



## **Aspects of Spirituality in Eco-Lodges' Landscape in Iran (from the Perspective of Tourists)**

**Mahdieh Sabaghpour Azarian<sup>1</sup>, Mohammadreza Rezvani<sup>2</sup>, Vajhollah  
Ghorbanizadeh<sup>3</sup>, Mohammad Hossein Imani Khoshkhoo<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> PhD Candidate in Tourism Management, University of Science and Culture  
(Corresponding Author), *mahdieh.sabaghpour@gmail.com*

<sup>2</sup> Faculty Member of Geography, University of Tehran  
*rrezvani@ut.ac.ir*

<sup>3</sup> Faculty Member of Management and Accounting, Allameh Tabataba'i University,  
*ghorbanizadeh@atu.ac.ir*

<sup>4</sup> Faculty Member of Tourism Management and ACECR, University of Science and  
Culture, *imanikhoshkhoo@usc.ac.ir*

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### **Abstract**

It is truly undeniable that tourism is a system leading to epistemology and resulting in spiritual growth and excellence. The mission of the journey lies in its spiritual achievements and eco-lodges provide the potential context for mutual interconnections and gaining meaning and excellence. Therefore, lacking emphasis on spiritual potentials of eco-lodges in the accommodation sector is the main concern of this research. The present study aims to identify the factors influencing the landscape development of eco-lodges from the viewpoint of tourists to explain and analyze the realization of the spiritual landscape of eco-lodges via the perception of the eco-lodges' landscape. The main concern of this qualitative research is seeking what a tourist sees, what he understands, how the type of accommodation would lead him from objectivity to subjectivity and ultimately, how the perception of the spiritual landscape from tourist's view is. Answering research questions through the qualitative

method with an interpretive approach and inductive strategy has been conducted by a semi-structured interview tool. Besides, the research data is gathered via two phases of coding the general concepts and classification of concepts based on the frequency. Lastly, the findings have been analyzed and interpreted through a conceptual framework. Based on research results, staying in eco-lodge causes leading resident tourist from objectivity to subjectivity and this is derived from perception of spiritual landscape. The components of the eco-lodges' landscape adapting with three parameters of spirituality in tourism, lead tourists to the perception of the spiritual landscape as well as the realization of the mutual understanding of nature and man in the journey and the achievement of the meaning and spirit through accommodation in eco-lodges.

**Keywords:** Tourism and Spirituality, Landscape, Eco-lodge, Accommodation, Destination



## **1. Introduction**

Since accommodation infrastructure is one the most significant components of tourism system, its quality is expected to have a direct influence on both tourism industry advancements and tourists' perception from destination (Soleimani Moghaddam and Eslami, 2011). Thus far, materialistic aspect is predominated by common paradigms of tourism where tourism is diminished to the means of gaining economic profits however, fluidity and physical movement of tourism contains many external and internal aspects and its main essence is based on human desire to cognition, excellence and attaining spiritual aspects of journey (Norman, 2011). Primarily tourism eco-lodges were including hotels, guest-houses and inn(s) but in recent decade new approaches are defined by UNWTO following the aims of preserving environment and developing eco-sites by constructing standards for reviving local eco accommodations adopting with ecological musts and must not(s).

Likewise, European Union (2003) proposed factors of quality assessment for tourists' accommodation in eco-lodges such as food quality, security, drinks, equipment quality, friendliness of locals and hosts, responsibility of hosts for providing peace and accessibility to attractions of destination. Though the emergence of this type of residence in tourism has had a long history back in ancient times of some countries, but tourist perception of travel when staying in eco-lodges is significant compared to the perception after hotel accommodation. Therefore, the undeniable non-materialistic aspects of this type residency appear where tourists experience both the direct connection with local culture of the destination and human interaction between the host and the guest. The present study intends to identify the main aspects of the eco-lodges' landscape from the viewpoint of tourists in Iran and clarifies the spiritual landscape of staying in eco-lodges by uncovering the significance of spirituality in tourism, may this emphasis become bold for researchers, managers and planners of tourism.

## **2. Literature Review**

Landscape is like a hologram which includes distinct dimensions and different people receive different concepts of it (Deming & Swaffield, 2011). The nature of landscape is objective-subjective, dynamic and it is all relative. In other words, landscape is the product of human experience in various

environments (Mansouri, 2010). Human is the key factor of landscape because landscape does not arise in itself and to this state human with all subjective complexities faces nature and various environments in a recursive process (Stobbelaar & Pedroli, 2011). Hence, landscape is based on two elements of observation and movement and is similar to tourism in this regard. There is a need to landscape narration in order to change the tourism to the epistemological system in which enhances the tourists' knowledge and encourages for attaining spiritual growth and uncovering the truth.

