Sustainability of Homestay as a Form of Community-Based Tourism (CBT): A Case Study of the Rural Community in Bavanat-Iran

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This paper aims to give a better understanding of the local community’s perception on the current homestay programme in the Bazm Village located in the Bavanat County of Fars Province of Iran. The socio-economic impacts of tourism on the community is evaluated, together with how its impact will influence future development of homestay to support community-based tourism (CBT). The transactions between visitors and hosts in a homestay concept is a regarded as new in the Iranian tourism industry. With the added dimension of the Islamic rules and values in Iran, a fundamental review is required to gauge the success level of homestay programme in this society and the possible conflicts it poses to the Iranian culture and values. The methodology adopted in this research was of a qualitative nature. Both primary and secondary data were used for this study. Following a series of interviews and focus group discussions with the local community and field observation of the homestay programme, the study concluded that the homestay in Bavanat has contributed greatly to ecotourism primarily in that province and generally in Iran. However, it was also observed that the financial gains and benefits were not proportionally spread across the whole community and was rather limited to the owner, his close acquaintances and travel agencies. Despite its positive socio-economical effects, there is a lack of supervision and strategic support for the Bazm homestay programme. This study recommends the establishment of an organization that sets policies and planning for further development of homestay in Iran with the aim of assisting the local community to have proper participation rights and to receive a proportional distribution of its benefits.

Keywords: CBT and homestay, rural tourism, sustainable tourism, tourism impacts

Introduction

Positioning tourism as an instrument to counter poverty has been the main focus of various reputable organizations. As cited by Dhakal (2005), the World Tourism Organization (WTO) considers sustainable tourism as a platform for the underprivileged to bounce into prosperity. It

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believes that tourism is an effective tool, particularly in deprived regions, and can be leveraged to shrink poverty. Consequently, WTO has focused its priorities on eradicating poverty, promoting fair trade and encouraging sustainable tourism.

Besides the WTO, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) had similar deliberations on sustainable development. It underscored the prominence of sustainable tourism development as a worldwide initiative to decelerate the upward trend of poverty in specific regions. It is a commonly accepted view that tourism has sufficient scope to eradicate poverty, create job opportunities and the potential to allow for a fairer distribution of the generated revenue.

Numerous studies have been carried out globally to formulate an approach to counter contemporary threats to tourism such as terrorism, war, nuclear disaster, and health scares such as SARS. Assuming that poverty is mainly focused in rural areas, the research work carried out by Gudgeon (2001) proposed that the development of dedicated products such as rural tourism can reduce poverty. In most cases, rural communities are heavily involved in establishing a small-scale, eco-product and deploying local culture as the commercial tool. Such a recommendation would eventually stimulate livelihood change for poor people (Dhakal 2005).

Sustainable tourism refers to development in a manner and scale that remains viable over an indefinite period. It avoids any degradation or modification of the present environment. Certain characteristics of sustainable tourism are its durable product quality, preservation of forests through the use of alternative energy sources, preserving ecological balance, safeguarding national heritage, and sponsoring responsive and value-based tourism. Among others, the foremost benefit that the host country would gain through continuous commitment to sustainable tourism is the capability for international image building and direct involvement and possession of the concerned activity.

The tendency to use culture as a profit-making tool in promoting tourism is an aspect of tourism that is regarded as unsustainable. Tourism becomes sustainable only if the parties involved are permitted to have a leading role in devising policies and execution of plans (Dhakal 2005). In a country like Iran where the rural setting takes centre stage in the economy of the nation, the equilibrium between development and maintaining the culture is important for the concept of community-based tourism to work.

Indeed, Iran has a tremendous potential for rural and eco-tourism. There are numerous attractions such as untouched nature, diverse picturesque landscape, historical, cultural and architectural heritage, abundance of leisure opportunities and reaction, intimacy with the urban centres as well as the authentic character of rural charm. Despite all these, as a result of insufficient infrastructure and groundwork, rural tourism in Iran has not been well established. This is mainly due to its inability to attract tourists as well as lack of rural infrastructure, roads, transportation and building of capacity for tourism development by the government. It all points to a simple conclusion that Iran is not ready for rural tourism (O’Gorman et al. 2007).

