



Community –Based Tourism (CBT) Planning and Possibilities: The Case of Shahmirzad, Iran

Esmail Khaksar Shahmirzadi ¹ , Habib Alipour ²

1. (Corresponding Author) *Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Faculty Tourism, Semnan University, Semnan, Iran*

Email: esmaeil_khaksar@semnan.ac.ir

2. *Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management, Eastern Mediterranean University, Famagusta, Northern Cyprus*

Email: habib.alipour@emu.edu.tr

ARTICLE INFO

Article type:
Research Paper

Article History:

Received:

15 January 2026

Received in revised form:

25 February 2026

Accepted:

1 April 2026

Available online:

26 April 2026

Keywords:

*Erosive Governance,
Community-Based Tourism
(CBT), Community
Participation,
Sustainable Tourism,
Rural Development,
Shahmirzad.*

ABSTRACT

Community participation is widely recognized as a critical component of sustainable tourism development; however, tourism planning in many destinations has historically overlooked the knowledge, consent, and involvement of host communities. Such top down approaches often result in uneven distribution of benefits and limited long term sustainability. In response, Community Based Tourism (CBT) has emerged as a development strategy that emphasizes local participation in tourism planning, management, and decision making while integrating environmental conservation and cultural heritage preservation. This study examines tourism development in Shahmirzad, Iran, and evaluates the extent to which current practices align with CBT principles. A mixed methods approach was adopted, combining quantitative survey data from local residents (N = 199) with semi structured interviews conducted with public officials and local stakeholders. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and one way ANOVA in SPSS, while qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis. The findings reveal a structural gap between community capacity and its actual role in tourism governance. Although residents demonstrate strong support for participatory tourism planning, tourism development in Shahmirzad remains largely reactive and weakly institutionalized. Statistical results indicate broad consensus among residents regarding the need for structured planning and greater community involvement. The study concludes that strengthening participatory governance, institutional coordination, and proactive planning is essential for advancing a sustainable Community Based Tourism model in Shahmirzad.

Citation: Khaksar Shahmirzadi, E., & Alipour, H. (2026). Community –Based Tourism (CBT) Planning and Possibilities: The Case of Shahmirzad, Iran. *Journal of Rural Research*, 17 (1), 21-34.
<http://doi.org/10.22059/jrur.2026.415435.2119>



© The Author (s)

This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC 4.0 license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>)

Publisher: University of Tehran Press

Introduction

Tourism has evolved into one of the most dynamic and economically significant industries globally, with the capacity to influence social, cultural, and environmental dimensions of host communities. Despite its economic potential, conventional mass tourism often marginalizes local populations by excluding them from decision-making processes, resulting in inequitable distribution of social and economic benefits (Abreu, Walkowski et al, 2024).

Communities, particularly those in rural or remote regions, frequently contribute labor and resources to tourism but gain limited returns, as real authority over planning and resource allocation typically resides with external actors, such as government agencies, tour operators, and private investors (Shone & Memon, 2008). This structural imbalance has motivated a shift toward more inclusive and sustainable approaches, emphasizing the centrality of local communities in tourism development (Priatmoko et al, 2025).

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) has emerged as a strategic response to the limitations of conventional tourism models. Originating in the 1970s as an alternative to mass tourism, CBT prioritizes local participation, empowerment, and the retention of economic benefits within host communities (De Kadt, 1979). CBT initiatives are characterized by active involvement of community members in planning, decision-making, and management processes, ensuring that tourism activities align with local cultural values, economic needs, and environmental priorities (Hall, 2007; Blackstock, 2005). By integrating social, economic, and ecological considerations, CBT seeks to mitigate the adverse impacts of tourism while maximizing opportunities for local development, poverty alleviation, and cultural preservation (Cordova-Buiza et al, 2025).

The theoretical foundation of CBT is rooted in principles of community development, social capital, and participatory governance. Community development emphasizes the role of local agency, collective action, and capacity building to enhance decision-making and resource management (Prasad, 2024). Social capital—comprising trust, networks, and shared norms—enables communities to cooperate effectively, mobilize resources, and manage tourism initiatives sustainably (Putnam, 2000; Onyx & Bullen, 2000). Participation, both as a procedural mechanism and as an ethical imperative, ensures that local voices shape tourism policies, program design, and the distribution of benefits. Research has demonstrated that effective community engagement fosters a sense of ownership, enhances local knowledge utilization, and supports conservation and cultural heritage preservation (Pearce & Moscardo, 1999; Sebele, 2010). Rural and peri-urban regions face unique challenges that make CBT particularly relevant (Cordova-Buiza et al, 2025; Priatmoko et al, 2025). Declining agricultural activities, economic hardship, environmental pressures, and limited infrastructure create a context in which tourism can serve as a diversification strategy for local economies. However, successful implementation requires deliberate planning, institutional support, and capacity-building initiatives to empower communities and align tourism development with local priorities (Aref, 2010; Murphy & Murphy, 2004). Case studies across various countries demonstrate that CBT can contribute to sustainable development by integrating local culture, natural resources, and social structures into the tourism framework while ensuring equitable distribution of benefits (Cordova-Buiza et al, 2025; Priatmoko et al, 2025).

