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## **Assessment of Rural Tourism Development Using Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) Model (Case Study: West Azerbaijan Province, Iran)**

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### **Abstract**

The present study aims to assess rural tourism development using Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model. Since there are different attractions in rural areas, the tourist villages of East Azerbaijan Province are selected as case studies to avoid a holistic view and achieve accurate and practical results. The statistical population includes rural tourism experts in East Azerbaijan Province who have adequate knowledge and experience of rural tourism, including the experts working in the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organization of East Azerbaijan Province, the Housing Foundation of Islamic Revolution of East Azerbaijan Province, and the Agriculture Organization of East Azerbaijan Province. The statistical sample is selected using snowball sampling, which is a non-probability purposive sampling technique. The statistical sample size is 78. In this study, Butler's TALC model is investigated. According to the TALC Model, the results show that Kandovan village is at the development stage and welcomed by domestic and foreign tourists. So, considering its characteristics and needs, it is required to adopt and combine appropriate environmental, economic, sociocultural, and human resource-education strategies. Tutah Khaneh, Ushtabin and Zonuzaq villages are also at the involvement stage and it is required to more focus on human resource-education, sociocultural, environmental, product marketing strategies.

**Keywords:** Butler's Tourism Area Life Cycle Model, Development, Rural Tourism

## **Introduction**

Nowadays, the world faces various challenges including economic diversification, solving the problems induced by industrialization and over pollution of cities, increasing human resource productivity, job creation, cultural interaction and environmental conservation, and in general, sustainable development and every country, at any level of development, is trying to find the necessary solutions to these issues. Meanwhile, those countries adopting economic diversification to put aside their single product economy and seeking to recognize or create new development capacities and advantages have been much more successful than other ones. One of the components of development is the tourism industry, which is considered in their national development plans to accelerate and evolve their national development process by most of the countries enjoying this advantage due to their locations (Shams al-Dini, 2010). Today, tourism development has been considered at all regional, national, and international levels by government planners and private companies. Many countries have increasingly realized the fact that they must take the initiative and try to find new solutions to improve their economic situations (Lotfi, 2005).

One of the types of tourism is rural tourism, with more than a century old. Since it provides attractiveness and encourages tourists to use the space and features of the rural environment to improve and enhance the economic, socio-cultural, and environmental indicators of the host region, rural tourism has greatly considered (Sharpley, 1997).

The failure of development programs and plans in rural communities and also the emergence of problems in urban communities in the world, especially in less developed countries, has made rural tourism development a critical strategy. Thus, in today's world, one of the most well-known strategies for rural development is tourism development and related opportunities.

The tourism policy must be implemented considering potentials, public participation, physical resources, and other resources, otherwise, the tourism program will not be successfully executed (Thabet, 2007). Although in many cases, tourism is considered an easy way to economically develop rural areas, this strategy is not one-size-fits-all and cannot be applied to all rural areas. It should be borne in mind that in Iran, villages are of great importance because they are considered the sources of raw materials and agricultural

products. In Iran, a great number of economic activists live in rural areas. Unfortunately, in most cases, villages have been considered the producers of agricultural products in Iran. While, it should be borne in mind that due to climatic conditions and soil type, there are not suitable conditions for agriculture in all the Iranian villages and even, in some cases, continuing agricultural activities would lead to deleterious environmental degradation.

Studying the evolution of tourism development models and patterns shows that over the past 60 years, much research has been conducted on the prediction of the tourism development process and path. These studies have been mainly conducted by tourism industry planners to find suitable tools to predict the process of tourism destination development. Such tools play a key role in understanding the effects of tourism development and increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of development plans. Therefore, over the past decades, various models and patterns have been proposed to forecast the tourism development process.

