residents can reduce class divisions, particularly when those engaged in agriculture or livestock benefit indirectly through tourism. Nonetheless, lifestyle differences between tourists and villagers may also intensify perceptions of inequality. Witnessing higher standards of living among visitors can cause local residents to feel disadvantaged.</p>
Participation and Social Capital <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sense of responsibility toward the environment Regional security Improved quality of life for local residents Local community participation Local participation in ensuring security 	<p>Tourism has enhanced residents' collective sense of responsibility for their environment. In local communities, responsibility is often communal, and tourism reinforces this by demonstrating its economic and social importance. Improved roads and infrastructure for tourism access have also strengthened security. A road with frequent traffic provides greater safety than one rarely used, and residents report feeling more secure on such main routes. Infrastructure development has been accompanied by community engagement in maintenance and security. Since tourism generates income, locals are more willing to contribute to safeguarding both the environment and infrastructure. Protected area tourism thus enhances residents' overall well-being and quality of life, with strengthened economic conditions serving as a key driver.</p>
Normative and Value Systems <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tensions between tourists' values and host community norms Emergence of new values Normative and cultural changes 	<p>Responsible tourism is essential, as cultural and value differences between hosts and guests can at times be difficult to reconcile. Tourists must act thoughtfully to avoid creating tension or conflict. Large cultural gaps can weaken local traditions, particularly among younger generations, leading to the emergence of new norms and values. Such transformations, while noteworthy, may erode the authenticity of the host community and diminish its cultural appeal, which is itself a key component of the tourism brand. Observable changes in lifestyle, dress, and food habits are partly attributable to tourism. While broader societal transformations and virtual communications play a role, interactions with urban visitors also drive shifts in rural life. These exchanges introduce new cultural elements into local daily life, underscoring the need for responsible tourism practices to minimize disruptive cultural divides.</p>
Connectivity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthening of communication infrastructure Relations with neighboring villages Relations with urban centers 	<p>Tourism has spurred the development of rural infrastructure, particularly in transportation. Wildlife tourism has also improved social relations, both quantitatively and qualitatively, with surrounding villages and nearby cities. A sense of interdependence has emerged, as residents recognize the necessity of establishing constructive relationships with both urban visitors and neighboring communities to sustain tourism.</p>
Demographics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduction in rural-to-urban migration Balanced age and gender distribution of rural residents 	<p>Tourism-generated income reduces rural-to-urban migration, curbing urban sprawl and informal settlements. Villages once at risk of aging populations are now retaining their youth, as improved livelihoods encourage young people to remain. While out-migration persists to some degree, especially among young men, tourism provides a strong counterbalance, revitalizing local communities and maintaining demographic diversity.</p>

Based on thematic analysis, the socio-cultural impacts of protected area tourism in Qaleh Bala can be divided into positive and negative effects.

Key positive impacts include:

- Cultural revitalization: Tourism enhances local awareness of cultural values and heritage, leading to revitalization and greater willingness to preserve them. It also highlights the economic value of culture, encouraging

locals to see cultural assets as both meaningful and income-generating.

- Participation and social capital: Tourism fosters stronger social responsibility among locals, enhances infrastructure and security due to economic growth, and thereby improves quality of life and local well-being.
- Demographic change: Tourism reduces rural-to-urban migration by improving livelihoods

and generating employment opportunities, maintaining demographic balance.

- Communication: Tourism strengthens local infrastructure and social ties with neighboring villages and cities, improving overall connectivity and well-being.

Key negative impacts include:

- Inequality and conflict: Economic and lifestyle disparities between tourists and locals may lead to perceptions of inequality and social tension.
- Normative and value systems: Cultural differences between hosts and guests can weaken local cultural values and norms, contributing to long-term cultural erosion and reducing destination attractiveness.

In sum, protected area tourism has diverse socio-cultural effects: while it can foster cultural revival, social participation, and improved quality of life, it can also create inequalities and cultural disruptions. Effective management is required to mitigate negative effects and strengthen positive contributions.

4.2. Economic Role

The economic impacts of protected area tourism on sustainable rural development in the Khartouran region were highly anticipated. Indeed, one of the most significant effects of tourism—particularly in protected areas—occurs in the economic and livelihood domains. Table 4 provides the conceptual statements of economic effects with supporting excerpts from analyzed interviews.