The present study focuses on Shahmirzad, Iran, a community embedded in a rural region yet experiencing a spontaneous tourism boom. Situated within the Semnan province, Shahmirzad offers unique climatic, topographical, and cultural attributes that attract domestic and international visitors. Despite these advantages, tourism development in Shahmirzad has been largely reactive, with limited strategic planning and inadequate community participation. This research aims to assess the extent to which tourism development in Shahmirzad aligns with CBT principles, including proactive planning, community engagement, and sustainable management of natural and cultural resources. By examining the processes, structures, and outcomes of tourism development in Shahmirzad, the study addresses critical questions regarding community involvement, institutional roles, and the potential for sustainable rural tourism. It explores the intersection of local knowledge, policy frameworks, and tourism resources, providing insights into the mechanisms through which communities can actively shape tourism to support socio-economic development, cultural preservation, and environmental stewardship. The findings are expected to inform policymakers, planners, and practitioners in designing strategies that promote participatory, inclusive, and sustainable tourism in comparable rural contexts (Abreu et al, 2024; Prasad, 2024; Jackson, 2025).

In summary, the shift toward Community-Based Tourism represents an ethical, participatory, and sustainable approach to tourism development. By centering local communities, integrating social and ecological considerations, and fostering empowerment and capacity building, CBT offers a framework for balancing economic growth with cultural integrity and environmental conservation. The case of Shahmirzad illustrates both the potential and the challenges of implementing CBT in rural areas, highlighting the need for strategic planning, stakeholder engagement, and institutional support to achieve sustainable and equitable tourism outcomes.

Methodology

This study adopts a concurrent triangulation mixed-methods research design to provide a comprehensive evaluation of community-based tourism (CBT) potential in Shahmirzad, utilizing both quantitative survey data and qualitative interview insights to ensure robust validation of the findings. The quantitative phase targeted adult residents (aged >18) who have lived in Shahmirzad for at least five years to ensure familiarity with local tourism dynamics. A simple random sampling method was used; out of 280 questionnaires distributed, 199 valid responses were retrieved, yielding a 72% response rate. The 46-item survey instrument, measured on a five-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree), was developed based on framework Hausler, 2005 and covered four dimensions: CBT awareness, community participation, social trust, and perception of economic/environmental impacts. The instrument's content validity was confirmed by a panel of 10 tourism and rural development experts, and a pilot study with 30 residents led to minor refinements and established a high internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.95).

In parallel, the qualitative phase utilized purposive sampling to select 10 key informants, ensuring a balanced representation of the local tourism ecosystem. The cohort consisted of 4 municipal officials (planning & management expertise), 3 local tourism business owners, and 3 community leaders, selected for their extensive experience and decision-

making roles in Shahmirzad. Semi-structured interviews (45–60 minutes) were conducted, audio-recorded, and transcribed verbatim. The qualitative data were processed using thematic analysis, involving open and axial coding to identify emergent patterns in institutional planning and participatory barriers. Finally, the quantitative and qualitative datasets were triangulated, harmonizing the statistical relationships—analyzed via SPSS v.20 (including Pearson correlation, t-tests, ANOVA, and chi-square)—with the institutional and social insights derived from the thematic analysis. This integration ensures that the study’s conclusions are empirically robust and reflect the multidimensional nature of tourism development in the region.

Literature Review

The conceptual evolution of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) signifies a paradigmatic shift in development discourse, moving away from capital-intensive, supply-led models toward a decentralized approach predicated on grassroots empowerment, socio-economic resilience, and ecological stewardship (Hall, 1996; Goodwin & Santilli, 2009). At the heart of this transformation lies the orchestration of social capital—defined as the network of trust and norms that facilitates collective action—which serves as the foundational architecture for participatory governance (Putnam, 2000; Aref, 2010). However, scholarly consensus posits that empowerment is not an automatic byproduct of tourism development; rather, it is a complex outcome contingent upon capacity building and the institutionalization of the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) framework (Beeton, 2006). In essence, CBT operates as an integrated system where the institutional “enabling environment” dictates the extent to which local residents can evolve from passive beneficiaries into strategic decision-makers (Blackstock, 2005; Sebele, 2010).

Translating these theoretical principles into practice, however, remains a persistent challenge across the Global South. Longitudinal analyses of CBT initiatives in Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa expose a recurring “implementation gap,” wherein the idealistic tenets of CBT frequently collide with the rigid, top-down structures of centralized governance (Tosun, 1998). In these settings, tourism expansion is often reactive and ad-hoc, prioritizing short-term revenue over long-term structural integrity. When institutional mechanisms fail to mediate this tension, participation is often reduced to a performative, tokenistic exercise (Murphy & Murphy, 2004; Pearce & Moscardo, 1999). Consequently, global evidence indicates that the success of CBT is inextricably linked to the presence of proactive, inclusive, and adaptive planning frameworks, rather than mere resource endowment (Sofield, 2003; Beeton, 2006).