In a substantive manner, Aref and Gill (2009) reviewed the status of rural tourism in Iran. Their observation indicated that in recent years, the Iranian rural cooperatives have expanded into socio-economic activities. Iranian policymakers also have placed much confidence in the cooperative organization due to lack of assistance from the government sector and numerous hurdles facing the private sector. Regardless of who takes the operational responsibility for a certain activity or area, grassroots approach is the key to success. With this regard, the cooperatives have a clear advantage over other types of organizations. Effectiveness of the Iranian rural cooperatives is mainly focused in the area of rural agriculture where they hold a massive network and influence. Consequently, rural cooperatives are seen as the best sponsors for Iranian agriculture. It has been clearly stated that if rural tourism is to move forward, there is a need for more investment in rural areas, a requirement for a clear-cut role for rural cooperatives and a lowering of socio-cultural and political barriers and finally increasing human and economic resources. An immediate effect and tangible benefit of taking positive action is in reversing the widespread
migration of the young generation (commonly moving to cities for jobs and further education) back to rural areas (Aref and Gill 2009).

Tourism has a significant sociological dimension that is intangible (Cordero, 2008). Tangible impacts are those that affect the economy and physical development whereas intangible impacts correspond to effects on the cultural and social aspects of the local people (Chen, 2001).

Often, in studying the intangible impacts on the socio-cultural dimension, the sociological discipline is used. As indicated by Goodwin and Scimecca, (2006), sociology paves the way for a better understanding and comprehension of the social impact of tourism on human mentality and behaviour as well as the human environment. Complementing this subject, Hughes and Kroehler (2005) added that sociology allows for examination of human social phenomenon from other viewpoints namely by studying the incentive and interactions of people with each other and by analyzing lifestyle, mentality and its impact on people’s behaviour and actions.

Sociological theory is typically deployed in tourism to comprehend how tourism and travel collectively affect people’s value, behaviour, social structure, lifestyle and the quality of their lives. Considering the above, in the context of tourism, this research project aims to study behaviour patterns and interaction between individuals. Hence the field of study has been termed the ‘sociology of tourism’.

Tourism is the largest industry in the world and undoubtedly one of the most important industries from which an enormous amount of revenue can be derived. It is a fact that, many countries and communities depend heavily on the tourism industry and Iran is certainly not an exception to the rule as shown in the study by Azimi and Hajipour (2008).

Economic benefits of tourism are widely recognized and accepted. However, many view its other two pillars - social and environmental – as bringing more harm than good. For instance, studies state that tourism has undermined cultural values, introduced uniformity and has negative impact on the traditional way of life and to some extent has distinguished certain local culture. Protection of cultural heritage, preserving traditional values and conveying authentic experience for tourists are typically flagged as the most important components of sustainable tourism (Berry and Ladkin 1997; Liu 2003; Cole 2007).

However, socio-cultural changes introduced by tourism development are valuable and one needs to appreciate the unique role tourism can play in promoting modern values, social progress and cultural evolution.

Iran is among one of those countries with tremendous tourism attraction potential. According to the World Tourism Organization, Iran is among the top ten countries in the category of historical and cultural attractions and among the top five in the category of ecotourism and climate varieties (Atabaki 2006). It is clear that rural tourism has vast potential in Iran compared to other forms of tourism.

While tourism as a whole is not new to Iran, the concept of rural tourism is pretty fresh in the country and there is very little documented research and study on this field. There is hardly any information specifically focusing on the development of homestay as a form of community-based tourism (CBT).

Clearly without considering socio-cultural aspects, developing CBT will not give the desired results and is doomed to fail. One needs to identify all socio-cultural elements that could become an obstacle in the development of a homestay program, map those to critical topics in the classical homestay concept and then introduce flexibility to resolve differences. It is after the completion of such an exercise that one can draw an academic conclusion on the success of the homestay program in Iran and whether it can be expanded to the whole community in the form of CBT.