Table 4. Economic impacts of protected area tourism on rural sustainability

First-Order Themes / Initial Codes	Analyzed Interviews
Inflation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rising land prices • Increased housing construction costs • Higher consumer goods prices • Rising cost of living for local residents 	With the expansion of tourism, demand for land has increased, driving up prices significantly. Some frequent visitors have purchased land and built villas, which has drastically raised land and housing prices in villages, making it difficult for local residents—especially younger generations—to afford property. Not only land prices, but also the cost of consumer goods has risen, contributing to an overall increase in the cost of living. While tourism has generated notable benefits, this issue remains: living expenses for all residents have increased. Although income levels have risen for some, the higher cost of living affects the entire community.
Wealth Creation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sale of surplus products • Increase in household income 	Tourism creates opportunities to market local products and handicrafts. Farmers and artisans can sell directly to consumers, which motivates them and generates additional income. One of the most significant economic benefits of tourism is providing financial support to rural areas by raising household income and creating new employment opportunities.
Economic Diversification <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Growth in handicraft production • Revitalization of handicrafts • Improvement in handicraft quality • Emergence of new economic groups 	The presence of tourists has revived certain handicrafts, such as weaving, which were at risk of disappearing. Women, in particular, play a major role in handicraft-based employment. Tourism has motivated residents to pursue constructive activities, many of which revolve around handicrafts and related industries. Increased handicraft sales have led producers to improve product quality, aligning with tourists' preferences. Tourism has gradually shifted underemployed rural labor from agriculture toward services and self-employment, creating opportunities especially for women. Some locals now guide tours, sell surplus agricultural and livestock products, and produce handicrafts, contributing to a more diverse local economy.
Job Creation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seasonal and unstable employment • New job opportunities 	Tourism generates employment opportunities in these areas; however, most of these jobs are seasonal and lack stability, as they depend on tourist inflows during certain times of the year. Despite these limitations, protected area tourism plays a significant role in boosting rural economic activities and creating new jobs for local residents, making it a valuable driver of rural development.
Focus on the Economic Dimension of Development	Development should be understood not merely as economic growth but as <i>sustainable development</i> . Tourism's impacts must be evaluated across economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions. Overemphasis on economic benefits risks undermining local cultural values or causing ecological harm. Tourism, like any other industry, carries specific consequences that must be addressed within a sustainability framework.

First-Order Themes / Initial Codes	Analyzed Interviews
Economic Dependence on Urban Centers	Rural economies are becoming increasingly dependent on urban markets, while many tourism-related jobs remain seasonal. This dependency is risky, as illustrated during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the absence of visitors severely harmed communities reliant on tourism. Tourism has also diversified local needs: new products and services introduced through tourism often cannot be met by local production alone, further increasing reliance on urban centers. Even in areas such as clothing, this dependency has become more evident.

Overall, the economic impacts of protected area tourism in Qaleh Bala can also be divided into positive and negative dimensions.

Positive impacts include:

- Wealth creation and household income growth: Tourism enables the direct sale of local products (handicrafts, agricultural goods), boosting local motivation and earnings.
- Economic diversification: Tourism revives traditional crafts such as weaving, supports women's economic participation, and fosters new business activities (e.g., tour guiding, local sales).
- Job creation: Tourism creates new employment opportunities that can substantially contribute to rural livelihoods.

Negative impacts include:

- Inflation: Increased demand for land, housing, and consumer goods raises local living costs, particularly harming those not directly benefiting from tourism.
- Urban dependency: Rural economies become more reliant on urban markets and external

services, making them vulnerable to crises (e.g., COVID-19).

- Seasonal and unstable employment: Many tourism-related jobs are temporary, operating only during peak visitor periods, reducing job security.

Thus, while tourism in protected areas can generate wealth, diversify the economy, and create jobs, overemphasis on economic growth alone risks producing inflation, dependency, and precarious livelihoods. Sustainable development requires integrating economic, social, cultural, and environmental considerations simultaneously.

4.3. Environmental Role

Undoubtedly, one of the key impacts of tourism on rural and sustainable development concerns the environment. While tourism has long been considered a "clean industry," recent decades have brought increased attention to both its positive and negative ecological consequences—especially in protected areas. Table 5 presents the conceptual statements of environmental effects alongside selected interview excerpts.