Therefore, tourism can be explained from two aspects: one illustrates the concept of tourism close to the sightseeing and leisure activities, but on the second tourism concept is epistemic and aims at developing spiritual insight and enhancing the tourist's understanding of nature and others (Mansouri, 2015). Herein the landscape subject is more emphasized. Bell (2003) believes that landscape is the part of environment in which human beings choose to live in and perceive it through their perceptions. Hence, there is a need for classifying the environment in order to understand the variety of factors affecting the formation of human life and the identification of different dimensions of the surrounding world (Sameh & Sameh, 2015: 38).

The most appropriate classification is the one based on the realities of the universe system which includes nature and man and the interaction of the two, thus the natural environment and its native landscape, human environment and its cultural landscape and ultimately the man-made environment and its physical landscape are considered. Sameh and Sameh (2015: 40) consider the mentioned three classified environments and emphasize on nature as a teacher of human and the most vital source of human cognition which allows him to receive the very initial perceptions and experiences through its native landscape (Zube, 1973). By the other aspect, the human environment means the external dimensions of man and the effects of his presence in the outside world, this creates the social and cultural landscape of every civilization and this provides the possibility for transferring traditions and values from generation to generation.

In environment, consequently in human environment the interactions amongst human and nature as well as human with other human beings are inevitable (Zube & Pitt, 1981). Similarly, the man-made environment constitutes a set of adaptations that man creates with other two natural and human environments. The man-made environment is derived from the change

in nature which is caused by human in order to meeting needs, accomplishing tasks and gaining novel experiences (Mansouri, 2015). This research has focused on man-made environment concerning accommodation services in tourism field.

Today, modern tourists seek for unique travel experience. Thus, the interaction of eco-lodge with nature enhances tourists' satisfaction and experience as well as improving sustainable development in many aspects. There are few researches in examining the role of touristic experience in accommodation infrastructure instead; huge numbers of investigations are about relations amongst travel service quality and tourist satisfaction (Kim Lian chan, 2010: 78). In recent decades, destination management organizations focus on implementing experiential and emotional marketing to derive more tourist loyalty to tourism destination (McIntosh & Siggs, ۲۰۰۵; Bigne and Andreu, 2004) and services play a significant role in generating emotional image in tourists' minds (Prentice & Anderson, ۲۰۰۰; Sirakaya et al., 2004) besides seems emotional reactions and mental responses are prerequisites of tourist satisfaction in destination. Consequently, Otto, J.E. and J.R.B. Ritchie (Table 1) identify six effective factors of the tourism service experience process and explain that the quality of tourism service experience can be measured by below scales

**Table 1: Effective Aspects of the Tourism Service Experience Process**

aspects	Examples
Hedonic	Excitement, Enjoyment, Memorability
Interactive	Meeting people, Being part of the process, Having Choice
Novelty	Escape Doing something New
Comfort	Physical comfort Relaxation
Safety	Personal Safety Security of Belongings
Stimulation	Educational and informative Challenging

Source: Otto and Ritchie (1996: 196)

As the nature of experience is subjective, individual, interpretive and emotion driven is similar to intangible aspect of services delivered in tourism destination (McCallum & Harrison, 1985).

In other word, the interaction of tourists and locals of a tourism destination is mentioned as a mean to enhance the tourist's knowledge about culture of destination as well as forming newborn experiences which lead to deep understanding of a culture of destination (Jacob, 2003: 82). The tourist is exposed to various tourism services from the moment the journey begins and during his stay in destination this involves three types of interactions including the interaction of man with the human being, which would be a kind of cultural confrontation, then the interaction amongst human with natural and local environment and lastly human interaction with the man-made environment and the physical aspect. Consequently, since tourism is a service-based industry, the quality of provided services is the main key to derive tourist's satisfaction and dissatisfaction (Kouzechian et al, 2011).

The intersection point of tourism and landscape is place. Tourism is location-based (Zahedi, 2013) likewise landscape owns the essence of place by nature (Mansouri, 2010). Therefore, tourists' movements through guest and host community includes interacting with variety of environments and service-centered nature of tourism illustrates the human as the key in both tourism and landscape subjects. The tourist experience interactions with other people and nature while receiving destination services, thus it is expected mentioned interactions lead the tourists to understand the native landscape, cultural landscape and physical landscape. The connection of human to rural nature by realization of landscape leads him to spirituality (Francis et al., 2008; Shackley, 2002).