As the first studies describing the tourism development process, one can mention Gilbert's research on the evolution of tourist destinations in 1939. Barret (1958) also studied the morphology of coastal tourist destinations that did not lead to a specific development model (Prideaux, 2004). Walter Chris taller (1964) was the first person who referred to the concept of the tourism area life cycle in a paragraph in his article. Considering psychological issues, Cohen (1972) has presented a tourist typology at different stages of development. According to him, there are four types of tourists: the drifter, the explorer, the individual mass tourist, and the organized mass tourist (Berry, 2001). At the beginning of the development of a tourist destination, drifters enter the tourist destination by chance. They enter the tourist destination alone and it is not required to provide special facilities. In the next stage, the tourist destination hosts individual mass tourists. These tourists need accommodation facilities, proper amenities and services, and safe transportation. Next, organized mass tourists enter the destination, and this process continues in the next stages. These tourists buy ready-made travel packages that include accommodation facilities, hospitality facilities, visiting attractions, transportation, etc., and are organized for tourist groups (Swarbrooke, 1998). Cohen's model is important because subsequent theories related to tourist destination development have recognized it and based on the results of his studies.

Plog (1972) studied the personalities of the tourists and travelers to present a tourist typology (through a telephone survey of the personalities of 1600 respondents). Like Cohen, he considered the tourist type as a key feature of each phase of tourism destination development (Berry, 2001). According to Plog, in the first stage of development, most of the tourists are allocentric ones (wanderers) (tourists who explore pristine areas and seek adventure through high-risk tourism activities). Then, as the destination becomes better known, midcentric tourists travel to it. At the consolidation and stagnation stages, psychocentric tourists (the repeaters) (tourists who travel only to known tourism destinations and areas and prefer planned leisure and recreational activities and accommodation in hotels and resorts with proper amenities). And, in the rejuvenation stage, midcentric tourists travel to the tourism destination (Swarbrooke, 1998).

Doxey (1975) has provided an irritation index or irridex to explain and understand local residents' attitude change toward tourists and tourism development (in different stages of a destination's life cycle) (Ardakani, 2003).

Miossec (1976) modeled the effect of evolutionary change on resort hierarchies (Prideaux, 2004). Stansfield (1978) studied tourism destinations in the Northeastern United States to identify destination change patterns, which were raised as "tourism area life cycle" in tourism literature (Butler, 2001).

In the 1980s, Butler developed the TALC model based on research and studies on tourism destination development patterns. Butler changed the product life cycle to suit it to the tourism industry (Alvares & Lourenco, 2005). This model indicates the six stages of tourism destination development, including exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation, decline, or rejuvenation (Moore & Whitehall, 2005).

According to Berry (2001), among the tourism development models presented before Butler's model, those presented by Cohen, Plog, and Doxey are of great importance and more comprehensive and have been applied as the theoretical bases for next tourism development models, especially Butler's TALC model (Berry, 2001). Butler's TALC model is greatly applicable to explain and analyze tourism destination development and it has been tested by many researchers.

According to his research on tourism development, Butler introduced his model entitled "destination life cycle" in 1980. This model is a derivation of the product life cycle model and displays an S-shaped curve (tourism growth) on the two axes of time and number of tourists. Without using incomplete and complex quantitative data and only applying qualitative ones, the places of most destinations are known in the tourism destination area life cycle. Knowles (1996) has identified eight qualitative variables to determine the place of destination in Butler's TALC model: market growth rate, potential growth, range of product lines, number of competitors, market share, customer loyalty, entry barriers, and technology. With the same aim, Cooper (1992) also has identified the qualitative variables such as rates of volume growth, ratio of repeat to first-time visitors, length of stay, visitor profile, expenditures per head, and visit arrangement (package/independent).

### **Methodology**

In this study, the tourist villages of East Azerbaijan province, Iran were investigated using Butler's TALC model. The TALC model is a derivation of the product life cycle model, and it displays an S-shaped curve (tourism growth) on the two axes of time and number of tourists. In fact, tourism destinations provide a basket of tourism products and experiences, so they can have a similar behavior pattern. In other words, like other products, the destination is produced, marketed, and made available to tourists (consumers) in a competitive environment. However, over time, the attractiveness of destinations (demand for goods) and the number of incoming tourists (market share) can decrease (Hongsrnagon, 2007). Butler identifies various stages for tourism development, as shown in Figure (1) (Butler, 1980).

