

Research Paper: The Role of Creative Tourism in Sustainable Entrepreneurship of Rural Areas (Case Study: Historic Villages of Northwestern Iran)

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to evaluate the creative tourism role in the development of Entrepreneurial activities in historic villages of northwestern Iran.

Methods: The current research is applied using the descriptive-analytical method. The data was collected using a closed-ended questionnaire. The validity of the questionnaire was reviewed using experts panel and a pre-test. Also, Cronbach's alpha method was used to determine the reliability of the items obtained at 0.868. The statistical population of the study consists of 850 households in four historic-cultural villages of Darsajin (Zanjan province), Kandovan (East Azerbaijan province), Atashgah (Ardabil province), and Hasanlou (West Azerbaijan province) in northwest Iran and by using the Cochran formula, 235 of them were selected as the sample. One-sample t-test, regression, and path analysis were used for data analysis.

Results: The results indicated that among the studied indicators, the most profound impact of creative tourism in investment indicators was on tourism activities (3.72) and the development of public tourism infrastructure in the region (3.70). The results of path analysis showed that investment in the field of tourism (0.346) has the biggest direct influence, the 'individuals' and local 'groups' creativity (0.143) has the hugest indirect influence, and the investment in tourism (0.462) has the biggest total influence on rural entrepreneurship improvement through the development of creative tourism.

Conclusion: Based on the results, creative tourism plays a significant role in creating and developing entrepreneurship in the historic villages of northwestern Iran. In this way, it has developed public tourism infrastructures and increased investments.

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1. Introduction

In most developing countries, rural communities experienced fundamental changes in the recent century. In this process, many local residents' economic activities declined (Chen et al., 2018; Shen et al., 2019). In developing countries during the last decades, the economic and political reform process due to the reconstruction of agriculture has led to a decline in economic activities of rural communities, loss of production, and urban migration of youth and educated labor forces (Suess-Reyes & Fuetsch, 2016; Gyawali et al., 2020). According to these transformations, the researchers believe that rural areas in developing countries face various economic, social, and environmental challenges (Rashid et al., 2019; Esparcia & Abbasi, 2020; Cowie et al., 2020). Meanwhile, the main economic challenges facing rural development in these countries include a high rate of disguised and seasonal unemployment, low capital formation, low income, and poverty (Li et al., 2019; Badri et al., 2021; Fathizadeh et al., 2022). In other words, the withdrawal of agriculture from being the dominant factor in providing livelihoods in many rural areas can be attributed to recurrent droughts, climate change (Ngcamu & Chari, 2020; Ahmad et al., 2022), socioeconomic transformations of economic globalization (Eularie, 2018; Loizou et al., 2019; Dangal, 2021), rapid development of urbanization (Yuan et al., 2018; Li & Li, 2019), and so on. Hence, some scholars have turned their attention to complementary sectors of agricultural activities such as the development of handicrafts, food industries, and tourism (Sawant, 2019; Singhania et al., 2022; Bento et al., 2022).

The tourism industry has emerged as a key force for sustainable socioeconomic development globally (Hwang & Lee, 2019; Manzoor et al., 2019). The idea behind sustainable tourism is to visit places without harming the local community and nature, moreover, to have a constructive impact on the environment, community, and local economy (Nguyen et al., 2020: 978; Sharma et al., 2021:1). Therefore, rural tourism as an alternative activity has tremendous capability to solve socioeconomic problems and challenges in these regions (Manzoor et al., 2019; Sawant, 2019), and as an agent of socioeconomic change (Hidayat et al., 2019; Pedersen, 2020) allows the residents of the rural community to understand their cultural roots and values and their forgotten peace (Khartishvili et al., 2019; Bakas et al., 2019; Sosa Tinoco et al., 2021). Since challenges facing rural areas of Iran lie in economic issues, some re-

searchers have highlighted entrepreneurship, especially entrepreneurship through tourism, to achieve social and economic development in rural areas. So, it is believed by experts that rural entrepreneurship is a formidable engine of economic growth (Kumar & Raj, 2019; Salim & Anis, 2021) and can reduce or prevent rural-urban migration (Okeke & Nwankwo, 2017; Salim & Anis, 2018), lead to formation and accumulation of capital in rural areas and generation of productive employment (Boiko, 2017; Muñoz & Kimmitt, 2019; Rahman & Majumder, 2020), innovation and effective marketing communication (Hwang & Lee, 2019; Pato, 2020), diversification of economic development opportunities (Calza et al., 2018; Deller et al., 2019), improving life quality, and increasing rural 'residents' satisfaction (Xu et al., 2021; Singhania et al., 2022).