### **1-2. Eco-lodges' Landscape in Tourism Destination**

The environment of eco-lodge is objective and perceptible and provides visual information. Hence eco-lodges' landscape may include a set of perceptible indicators through human senses and are processed in the procedure of perception. The eco-lodges' landscape is directly related to the accommodation identity and leads to concepts derived from interaction of human and various defined environments. Similar researches with the same context (Soleimani Moghaddam & Eslami, 2011; Shahivandi et al., 2012) indicate the fact that lack of proper accommodation infrastructure in tourism

destinations of Iran is one of the major dilemmas in tourism development. So far, the numbers of methods are proposed for developing local accommodations and eco-lodges and It seems logical to identify local accommodations with native architecture to take the first steps for quantitative development of tourism accommodations and this will allow identifying and analyzing effective factors of the constructive interaction amongst tourists and Natives and tourists with natural environment in order to enhance travel memories. Undoubtedly, the beginning of any decision aimed at development in the human environment requires an understanding of its nature and circumstances (Sameh & Sameh, 2015).

### **2-2. Spiritual Landscape in Tourism Destination**

In tourism destination there are many touch points with the tourist leading to tourist's experience and perception of the destination. Since tourism is known as a valuable change initiator in human life, it encourages human to restore his original nature and the existence of arranged platforms in various types of tourism allows the presence of meaning and concept (Imani Khoshkhoo, 2016: 11). Hence, the spiritual landscape is in fact referred to as the manifestation of spirituality in human when confronting the landscape in a defined place (Allerton, 2009, 2) and the perceptions' quality of the spiritual landscape related to the potential of landscape indicators to create an inspirational feeling, Identity seeking and thinking about hidden values (Brown, 1998: 1). Today, tourism in the world emphasizes on the lack and absence of the amount of spirituality more than attainment to the ideal spiritual point (Graburn, 2001; Haq & Jackson, 2006; Olsen, 2006; Sharpley, 2009).

Religious factors consist of a kind of loyalty and prejudice to preceding human values, on the other side the spiritual landscape does not merely refer to religious elements as spirituality is away from fanaticism and gives human the opportunity to explore, revise and rebuild prior human values (Hill PC, 2000: 66). Spirituality in tourism can be mentioned in all types of tourism and in dissimilar phases of travel but not just religious tourism. Spirituality is the essence of life because it affects human thoughts and deeds therefore it can be considered as a fundamental human quality that enhances values and inspirations of individuals' lives. (Shafia & Sabaghpour Azarian, 2016).

Nowadays, there are groups of tourists who enjoy ignoring customary modern world by welcoming urban tourism as well as staying and spending

their time in rural areas, unspoiled nature and local homes. Each physical location has a visual potential of various illustrations and the type of landscape perceived by the audience extremely depends on the audience's culture, personal needs and motives (Manzo, 2003). In fact, if a tourist seeks to meet spiritual needs, the physical spatial elements allows for spiritual perception and this understanding of a landscape leads to spiritual experience (Belhassen et al., 2008).

According to the research literature, achieving spirituality through tourism has been considered less as a goal but often as a mediator variable. Tourism includes various phases and leads people to recognize different values, and encourages daring to change and revise initial attitudes where necessary. Consequently, the researcher's concern is the discovery of qualitative communication amongst eco-lodges and spirituality and this research seeks explaining the spiritual landscape by identify components of eco-lodges' landscape. Thus, it is undeniably true that identifying effective indicators of landscape design is significant for realizing and clarifying managerial and planning issues. Therefore, the researcher seeks to discover the existence or absence of the potential spiritual landscape perception in eco-lodges and attempts to detect the effective elements in the formation of the eco-lodges' landscape from tourists' viewpoint.

### **3. Research Methodology**

This research intended to identify and explain the landscape factors of eco-lodges from tourists' perspective and utilized qualitative research method, interpretive approach and inductive strategy by means of interview and conducted semi-structured interviews to explain the spiritual landscape. This qualitative research encountered with a human related and interdisciplinary subject which existing prior theories cannot explain it yet, accordingly the need for qualitative research is necessary for exploration of new concepts and explanation.