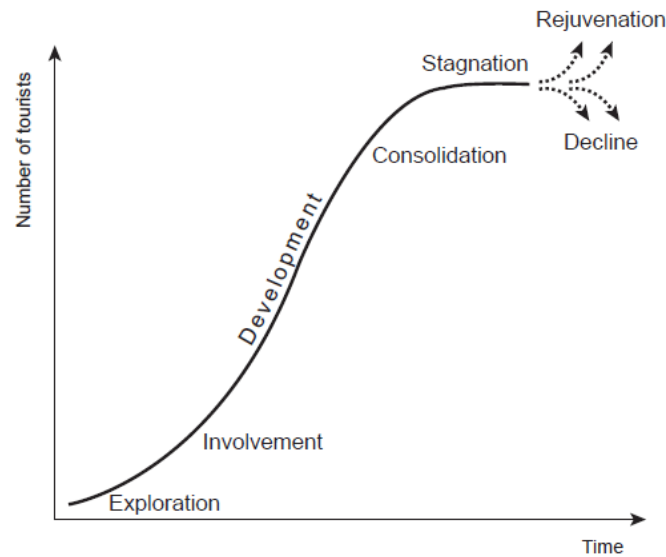


Figure 1: Butler's Tourism mode (Butler, 1980)

1- In the tourism development process, the first stage is "exploration". Butler believes that initially, there are few tourists and small economic impact of tourism for a tourism destination. The number of tourists is not enough to provide special facilities, because the sources of income are low. There is not a significant relationship between tourism and the local economy, and local people control the area. Local people usually communicate with tourists heartily and treat them as guests of honor. At this stage, tourism activity is not recognized and tourists usually have to adapt to local conditions.

2- The second stage is called the "involvement of people in tourism". At this stage, the increase of tourism activities happens. The number of tourists begins to increase. A higher number of tourists usually come to a destination for a shorter stay. Businesses start to build specialized tourism services, and facilities. Small inns and hotels and dining areas are established to provide guidance and small tourism activities. Some people simply provide one or two rooms for tourists in their homes. The number of tourists is significant and brings sufficient sources of income. At this stage, incremental effects are observed, i.e. providing tourism facilities brings other facilities and attracting one tourist brings the attraction of next tourists. Tourist services are formally provided and local people gradually adapt to tourism activities and the presence of tourists.

3- In the third stage, i.e. development, the rapid growth of tourists and changes in all aspects of the tourism sector happen in a relatively short period of time. Like the other stages, this stage proceeds in a transitional way so that it can occur quickly. The real tourism growth rate and growth properties depend on the attractive factors and efforts made to control tourism management. The tourism destination enters a formal integrated tourism system, which includes non-local and transnational companies and enterprises, and tourism activities take place in a well-organized structure. Small hotels are converted to big ones. It is at this stage that the prospect of tourism is formed and the destination becomes transnational.

4- In the fourth stage, i.e. consolidation, the tourism growth rate and other related tourism activities will decrease, although the real number of tourists will still increase. According to Butler, the total number of visitors in a year is more than the population living in the destination. What is important at this stage is that the level of tourism development exceeds the environmental, economic, and social carrying capacities of the destination and makes the tourism product decline. At this stage, tour operators and hotel chains arrange tourism trips, the destination becomes part of an integrated system, and the tourist dominates the area's economy. Existing attractions become specialized and non-unique. Besides, the seasonality of tourism activities is an obstacle to the area's economy.

5- The fifth stage is called the "stagnation" stage. At the stagnation stage, the problem of reaching or exceeding the maximum capacity is raised, and this leads to the decline of the tourism product. The destination may have high tourism potential but may not result in an increased number of tourists. The tourists are usually repeat visitors.