Despite the proliferation of global discourse, the operationalization of CBT within the Iranian tourism landscape remains remarkably underexplored. Existing literature in the region is predominantly characterized by descriptive inventory-taking or surveys focusing on general resident attitudes, often lacking the diagnostic depth required to inform strategic policy (Aref, 2010; Alipour & Dizdarevic, 2007). This study contends that there is a critical disconnect between the theoretical imperatives of sustainable CBT and the lived reality of destinations experiencing rapid, spontaneous, and uncoordinated tourism growth. Shahmirzad acts as a pivotal case study for this impasse, embodying the friction between indigenous social potential and the systemic lack of a structured, community-centric planning trajectory. By shifting the research focus from descriptive

resource mapping to a diagnostic assessment of institutional bottlenecks and participatory readiness, this paper addresses a vital void in the literature. It offers not merely an analysis of a specific location, but a robust framework for bridging the divide between theoretical sustainability standards and the practical governance constraints of an emerging, high-potential Iranian tourism destination.

Strategic Community Tourism Planning and Management

Community-based tourism (CBT) has emerged as a key approach to sustainable tourism by emphasizing the active role of local communities in planning and managing tourism development. First conceptualized in the 1990s, CBT sought to ensure that tourism benefits were distributed equitably while strengthening local decision-making and participation (Pearce, 1992). However, early approaches were criticized for treating communities as homogeneous entities and underestimating internal diversity and external power structures that shape tourism governance (Blackstock, 2005). Despite these limitations, CBT established an important foundation for more inclusive and community-centered tourism planning.

The transition from reactive management to proactive strategic planning is considered essential for sustainable tourism development. Beeton (2006) distinguishes between reactive, compliance-based, and proactive management, emphasizing that proactive strategies enable tourism destinations to anticipate challenges and align economic, social, and environmental objectives. In tourism contexts, this approach often requires collaboration among stakeholders rather than competition, as partnerships and collective initiatives can enhance destination performance and community benefits (Leiper, 2002). Strategic planning in community tourism typically involves three interrelated stages: formulation, implementation, and evaluation, allowing communities to define development goals, implement locally driven initiatives, and monitor outcomes through adaptive management processes (Murphy & Murphy, 2004).

Understanding community perceptions is also essential for effective tourism planning. Social Representation Theory (SRT) highlights that communities consist of diverse groups with different values and priorities, shaping how tourism impacts are interpreted (Moscardo & Pearce, 2003). Identifying these social representations enables planners to better capture local concerns and support participatory decision-making, thereby strengthening community engagement and policy relevance (Beeton, 2006).

Assessing the outcomes of community tourism initiatives requires comprehensive evaluation frameworks. The Triple Bottom Line (TBL) approach integrates social, environmental, and economic dimensions of sustainability, providing measurable indicators for monitoring tourism impacts and guiding long-term development strategies (Beeton, 2006). Such evaluation mechanisms support accountability and enable communities to adapt tourism strategies in response to emerging challenges (Beeton & Pinge, 2003).

Community wellbeing remains central to sustainable tourism planning, encompassing quality of life, cultural integrity, and environmental sustainability (Dredge, 2003). Achieving these outcomes requires empowerment strategies such as capacity building, participatory governance, and support for local entrepreneurship, which enable communities to actively manage tourism development and benefit from its opportunities

(Beeton, 2006). At the same time, power relations between governmental institutions, private actors, and local communities significantly influence the effectiveness of participatory approaches, making the management of political and social power a critical element of community tourism governance (Hall, 2003b).

Finally, ethical tourism practices, corporate social responsibility (CSR), and public-private partnerships can strengthen the alignment between tourism development and community objectives (Beeton, 2006; WTTC, 2002). Ecotourism initiatives, for example, often link economic opportunities with conservation and community participation, supporting sustainable livelihoods and environmental stewardship (Rahmawati et al., 2024). Overall, integrating CBT principles with strategic planning, participatory governance, and sustainability frameworks provides a comprehensive basis for fostering inclusive and adaptive tourism development (Wijaya et al., 2023).

Figure 1 presents the Analytical Diagnostic Framework applied in this study. Rather than depicting a generic CBT model, the framework operationalizes the theoretical constructs discussed above and applies them to the Shahmirzad case. The three sustainability pillars—Social, Economic, and Environmental—serve as analytical categories for examining survey results and interview data. The lower governance cycle represents the shift from reactive management toward proactive strategic planning. Through this framework, the study identifies the structural gap between sustainability principles and current tourism governance practices in Shahmirzad, thereby providing a basis for strategic intervention.

