Prioritizing Ecotourism Entrepreneurship Development in Rural Regions
(Case study: villages with on river-valley tourism potentials in Tehran province)

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Extended Abstract

1. INTRODUCTION
The development of Entrepreneurial activities has become one of the main concerns of human societies, and rural communities aren’t an exception to the rule. On the one hand, entrepreneurs prepare conditions for diversifying the rural economy by identifying opportunities in different fields. On the other hand, rural environment is the best and virgin environment for economical innovations in different fields due to the natural and human potentials. Therefore, one of the new economic opportunities is the tourism industry. Among the present tourism opportunities, factors such as natural attractions, original landscapes, and appropriate weather would provide the condition for ecotourism development in rural areas rather than the other branches of tourism that are adopted with protected areas. This phenomenon is becoming important more than before especially on the periphery of the large cities. Thus, through a new perspective, ecotourism in rural areas is potentially regarded as an economical Entrepreneurial activity to seize and merge the new economic opportunities on the periphery of the large cities in economic cycle that could be important in achieving aesthetic and environmental economy and could lead to pricing the nature of rural areas.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
Ecotourism is one of the new forms of tourism in the scientific literature that has often shaped in rural areas territory and in global literature is adopted with protected areas. Various types of natural attractions and landscape in protected rural areas are considered as new economic opportunities which could provide an appropriate basis for Entrepreneurial activities. Thus, in historical ages and from well-known perspectives related to tourism entrepreneurship since the emergence of this concept, many approaches had been proposed about tourism entrepreneurship, especially ecotourism. Among these approaches, the most related one is environmental approach in systematic framework. The importance of environmental situations in entrepreneurship field has been emphasized by many experts and researchers so that the environment and spaces shape the basis and new potential activities in geographic regions and play an important and a central role in Entrepreneurial activities from different aspects.

Paying attention to environmental entrepreneurship theory is an attitude that deals with the importance of environment protection and its maintenance and appropriate consumption of environment resources. Environmental entrepreneurship or ecological entrepreneurship means special systems of entrepreneurship that is capable of sustainable protection, use, and revival of environment.

Generally speaking, ecotourism entrepreneurship is the consequent of entrepreneurship development on ecotourism basis that leads to the creation of a new enterprise in ecotourism field and provides employment, income, and marketing opportunities for the rural community.

3. METHODOLOGY
This paper is an applied research with descriptive – annalistic approach. Our sample community contains elites, small, and medium enterprise owners related to ecotourism in Tehran province river-valleys. In this paper, by evaluating overlapping layers in ArcGis software, 17 sample ecotourism rural areas were selected in 7 river-valleys main path. To estimate the sample size

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among small and medium enterprise owners in case study area, Cochran was used with a confidence level of 95% with at least 10 samples. 159 small enterprises were selected for main path and 176 small enterprises were chosen for rural areas. After collecting the data, the corpus was assessed via document and survey study, along with observation and questionnaire tools based on extracted variables and indexes in theoretical framework. For this regard, at first, theoretical literature was studied and then by designing the questionnaires based on extracted indexes, the needed data were gathered.

4. DISCUSSION
To identify the situation of the ecotourism entrepreneurship development in case study area, t-test was utilized. The results show that the obtained means of ecotourism entrepreneurship variables aren’t significantly different from each other in selected rural and paths (p<0.01). Thus, based on enterprise owner views, the rural areas in the scope of this study are not significantly different in ecotourism entrepreneurship fields. TOPSIS technique is also used for prioritizing the selected rural and path regions in terms of ecotourism entrepreneurship. The results indicate that the highest rank among the enterprise owners belongs to Galizjand rural area with 0.83 amount of CI. The results of the test according to enterprise owners in main paths demonstrate that Firoozkoooh received the highest rank with having 0.72 amount of CI, Damavand and Jajrood pathways are in the second and third place, respectively. In general, it can be said that rural areas near Tehran and busy roads have higher ratings in comparison with others.

5. CONCLUSION
Findings illuminated the fact that ecotourism and the ecotourism economy of the rural areas in the scope of this study have never been taken into consideration in the literal sense of this concept. In other words, regarding the fact that the protected areas in the world are the basis for ecotourism activities and economy, they have not been considered in this area and have not been different from the economic activities and enterprises out of there. Therefore, it could be argued that the types of protected rural enterprises are from extended enterprises and have the least appropriateness to the environment and the tourism in this area is mass tourism which is in the renewal stage in the terms of life cycle.

Keywords: Ecotourism, sustainable entrepreneurship, ecotourism entrepreneurship, river-valley tourism, MCDM, rural areas of Tehran Province.

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