Regarding the increasing growth of creative tourism and its benefits and concerning the diversification of natural and cultural-human attractions of historic-cultural villages and their high potential in attracting tourists and domestic and foreign travelers, there has been an exponential growth in the formation and development of small businesses by residents and further in attracting non-villagers fund as well as government budget (construction investment and public infrastructure) to meet the needs of tourists by way of developing tourist homes, ecolodges, local accommodations, stores and exhibition of handicrafts and local products, restaurants, and local restaurants. Therefore, the present study attempts to investigate the effectiveness of creative tourism in rural entrepreneurship development in tourism activities and seeks to answer the following question.

- What is the relationship between creative tourism and small-scale entrepreneurship improvement in the studied villages?
- What are the impacts of attracting financial capital in rural creative tourism (local and outside of the village) in small-scale entrepreneurship improvement in the studied villages?

2. Literature Review

Nowadays, rural areas are considered suitable to adapt to new tourism and market needs (Tambovceva et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2022). The critical point is that, given the centrality of a constructed rurality to many rural tourism experiences, the potential exists for tourists to engage with natural or rural places not only at a physical level but also within a deeper, more spiritual context (Sharpley & Jepson, 2011); because rural areas stand out

as spaces apt to accommodate tourism demands such as the search of the “authentic,” a nostalgically embellished past, the perfect integration of Man in Nature, outdoors activities in natural contexts, scenic beauty and relaxation in a calm and peaceful environment, far away from busy cities (Kastenholz & Sparrer, 2009; Shen et al., 2019). With the emergence of the postmodern tourist and cultural consumer, standardized experiences, like those provided by large entertainment venues, no longer satisfy the demands of these consumers. Instead, these postmodern tourists and cultural consumers now seek opportunities for authentic and unique experiences through expressions of culture, heritage, recreational activities, and natural landscapes (Stolarick et al., 2011).

Given ‘tourism’s multiple effects on rural development due to its relation with economic activities, it plays a decisive role in rural ‘areas’ development (Ibănescu et al., 2018). Rural development strategy emphasizing the rural economy through tourism as the engine of economic growth at a local level (Sharif & Lonik, 2014; Sharif & Lonik, 2017; Dai et al., 2017) through diversification of economic activities with the local community participation (Ertuna & Kirbas, 2012; Sharif & Lonik, 2017) in terms of resorts and accommodations, hospitality, locally made food items, recreation and spending leisure time, offering tourism support services, and integration of agricultural activities with tourism contributes to the socioeconomic development of rural communities (Salleh et al., 2012; Hasan & Siddique, 2016). Considering the positive tourism impacts on the local economy, tourism development has boosted motivation for small-scale entrepreneurship development and can play a crucial role in reducing poverty (Ginting et al., 2023; Njoya & Seetaram, 2018), enhancing livelihood (Anup & Parajuli, 2014; Chen et al., 2018), improving life quality and enhancing ‘villagers’ socioeconomic wellbeing (Muresan et al., 2016; Mahjori Karmozdi et al., 2019; Sharif & Lonik, 2017), increasing the economic value of food products and motivation for agricultural development (Chuang, 2010; Roberts et al., 2017), creating or developing new local enterprises (Hasan & Siddique, 2016; Chang et al., 2018) can stabilize rural populations (Chen et al., 2018; Ibănescu et al., 2018). Today, the

tourism industry, particularly creative tourism, in addition to the quantitative efforts, goes towards qualitative and creativity trends (Shahraki, 2018; Lee & Lee, 2015). In this trend, creative economy, industries, and creative class play a crucial role. The changes in tourism trends are presented in Table 1.

Conventional models of heritage-based cultural tourism differ from creative tourism, centered on intangible skills and knowledge-based assets (Richards, 2020). There are also emerging examples of new models of creative tourism in rural areas, which include the development of knowledge hubs, maker festivals, rural networks, and niche specialization (Richards, 2019). Besides creating and managing spare time entertainment, it creates new and unique tourist experiences (De Bruin & Jelinčić, 2016; Dean et al., 2019). Many aspects of creativity and contemporary culture now fall under the UNWTO (2018: 13) definition of cultural tourism, which includes “arts and architecture, historical and cultural heritage, culinary heritage, literature, music, creative industries and the living cultures with their lifestyles, value systems, beliefs and traditions.” This suggests significant integration of the creative economy and cultural tourism. Thus, in tourism, creativity has become a condition for the survival of many destinations, trying to oppose the massification present in this activity (Remoaldo et al., 2020). Broder suggests that there is a link between creativity and place that has been conceptualized as creative effervescence (Brouder, 2012). Besides creativity, there are common key elements in the creative tourism concept, including active participation (Lee et al., 2016; Souca, 2019), learning and cocreation activities (Richards, 2020; Remoaldo et al., 2020), acquiring unique and memorable experiences (Li & Kovacs, 2021; Dean et al., 2019) contact with local people (Richards, 2011; Remoaldo et al., 2019; Li & Kovacs, 2021), and developing skills (Li & Kovacs, 2021). In this respect, creative tourism, through an organic process, involves the interaction between tourists and the local community and contributes to safeguarding the intangible cultural heritage for the further generations (Einali et al., 2019; Remoaldo et al., 2020; Rahimi et al., 2020).