Table 5. Environmental impacts of protected area tourism on rural sustainability

First-Order Themes / Initial Codes	Analyzed Interviews
Environmental Culture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Environmental awareness • Environmental sensitivity of local residents 	Tourism development should not lead to the destruction of natural resources. In recent years, both tourists and local residents have shown greater environmental awareness, partly as a result of increased interactions within protected areas. The tourism industry can promote environmental values through cultural exchange and the dissemination of information. This process has fostered a stronger sense of environmental responsibility among locals, which is highly significant. Tourism in protected areas not only raises awareness but also cultivates sensitivity among local communities toward the importance of their ecosystems. This heightened sensitivity is one of the positive outcomes of tourism in these areas.
Pressure on Resources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overexploitation of resources • Reduced agricultural and livestock pressure on the environment • Decline in biodiversity 	Although tourism in the studied region is still emerging and has not yet reached levels that pose severe risks, there is potential for excessive use of natural resources, such as water depletion, land degradation, and overexploitation of other local resources. The shift from agriculture and livestock-based livelihoods to tourism-related employment has, to some extent, reduced pressure on rangelands and water resources traditionally overused by these sectors. However, tourism can also negatively impact biodiversity due to the direct presence of visitors in natural habitats. The construction of accommodation facilities and related infrastructure has contributed to environmental

First-Order Themes / Initial Codes	Analyzed Interviews
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Environmental degradation Waste generation and pollution 	degradation. In addition, large-scale vegetation removal and wildfires are often associated with tourist activities, creating serious challenges across the country. Even in Qaleh Bala—where most visitors are environmentally conscious—issues such as litter accumulation and improper waste disposal persist. Tourist flows inevitably generate various forms of pollution (air, water, soil), with waste volumes often exceeding the capacity of local ecosystems, eventually turning into a critical environmental concern.

The environmental effects of protected area tourism in Qaleh Bala can be summarized as both positive and negative.

Positive impacts include:

- **Environmental awareness:** Tourism increases ecological knowledge among locals and visitors through cultural interaction, enhancing conservation attitudes.
- **Environmental responsibility:** Greater engagement in tourism fosters stronger environmental stewardship among locals, encouraging sustainable practices.
- **Reduced agricultural pressure:** By shifting livelihoods from farming and herding to tourism, pressure on rangelands and agricultural resources is alleviated.

Negative impacts include:

- **Overuse of resources:** Increased water, land, and natural resource consumption may threaten ecological balance and reduce biodiversity.
- **Pollution and waste generation:** Tourism often leads to waste accumulation and multiple forms of pollution (air, water, noise, visual), exceeding the destination's capacity and creating environmental risks.

In conclusion, protected area tourism exerts complex environmental effects. While it can strengthen awareness, responsibility, and conservation, unmanaged growth risks overexploitation and environmental degradation. Achieving sustainable rural development thus requires careful management to balance positive and negative impacts through responsible planning.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that protected area tourism significantly influences sustainable rural development, with impacts observable across three major dimensions: economic, socio-cultural, and environmental.

While protected area tourism offers substantial opportunities for rural development, it simultaneously generates challenges that must be addressed through targeted and comprehensive planning.

5.1. Economic Dimension

Protected area tourism has contributed to increasing rural household income through the sale of local products, revitalization of handicrafts, and the creation of new employment opportunities. One of the most important positive outcomes is the diversification of the rural economy, which has reduced dependence on agriculture and livestock as the primary livelihoods, while simultaneously creating new opportunities in services and handicraft-based industries. Nevertheless, challenges such as land and commodity price inflation, rising living costs for local residents, and the prevalence of seasonal and unstable employment threaten the economic sustainability of these areas. Employment in the tourism sector is particularly vulnerable, as it is often seasonal, short-term, and heavily reliant on tourist flows, making it an insufficiently stable source of income. Furthermore, economic dependence on urban centers for emerging needs represents another critical challenge that undermines rural economic sustainability.