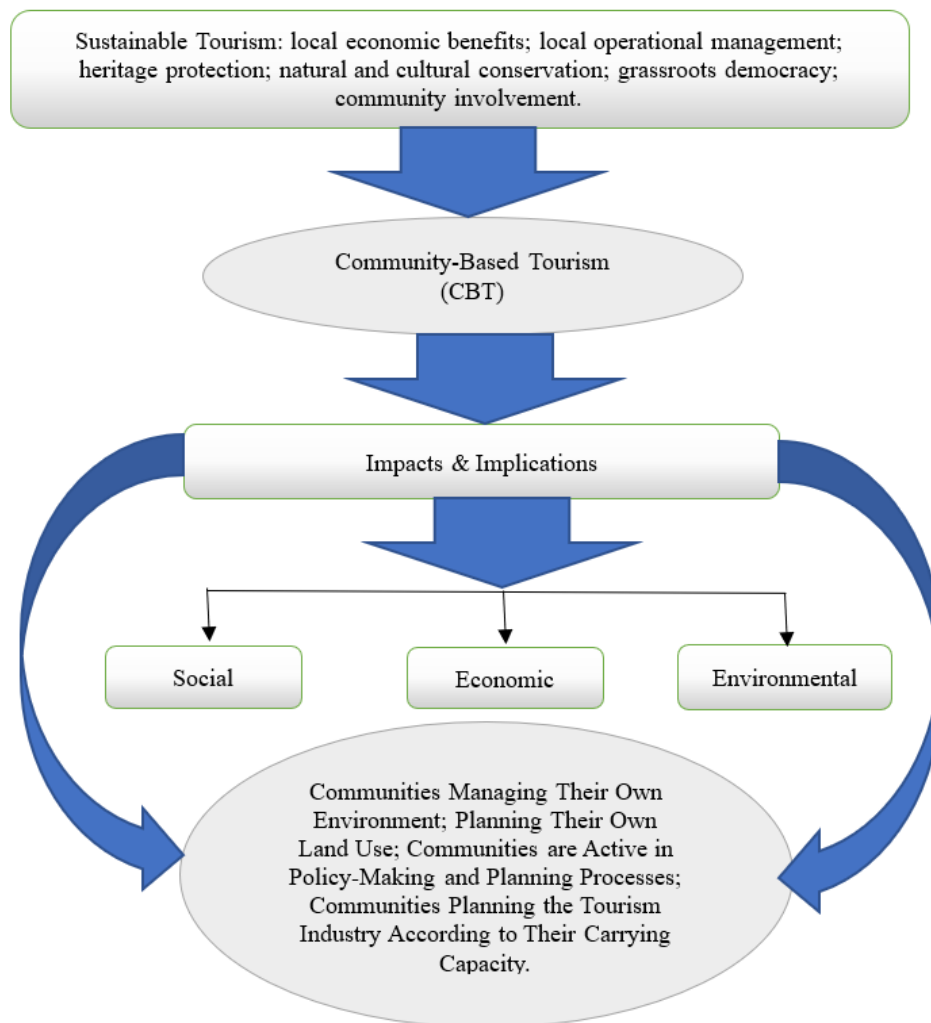


Figure 1. Sustainable Community-Based Tourism (CBT) Framework for Shahmirzad (adapted from Beeton, 2006)

Theoretical Framework

Strategic Management and Community Empowerment

Community-based tourism (CBT) has evolved from a normative concept into a strategic approach that demands proactive management. While early CBT models were criticized for oversimplification and failing to account for internal community dynamics (Blackstock, 2005), contemporary approaches emphasize the transition from reactive to strategic planning. As Beeton (2006) argues, proactive management enables destinations to anticipate challenges and align economic, social, and environmental objectives through long-term planning, formulation, implementation, and iterative evaluation (Murphy & Murphy, 2004).

The operational success of CBT relies on three interconnected pillars: empowerment, capacity building, and social capital. Empowerment is not merely a theoretical ideal but a practical requirement for ensuring that tourism initiatives benefit local populations and resist marginalization (Campbell et al., 2007). This process is sustained through capacity building—developing organizational, technical, and infrastructural skills that reduce external dependence (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2023). Furthermore, social capital—

manifested in networks, trust, and shared norms—facilitates the collective action necessary to manage tourism sustainably (Rahmawati et al., 2024).

To evaluate these dynamics, this study employs a multidimensional framework. Fig 1 presents the Multidimensional Analytical Framework for CBT Implementation in Shahmirzad (Adapted from Hausler, 2005).

Rather than serving as a purely conceptual model, this framework functions as the primary coding and evaluation matrix for this study. It operationalizes the theoretical constructs of sustainability into four distinct analytical dimensions: Economic, Social, Political, and Environmental. These pillars provide the categorical basis for our empirical investigation: they were utilized to structure the survey instrument and guide the thematic analysis of qualitative interviews. By applying this framework, we are able to evaluate the performance of tourism initiatives in Shahmirzad against specific sustainability benchmarks, thereby identifying the disconnect between policy objectives and local governance practices. The governance cycle depicted in the framework represents the necessary trajectory for Shahmirzad to transition from its current spontaneous growth phase toward a community-integrated strategic model.