6- Decline stage. The stagnation stage may continue for a while, and then there may be an increase or decrease in the number of visitors. The decline stage occurs when repeat visitors are satisfied with the products offered. Some previous visitors died or are unable to travel. At this stage, those controlling tourism activities don't usually make any effort in the destination or their efforts are unsuccessful. People's attitudes towards tourism are not favorable, and those who recently begin to compete in the tourism industry, especially "intervening opportunities," deviate and conquer traditional tourism markets. As the number of tourists decreases, hotels, and specialized facilities become less used. Intervening

opportunities refer to the provision of tourism opportunities in other places that attract the tourism market.

7- Rejuvenation stage; this stage refers to the restructuring of the destination. According to Butler's TALC model, the rejuvenation stage occurs after the stagnation stage. According to Butler, restructuring occurs when new tourism products are introduced or a new image of the destination is perceived by people. Butler suggests that one of three following states occurs after the stagnation stage:

1- Decline

2- Continuation of stagnation

3- Restructuring

Since it seems that first the decline stage occurs and then, it is followed by the rejuvenation stage, it is recommended that to offer a new and unique item as a new tourism product. The experiences show that the rejuvenation stage is less "spontaneous" but is created in a well-thought-out way or through appropriate strategies.

The TALC model identifies each stage of development according to the number of visitors, changes in tourism activities, and the relationship between tourism and the local community. This is a widely used model and has often been used to study tourism sites in terms of physical, environmental, and socio-cultural (behavior and reactions of the host community) statuses. It seems that what makes this model important is the introduction of changes that may occur in tourism places reaching the stagnation stage in the future (Armanshahr Consulting Engineers, 2010).

To identify the place of villages in Butler's TALC model, it is required to have various statistics and data obtained on the rural tourism development over a period of several years. So, due to the lack of reliable and official statistical data, a field study was carried out to determine the place of villages in the model using a questionnaire. The explanatory items of the questionnaires were collected through library studies and literature review, and are listed in Table (1). Also, the characteristics and variables of tourist villages according to Butler's TALC model are presented in Table (2).

Table 1: The items explaining the tourism area life cycle

Items
Ratio of tourists to locals
Tourist's motivation to travel
Tourists' attention to sustainable development issues
Tourism market share in rural economy
Involvement of locals
Accessibility of tourist attractions
Facilities and services needed by tourists in the village
Presence of active footprints in tourist destinations
Tourism benefits
Local community's satisfaction with the presence of tourists
Consumers' familiarity with tourism products
Satisfaction of the local community with the presence of tourists
Tourists' desire to travel to the village again
Upward trend of visitor numbers
Level of infrastructure and facilities development
Behaviors and attitudes of local community
Management
Tourism impacts

Table 2: The characteristics and variables of tourist villages according to Butler's TALC model

Butler	Variables						
	Tourist (number, motivation, organization)	Ratio of tourists to locals	Involvement of locals	Level of infrastructure and facilities development	Behavior and attitudes of local community	Management	Tourism impacts
Exploration	Low number, motivation to acquire new experiences, the tourists are knowledgeable and educated,	Very low	Unplanned involvement, spiritual and non-commercial goals are followed.	Little or none	Non-commercial relations, a strong desire to communicate	None	There are no negative impacts.

	allocentric, interested in communicating with local community and nature, and aware of sustainable development issues						
Involve ment	Low number of tourists, aesthetic motives, presence of tourists at tourism seasons, start of the activities of specialized tours with no business motives	Low	Local investment, initiation of involvement, leading groups are mainly involved, spiritual and non-commercial goals.	There are no specific facilities, but some measures have been taken for minimal infrastructure development.	Relationships are commercializing, there is a desire to strengthen relations.	Management is not fully involved yet.	Minor and negligible negative impacts
Develop ment	High number of tourists, growth of business tours, mass tourism,	Very high	Involvement increases, change in use begins at this stage,	Infrastructures are developed and non-local investors	Business relations, interest in business communication	Management enters the destination and pays attention to it.	Increase of negative and positive impacts, dissatisfaction of those not