This study provides new insights into the economic effects of tourism in protected areas, expanding upon findings of prior research. Studies such as [Jamshidzahi Shahbakhsh and Moradi \(2021\)](#), [He et al. \(2021\)](#), [Dehghani et al. \(2024\)](#), [Liu et al. \(2023\)](#), and [Soleimani and Momeni \(2022\)](#) have largely emphasized positive economic impacts such as job creation, income generation, handicraft development, and infrastructure improvement. A novel finding of this study is the role of tourism in enhancing economic equity by reducing income disparities among local residents and fostering new economic groups and initiatives—an issue rarely addressed in earlier research. At the same time, the

present study identifies economic challenges that were underexplored in prior work, particularly employment instability and economic dependency on urban centers. In contrast to earlier studies, our results show that tourism-related employment is predominantly seasonal and cannot serve as a fully sustainable source of livelihood. Moreover, reliance on urban centers for emerging needs—driven by cultural change—can further destabilize rural economies. Compared to previous literature, this article places greater emphasis on economic instability stemming from seasonal tourism, rising living costs, and urban dependency. These findings highlight the necessity of precise planning and integrated management to ensure long-term economic sustainability in rural and protected areas.

5.2. Socio-Cultural Dimension

Protected area tourism also generates substantial socio-cultural impacts. On the positive side, interactions between tourists and local residents foster greater cultural awareness, strengthen local identity, and revitalize traditional handicrafts. These processes enhance community self-confidence, contribute to the continuity of traditions, and support the preservation of indigenous arts. Additional positive outcomes include increased responsibility and participation of local people in development initiatives and security provision, improved road safety, and reduced outmigration. However, tourism-induced cultural changes may also erode traditional values, alter lifestyles, and weaken social cohesion. Such changes can generate cultural tensions and amplify feelings of alienation among local communities.

Previous studies such as [Dehghani et al. \(2024\)](#), [Widawski et al. \(2023\)](#), [\(Shafieisabet & Haratifard, 2019\)](#), and [Singh et al. \(2023\)](#) have identified positive socio-cultural impacts including reduced migration, enhanced community participation, safeguarding intangible heritage, fostering place attachment, and preserving traditions. The present study confirms these outcomes while also introducing new findings: the economic value of local culture and customs, improved road and regional security particularly along tourist routes, and enhanced social interactions between rural communities and neighboring villages or towns. On the other hand, this study highlights negative

socio-cultural consequences that have received less attention in earlier research, such as cultural clashes between host communities and tourists, and the transformation of local cultural values and traditions through tourist interactions.

5.3. Environmental Dimension

In terms of the environment, protected area tourism has dual effects. On one hand, it contributes to environmental protection by raising awareness and fostering a sense of responsibility among both tourists and local residents. Moreover, by diversifying rural livelihoods, tourism can reduce reliance on agriculture and livestock, thereby lessening environmental pressure. On the other hand, high volumes of tourist presence exert significant stress on natural resources such as water, soil, and vegetation, while increasing waste generation, pollution, and habitat degradation. Tourism-related infrastructure development and the intensification of human presence in ecologically sensitive areas further threaten biodiversity and ecosystems.

Earlier studies have also underlined the destructive impacts of unregulated tourism, including waste accumulation, overexploitation of water and soil, ecosystem degradation, and biodiversity loss ([Nasiri Hendekkhaleh et al., 2022](#); [Ramaano, 2023](#); [Saputro et al., 2023](#)). However, the present study emphasizes not only these negative effects but also the positive contributions of tourism. Specifically, tourism can enhance environmental awareness and sensitivity among both locals and visitors, while creating new employment opportunities in tourism and handicraft sectors that alleviate pressure from agriculture and livestock on natural resources. Findings from Qaleh Bala village indicate that, due to the relatively high level of environmental awareness among both tourists and local communities, negative ecological effects have not yet reached a critical level. This contrasts with previous studies that reported more widespread negative environmental consequences, suggesting that such differences may stem from local contexts and varying levels of community and tourist awareness.

[Table 6](#) presents a synthesized summary of the positive and negative impacts of protected area tourism on sustainable rural development.

Table 6. Positive and Negative Impacts of Protected Area Tourism on Sustainable Rural Development