Finally, the integration of ethical practices and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) is essential for reinforcing these outcomes. Ethical tourism and Pro-Poor Tourism (PPT) initiatives—when embedded in institutionalized frameworks—ensure that tourism revenues and benefits are distributed equitably (WTTC, 2002; Beeton, 2006). By combining participatory governance, capacity-building, and ethical management, communities can retain control over their developmental trajectories, ensuring that tourism acts as a vehicle for holistic development rather than merely an economic activity (Wijaya et al., 2023).

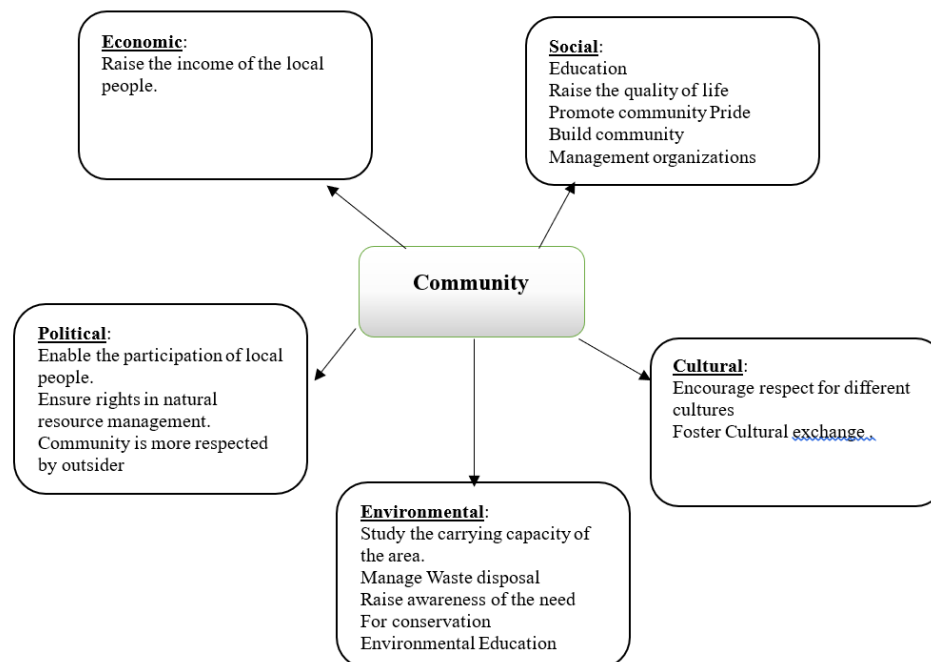


Figure 2. Multidimensional Analytical Framework for CBT Implementation in Shahmirzad (Adapted from Hausler, 2005).

Results and discussion

Demographic Structure and Socio-Economic Context

The demographic characteristics of respondents provide an important contextual foundation for understanding community attitudes toward tourism development. Table 1 presents the distribution of respondents by age, education level, and the relationship of household income to tourism activities.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 199)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	16-30	99	49.5
	31-45	56	28.1
	46-60	31	15.6
	Over 60	13	6.5
Education	High school or below	71	35.7
	Diploma	54	27.1
	University degree	74	37.2
Relation of income to tourism	Yes	72	36.2
	No	127	63.8

As shown in Table 1, nearly half of the respondents (49.5%) fall within the 16–30 age group, indicating a relatively young population with potential for entrepreneurial and participatory engagement in tourism activities. In addition, 37.2% of respondents possess university-level education, suggesting the presence of significant human capital within the community.

Despite these favorable demographic conditions, a clear economic disconnection emerges: approximately 63.8% of respondents reported that their household income is not related to tourism. This finding indicates that although Shahmirzad has considerable tourism potential and a capable workforce, the majority of residents remain economically detached from tourism activities. Such a pattern suggests that tourism development in Shahmirzad has not yet evolved into a community-embedded economic system and instead functions largely as an externally driven activity.

Community Perceptions Toward Participation in Tourism Development

Residents' attitudes toward participation and governance in tourism development were measured using a series of Likert-scale items. Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for key indicators related to community participation and institutional support.

Table 2. Residents' Perceptions of Community Participation in Tourism Development

Item Code	Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation
N14	Local residents should participate in tourism planning processes	4.21	0.71
N15	Community participation improves sustainability of tourism development	4.18	0.75
N23	Tourism policies should consider local community interests	4.09	0.82
N24	Residents are willing to cooperate in tourism-related initiatives	4.02	0.86
N40	Shahmirzad requires a structured community-based tourism framework	4.26	0.68
N41	Government institutions should support local tourism initiatives	4.13	0.74

N46	Long-term strategic planning is necessary for tourism development	4.19	0.70
-----	---	------	------

The results indicate a consistently high level of agreement across all participation-related items. In particular, respondents strongly supported the idea that local communities should be involved in tourism planning (Mean = 4.21) and emphasized the importance of establishing a structured CBT framework (Mean = 4.26). Similarly, the perception that community participation enhances tourism sustainability also received high support (Mean = 4.18).