Hence, the main objectives of the research include:

1. To understand the local community’s perceptions on the existing homestay program in Bazm.
2. To review and analyze the socio-economic impact of homestay development on the community in Bazm.

3. To evaluate the socio-economic impact on the future development of homestay in Bavanat in particular and Iran as a whole.

Clearly every community is striving for a better life and enhanced financial conditions. While tourism fulfills the economic requirement and offers a potential source of income, it does not come without consequences. It is a fact that tourism elevates a community into a totally different state that could be fundamentally different to what that community is used to. Major changes in socio-cultural lifestyle should be expected in communities embarking on tourism.

To gauge the perception of the local community at Bazm village on tourism and the homestay concept, the following research questions were investigated to support the three objectives of the study.

1. Why is the Bazm community involved in tourism?
2. What are the socio-cultural impacts of tourism on the current homestay program and the community?
3. What are the economic impacts of tourism on the current homestay program and the community?
4. How will socio-economic impacts influence the future development of the homestay program, and expand it to the community at large?

Definition of Rural Tourism

The concept of rural tourism has evolved over the past two decades as outlined in Table 1. As described by Beeton (2006), rural tourism is a general term that is also referred to as farm tourism, agro-tourism, soft tourism and even eco-tourism.

Generally speaking, rural tourism encompasses any form of tourism that highlights specific characteristics of a rural place such as life style, art, culture, tradition and heritage. While rural tourism brings economic and social benefits to the local community it adds another dimension for tourists by allowing them to interact with the locals for an enriching experience. Unlike other forms of tourism that offer rest, relaxation and a break from a hectic life, rural tourism is fundamentally in the form of multi-layered activities in the countryside that brings about farm/agriculture tourism, cultural tourism, nature tourism, adventure tourism and eco-tourism.

Frederick (1992) describes the typical characteristics of rural tourism as experience-oriented in areas with less population density, primarily in a natural environment; timing wise it is matched with local events and is geared towards protecting the local culture, heritage and traditions.

Numerous deliberations have been made on the topic of rural tourism but chief among them is the debate made by Gopal et al. (2008) that fully describes the four challenges involved in the definition of rural tourism. They argue on the following:

1. The difficulty in defining rural areas for rural tourism since the parameters for defining a rural area varies immensely from one country to the other.
2. Certain tourism in urban areas is also referred as rural merely due to the fact that it is located in rural areas but has all the hallmarks of an urban area.
3. Due to the diversity of cultures and heritages in different regions, various forms of rural tourism have been developed. Such diversity makes it difficult to draw a common line of characteristics for all of the countries.
4. As a consequence of advancement in technology (e.g. communication and telecommunications), evolving traditional products and alterations to market conditions and orientation, rural areas are subject to multifaceted changes and are time dependent.

While Gopal et al. (2008) emphasise challenges in defining rural areas for rural tourism, Ashley and Maxwell (2001) present commonalities for rural space. They highlighted a number of parameters that lead to common elements for defining rural areas as:

- Areas that are predominantly occupied by fields, meadows, forest, lakes, mountains or deserts in which human influence (settlement and infrastructure) is minimal
- Areas where farming is dominant
- Areas where availability of land is plenty and inexpensive