Table 1. Changes in tourism trends

Characteristics of tourism	Era	Tourism typologies
Package tour	Industrial era	Mass tourism
Tangible Heritage	Late industrial era	Culture tourism
Intangible heritage	Network era	Creative tourism

Source: Shahraki, 2018; Lee & Lee, 2015

The theory of creative tourism focuses on the creative class primarily concentrated in large urban areas (Souca, 2019: 43; Remoaldo et al., 2020; Duxbury et al., 2021), and less attention has been given to sparsely populated rural areas. Nevertheless, Creative tourism can be a beneficial strategy for small places because it is based on personal interaction, one-to-one contact between tourists and locals, and depth of place experience (Richards, 2019). Dimitrovski et al. (2012) believe that rural areas have a unique opportunity to attract tourists by means of establishing a connection between rural areas and their cultural, historical, ethnic, and geographical roots, which has led up to the captivation of creative class and formation of creative industries development highlighting tourism due to the movement towards making new connections in the rural creative economy agendas. In this process, Movements of creative workers to rural locations to live and work have been observed, and the creative industries are now being harnessed as part of economic development strategies – as a ‘rural regeneration tool.’ Rural areas most attractive to creative workers tend to have sufficient density to provide reasonable services, appealing landscapes, and other natural amenities. Thus, regarding the effects of tourism on the rural economy, besides attracting tourists, it lays the ground for reverse migration, attracting entrepreneurs and investors in small-scale activities such as providing services (restaurants, shops, health care, etc.) and marketing and developing handicrafts.

Entrepreneurship is a key element for any country aiming to be competitive in the knowledge-based global market (Penco et al., 2020). It is believed by experts that rural entrepreneurship is a formidable engine of economic growth (Katekhaye et al., 2020; Salim & Anis, 2021) and plays a crucial role in confronting economic challenges of rural areas, including maintenance of population or stopping rural-urban migration (Li et al., 2019; Supekar & Dhage, 2022), capital formation and accumulation and new investments as a link between innovation and market (Ievoli et al., 2019; Supekar & Dhage, 2022), generation of productive employment (Muñoz & Kimmitt, 2019), opportunities-risk management and generating motivation (Dobryagina, 2019; Katekhaye et al., 2020), increasing the productivity and competitiveness (Ievoli et al., 2019; Muñoz & Kimmitt, 2019), and so on. By increasing tourism participation in the rural economic development process, the rural community contributed to creating new growth centers; in this way, they can create new entrepreneurship among local communities (Ahmed & Jahan, 2013; Sharif & Lonik, 2017). In addition, rural tourism also contributes to economic and sociocultural growth, protection and improvement of the

natural environment, and the provision of infrastructure (Ahmed & Jahan, 2013). Some researchers have classified small-scale tourism entrepreneurship as lifestyle entrepreneurship, representing the non-economic goals as a motivational factor for hospitality entrepreneurs and tourists (Dias et al., 2020; Dias & Silva, 2021a; Sörensson et al., 2019). In this view, lifestyle entrepreneurs often go into business to make a hobby their income source or create a certain quality of life in a specific place (Sörensson et al., 2019). In rural areas, lifestyle entrepreneurs play a significant role in increasing income, added value, and business development because of creating a link between tourism and traditional businesses such as agriculture, forestry, etc. (Dias et al., 2020; Dias & Silva, 2021a). In other words, lifestyle entrepreneurship is a distinct mode of living that reflects a socially constructed concept of self that symbolically communicates a socio-political ideology/value position (Sweeney et al., 2018). In general, lifestyle entrepreneurship has the following characteristics (Wang & Xu, 2019):

- Lifestyle ‘entrepreneurs’ emotional requirements for egalitarianism and harmony and their preference for business reciprocity and cooperation tend to promote responsible behaviors in small tourism firms. Lifestyle entrepreneurs escape metropolitan cities to live in communities where they know their neighbors and can establish long-term relationships. They also want to work and live in the same place and avoid the separation of home and work (Xu & Tang, 2015).

