

## **The role of strategic planning in promoting rural ecotourism (Case study : Zagros region)**

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### **Abstract :**

Nowadays, ecotourism is a new approach in the world. ecotourism as a purposive trip to natural settings and habitats and with the aims of cultural preservation and conservation is a viable economic alternative. Ecotourism possesses some positive environmental , economic ,and social impacts among which conduction of environmental protection measures, income generation , creation of job opportunities, and promotion of host communities cultural values need considerable attention .There are many attractions in these regions. Because of varieties of natural landscapes, potentials of these regions are very different.

### **Keywords:**

Strategic planning , ecotourism , sustainable development, sustainable tourism , action plan

### **Objects:**

Some objects of this study are as follow :

- ❖ Mentioning the problems of expanding ecotourism.
- ❖ Determining the problems of specific regions.
- ❖ Noticing the advantages of ecotourism.
- ❖ Stating the ways of promoting ecotourism
- ❖ Determining the phases of strategic planning

### **Introduction:**

Ecotourism is a new approach in the urbanized world. According to Rio acceleration, nature is a basis of human life, and men is depended on nature. Then, nature is one of necessities of life. In sustainability theory, nature is a background of development, that people recommended to keep their environment very well.

### **The scope of ecotourism :**

Ceballos described ecotourism as : Tourism that involves traveling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated areas with the specific objective of studying ,admiring, and enjoying the scenery , and its wild plants , and animals , as well as any existing cultural manifestations found in these areas ( ceballes,1991,p:25).

In other approach , the international ecotourism society defines ecotourism as :

" Responsible travel to natural areas , that conserves the environment ,and improves the well-being of local people".

The green globe 21 adopted this definition :

" Ecologically sustainable tourism with a primary focus on experiencing natural areas that fosters environmental and cultural understanding, appreciation and conservation ".

Martha Honey presents her definition as :

"Ecotourism is travel to fragile , pristine, and usually protected areas ,that strive to be low impact and small scale . It helps educate the traveler ; provides funds for conservation ; directly benefits the economic development ,and political empowerment of local communities ; and fosters respect for different cultures ,and for human rights " (Honey,1999,p:25).

Fennell finally after reviewing other definitions of ecotourism provides his own definition:

" Ecotourism is a sustainable form of natural resource – based tourism that focuses primarily on experiencing ,and learning about nature ,and which is ethically managed to be low impact ,non – consumptive , and locally oriented (control ,benefits, and scale).It typically occurs in natural areas ,and should contribute to the conservation or preservation of such areas" (Fennell,2000,p: 43).

Then, the overall or net effect of the tourism experience can be environmentally sound relative ecotourism ,or every component ,and sub – component in the tourism web can be environmentally sound-absolute ecotourism.

#### **Dimensions of ecotourism :**

Ecotourism have various dimensions that are social, cultural, physical aspects. These are mentioned as:

- ❖ Involves travel to natural destinations.
- ❖ Minimizes impacts.
- ❖ Builds environmental awareness .
- ❖ Provides direct financial benefits ,and empowerment for local people.
- ❖ Respects local culture.
- ❖ Supports human right ,and nature.

Most operations which can truly be named ecotourism should be striving to meet as many of these criteria as possible.

The environment is one of the primary concerns of ecotourism, which often involves travel to relatively undistributed areas . As the tourism product is often dependent upon nature , negative impacts up on that resource should be minimized.

#### **importance of ecotourism :**

In this kind of tourism , local population should minimize negative impacts on the host community ,because otherwise the local population may come to dislike the presence of tourism, and this could undermine its long-term prospects. Tourism is likely to have the greatest socio –cultural impacts on small, isolated communities ,

that have historical attractions for tourism. As a result , any cultural changes in the community, may reduce the tourism product's overall marketability , and therefore future prospects. Therefore, ecotourism Should produce direct economic benefits for the local community if it is to receive their continued support-benefits ,that should compliment rather than overwhelm traditional practices ,and sources of income . These economic benefits led to cultural changes in the way of life. The literature on ecotourism asserts ,that economic benefits should be accrued by the host community whilst at the same time preserving the environment ,and cultural way of life.

Also , ecotourism may have to be viewed as part of a longer term strategy of sustainable development in which tourism is later phased out. such an argument questions the underlying principle of ecotourism that is a sustainable form of tourism.

It is argued that the rural population should receive economic benefits from ecotourism. Without economic benefits, the rural community will have little reason to view the intrusion of tourists positively ,and will have little incentive to protect the environment upon which tourism depends.

The combination of economic growing ratio of city living ,and environment consciousness elevates the attractiveness of rural ,and underdeveloped area endowed with high quality tourism services in the form of nature resources. For most of the remote and undeveloped areas, they are usually economically impoverished, but biologically ,and environmentally rich with clean air, water, charming landscape , lack of noise ,etc .Ecotourism industry is often considered as a suitable development strategy (Deng,2005,p:2).

Ecotourism is by definition an activity that attempts to achieve a balance between the economic exploitation of natural resources and native communities' cultural heritage without threatening their existence (Wood,2002,p:10).