Therefore, regarding to the specific context of research including eco-lodges, research has been accomplished with qualitative means of case study. In this research, the researcher did not face the pre-prepared hypothesis but met the heart of the landscape phenomenon to extract the elements of the eco-lodges' landscape from the qualitative data, and adaptation of mentioned elements of landscape to the dimensions of spirituality leaded to the spiritual



landscape perception. The interviewees have been determined purposefully among tourists who have experienced settling in local eco-lodge accommodations during journey in various cities of Iran. Since a qualitative research is researcher-centered, interviews are conducted by snowball sampling because samples with the target characteristics are not easily accessible. This qualitative research applies snowball sampling as a purposeful method of data collection. In this regard, the act of interviewing had been continued and repeated until there was no new concept and meaning to generate and researcher reached to theoretical saturation.

Data are collected from total of seventeen interviews through semi-structured in-depth interview and were coded through two phases. General concepts were extracted at the initial phase and secondly, the data were classified according to the frequency of concepts achieved from the first phase. Then the obtained concepts were adapted with the dimensions of spirituality in journey to achieve a spiritual landscape model. The results of the interviews had provided an opportunity for explaining and analyzing the set of eco-lodges' landscape forming components. Therefore, the research data collection is completed by library study method, experts' opinions, rational analyzes and the means of interview by snowball sampling. Besides, experts' opinions were used as a guide to find library resources and to conclude derived results from qualitative research results. In order to complete the research, the logical and rational analyzes of the derived findings from the interviews led to the proposing the final framework.

In addition to interviews with people who experienced staying in local houses and eco-lodges in tourism destination, there are numerous extractable landscape components from the perspective of tourists. Semi-structured Interview questions aimed at making discussions and realizing the real impressions of interviewees about differences of staying in co-lodges and the overall sense of this type accommodation in trip. As research data are gathered through in-depth interviews, few of opening questions are such as: 1) Have you ever had an experience of staying in the local home / eco-lodge in tourism destination rather than staying in a hotel? Where? 2) What are the differences caused by eco-lodge accommodation in your trip? 3), which factors grabbed your attention comparing before and by this kind of accommodation in journey? 4) How the accommodation experience varied and why? 5) What do you say if you want to express your feelings about this type of stay in the

journey? Likewise, interview flow guided to profounder talk as well as valuable data which are recorded and documented.

#### 4. Research Findings

In-depth interview with tourists experienced staying in eco-lodges, is analyzed through two main stages of coding. First step attempts to sentence by sentence analysis with interpretive approach through and afterwards, data is examined based on frequency of concepts and categories extracted from initial concepts. The researcher seeks to present geographical distribution of eco-lodges those were attended by research statistical population and this enhanced accuracy of interpretive analysis of data.

**Table 2: Geographical Distribution of eco-lodges based on research Statistical Population**

Interviewee code	Geographical Location
04, 17, 10, 07, 05, 14	Rural Areas in North of Iran
09, 11, 15	Rural Areas in East of Iran
06, 12, 13	Rural Areas in Center of Iran
08	Rural Areas in West of Iran
01, 02, 03, 16	Rural Areas in South of Iran

Source: Current Research Data

The implementation and coding of concepts derived from interview contents is accomplished based on data gathered by interviewing tourists experienced a stay in eco-lodges and local accommodations. A number of concepts are illustrated based on priority and frequency:

- There is an Intimacy and engagement amongst a host and tourist when tourists stay in local accommodations and this leads to enhanced tourists' knowledge regarding unspoiled attractions of tourism destination and essentially avoids tourists from distractions regarding paths and circumstances of visiting attractions. Therefore, a number of interviewees believe that engaging with local hosts and native people in destination cause with more familiarity and information about destination (01A, 02A, 03A, 09A, 11A):

*"... the intimacy that was created by the native people made me feel that I am in the heart of that community, I had an opportunity to get acquainted with the popular*

*special places where the locals used to visit, like spa and ..."* (02A) and *"... The natives themselves offer good suggestions for choosing routes and visiting attractions ..."*(09A).