- Lifestyle ‘entrepreneurs’ tendency to align their businesses with their interests promotes responsible behavior toward customers and reduces their interest in mass tourism products (Xu et al., 2017; Cunha et al., 2020) and by communicating and engaging with customers, they serve as cultural brokers for the locals (Sweeney et al., 2018).

- Lifestyle tourism entrepreneurs are generally “seeking closer relationships within a natural environment, together with opportunities to be involved in and initiate inclusive community relationships” (Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000: 386). They select tourist destinations as their place of work because of these ‘locations’ favorable natural environments (Sweeney et al., 2018; Dias & Silva, 2021a).

In exploring the domestic scientific databases, it was found that only a few studies have been conducted on the role of creative tourism in rural entrepreneurship development. On the contrary, there has been much research on this topic in Latin resources.

Richards (2011) assumes that the growth in the provision of tourism services regarding the tourist interest in local vernacular culture, everyday life, and the desire to become more involved through active, creative learning experiences has a decisive role in rural entrepreneurship. Lee & Lee (2015: 480) argue that nowadays, creative tourists try to participate in local cultures and want to experience creative activities offered by locals; further, these experiences had a prominent role in the changes in tourism trends. The study by Blapp (2018) in rural areas of Bali in Indonesia revealed that creative experience based on local culture and natural environment achieved great success in creating and developing micro-entrepreneurship. Furthermore, the findings of Wisansing (2015) in Thailand show that policymakers in rural entrepreneurship debates have emphasized creative tourism as a tool for community-based tourism development. Johanson & Lund (2017) in rural areas of north-west Iceland investigated creative tourism and entrepreneurship in rural areas with three interrelated aspects of destination dynamics. Firstly, the intensification of the experience economy and commoditization of the social; secondly, the 'individual's capacity and responsibility to innovate and respond to societal changes; and thirdly, the sociospatial embeddedness of economic activities. The findings suggest that focusing on the connections between tourists and tourism lifestyle entrepreneurs, creative entrepreneurship in tourism contributes to the socioeconomic dynamics of tourism destinations. Bezerra & Correia (2018) has pointed to the concept of a 'rural world' in north Portugal as a new form of tourism that increasingly looks for environmental, cultural, and heritage-related experiences. In this context, rural-based regions stand out, given the opportunity to contact nature and the traditions of communities (Partidário, 2003), particularly with food and local gastronomic traditions. These context links provide socioeconomic opportunities for the development of various creative activities. Bakas & Duxbury (2018) investigated how organizations, tourists, and communities in small cities and rural areas in Portugal interacted and forged new alliances and concluded that small and medium entrepreneurs play a significant role by establishing local organizations incentivized to offer innovative, creative tourism products within rural areas in local development.

The findings of Bakas et al. (2019) in rural areas of Portugal shows that rural creative tourism contributes to the emergence of artisan entrepreneur through creative tourism experiences and provides a link between artisans and tourists. Matetskaya et al. (2019), in a study in rural areas of Russia, concluded that considering the governmental and private sector support and investment, rural creative

tourism led to the development of creative tourism on a micro-scale. These projects have several economic advantages in collaborating with local communities, including craftspeople (artisans). Souca (2019) considers the development of rural creative tourism one of the best sustainable tourism strategies in Romanian villages, rich in culture that can develop small and medium-sized rural entrepreneurship to minimize economic challenges by strengthening local community participation. In their studies, Ferreira et al. (2019) concluded that the experience, knowledge, and importance of learning the entrepreneurship tourism perspective engage in the growing experiences and strengthen the territories and consumer satisfaction in rural areas. Dean et al. (2019) examined tourist and resident experiences of creative tourist attractions in Bandung, Indonesia. They concluded that experience quality, perceived value, satisfaction, and destination image are pivotal in enterprise development, interconnected with increasing the 'locals' participation in tourism. Suhartanto et al. (2019) investigated the role of rural creative tourism in four attractions in Bandung, Indonesia. They found that experience quality, perceived value, tourist loyalty, and tourist motivation are key factors that determine tourist loyalty towards a creative attraction and increase the motivation of rural tourism participants to enhance their businesses. The findings of Ginting et al. (2023) show that creative tourism is vital for the survivability and flexibility of tourism 'villages' businesses, especially during and post-pandemic, and continues to prosper the local community.