Ecotourism can be integrated with other sectors of the rural economy, creating mutually supportive linkages, and reducing financial leakage away from the area. It can be coordinated with agriculture , in terms of the use of time ,and resources ,and in providing markets for local products (Weaver,2002,p: 262).

#### **Potentials of rural settlements of Zagros:**

Zagros is one of the most important region of Iran , that have many physical ,social ,and cultural advantages.



Figure1.mountainous settlement

In physical aspects, rural settlements of Zagros have many advantages ,that are very important in ecotourism. Some physical characteristics are :

High ridge :

These high ridges are one of the most important features in the area. Rural region are influenced by these ridge .Because natural landscapes are dependent to mountains.

Rivers :

There are many rivers ,that give beautiful landscape to rural region. These rivers stream every where.

Vegetation:

Vegetation like mountainous trees create a fantastic landscapes in these regions.

These physical features, produce a unique landscape in the region.

Rural villages:

Rural villages are important characteristics in mountainous areas. They represent local culture. These village have old houses ,that have historical background. These background are very precious in ecotourism(Soltani,2008,p:3). Many people go to these places for vacations. Then , nature and ecotourism are important elements in these process.



**Figure2.Nature in rural settlement**

### **Challenges of developing ecotourism:**

There are many problems in rural regions for developing ecotourism. The rural routes are very far, and unsuitable for driving. Only special cars can carry passengers to these regions. Then, most of tourists can't go to these regions. Because focuses of ecotourism are unknown for people and planners. Planners should be introduced these regions to people.

Other problem of ecotourism region is shortage of services, that is very important for tourists. These services contain various kinds of facilities such as: sanitary services, residential services, camps, transportation offices, and other facilities, that tourists need for resident and visit natural regions especially: mountainous regions.

Because of residential problems, many ecotourism regions do not have a good background, and they could not gain a place in the country. Another problem is, bad quality of advertisements. Planners must suggest a suitable plan for advertisements.

Also, There many cultural barriers. Local residents usually don't like tourists, and it may cause some impacts between them. Then, people should be ready for accepting strange or foreign tourists. In conclusion, because of many problem in these regions, we need strategic planning (Soltani,2008,p:327).

### **The scope of Strategic planning :**

Strategic planning is the cornerstone of every common-interest community. Without strategic planning, the community will never know where it is going—much less know if it ever got here. An important concept of strategic planning is an understanding that in order for the community to flourish, everyone needs to work to

ensure the team's goals are met. Team members include all association homeowners, the board of directors, professional management –whether onsite or through a management company- and various service professionals such as accountants and reserve professionals. This team needs to work as a collective body to be successful. Part of the team concept is the establishment of roles for the team players. Team usually perform poorly if every one or no one is trying to be the quarterback.

#### **Principles of strategic planning :**

Strategic planning has various types of principles ,that cover all goals of ecotourism planning . Some goals of this planning are :

- ❖ Recruiting stakeholders, power brokers , and leadership
- ❖ Reviewing the organization's history and current situation.
- ❖ Reviewing and revising the organization's mission statement.
- ❖ Identifying the organizational strengths and weaknesses.
- ❖ Identifying the most critical issue arising from any of the organization's opportunities, threats , strengths ,and weaknesses.
- ❖ Setting goals to remove weaknesses ,blunt threats , and seizing opportunities.
- ❖ Brainstorming ,evaluating ,and selecting strategies to empower leaders.
- ❖ Critiquing and reviewing the plan.
- ❖ Revising goals, and re-implementing goals ,as appropriate.

expanding ecotourism need these strategies ,and approaches. Planners should do these ways for developing this new tourism.

#### **The strategic planning for ecotourism :**

The strategic planning have five process. These process are :

- 1- Situational analysis .
- 2- Set strategic directions.
- 3- Define strategies.
- 4- Strategy roll out.
- 5- Evaluation.

These process are like cycle, and every successful strategic planning should spend these items . In strategic planning for ecotourism ,the first stage is determination of all characteristics of case region., and separate

natural and human elements for identifying the advantages ,and problems. Because, planners

Should promote advantages , and solve problems. In stage two, they should consider some goals for planning process. Because according to these goals, planners must arrange strategic direction. These special directions are: determining economic ,and social ways for development. The third stage is : define strategies. In ecotourism ,strategies are : benefits advertisements, solving problems, expanding services, producing public transportation , building suitable roads , increasing . The forth stage is rolling out strategies. In this stage, planners should gain goals through action plan .In other word, they should suggest some activities that planners achieve the aims of plan in shape of action plan. At last stage is, evaluating the process of planning .This stage is the most important phase in the strategic planning, because in many situations, planners only suggest ,and they do not evaluate the results of planning. Then ,planning doesn't led to successful results. In conclusion we should achieve sustainable tourism.

#### **Conclusion :**

Rural regions have many capabilities for ecotourism. Because ,they are surrounded by natural factors. Ecotourism region can develop very much, but so me barrier prevent their growth. These regions have many potentials, that they are unknown. If every country discover these advantages ,and grow them, they will gain many economic profits from these natural region. There isn't need for huge investing in this region. Because, nature provide all rare landscape, that tourists like. The composition of blue, green , and red give a unique view to nature.

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