Positive Impacts of Protected Area Tourism on Sustainable Rural Development	Negative Impacts of Protected Area Tourism on Sustainable Rural Development
Economic Impacts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increases household income Creates employment opportunities Diversifies the rural economy Facilitates the sale of surplus rural products Enhances the quantitative growth of handicrafts Improves the quality of handicrafts Fosters new entrepreneurial groups (notably women) Reduces local income disparities 	Economic Impacts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Raises the price of consumer goods. Increases land and housing prices in rural areas. Raises the overall cost of living for local residents. Tourism-related jobs are largely seasonal and unstable. Strengthens economic dependency on urban centers. prioritizes economic gains at the expense of broader sustainability.
Socio-Cultural Impacts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enhances local residents' appreciation of their culture Highlights the symbolic and economic value of local culture Strengthens residents' sense of responsibility toward their living environment. Improves road and regional security. Enhances the quality of life of local residents. Encourages local participation in development programs. Increases local involvement in maintaining community security. Contributes to infrastructure and communication development. Expands social relations with neighboring villages. Strengthens connections with urban centers. Reduces rural-to-urban migration. Promotes demographic balance in terms of age and gender. 	Socio-Cultural Impacts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Differences in lifestyle between hosts and tourists intensify perceptions of social inequality. Generates cultural tensions between host communities and tourists. Introduces new cultural values into rural settings. alters traditional norms and lifestyles.
Environmental Impacts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increases environmental awareness among local residents. Enhances environmental sensitivity within the host community. Reduces pressure on natural resources by shifting livelihoods away from agriculture and livestock. 	Environmental Impacts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promotes overuse of natural resources Accelerates biodiversity loss Causes habitat degradation Generates waste and pollution.

5.4. Managerial and Practical Strategies

To ensure the sustainable management of tourism in protected areas and to achieve sustainable rural development, it is essential to adopt a set of managerial and practical strategies:

- **Formulating Sustainable Tourism Management Plans:** Policymakers should design strategies that simultaneously maximize the economic benefits of tourism while safeguarding environmental resources and cultural values. Such strategies must be comprehensive and inclusive, addressing all three dimensions of sustainable development—economic, socio-cultural, and environmental.
- **Capacity Building and Education:** Enhancing public awareness among both local communities and tourists regarding the importance of protecting natural and cultural resources is crucial. This can be achieved through targeted education and

awareness-raising programs. Training local residents in sustainable and environmentally friendly occupations can reduce resource degradation while strengthening the foundations of a resilient rural economy.

- **Enforcement of Strict Regulations for Resource Protection:** Implementing local regulations that limit the number of visitors, safeguard ecologically sensitive areas, and prevent uncontrolled construction is vital to reducing pressure on natural resources. Equally important are effective waste management regulations and measures aimed at reducing pollution in tourism destinations.
- **Development of Sustainable Infrastructure:** Tourism infrastructure must be designed and constructed in compliance with environmental standards and through the use of eco-friendly materials and technologies. Such infrastructure should be planned

to minimize negative impacts on ecosystems and natural resources.

- **Prioritizing Ecotourism and Responsible Tourism:** Promoting ecotourism as a sustainable tourism model offers a viable approach to reducing environmental degradation while preserving cultural values. Ecotourism, with its emphasis on education, conservation, and empowerment of local communities, should be prioritized as a key pathway for sustainable tourism development.
- **Diversification of Income Sources and Sustainable Employment:** To mitigate overdependence on tourism and seasonal employment, policies should encourage diversification of the rural economy through the promotion of local industries, sustainable agriculture, and alternative livelihood sources. Such measures can help ensure year-round employment and income stability.
- **Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation:** Sustainable development requires ongoing monitoring and

evaluation of tourism activities and their outcomes. This should include systematic assessment of economic, socio-cultural, and environmental impacts to allow for timely corrective measures in the event of emerging challenges.

By adopting these managerial strategies, tourism in protected areas can be developed in a way that not only safeguards natural and cultural resources but also contributes meaningfully to the long-term sustainability of rural communities.

Acknowledgments

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Authors contributions

The authors equally contributed to the preparation of this article.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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نقش گردشگری مناطق حفاظت شده در توسعه پایدار روستایی (مطالعه کیفی: منطقه خارتوران)

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چکیده مبسوط

۱. مقدمه

اقتصادی، ناپایداری شغلی و فشار بر منابع طبیعی خواهد شد. بررسی شکاف‌های موجود در ادبیات نشان می‌دهد که کمتر پژوهشی به تعامل همزمان و چندبعدی آثار اقتصادی، اجتماعی و زیست‌محیطی گردشگری مناطق حفاظت‌شده بر توسعه پایدار روستایی پرداخته است. این مقاله درصدد پرکردن این خلأ از طریق یک مطالعه موردی در منطقه خارتوران است.