Custódio Santos et al. (2020) believe that applying innovative tourism products or low-cost tourism services by small and medium-sized entrepreneurs will maintain tourism 'destinations' competitiveness. Richards (2020: 1) investigated Case studies and claimed that creative tourism development by designing creative places to achieve unique experiences and attract active tourism participation develops a coherent narrative for local development. Henche et al. (2020: 1) consider creative tourism a knowledge-based management model to create competitive cultural/creative/historic tourism ecosystems while still preserving the sustainability of their social/commercial fabric. The findings of Dias et al. (2021b) pointed out that creative tourism development is a positive response to alleviate poverty through entrepreneurship development. As such, creative tourism offers interactive experiences, involvement of external entities, achievement of consensus, and traditions and culture management for poor communities, eventually allocating capital, skills and resources and strengthening the connection with other non-tourism activities. Meitasari & Furkan (2021) investigated the four principles of Sar-

vodaya ideology: 1) collective ownership, 2) cooperation, 3) self-reliance, and 4) profit sharing and concluded that the creative business development in rural tourism has contributed to the ‘communities’ socioeconomic sustainability. Scalabrini & Alvez (2022) explored some examples of good and not-so-good practices implemented worldwide, especially in Southern Europe, in Creative Tourism activities developed by entrepreneurs. The results show that ‘locals’ active participation and private and public sector support from institutions and enterprises developing creative tourism activities are playing an increasing role in creating clusters and the survival of local and regional economies.

The current research is applied and descriptive-analytic and in terms of method. Furthermore, the field survey method was used for data collection. Investigating different sources and extracting indicators and variables, the questionnaire was designed using a 5-point Likert scale (Table 2). The validity of the items was confirmed using a pre-test and experts panel, and Cronbach’s alpha method was used to determine the reliability of the items obtained at 0.868. One-sample t-test (examining the desirability degree of creative tourism indicators), regression, and path analysis (examining the intensity and directions of creative tourism indicators on rural entrepreneurship) was used for the ‘questionnaire’s data analysis.

3. Methodology

Table 2. Indicators and items of sustainability dimensions

Indicator	Variables	Items
Investment in tourism activities	Capitals from outside the village	Attracting capital from outside the village, accepting non-local people and investors, land and home ownership by non-natives, attracting investors in small tourism businesses, attracting reverse migration to villages and investment in villages, supporting investors in developing tourism accommodations and ecolodges, etc.
	‘Villages’ local capital	Investment in the development and production of local handicrafts, devoting more attention to renovation and rehabilitation of houses by locals, ‘locals’ investment in the development of gardens and farms for offering products to tourists, preparing a part of the house or farm as a tourist rest area, etc.
	Local institutions investment	Local ‘institution’s support of investors, facilitating the permitting of activities, investment in providing public services, offering discounts to investors, investment in building tourism facilities, investment in the communication sector
Infrastructures development	Communicative	Installation of traffic signs on the roads to the village, enhancing tourists transportation such as taxis, improving the quality of ‘villages’ and ‘attractions’ access roads
	Tourism public infrastructures	The number of handicrafts stores, providing specific places for exhibitions and daily markets, providing public services, offering infrastructural services to investors, making rest areas for tourists, social media advertising to attract tourists, ensuring the safety and security of tourists, etc.
Increasing the number of rural jobs	Job diversification in tourism	Increasing the tourism labor forces, increasing the number of new occupations due to non-‘natives’ investment, diversifying jobs, building motivation to start activities in villages, increasing job opportunities, etc.
	‘Resident’s persistence	Suitable conditions for university graduates to stay in villages, tourism development, and investment role in reducing youth and economic ‘activists’ urban migration, etc.
Attracting the creative groups	Creative class	Favorable conditions for attracting new ideas, welcoming innovation in offering tourism services, preparing the bases for artists and handicrafts in the village, employing expert and skilled people in tourism management, attracting educated in tourism decision-making and managing, ‘locals’ participation in ‘villages’ social, cultural, economic, and political decisions, etc.
	Traditional cultural values	Cooperation and participation with non-locals, Cooperation with local officials in holding festivals and rituals, advertising and introducing attractions in real and virtual spaces, local ‘community’s interaction with tourists, consideration of local officials to engaging with traditional cultural groups, local ‘officials’ attention to the revival of traditions and traditional culture, ‘officials’ effort to educate manners in meeting attractions, ‘tourists’ respect to cultural values, increasing ‘locals’ information, knowledge, and experiences, modeling ‘tourists’ lifestyle, etc.
	Aesthetics	Landscape changes in rural areas, environment compliance, protecting rural landscapes, land use changes, using indigenous materials for tourism constructions, using cultural and local symbols in road beautification
Tourism management	Risk-taking	the level of risk-taking in tourism investments, access to financial resources, readiness to run economic activities risks, receiving proper training to cope with crises
	Local ‘institutions’ support	Protecting the investors in tourism areas, facilitating tourism investment in villages, compliance in tourism construction, providing training in tourism self-employed activities, good local resources governance, supporting tourism entrepreneurs and local investors, facilitating legal impediments in tourism activities by ‘villages’ managers, etc.