These findings demonstrate that residents possess a strong normative orientation toward participatory governance in tourism. However, when interpreted alongside qualitative interview data, a discrepancy becomes evident between residents' willingness to participate and their actual involvement in decision-making processes. Interviews with municipal representatives and local stakeholders revealed that formal mechanisms enabling community participation remain limited. Consequently, the high agreement levels observed in the survey can be interpreted as an expression of latent participatory demand rather than evidence of existing participatory structures.

Statistical Comparison of Perceptions Across Income Groups

To determine whether perceptions of tourism development differ significantly among socio-economic groups, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted based on respondents' income categories. The results are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. One-Way ANOVA Results for Selected Tourism Perception Variables

Variable	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig. (P-value)
NO4	4.216	2	2.108	3.42	0.035
NO6	3.885	2	1.942	3.11	0.047
N34	4.973	2	2.486	4.02	0.019
N39	3.642	2	1.821	3.27	0.041
N40	5.118	2	2.559	4.36	0.014
Other variables	-	-	-	-	≥ 0.05

The ANOVA analysis shows that for the majority of variables, no statistically significant differences were found among income groups ($P \geq 0.05$). This suggests that perceptions regarding tourism governance, participation, and sustainability are relatively consistent across different socio-economic segments of the community.

The few variables that show statistically significant differences ($P < 0.05$), such as NO4, NO6, N34, N39, and N40, are mainly related to perceptions of economic benefits and institutional planning. These variations likely reflect the differing levels of direct engagement with tourism activities among income groups. Individuals whose livelihoods are more closely tied to tourism may perceive tourism development and policy frameworks differently compared to those with limited involvement.

Nevertheless, the overall pattern of non-significant differences indicates a high level of community consensus regarding the major challenges and opportunities associated with tourism development. Rather than reflecting polarized opinions, the results suggest that residents broadly share similar concerns about governance structures, planning mechanisms, and community inclusion.

Integrated Interpretation of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

To provide a comprehensive understanding of tourism governance in Shahmirzad, quantitative survey results were interpreted alongside qualitative insights obtained from interviews with public officials, academic experts, and local business owners. Table 4 summarizes the key themes emerging from this triangulated analysis.

Table 4. Integrated Findings from Quantitative and Qualitative Data

Dimension	Quantitative Evidence	Qualitative Evidence	Analytical Interpretation
Governance	High agreement on need for structured tourism planning	Officials report absence of formal CBT strategies	Governance gap between planning needs and institutional action
Community Participation	Strong willingness for participation (high mean scores)	Residents report limited influence in decision-making	Institutional barriers restrict effective participation
Economic Impact	Tourism provides income for a minority of households	Stakeholders note unequal benefit distribution	Tourism economy remains fragmented
Environmental Sustainability	Concern about future environmental pressures	Experts warn about potential ecological degradation	Need for proactive environmental management

The integrated analysis highlights a recurring pattern across multiple dimensions: while the community exhibits strong social capital and willingness to participate in tourism development, institutional frameworks capable of channeling this capacity into structured governance are largely absent.

This situation creates a paradox in which tourism development continues to expand due to the town's natural and climatic attractiveness, yet the governance structures necessary for sustainable and inclusive development remain underdeveloped. As a result, tourism growth in Shahmirzad can be characterized as largely reactive rather than strategically planned.

Taken together, the empirical evidence suggests that tourism development in Shahmirzad is shaped by three interrelated structural conditions. First, there is a significant gap between the town's human capital and its integration into the tourism economy. Second, governance structures for tourism planning remain weak and largely reactive. Third, despite strong social willingness for participation, institutional mechanisms for collaborative governance have not yet been fully established.

These findings indicate that the central challenge facing tourism development in Shahmirzad is not a lack of natural resources or community interest, but rather the absence of participatory governance frameworks capable of aligning community capacities with strategic tourism planning. Strengthening such frameworks would therefore represent a crucial step toward achieving a more sustainable and community-based model of tourism development.

Conclusion

To transition from the normative aspirations of CBT to operational success, this study utilizes the framework presented in Figure 3 not merely as a conceptual map, but as a

diagnostic analytical matrix. This framework synthesizes our empirical findings, enabling a granular assessment of the tourism development process in Shahmirzad. By mapping our data against these pillars, we validate the study's findings within the broader discourse of rural development, consistent with recent scholarship in the Journal of Rural Research.