- According to the findings, interaction with native host also has a great importance in informing the tourist about local customs, lifestyle and in general the culture of the host community. Thus, it creates a better understanding about the tourism destination's culture, ethics and believes. (04A, 05A, 08A, 09A, 11A, 14B, 15B):

*"... this type of residence is a great place for helping tourists to understand the region's customs, lifestyles and the way they interact, even during weddings and mourning, but conversely staying in hotels gives you the feeling of being in the isolated environment and you cannot really understand the real essence and nature of that community. "* (04A)

- Food is one of the three sacred desirability of tourism likewise it is considered as a part of culture which is significant in drawing tourist's satisfaction of a tourism destination (Sattari et al., 2011). While food has undeniable significant impact on the travel experience but it promotes recognition of the destination of tourism. Therefore, the use of local food in each region can play an important role in creating the destination image and unique essence. A large number of interviewees (01A, 02A, 04A, 08A, 09A, 12B, 14B, 16B) have considered the benefits of this type of accommodation due to the possibility of consuming local food in the native eco-lodge.

*"... The traditional meal that the host gave us was very simple, along with the local bread, which gave a huge pleasure ..."* (01A) and *"... in the most of hotels you have to eat their determined food but when you're at local home You use local cuisine and have more convenience and fun ... "*(14B).

- Furthermore, there are several contradictory and different claims regarding the security of eco-lodges from the aspect of interviewees. As the number of three interviewees who had experience of staying in eco-lodges of Hamadan city and Giso Beach believed that the accommodation

in local lodges had risky security whereas, three of the other interviewees who experienced Staying in Noshahr, Masouleh and Ramsar cities believe that this type of residence comprises a high security (03A, 04A, 12B, 13B, 14B, 16B). The reasons of mentioned ambiguity will be discussed in concluding part of findings:

*"... the security was very low, I made my mind to never experience staying in local lodges after this ..."* (03A), and *"... eco-lodge's security was also great so that we would leave our equipment, go around city return, yet everything was untouched ..."* (16B) and *"... I would prefer hotel because there are high levels of security ..."* (12B).

- Another determining point which can push tourists to either choose staying in eco-lodges and local accommodations or deciding on staying at hotel is the cost-effectiveness of residency. A number of interviewees believe that the lower cost of staying in an eco-lodge would make it more likely to go for this type of accommodation. (03A, 04A, 10A, 14B, 17B):

*"... Well, staying at the local lodge was an economic one, as we just go on holiday once a year it's very important and we try to choose an affordable residency for not losing pocket, even if we want we can cook ourselves so that we spend less on food ..."* (14B).

- Moreover, by asking about general emotions and feelings toward this type of residency, a number of respondents (05A, 06A, 07A, 08A, 16B) replied: "... staying in an eco-lodge was full of delegation. The landlord's cock used to awake us early in the morning and we could feel the spirit of life..." (05A), and "... I have a positive sense to staying in local lodges, it is extremely relaxing and refreshing, because it is sometimes necessary to avoid the use of technology and Internet ..." (07A) and "... local lodges have a fresh feeling whereas hotel is just too bulky with a very four-square building, no feelings can be find there..." (16B).
- On the other hand, some of the interviewees mentioned low health in the eco-lodges (04A, 09A, 10A, 17B) and noted that "... health and cleanliness was not observed, it was not clean at all, we won't go again it was enough once. ... " (17B), and " ... there is no health in the local lodges and comparatively hotel is far better and cleaner ... " (10A), and " ... actually

health is not respected in eco-lodges because there is no quality control like a hotel... "(04A).

- There are various holograms like aspects and views regarding issue of privacy and restrictions on privacy, as several interviewees (04A, 06A, 10A, 12B) claim that their privacy has been severely restricted in eco-lodges, and others believe that there is no limitations in this kind accommodation and the tourist is free and the privacy is respected:

*"... As the owner of eco-lodge usually stays at the same lodge, this highly endangers the guest's privacy, and hotel is fairly better" (12B), and "... in local lodges, lower level of limitations and restrictions are applied, so that guest is much comfortable because there is no annoying behavior tracking..."(06A), and"... The negative point of staying in an eco-lodge is that your personal privacy is at high risk, especially when you are with family ... "(04A).*

- Likewise, the impact of the simplicity and integrity of the eco-lodges' atmosphere have significant role in creating a sense of satisfaction and memory making which directly influence on the quality of tourists' travelling experience (01A, 04A), as some interviewees pointed out:

*"... The interior design of the eco-lodge seemed very interesting to us and that was encouraging for seeking and getting acquainted with the local culture of there ..." (04A).  
"... local people asked us for accompanying them to the farmland, then we observed and experienced the rural work, they were working hard to meet every day needs, but if we were going to the hotel, we would only have some fun and then return, so we could not communicate with the local environment properly..."(01A).*

In spite of the findings and according to reviewed literature, it is undeniable that the lack of a sufficient quantity of accommodations and improper infrastructure drive tourists to eco-lodges nonetheless the economic factor and cost-effective of this type of residence is one of the most important decision making determinants for tourists.