Source: Einali et al., 2019; Sadeghiyan et al., 2021; Qasemlu, 2017; Bakas et al., 2019; Souca, 2019

The study area includes historic villages in the North-west of Iran, including Kandovan (East Azerbaijan), Darsajin (Zanjan), Hasanlou (West Azerbaijan), and Atashgah (Ardabil) villages (Figure 1). These villages were selected as the statistical population by considering the indicators and determiners of tourism performance, including the world and national heritage lists, historical context, unique architectural style or cultural ceremonies that occur at particular times, fixed population, and the national and international action scope. In terms of resources and tourist attractions, Kandovan village has a historical texture with hand-carved houses in the heart of rocks and mountains; Hasanlou village has a historic hill and city ruins and historical forts; Darsajin village have a historical texture, grape festivals, and unique customs; finally, Atashgah village has a historical fire temple, Kohollor cave, and an ancient hill that attracts several tourists besides their natural attractions. At the household level regarding the permanent residence of 850 households in the sample villages (Iran's Statistical Centre, 2016), 264 items were selected as the sample, using the Cochran formula, among which 235 completed questionnaires were sent to researchers and were set as the basis of analysis.

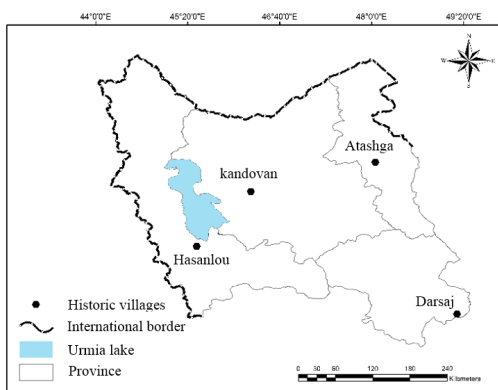


Figure 1. The location of the study area



4. Findings

The finding suggests that based on gender, respondents were dominated by males (85%), and the highest frequency was in the age group of 31-40 years old, which equals 73 % of the entire sample. Moreover, 73% of the sample has between 2 to 4 dependents. The literacy and education levels show that 72% of the respondents had an academic education, and 71% were married. On the other hand, 87% of people with formal training in each family were between 1 to 3 persons, and the primary jobs of 48% of the sample were in agriculture.

According to theoretical studies, the indicators related to creative tourism and its role in entrepreneurship development in rural areas can be classified into five groups: “investment in tourism activities”, “development of public infrastructures in the region,” increasing the number of jobs in rural areas,” “attracting creative groups in region’s tourism activities,” and “tourist attractions management.” Using the questionnaire while examining its desirability, the one-sample t-test, a parametric test, was used to analyze the collected data. Since the questionnaire used a 5-point Likert scale (1- very much, 2- much, 3- to some extent, 4- little, 5- very little), the obtained data fluctuated between 1-5. Thus, considering the numerical desirability of 3 (scale mean), the average calculated for all creative tourism indicators was higher than the target numerical desirability. All indicators were at the significance level of 99% and a 95% confidence interval of the difference. In all cases, the lower and upper bound got positive. Hence, regarding the studied indicators, it can be concluded that the development of creative tourism has a positive impact on tourism entrepreneurship development.

Moreover, the results suggest that the most significant impact of creative tourism in the study area belongs to the indicators of “investment in tourism activities in the region,” with an average of (3.27) and t of (32.78), including “attracting capital from outside the village,” “attracting rural capitals,” and “increasing the local institution’s investment.” According to respondents among indicators of investment in tourism activities, “attracting capitals from outside the village” and “attracting villages’ local capitals” indicators with an average of (4.21) and t of (3.62), respectively, felt the most significant impact of creative tourism development in the region. Furthermore, the results revealed that the variables of “the development of public tourism infrastructure in the region,” with an average of (3.70) and t of (26.47), along with the indicators, including “the development of communicative infrastructures” and “the development of public tourism infrastructure” were placed in the second rank of tourism development influence, below the investment indicators.

On the other hand, the results reveal that the development of creative tourism has paved the ground for attracting creative groups, such as attracting the creative groups and class, attention to traditional cultural values in tourism development and attention to aesthetics principles of attractions; indicators of tourist attraction management, including increasing the power of risk-taking in tourism activities and activities management; and increasing the number of jobs in the study area, such

as job diversification in the tourism area, also increasing the residents' persistence in the study area. Hence, it may be concluded that the development of creative tourism in the study area has contributed to entrepreneurship and sustainability improvement. Therefore, the relationship between creative tourism development and entrepreneurship variables is examined in this sector. In this respect, after defining the entrepreneurship indicators and later a theoretical study, the rural entrepreneurship indicator (diversification of entrepreneurship units, e.g., production units and offering handicrafts, people active in managing exhibition units, art festivals, and rituals, number of people working in entrepreneurship units, villages' accommodation and hospitality service units, etc.) were first calculated and was eventually used as a dependent variable in drawing the path analysis model. Moreover, the influential indicators in rural creative tourism, for instance, "investment in the tourism area," "public infrastructure development in the region," "the level of activities creativity," and "local management," were used as independent variables. From the perspective of the sample's household heads regression fitness model of factors affecting tourism entrepreneurship de-

velopment in the region indicates that about 0.694 of the positive effect of creative tourism development in small-sized entrepreneurship activities development is due to tourism (Table 4).