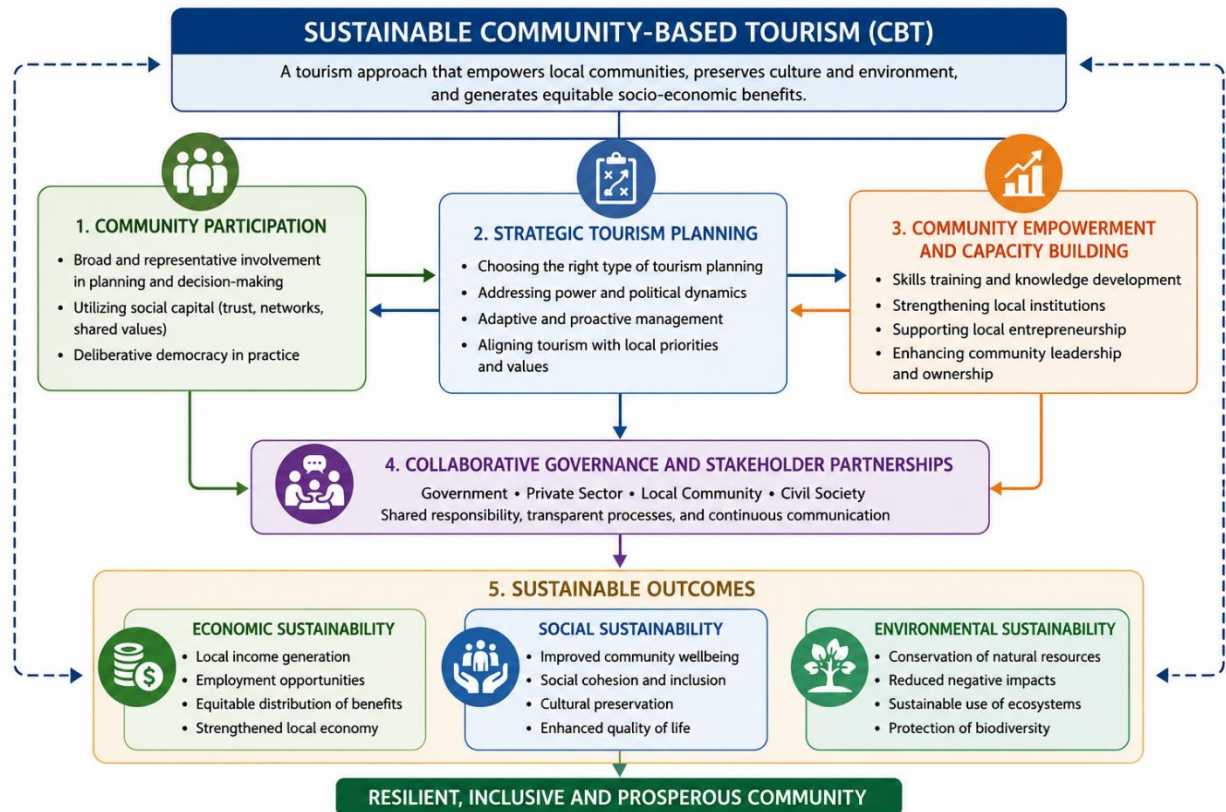


Figure 3. Analytical Framework for Sustainable CBT Development in Shahmirzad

The framework's diagnostic utility is demonstrated through the following empirical linkages:

1. Community Participation & Strategic Planning: Our quantitative survey data (see Table 2) reveal that while residents express high motivation for tourism, their participation is structurally limited by existing centralized administrative hierarchies. This finding aligns with the “Community Participation” pillar, confirming that spontaneous tourism growth in the region—devoid of strategic integration—fails to leverage local social capital (trust and shared values).

2. Collaborative Governance (The Bridging Mechanism): The qualitative interview findings expose a significant “governance gap” between local stakeholders and the private sector. The framework highlights “Collaborative Governance” as the essential bridge; our interviews confirm that current tourism initiatives often operate in silos, lacking the transparent communication channels required to translate social capital into collective action.

3. Sustainable Outcomes: The framework serves as our evaluation matrix. Our findings indicate that economic benefits, while present, remain skewed toward established actors, reflecting the need to operationalize the “Equitable distribution of benefits” metric

defined in our framework. The environmental dimension (conservation and biodiversity protection) remains the most under-utilized pillar, pointing to a critical need for local policy intervention.

The empirical evidence from Shahmirzad showcases a critical juncture: the community is moving from a “spontaneous” phase toward a requirement for “deliberative” development. As noted by Munro et al. (2010), tourism development in communities with centralized political cultures requires a slow, deliberate process of community building rather than top-down mandates. Our data supports this; successful CBT in Shahmirzad cannot rely on “lip service” to participation. Instead, it requires a formalization of the “Collaborative Governance” mechanisms depicted in Figure 3.