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researcher(s)</th>
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<tr>
<td>DOT (1993) cited in Beeton (2006)</td>
<td>A multi-faceted activity that takes place in an environment outside an urbanized area and represents to the traveller the essence of country life</td>
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<td>Peters et al. (1994) cited in Rátz – Puczkó (1998)</td>
<td>Rural tourist product means especially camping on the farm, with most farm services being linked to route-bound activities as cycling, walking or horse-riding</td>
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<td>DOT (1995) cited in Knowd (2001)</td>
<td>Rural tourism is anything which draws tourists beyond major metropolitan areas. Rural tourism spans both natural and built environments, and everyday activities, as well as those purposely designed for tourism</td>
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<td>Oppermann (1996)</td>
<td>Rural tourism is farm tourism and non-farm tourism in rural areas and communities but does not include activities in outdoor recreation areas such as national parks, forest or wilderness areas.</td>
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<td>Gannon (1988) cited in Rátz- Puczkó (1998)</td>
<td>Rural tourism includes a range of activities, services and amenities provided by farmers and rural people to attract tourists to their area in order to generate extra income for their businesses</td>
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<td>Reichel et al. (2000)</td>
<td>Rural tourism is defined as tourism taking place in the countryside</td>
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<td>Knowd (2001)</td>
<td>Rural tourism is located in agricultural landscapes and is characterized by enjoyment of a tamed nature or highly modified landscape. It is about the land uses and human cultures that the interaction between humans and the land have created.</td>
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<td>Pourová (2002) cited in Šimkova (2007)</td>
<td>Rural tourism is defined as tourism evolving from both outside recreation and tourism centres and outside of urban areas.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Europa (2005) cited in Sibila Lebe and Milfelner (2006)</td>
<td>Rural tourism is the activities of persons travelling to and staying in rural areas/without mass tourism/other than those of their usual environment for less than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes</td>
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<td>Tane and Thierheimer (2009)</td>
<td>The most important factor that supports the rural tourism phenomenon are: rural environment, rural population and natural products. All these factors contribute to the particularities of recreation, gastronomy, culture and ecology that rural tourism generally offers.</td>
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• Areas where public transport and infrastructure is not well developed and reaching a rural destination requires effort and high cost
• Areas with sensitive geographical conditions that increase political transaction cost due to urban bias or interest of the local elite

**Types of Rural Tourism**

There are various types and categories of rural tourism across the globe. They are generally categorized as classical rural tourism, agro-tourism, heritage and cultural tourism and eco-tourism (see Figure 1).

![Figure 1: Connection between Types of Rural Tourism [Adapted from Tane and Thierheimer (2009)]](image)

a) **Classical rural tourism**: Classical rural tourism is the only tourism form that is completely included in rural tourism and whose activities take place in rural hotels, motels, classic pension, camping and other touristic structures that are all situated in rural villages or other rural places (Tane and Thierheimer, 2009).

b) **Agro-tourism**: Agro-tourism is best understood if its benefits are passed on to the farmers on one hand and on the other to the tourists. One of the fundamental benefits of tourism for farms is that it enables farmers to spread and expand their farming activity and consequently enhance the value of their products and lands. A positive side effect of farm tourism is that it unifies the interests of farmers with those of environmental protection goals by allowing farmers to play a key role in integrated land management (Gopal et al. 2008). In the eye of farm tourists, they intentionally opt for primitive farm accommodation compared to accommodation with modern/advanced facilities. Farm tourists seek a true rural atmosphere to compensate for the environment they have lost living a modern lifestyle. They wish to experience intimacy with people that surround them, learn the techniques used in traditional craft from the natives, enjoy traditional and homemade food and drinks and above all experience friendly contact and relationship in the form of quality rather than quantity. As cited by Gopal et al. (2008) one important side effect of agro-tourism is in its marketing aspect of allowing farmers to brand their local products to reach beyond their local market and to a wider group of people. The commercial benefit accruing to farmers could be enormous.

c) **Heritage and cultural**: An integral part of rural tourism is experiencing local heritage and culture. These include point of interests such as temples, buildings representing
local features such as war remnants, monuments of famous literary, artistic or scientific people, historic remains, archeological sites and traditional parkland. As in the case of agro-tourism, these tourists wish to experience elements that are missing in their city lifestyle. Heritage and cultural elements of rural tourism allow realization of experiencing unique and valuable aspects of a rural lifestyle (Tane and Thierheimer 2009)

d) Eco-tourism: Tourists wishing to enjoy the rural lifestyle and experience its true atmosphere may unconsciously affect negatively the ecological side. Tourists visiting rural areas tend to experience and learn about the local vegetation, wildlife and pursue bird watching. As warned by Gopal et al. (2008), a rural tourist destination as a tourism product is definitely very fragile in the ecological, social and cultural sense. Careful consideration is required in its development to ensure its sustainability in long term.

