Investigate the Status of Financial Support Rural Tourism Businesses Together with a Network Analysis Approach 
(Case Study: Haraz Road Restaurants)

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Extended Abstract

1. INTRODUCTION

The main objective, in every country, is to achieve sustainable development. To this end, the strategies regarding development of tourism can be conducive. Tourism industry is able to help in development and diversification of the economy of local communities. Using the notion of network in the literature of tourism seems rational and presents useful results for analyzing tourism institutions and objectives. The divergent nature of tourism section has always been a subject of discussion in academic literature. Tourism, geographically speaking, usually concerns areas located in remote places, away from resource markets, and involves small businesses in a non-organized work space. In such an environment, survival of newcomers hinges upon their collective actions. In fact, tourism has been defined as a system in which intrinsic dependencies are essential and one which necessitates cooperation and collaboration among various organizations and institutes and manufacturing tourism products in tourism destinations. The small size of tourism businesses together with their dispersion necessitates more cooperation for their survival; however, regardless of their small size, tourism businesses play an important role in the development of local economy and marginal areas. Larijan district in Amol County in Mazandaran province is one of the areas where, amidst the recent foreclosures, rural tourism has developed significantly. This district, considering its proximity to population centers such as Tehran, Mazandaran and Alborz provinces, its location in the highly traversed route of Haraz and its enjoyment of numerous natural attractions has become the destination of many tourists which has led to a significant increase in the number of weekend houses there. Considering the importance of communication among business, which will in turn lead to their development, the present research aims to pinpoint and analyze the various links among the restaurants and the factors influencing these links in the area under study.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The notion of networks and methods of network analysis provide a tool for imagining, visualizing and analyzing complex networks of relationships and help in simplifying and consolidating them, thus they can be very helpful in developing a useful cooperation in achieving the objectives. Since a large number of small businesses, in isolation and bereft of adequate resources, cannot pursue a sustainable development, having a network approach towards sustainability seems essential in an industry such as tourism. Networks, be it based on the unofficial local unions or official collaboration agreements, are helpful not only to the interests of national, regional or local tourism institutes or other government structures but they also compensate for the dispersed nature of tourism. This is the reason why those who are active in the tourism sector call for the creation of network structures. In fact, network theory can help in understanding the collective nature of organizational action, limitations and coordination in tourism. Network and network analysis (social network analysis) are approaches and the collection of methods used to investigate the exchange of resources among actors such as people, groups or organizations. Due to concentration on such relations, the methods used for analysis of networks are considerably different from the statistical methods which are contingent upon independent units of analysis. So network analysis uses a set of coherent methods to depict the pattern of links among actors and to analyze their structure.

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3. METHODOLOGY
Methodology constitutes a key section of every research paper and reveals the approach taken by the researcher. The present research is a descriptive-analysis one which has been done through surveys. It contains one documentary and one quantitative section. In the documentary section, through library research, the related literature regarding the research has been reviewed. In the quantitative section, which involves field surveys, questionnaires have been used to collect data. The research population included restaurant owners on Haraz road, comprising 76 people, who were subjected to matrix questionnaire in order for their relations to be identified. With regards to theories and models of network analysis, using UCINET, density, degree, reciprocity, transitivity, E-I tests and etc. have been utilized for the analysis of the data. The links, also, are depicted in various graphs.

4. DISCUSSION
Density is the first index which determines the ratio of existing links to the ones that are supposed to exist. This index with regards to financial support among the restaurants in the region is 0.0429 or 4.29% (among the 5776 possible links only 238 have been materialized), meaning that only 4.2 percent of the restaurants support one another financially which is very weak and fragile for the network. The reciprocity index, which shows the ratio of reciprocal links to the ones that are supposed to exist, with regards to financial support among the restaurants of the region under study, is 0.2332 or 23.32%. The transitivity index, regarding financial support of restaurants of one another, is 40.58% which shows a 40.58% chance of each restaurant communicating with a third one, a fairly reasonable number. It merits a mention that the higher the transitivity index, the higher the sustainability of the network. E-I index regarding the financial support of the restaurants of one another, for the entire network was calculated to be 0.233 or 23.3% in terms of income strata and - 0.254 or - 25.4% in terms of geographical location.

5− CONCLUSION
Tourism industry and specifically rural tourism to a large degree comprise of small or medium-sized enterprises (SME), most of which are family businesses. These types of businesses play an important role in the economy of countries and especially in the growth and development of tourist destinations, emanating from tourist destinations’ ability in creating new businesses, stirring competition and their other multifold effects. Overall the present research revealed the inappropriate status of financial support, among restaurants, of one another. Very few of the restaurants (4 percent) support each other financially, 23 percent of which is reciprocal and mutual. Among the most important factors influencing the restaurants’ financial support of one another their income, geographical location, kinship and friendship and trust can be named. Of course many of the restaurateurs are in favor of having links with their colleagues in case desirable conditions (mutual trust, lack of abuse, supervision and managing restaurants’ behavior and etc.) are met. So considering the fact that a relatively large number of small businesses cannot pursue sustainable development in isolation and bereft of adequate resources, having a network approach in tourism seems essential.

Key word: Rural development, rural tourism, a network approach, Haraz road restaurants.

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