۳. روش تحقیق

این پژوهش به روش کیفی و مبتنی بر تحلیل مضامین انجام شده است. جامعه آماری شامل ذی‌نفعان مرتبط با گردشگری در روستای قلعه بالا شامل ساکنان محلی، راهنمایان گردشگری، کارشناسان محیط‌زیست و فعالان حوزه گردشگری بود. نمونه‌گیری به شیوه هدفمند و قضاوتی صورت گرفت و تعداد ۹ مصاحبه نیمه‌ساختاریافته تا رسیدن به اشباع نظری انجام شد. داده‌ها با استفاده از الگوی شش‌مرحله‌ای براون و کلارک کدگذاری و تحلیل شدند. اعتبار نتایج از طریق بازبینی مشارکت‌کنندگان، توصیف غنی زمینه‌ای و بازاندیشی مستمر پژوهشگر تضمین شد. کدهای اولیه به مضامین سطح اول و در نهایت به سه مضمون اصلی اقتصادی، اجتماعی-فرهنگی و زیست‌محیطی انتزاع شدند.

۴. یافته‌های تحقیق

تأثیرات اجتماعی-فرهنگی- گردشگری در روستای قلعه بالا پیامدهای اجتماعی-فرهنگی متنوعی به همراه داشت. از جنبه مثبت، گردشگری موجب افزایش آگاهی مردم محلی نسبت به ارزش‌های فرهنگی، احیای صنایع‌دستی، تقویت هویت محلی و افزایش مشارکت

در دهه‌های اخیر، گردشگری در مناطق حفاظت‌شده به‌عنوان یکی از شاخه‌های کلیدی اکوتوریسم، اهمیت فزاینده‌ای یافته است. این نوع گردشگری علاوه بر ارتقای حفاظت از منابع طبیعی، می‌تواند به‌عنوان ابزاری برای بهبود معیشت جوامع محلی نیز عمل کند. با این حال، توسعه بی‌برنامه آن می‌تواند آثار منفی بر محیط‌زیست و فرهنگ محلی برجای گذارد. در ایران، منطقه حفاظت‌شده خارتوران به‌عنوان یکی از بزرگ‌ترین و ارزشمندترین ذخیره‌گاه‌های زیستی کشور، ظرفیت بالایی برای توسعه اکوتوریسم دارد. این مقاله با تمرکز بر روستای قلعه بالای شاهرود در محدوده خارتوران، به بررسی تأثیرات چندوجهی گردشگری بر توسعه پایدار روستایی می‌پردازد. هدف اصلی پژوهش، شناسایی ابعاد اقتصادی، اجتماعی-فرهنگی و زیست‌محیطی گردشگری و تحلیل پیامدهای آن در راستای دستیابی به توسعه پایدار است.

۲. مبانی نظری پژوهش

گردشگری در مناطق حفاظت‌شده بخشی از اکوتوریسم محسوب می‌شود که با هدف مشاهده، تجربه و تعامل با زیستگاه‌های طبیعی شکل می‌گیرد. این مناطق با ارزش اکولوژیکی بالا، علاوه بر کارکرد حفاظتی، فرصت‌های مناسبی برای توسعه گردشگری پایدار فراهم می‌کنند. پژوهش‌های پیشین نشان داده‌اند که گردشگری می‌تواند از یک‌سو موجب افزایش اشتغال و درآمد و حفظ میراث فرهنگی شود و از سوی دیگر تهدیداتی چون تخریب زیستگاه‌ها و تغییرات فرهنگی نامطلوب ایجاد کند. در حوزه توسعه روستایی نیز گردشگری به‌عنوان یکی از ابزارهای مهم متنوع‌سازی اقتصاد و ارتقای کیفیت زندگی شناخته شده است. با این حال، عدم مدیریت اصولی موجب وابستگی