According to (Table 3) the regression fitness model was used to determine the indicators and factors affecting tourism-based entrepreneurship development in sample villages from the respondents' point of view. The results indicate that the relationship between the entrepreneurship coefficient and creative tourism variables is at a 99% significance level.

Looking at the β values, it became evident that a unit conversion in the standard deviation of creative tourism variables (investment in the tourism area, development of public infrastructure in the region, the level of creativity in local activities and management) from household heads perspective, respectively, with 0.346, 0.340, 0.140, and 0.094 units will enhance and develop entrepreneurship in the tourism area (Table 6).

Table 3. The difference in the role of creative tourism in rural entrepreneurship indicators

Creative tourism indicators	Test Value = 3						
	Mean	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
Investment in tourism activities	3.7930	32.784	234	0.000	0.793	0.745	0.840
Public infrastructure of rural tourism	3.7028	26.467	234	0.000	0.702	0.650	0.755
Increasing the number of jobs in the region	3.3606	15.824	234	0.000	0.360	0.315	0.405
Attracting creative groups in the region	3.4744	44.066	234	0.000	0.474	0.453	0.495
Increasing the number of jobs in the region	3.4627	25.273	234	0.000	0.467	0.426	0.498



Table 4. Variance Analysis of Creative tourism variables Affecting Entrepreneurship

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
0.833	0.694	0.685	0.073



Table 5. The linear relationship between the entrepreneurship coefficient and creative tourism indicators

Indicators	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression effect	11.555	4	0.382	52.514	0.000
Residual	12.652	230	0.055		
Total	24.208	231			



Table 6. The coefficients of the intensity of the relationships between creative tourism and entrepreneurship

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	B Std. Error	Beta(β)		
Constant	-0.008	0.347	-	0.347	-0.008
Investment	0.300	0.051	0.346	-0.023	0.982
Infrastructure	0.269	0.046	0.340	5.870	0.000
Creativity	0.273	0.098	0.140	5.846	0.000
Management	0.107	0.063	0.094	2.776	0.006



Dependent variable: entrepreneurship variable extracted from the questionnaire

In this part, the regression fitness model is used to draw a path analysis model of factors affecting entrepreneurship in tourism activities of the study area from the respondent's view using the theoretical foundation of research and other research findings (Figure 2 & Table 6).

Regarding the influence of creative tourism indicators on the rural entrepreneurship process, it can be said that the indicators of investment in tourism (0.346) and local

infrastructure development (0.340), respectively, have the most significant direct influence. Moreover, calculating indirect influence, considering the internal relationship among indicators, individuals, and group activities in tourism with a value of (0.143), has the most profound impact on tourism entrepreneurship. The calculation of the total influence of creative tourism variables suggests that the indicators with the highest impact are the investment in tourism indicator in the study area with a value of (0.462) and the local infrastructure development indicator with a value of (0.340) (Table 7).

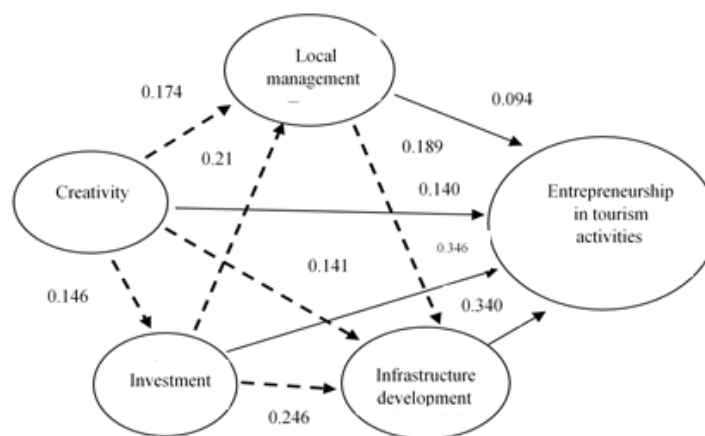


Figure 2. Path analysis of creative tourism influence in sample villages on entrepreneurship development from the respondents' point of view