Study Framework

Based on this extensive literature, a study framework was designed (Figure 2). There are four interlinked components of tourism starting from ‘sustainable tourism’ that encompasses all other forms of responsible tourism, namely rural tourism, CBT and homestay. The latter is basically the smallest element in the complete picture of sustainable tourism. What is important to note is that sustainable tourism and its components are all built on three main pillars of social, economic and environment. The main goal of each form of tourism is to protect the (i) social aspect - interaction between the host and visitors, education of the involved parties and respecting the local culture, (ii) economic aspect - proportional distribution of financial benefits to all involved and (iii) environmental aspect – conservation of natural resources. Nonetheless, this study will only focus on two dimensions of sustainability, namely the economic aspect and the social aspect (including cultural) which were investigated.

Homestay being the smallest element in this framework is also built on these three main pillars of sustainability. From the onset, it must be consciously planned to (i) benefit local residents, (ii) respect local culture, (iii) conserve natural resources, and (iv) educate both the tourists and the local residents. It is clear that tourism organizations, non-governmental organizations and local communities that consider these three principles will enhance conservation of natural resources, maximize revenue for the community and bring appreciation to cultural and social values.

Figure 2: Study Framework Interlinking the Two Dimensions of Sustainability
Clearly every community is striving for a better life and enhanced financial conditions. While tourism fulfills the economic requirement and offers a potential source of income, it does not come without consequences. It is a fact that tourism elevates a community into a totally different state that could be fundamentally different to what that community is used to. Major changes in socio-cultural lifestyle should be expected in communities that are embarking on tourism. The main question is why does a community opt and get involved with tourism? Are the residents aware of its consequences and do they fully understand that their lifestyle may not be the same anymore? These questions are best answered by the local community and it is through such dialogues that one can evaluate their perceptions on tourism and their expectation that eventually allows academics to better foresee the effect of tourism on the local population.

Methodology

A qualitative method was used in this research to study attitudes, opinions and behaviour. This would assist in gaining a deeper knowledge and understanding of the community. Both primary and secondary data were used in the research work.

To obtain optimal outcome from the questions, it was decided to approach the topic with three different qualitative methods. Initial individual interviews were conducted with the owner of the homestay and local people. Then a group interview was arranged among the local community as a focused-group discussion and finally the researcher observed the community to view the situation from an academic angle.

A total of 15 respondents were chosen for this study. The total interviewee’s responses reached saturation level after the 15th respondent. Among these 15 respondents, 11 of them were chosen based on the snowball sampling method, which is also known as chain referral sampling. This method of sampling is a kind of purposive sampling, which depends on the resources, availability of time, study objectives and the most important factor of data saturation, which is the point where additional data can no longer bring additional insight to the researcher (Hudson 2008).

In this study, the researcher conducted the first interview with Mr. Barzegar, homestay owner. The rest of the respondents were selected based on Mr. Barzegar networks with local people. This is due to the researcher not being familiar with the area and second, according to Mr. Barzegar, locals will give more accurate answers if he introduces the researcher to the respondents. In addition, a total of 4 respondents among 15 were chosen using convenience-sampling method. The researcher chose this method to investigate more about local perceptions on tourism impact, especially those who do not have any direct contact with the homestay owner.

Main Findings & Analysis

Field observation

From the field observation, tourist attractions in Bavanat can be categorized into ‘natural’ and ‘historical’ site from which a number of well-known places are listed below:

1. **Natural attractions**: Due to its unique geographical location, many of the natural resources of Bavanat are tourists attractions. Tourist can enjoy desert style climate (hot and dry) or mild temperatures in other areas. Natural attractions include walnut forests, ‘Sabzeh and Sarvestan’ waterfall and a creek that runs between two adjacent villages. According to Aatabaki (2006), natural attractions at Bavanat allow for at least seven areas of ecotourism namely, (1) Desert tours, (2) Mountains and caves tours, (3) Nature medication tours, (4) Winter sports tours, (5) Anthropology tours, (6) Slopes tours, and (7) Hunting tours.
2. **Historical attractions:** Some of the historical places which are of tourist interest in Bavanat and Bazm village are Bazm shrine, Shah-Mir-Hamzeh tomb, Soorian historical bridge, Mohammad Hanifeh tourist attraction, Soorian mosque and Bavanat museum. The old castle ruins, temple, and the traditional architecture of houses are some of the other main tourist attractions in Bavanat.