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۵. بحث و نتیجه‌گیری

نتایج این مطالعه نشان می‌دهد که گردشگری مناطق حفاظت‌شده، همچون خارتوران، تأثیرات چندوجهی بر توسعه پایدار روستایی دارد. در بُعد اقتصادی، هرچند گردشگری موجب تنوع‌بخشی به اقتصاد و افزایش درآمد شد، اما وابستگی به گردشگری فصلی و تورم محلی از چالش‌های مهم آن به شمار می‌روند. در بُعد اجتماعی-فرهنگی، اگرچه احیای فرهنگ و افزایش مشارکت اجتماعی به‌عنوان پیامدهای مثبت برجسته شدند، اما تقابل ارزشی و تغییر هنجارهای محلی از تهدیدهای جدی محسوب می‌شوند. در بُعد زیست‌محیطی نیز ضمن ارتقای آگاهی زیست‌محیطی، خطر بهره‌برداری بیش‌ازحد از منابع طبیعی وجود دارد. به‌طور کلی، این پژوهش نشان داد که برای دستیابی به توسعه پایدار، مدیریت هوشمندانه و برنامه‌ریزی جامع ضروری است. تقویت آموزش زیست‌محیطی، حمایت از صنایع‌دستی، ایجاد مشاغل پایدار، کنترل ساخت‌وساز و مشارکت فعال جامعه محلی می‌تواند به کاهش آثار منفی و تقویت آثار مثبت گردشگری در مناطق حفاظت‌شده کمک کند. مطالعه حاضر با شناسایی ابعاد مثبت و منفی گردشگری در خارتوران، الگویی عملی برای سایر مناطق حفاظت‌شده ایران ارائه می‌دهد و تأکید می‌کند که تنها با رویکردی متوازن میان ابعاد اقتصادی، اجتماعی و زیست‌محیطی می‌توان به توسعه پایدار روستایی دست یافت.

کلیدواژه‌ها: گردشگری پایدار، گردشگری مسئولانه، اکوتوریسم، اثرات گردشگری، مشارکت جامعه محلی، پارک ملی خارتوران.

تشکر و قدرانی

پژوهش حاضر حامی مالی نداشته و حاصل فعالیت علمی نویسندگان است.

اجتماعی شد. همچنین، کاهش مهاجرت جوانان و بهبود زیرساخت‌های ارتباطی از دیگر آثار مثبت آن بود. در مقابل، برخی چالش‌ها همچون تضاد ارزش‌ها میان گردشگران و جامعه میزبان، ایجاد شکاف اقتصادی و تغییرات در هنجارهای فرهنگی مشاهده شد. این دوگانگی نشان می‌دهد که اگرچه گردشگری می‌تواند به تحکیم سرمایه اجتماعی کمک کند، اما بدون مدیریت صحیح، خطر فرسایش فرهنگی را نیز در پی خواهد داشت.

تأثیرات اقتصادی- یافته‌ها نشان دادند که گردشگری به‌طور چشمگیری به افزایش درآمد خانوارهای روستایی از طریق فروش صنایع‌دستی، محصولات کشاورزی و خدمات گردشگری کمک کرده است. علاوه بر این، اشتغال‌زایی مستقیم و غیرمستقیم به‌ویژه برای زنان و جوانان، موجب تنوع‌بخشی به اقتصاد روستا شد. اما، آثار منفی همچون افزایش قیمت زمین و کالاهای مصرفی، اشتغال فصلی و وابستگی اقتصادی به شهرها نیز شناسایی گردید. این امر بیانگر آن است که گردشگری، هرچند به‌عنوان موتور محرک توسعه اقتصادی عمل می‌کند، اما در صورت نبود سیاست‌های کنترلی، می‌تواند پایداری اقتصادی روستا را تهدید کند.

تأثیرات زیست‌محیطی- در بُعد زیست‌محیطی، گردشگری موجب افزایش آگاهی زیست‌محیطی ساکنان و گردشگران و ارتقای مسئولیت‌پذیری آنان شد. تغییر الگوی معیشت از کشاورزی و دامداری به فعالیت‌های گردشگری، فشار بر مراتع و منابع طبیعی را کاهش داد. با این حال، مشکلاتی مانند افزایش زباله، مصرف بی‌رویه منابع و تهدید اکوسیستم‌ها نیز مشاهده شد. برخلاف برخی مطالعات گذشته، نتایج نشان داد که در روستای قلعه بالا، سطح بالای آگاهی زیست‌محیطی تا حد زیادی مانع بروز آثار مخرب گسترده شده است.

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How to cite this article:

Hosseini, S. A., Ghaderi, E. Nowrozzadeh, B., & Moussavi Neghabi, S. M. (2025). The role of protected area tourism in sustainable rural development (A qualitative study: The Khartouran Region). *Journal of Research & Rural Planning*, 14(2), 39-60.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.22067/jrrp.v14i2.2409-1110>

Date:

Received: 13-05-2025

Revised: 14-06-2025

Accepted: 28-08-2025

Available Online: 28-08-2025