Table 7. The direct and indirect influence of creative tourism indicators on rural entrepreneurship

Creative tourism indicators	Direct influence	Indirect influence	Total influence
Local management	0.094	0.064	0.158
Investment	0.346	0.117	0.462
Individuals and groups' creativity	0.140	0.143	0.283
Local infrastructure development	0.340	-	0.340



5. Discussion

Today, rural areas have attracted the increasing attention of the urban population as a tourist attraction due to the socioeconomic changes over the last half-century, with the aim of recreation and entertainment, leisure time, second homes, and to say just a few. In other words, tourism nowadays has been exposed to changes given the transition from the industrial era to the creative era. With the emergence of the postmodern tourist and cultural consumer, standardized experiences, like those provided by large entertainment venues, no longer satisfy the demands of these consumers. Instead, these postmodern tourists and cultural consumers now seek opportunities for authentic and unique experiences through expressions of culture, heritage, recreational activities, and natural landscapes. Therefore, rural life through a perfect combination of values, culture, traditions, crafts, rituals, art festivals, and traditional lifestyle of local people as the rural tangible and intangible capitals with historical, natural, and geographical resources can bring competitive advantages to rural areas without much investment for a postmodern tourism and tourist attractions development. Hence, rural areas can, through creativity, respond to the tourism demands such as the search for the “authentic,” a nostalgically embellished past, the perfect integration of Man in Nature, outdoor activities in natural contexts, scenic beauty, and relaxation in a calm and peaceful environment, far away from busy cities and by employing tourism opportunities as a catalyst for long term local innovation development has improved the rural cultural and social landscape, economic dynamics, and entrepreneurship development.

The results of analyzing the questionnaire suggest that from the respondents' point of view, creative tourism contributes to entrepreneurship opportunities improvement in historic villages of northwest Iran through a perfect combination of geographical environments, culture, and rural and traditional lifestyles. So that the natural beauties of villages, besides their tangible and intangible and cultural and historical attractions, have attracted non-villager entrepreneurs, increased investment in tourism activities, attracted capital from outside the village, and improved tourism public infrastructures. Thus, the results of the current study are in line with the results of the studies of Blapp (2018) in Indonesia concerned with the use of offering creative experience through the combination of local culture and natural environment to create and develop micro-entrepreneurship; Johanson & Lund (2017) in Iceland grounded on creative entrepreneurship in rural tourism with an emphasis on the communication between tourists and lifestyle entrepreneurs in rural

areas; Bezerra & Correia (2018) in Portugal by integrating nature and cultural traditions of rural communities to develop creativity in entrepreneurial activities; Bakas & Duxbury (2018) in Portugal grounded on providing a link between artisans and tourists in rural entrepreneurship development; Souca (2019) by strengthening local community participation in the development of small and medium-sized rural entrepreneurship; Matetskaya et al. (2019) in Russia, grounded on the governmental and private sector support and investment in increasing micro-entrepreneurial activities; and Scalabrini & Alvez (2022) by locals' active participation, and private and public sector support from institutions and enterprises developing creative tourism activities. Moreover, the analysis of the relationships between creative tourism development and tourism entrepreneurship suggests that the coefficient of determination (69%) indicates a linear relationship. Furthermore, the “investment in tourism” and “local management” indicators had the most and least influence on entrepreneurship of tourism activities in historic villages in northwestern Iran. In addition, the indicators of “individuals' and local groups' creativity” has the most indirect influence, and the “investment in tourism” indicator has the highest total influence on improving rural entrepreneurship through creative tourism development.

According to the results, the following suggestions are presented:

- Protecting and revitalizing the valuable texture in sample villages, especially in Kandovan and Darsajin villages.
- Supporting the producers of the declining handicrafts, such as Jajim weaving or carpet weaving, through developing local family workshops to increase employment and income
- Holding regular local harvest festivals (grape in Darsajin and walnuts in Kandovan), and rituals in sample villages.
- Supporting entrepreneurial activities through offering incentives, such as providing low-interest loans, holding handicrafts festivals, introducing tourists to local and cultural attractions, etc.
- Preparing the ground for attracting creative groups and individuals through offering incentives to increase residents' motivation

- Attracting residents' active participation in tourism activities by local institutions to develop their sense of responsibility

- Laying the ground for developing agritourism development regarding the sample villages' potential for diversifying jobs and residents' income and maintenance of the native population

- Providing tourism formal and informal training and offering tourists services at their request

- Using social media advertising to introduce the region's cultural and natural attractions to preserve them

- Managing tourism facilities investment through offering necessary licenses to improve tourism units' competitiveness

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no conflicts of interest.

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