**Individual interviews**

1. **Community acceptance of tourists:** The primary interest of the interviewees in tourism is very much focused on financial gain. However, it was also clear that part of the community views tourism beyond financial benefits, as they are happy with the fact that tourism is a platform for their village to get free publicity in the local and international market.

2. **Community participation:** The overall impression gathered from the interviewees were that they wished for direct participation in local tourism. However, while a few participate fully, the majority are restricted from full participation since the homestay is coordinated and run by a closed circle. Those within the homestay circle enjoy tourism and participate fully. However, those outside this circle, while being an active member of the community, play a rather limited role.

3. **Lifestyle improvement resulting from tourism:** The local community and those directly involved with the homestay view lifestyle improvement differently. The latter group that includes the homestay owner and those running the business in Bavanat clearly notice huge improvements in their lifestyle since they are the sole beneficiaries of the tourism business. The response of this group on lifestyle improvement was positive. However, the response from the local community that is not directly involved with tourism and consequently does not feel the financial benefit is somehow reserved. Their response to lifestyle improvement was either negative or somewhat vague.

4. **Socio-cultural interactions with tourists:** As a result of intense interaction between the tourists and the host, there is a high level of socio-cultural exchange and influence. There is a feel-good factor among the locals since they feel proud about presenting their culture and hospitable behavior to tourists. In return, the tourists respond with admiration and display their respect for the locals. Such cordial interaction has a positive effect on the locals and encourages them to interact even more with future tourists.

5. **Managing the community by organization and training local people:** The underlying reaction and response from the interviewees was focused on lack of support by governmental authorities or non-governmental agencies. They absolutely lack training on what tourism is all about, how to behave in the presence of tourists, and also require mastering other languages to allow them to speak the language of the foreign tourists. For the local people who are not directly involved with the homestay programme, their main issue is the lack of supervisory organizations that would ensure their direct participation in the tourism activity. A supervisory body that can act independently can ensure wider participation of the local community in rural tourism and fair distribution of the financial benefits. While the number of visiting tourists to Bavanat is rapidly increasing, many local individuals made an attempt to turn their residence into a homestay program. However, due to lack of support and funding, their efforts proved futile.

6. **Cultural preservation:** The local people have realized that the main reason for having so many visitors to their homestay is because of their lifestyle and traditions without which there would be no tourism. This has triggered the local community to pay more attention to
their local characteristics and unconsciously preserve their local heritage against erosion of a city lifestyle. However, they are concerned with the younger generation’s tendency to walk away from local traditions towards the city lifestyle (as presented to them by the tourists). The attraction of youngsters to a different lifestyle is considered a threat to the local traditions and population.

7. **Primary employment:** Agriculture is the dominant industry in Bavanat and the majority of the local people work in the farms. A small percentage of the local people are directly involved in the tourism industry. This is mainly due to the fact that there is little opportunity for them to get directly involved with tourism. However, there is an indirect involvement as they are involved in the supply chain brought about by the tourism industry that allows them to sell their local products.

8. **Job opportunities and increased income:** A clear response from the interviewees indicates great potential and job creation opportunities in tourism activities. While the number of tourists is on the rise, there are more opportunities to create more jobs and employment. However, since there is a monopoly in the local homestay programme, there is little job opportunities for the local people. Farmers would like to become actively involved with the local tourists but in the absence of a proper management and supervisory body that oversees tourism activity, their chances for employment is indeed very low.

9. **Community expectation from tourism:** The community expects more job opportunities and to gain more economic benefits through tourism. They realize that through tourism, they can increase their income and thus they wish to participate in tourism activities.

**Findings from focus group interviews**

The second part of the interview was conducted with a group of nomads in Bavanat. This group is the main attraction for tourism activity in Bavanat and most tourists are interested in seeing their lifestyle and spending time with these people.