Furthermore, this study underscores that tourism is not merely an economic activity but a potent “social force.” In alignment with the perspective that tourism acts as a vehicle for holistic rural development (as discussed in numerous studies within *Pajouhesh-haye Roustayi*), we argue that for Shahmirzad to achieve the “Resilient, Inclusive, and Prosperous” outcome envisioned in our model, the local governance structure must undergo a reorientation. The “5. Sustainable Outcomes” pillar in our framework serves as a benchmark against which future policy performance should be measured. By institutionalizing the principles of capacity building and collaborative partnerships, the community can shift from being passive recipients of tourism impacts to active architects of their developmental trajectory.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Authors’ Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the preparation of this manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgment

The authors would like to thank the editor and anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments and constructive remarks.

References

- Abreu, L. A. D., Walkowski, M. D. C., Perinotto, A. R. C., & Fonseca, J. F. D. (2024). Community-based tourism and best practices with the sustainable development goals. *Administrative Sciences*, 14(2), 36.
- Alipour, H., & Dizdarevic, L. (2007). *A conceptual sustainability approach to tourism planning and development in post-war Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH)*. Taylor & Francis.
- Aref, F. (2010). Barriers to community capacity building for tourism development in communities in Shiraz, Iran. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*.
- Beeton, S. (2006). *Community development through tourism*. Landlinks Press.
- Blackstock, K. (2005). A critical look at community-based tourism. *Community Development Journal*, 40(1), 39-49.
- Cordova-Buiza, F., Medina-Viruel, M. J., & Pérez-Gálvez, J. C. (2025). Community-based rural tourism: A mapping technique analysis study from 2005 to 2023. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 12(1), 1-14.

- De Kadt, E. (Ed.). (1979). *Tourism: Passport to development? Perspectives on the social and cultural effects of tourism in developing countries*. Oxford University Press.
- Dredge, D. (2003). Tourism, community well-being, and local government. *Australian Regional Tourism Convention*, 3-6 September 2003.
- Giampiccoli, A., & Mtapuri, O. (2023). Community-based tourism and sustainable development: Critical perspectives and future directions. *Sustainability*, 15(4), 3258.
- Goodwin, H., & Santilli, R. (2009). *Community based tourism: A success?* <http://www.andamandiscoveries.com/press/press-harold-goodwin.pdf>
- Hall, C. M. (2007). *Pro-poor tourism: Who benefits?* Channel View Publications.
- Jackson, L. A. (2025). Community-based tourism: A catalyst for achieving the United Nations sustainable development goals one and eight. *Tourism and Hospitality*, 6(1), 29.
- Lee, T. H., & Jan, F. H. (2023). The effects of community attachment and environmental attitudes on sustainable community-based tourism. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 45, 101062.
- Murphy, P. E., & Murphy, A. E. (2004). *Strategic management for tourism communities: Bridging the gap*. Channel View Publications.
- Nematpour, M., Khodadadi, M., & Gholami, R. (2024). Sustainable tourism planning and community empowerment in rural destinations. *Sustainability*, 16(3), 1442.
- Onyx, J., & Bullen, P. (2000). Measuring social capital in five communities. *Journal of Applied Behavioural Science*, 36, 23-42.
- Pearce, P. L., & Moscardo, G. (1999). Tourism community analysis: Asking the right questions. In D. G. Pearce & R. W. Butler (Eds.), *Contemporary issues in tourism development* (pp. 31-51). Routledge.
- Prasad, K. (2024). The role of local community in enhancing sustainable community-based tourism. *Journal of Electrical Systems*, 20(7s), 558-571.
- Priatmoko, S., Isnugroho, E., Bujidosó, Z., & David, L. D. (2025). Digging up rural community-based tourism (CBT) in developing country, Indonesia's framework finding. *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 61(3), 1420-1429.
- Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. Simon and Schuster.
- Rahmawati, R., Nugroho, I., & Hakim, L. (2024). Community-based tourism as a strategy for rural resilience and local economic development. *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 55(1), 118-129.
- Sebel, L. S. (2010). Community-based tourism ventures, benefits and challenges: Khama Rhino Sanctuary Trust, Central District, Botswana. *Tourism Management*, 31(1), 136-146.
- Shahmirzadi, E. K. (2018). Development of rural tourism with a sustainable tourism approach: Case study of Shahmirzad City. *International Journal of Recent Engineering Research and Development*, 3(4), 1-8.
- Shone, M. C., & Memon, P. A. (2008). Tourism, public policy and regional development: A turn from neo-liberalism to the new regionalism. *Local Economy*, 23(4), 290-304.
- Sofield, T. (2003). *Empowerment for sustainable tourism development*. Pergamon, Elsevier Science.
- Tosun, C. (1998). Roots of unsustainable tourism development at the local level: The case of Urgup in Turkey. *Tourism Management*, 19(6), 595-610.
- Wijaya, S., King, B., Nguyen, T. H., & Morrison, A. M. (2023). Community-based tourism development and stakeholder collaboration in emerging destinations. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 48(5), 689-703.