	less attention to sustainable development		man-made attractions are created.	enter the area			involved in tourism, visible impacts
Consolidation	Maximum number of tourists, reduced growth rate, consolidated market, organized business tourism, declining reputation of the area, the high presence of psychocentric tourists	Very high	Involvement reaches its maximum.	The investors' desire to invest decreases.	Business relations, decreased interest in communication in some groups	Management plays a key role in the destination.	High and visible impacts in all dimensions, competition for the use of facilities between tourists and locals
Stagnation	Decreasing number of tourists, declined reputation of the area, declining market share	decreasing	Involvement of people decreases due to their problems.	Demolition of infrastructure, tourism investments shift to other uses.	Business relations, lack of interest in more communication in most groups	Management plays a key role in the destination and attempts to improve the status quo.	Due to tourism impacts and tourism-induced problems, locals confront tourists behaviorally and even

							physically, the bearing capacity of the area reaches its maximum.
Rejuvenation	Gradual growth of tourism, maintaining market share, beginning to attract new markets	Relatively high	Involvement of locals begins again.	Addition of new man-made attractions, rejuvenation of the attractions in the destination.	Making local people enthusiastic again	Management is strongly dominated	Proper utilization of natural resources, attention to the bearing capacity of the area
Decline	Lack of tourism growth, continuous decline in market share, loss of existing markets	decreasing	No involvement	Withdrawal of resources from the destination	Passive and sometimes negative attitudes	Management is disappointed	Tourism economically, socio-culturally, and environmentally weakens local community

### Findings and discussion

In this study, first, the tourist villages in East Azerbaijan province were selected. Then, the places of the studied villages in the TALC model were determined according to the extracted indicators. To do this, the questionnaire, along with the attached guidance document, was provided to the experts. Tables (13-3) show the characteristics of villages according to Butler's TALC model and the average scores of the variables obtained based on the experts' opinions.

**Table 3:** The ratio of the number of tourists to the local community of villages according to the Butler destination life cycle model in the tourism target villages of East Azerbaijan province

<b>The ratio of the number of tourists to the local community</b>	
Kandovan	top
Tutah Khaneh	low
Ushtabin	low
Zonuzag	low

**Table 4:** Motivation of traveling to villages according to Butler destination life cycle model in tourism target villages of East Azerbaijan province

<b>Motivation of travel</b>	
Kandovan	Generally interested in historical, cultural and natural tourism
Tutah Khaneh	Generally interested in nature
Ushtabin	Generally interested in nature
Zonuzag	Generally interested in nature

**Table 5:** Variables of tourists' attention to the issues of sustainable rural development according to the Butler destination life cycle model in the tourism target villages of East Azerbaijan province

<b>Tourists' attention to sustainable development issues</b>	
Kandovan	Less attention to sustainable development
Tutah Khaneh	Attention to sustainable development
Ushtabin	Attention to sustainable development
Zonuzag	Attention to sustainable development

**Table 6:** Local community participation variable according to Butler destination life cycle model in tourism target villages of East Azerbaijan province

<b>Local community participation</b>	
Kandovan	Top
Tutah Khaneh	Local investment, partnership start
Ushtabin	Local investment, partnership start
Zonuzag	Local investment, partnership start

**Table 7:** Variability of access to rural tourist attractions according to Butler destination life cycle model in tourism target villages of East Azerbaijan province

<b>Possibility of access to tourist attractions</b>	
Kandovan	top
Tutah Khaneh	low
Ushtabin	low
Zonuzag	low

**Table 8:** The increasing trend of the number of rural tourists according to the Butler destination life cycle model in the tourism target villages of East Azerbaijan province

<b>Increasing trend in the number of tourists</b>	
Kandovan	top
Tutah Khaneh	low
Ushtabin	low
Zonuzag	low

**Table 9:** The tendency of re-traveling to the village among tourists according to the Butler destination life cycle model in the tourism target villages of East Azerbaijan province