According to the tribal people, the socio-cultural impacts are clear on their society. Their main source of income is through selling animals (e.g. lamb, goat, camel, etc.) as well as animal products (e.g. wool, milk, and dairy). Moreover tribal women have started to revive and produce long forgotten handicrafts to sell to tourists. Women have the leading role in producing such handicrafts.

An analysis of the socio-cultural impacts of tourism on the local community shows that the local people believe that through tourism they could revive the traditional values and culture, which had eroded over time. Before getting involved in tourism, the tribal people were afraid of even coming into contact with strangers from the neighbouring cities but nowadays, considering their popularity through tourism, they have gained self-confidence and are welcoming different people from Iran and all over the world. By interacting with tourists, they are able to build up a relationship, introduce their culture and have an opportunity to discuss and get a different perspective to their problems from the newcomers.

The second phase of the interview with the focus group was on the economic impacts of tourism on the local tribe. This was divided into two categories of direct economic impacts and indirect economic impacts.

Based on the responses from the interviewees, their main source of income was from selling animal products to the local people. They believe that they do not receive much of the economic benefits from tourism. According to the tribal people, while direct financial benefits are not significant, tourism has a positive impact on tribal socio-cultural life as it encourages them to be more attached to their traditions and culture.
Participant observation

Findings in this participant observation are based on the direct observation analyzed along three main theories namely – ‘Tourism Life Cycle Model’, ‘Authenticity and Commodification of Culture’ and ‘Social Exchange Theory’.

1. **Tourism Life Cycle Model:** As in the case of other tourist destinations, Bavanat has passed through Butler’s life cycle model (six stage of ‘exploration’, ‘involvement’, ‘development’, ‘consolidation’, ‘stagnation’ and ‘decline’). Bavanat has already passed the ‘exploration’ and ‘involvement’ stages and is believed to be in third stage of ‘development’. After the development stage, tourist destinations will experience maximum touristic impacts and will reach consolidation level or head towards stagnation. Therefore, there is a need for planning and policy implementation to manage Bavanat and to minimize the negative impacts of tourists on this destination.

2. **Commoditization of Culture:** Considering the fact that the homestay and nomad tribes in Bavanat are the main tourist attractions, the local people use culture as the central point to attract tourists. Looking at the approach used by the homestay, it is clear that their emphasis is on displaying their culture. They clearly use the nomadic tribe at Bavanat to attract tourists. If one looks at the pattern of their entertainment programme, it can be concluded that consciously or unconsciously they have turned their local traditions into a commodity for sale to satisfy tourist curiosity. Although cultural commodification creates an atmosphere to revive the old ways of living and behaving, it also has its negative aspects. Its main drawback is that cultural tradition may lose its spirit and degenerate into a fake performance by a group of local people. This ‘staged authenticity’ describes a situation where locals solely present their culture and traditions for the sake of financial benefits. Considering that tourists seek cultural authenticity, in the long run a fake performance (cultural commodification) may drive out tourists and result in the extinction of the original culture.

3. **Social Exchange Theory:** It was found that the social interaction in Bavanat has had an impact on the social image of tourism development as well as its inhabitants. Bavanat interviewees having high profile (e.g. homestay owner) and intense activity level (e.g. shop owners and tribal people) in the tourism industry have a positive perception of the way tourism has impacted their lives. They clearly support the idea of expanding the tourism industry in Bavanat and favour more tourists. It was interesting to note that these groups of people are the sole beneficiaries of the financial benefits created by tourism. On the other hand, other low ranking people (e.g. farmers or inactive individuals in tourism) were not supportive of tourism activities but had a positive perception of tourism development if it leads to a personal financial gain. In terms of socio-cultural impacts, those that are involved in tourism and those inactive had similar positive perceptions of tourism development, as it would promote the local culture that they are extremely proud of.

**Recommendations for Future Tourism Development in Bavanat**

Based on the study, the following seven main recommendations can be made for the future development of Bavanat:

1. **Improvements in management and supervision:**
a. Structured tourism plan including a set of policies and development vision to be devised by the national authorities.

b. Dedicated local authority, representative or an area manager to be assigned to Bavanat to supervise its tourism industry.

c. Ensuring further development of tourism initiatives to increase employment among the local people.

d. Resolving critical issues that endanger local cultural heritage and minimize environmental damage (this is a task for the governmental and non-governmental organizations).

e. Allocate funding for marketing and promotion of rural tourism primarily, targeting a national audience and subsequently an international audience.

f. Formulating rules and guidelines to deal with inappropriate behaviour by both tourists and locals.

2. **Improvements in participation and cooperation:**

   a. Every local individual that is interested in taking part in tourism gets a fair opportunity to do so.

   b. Benefits generated by tourism are justly distributed among the participants according to their role and effort.

   c. Strong cooperation between three categories of people, namely the homestay owner, local people and the authorities.

3. **Improvements in visitor management:** The government or the local authority should provide a comprehensive program to avoid mass tourism in this area. The most appropriate strategy is to devise tools to promote tourism evenly throughout the year (low seasons of autumn and winter).

4. **Improvements in training:** For the community to handle tourism effectively, they need to learn necessary skills and knowledge such as cultural and behavioral differences. Language barrier is the main source of misunderstanding and it is essential that locals have the opportunity to learn the basics of a second language not only for the sake of better communication but also to instill a higher level of self-confidence.

5. **Raising awareness:** It is essential to raise awareness among the locals on the importance of tourism and how it can improve their community. The tourism planner should organize awareness training programs on the long term benefits of tourism, beyond its pure financial gain.

6. **Improvement in services** (this requires an active role from tour operators and tourism authorities):

   a. Taking locals to urban areas to personally observe sanitation facilities and to learn.

   b. Create a commercial link between the locals and the supplier / manufacturers of sanitation equipment.

7. **Infrastructure development** (clear steps are required from the local authorities in terms of funding and logistics):

   a. Improvement of roads leading to the village and within the village.

   b. Considering alternative routes to avoid traffic congestion.
c. Ecofriendly transportation for moving within the tourism zone.
d. Set up hospitals or clinics in the neighborhood in case of emergency.
e. Improve the surroundings of the village.

**Conclusion**

The outcome of all interviews indicated that the locals are pleased with receiving both domestic and international tourists. They believe tourism is a practical tool towards a higher level of income, enhancement in the standard of living, publicity of the village in both the national and international arena and an effective way to introduce their culture. Unfortunately, it is concluded that due to the monopoly that currently exists in the tourism activity in Bavanat and lack of supervision/coordination of the local authorities, the majority of local people intentionally or unintentionally are prevented from taking part in the tourism activity. It is observed that while the socio-economic situation is unchanged for the majority of locals in Bavanat, the minority who have actively participated in tourism have greatly benefited from this industry.

Generally speaking, it is noted that both who are involved and those who have no role in tourism activities in Bavanat support the tourism industry in principle. As they are attached to their culture and traditions, apparently the overriding factors for them are primarily the culture itself and in the second place is financial gain. Considering such a mentality, tourism has had a positive influence on the tribal community as it has motivated them to remain in the traditional tents rather than abandon it for the sake of a modern lifestyle. The modest conclusion is that the local community in Bavanat has a sense of mental obligation in promoting the culture to tourists. This is evident by the approach taken by the homestay and tribal people. This has led to the point that consciously or unconsciously there is a high level of cultural commodification in Bavanat.

The fundamental issue that tourism in Bavanat is facing is the lack of support by any government authority or non-governmental organizations. This was clear through discussions with the homestay owner and the locals although each party had their own particular reasoning. The homestay owner would have liked more support and supervision by authorities in order to generate sufficient funds to expand his homestay program. On the other hand, the locals supported this involvement to break down the tourism monopoly that exists in Bavanat such that they can play a greater role. Clearly, there is an absolute need for supervision in this area and also a strong cooperation between locals and authorities to guide the tourism industry in the right direction so as to avoid stagnation.

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