<b>Willingness to return to the village</b>	
Kandovan	top
Tutah Khaneh	top

Ushtabin	top
Zonuzag	top

**Table 10:** Variable level of infrastructure development and facilities of villages according to Butler destination life cycle model in tourism target villages of East Azerbaijan province

<b>Level of development of infrastructure and facilities</b>	
Kandovan	top
Tutah Khaneh	There are no specific facilities, but arrangements have been made for the development of minimum infrastructure.
Ushtabin	There are no specific facilities, but arrangements have been made for the development of minimum infrastructure.
Zonuzag	There are no specific facilities, but arrangements have been made for the development of minimum infrastructure.

**Table 11:** Variables of local community behaviors of villages according to Butler destination life cycle model in tourism target villages of East Azerbaijan province

<b>Local community behaviors</b>	
Kandovan	Business relations, interest in attracting business relations
Tutah Khaneh	Non-business relationships, expressing a strong desire to communicate
Ushtabin	Non-business relationships, expressing a strong desire to communicate
Zonuzag	Non-business relationships, expressing a strong desire to communicate

**Table 12:** Village management variable according to Butler destination life cycle model in tourism target villages of East Azerbaijan province

<b>management</b>	
Kandovan	Management is involved in village planning, but basic organization has not yet taken place
Tutah Khaneh	Management is not involved yet.
Ushtabin	Management is not involved yet.
Zonuzag	Management is not involved yet.

**Table 13:** Variables of rural tourism effects according to Butler destination life cycle model in tourism target villages of East Azerbaijan province

<b>Tourism effects</b>	
Kandovan	Management is involved in village planning, but basic organization has not yet taken place
Tutah Khaneh	Negative environmental effects are increasing.
Ushtabin	Minor and negligible negative effects
Zonuzag	Minor and negligible negative effects

### **Conclusions and suggestions**

Investigating the characteristics of the studied villages and reviewing various studies on different areas including Hovinen's (1981) study on Lancaster County, Cooper (1992), Weaver's (1992) study on Grand Cayman, Cooper (1994), Prosser (1995), Russell (1995) on Coolangatta, Knowles (1996), and Hovinen's (2002) study on Lancaster County indicate that destinations usually show almost identical reactions in the case of tourism development. Although the characteristics of the tourist destinations, the intensity, and combination of external factors, and the tourism market make it possible to change assumptions and expectations, it is obvious that the combination of internal characteristics of the destinations and the type and amount of tourism effects (which are themselves a function of the tourism market and demand) are the main factors changing destinations moving at different stages in the TALC model. On the other hand, the effects of tourism can be controlled by managing, planning, and properly using resources through the application of appropriate strategies and operational plans in different areas. Optimal use and management of resources, along with resource constraints, make it necessary to prioritize and combine strategic areas and executive plans.

The above-mentioned points and investigating the studied villages show that according to the TALC Model, Kandovan village is at the development stage and welcomed by domestic and foreign tourists. So, considering its characteristics and needs, it is required to adopt and combine appropriate environmental, economic, sociocultural, and human resource-education strategies. These strategies will lead the studied destination, with the characteristics such as demand-supply imbalance in tourism, lack of a developed plan, lack of education for

residents and tourists, socio-cultural sensitivities, land price inflation, and conflicts between residents, to sustainable destination management.

Moreover, Tutah Khaneh, Ushtabin, and Zonuzaq villages are also at the involvement stage and it is required to more focus on human resource-education, sociocultural, environmental, product marketing strategies. The improper ratio of tourists to locals in the near future (in the development stage) makes it considerable to prioritize the social and cultural concerns of the destination, the prevention of socio-cultural, and environmental problems, access to different markets, and the introduction of the product and destination.

In general, the following strategies should be considered: providing facilities to the villages considering the stages of the tourism life cycle at which they are, paying attention to the bearing capacity of tourism destinations in development, involving local people as the main stakeholders of tourism, educating tourists and local people on environmental protection through brochures, etc.

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