The interaction appears in two approaches when the tourist encounters the environment by accommodation in eco-lodge: the interaction amongst tourist host and local people of destination whom declare tourism services and

directly reflect ethics, beliefs and values of host community, such as intimacy, hospitality, local food, the amount of attention paid by the locals to the cleanliness as well as respecting to comfort and needs of tourist. The second interface is the interaction of tourist and nature which plays a significant role in presentation of the beliefs and values of the host society and the creation of a native perspective.

#### 1-4. Initial Framework of Research Findings

After reviewing and analyzing the findings of the research, the indicators are proposed in Table 3, in this table the frequency of the derived concepts are mentioned based on priority and each one play a significant role in generating the eco-lodges' landscape in relation to three areas of human, nature and accommodation services from the aspects of tourists who experienced this type of accommodation in different cities and villages of Iran.

**Table 3: Indicators of Eco-lodges' Landscape from Tourists' Perspective**

code	Frequency of Responses	Eco-lodges' Landscape from Tourists' Perspective	Type of Indicator
A	1,2,3,4,5,6,8,9,11,13,14,15	Interaction with locals and host	Man-made
B	1,2,4,8,9,12,14,16	Eating local food	accommodation services
C	3,4,12,13,14,15	The security of accommodation	accommodation services
D	3,4,10,14,17	Cost-effective and economic	accommodation services
E	5,6,7,8,16	Feeling fresh and relax	Man-made
F	4,9,10,17	Low environmental health	accommodation services
G	4,6,10,12	Privacy risk and limitations	accommodation services
H	1,4	Intimate environment	Natural Environment

Source: Research findings based on Interviews

Based on above table and its relevance to the findings of the research, it can be concluded from the fact that the dispersion of tourism destinations

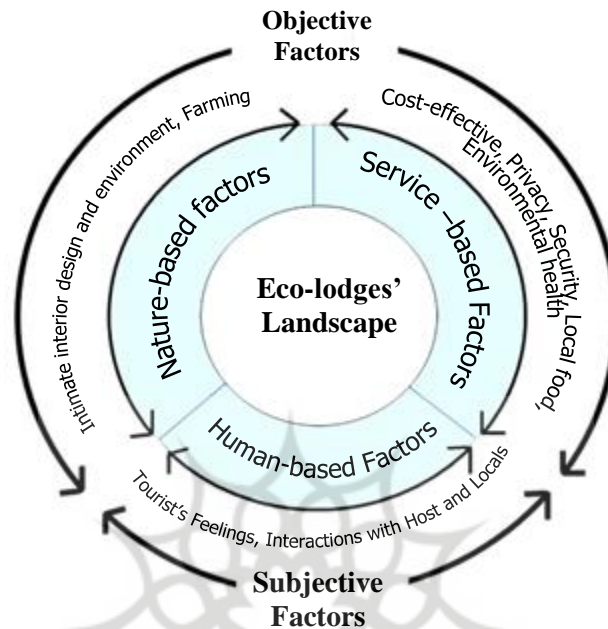
contributes to the generation of dissimilar eco-lodges' landscapes. Therefore, particular indicators such as security and privacy are more subjects to change than others and it is directly related to beliefs and values of tourists. Likewise, by evaluating the influencing factors of the landscape, it is important to mention the fact that staying in eco-lodges has led to the improvement of the quality of infrastructure. Since out of the eight effective landscape factors from the viewpoint of tourists, five indicators of interaction with the locals and host, local food, cost-effectiveness and a sense of relaxing and freshness and intimate encountered environments have pointed to the positive burden of this type of accommodation in tourism destination.

The interviewees' opinions about two indicators of privacy and security differ then the researcher faces both positive and negative interpretations. Finally, four out of the total interviewees emphasized on the low environmental health in eco-lodges and claimed that seems there is no quality control like hotels.

Consequently, three new indicators of privacy, cost-effectiveness and intimate environment of eco-lodge are derived from research findings and tourist's interaction with local and physical environment once they accommodate in eco-lodge and comparing to proposed quality assessment factors by European Union (2003), the mentioned three elements are novel and have the potential for future researches. Similarly, three mentioned indicators illustrate a greater necessity to investigate on tourists' privacy and lowering cost of tourism accommodation in Iran. Besides, it is true that diverse cultures all over Iran together with local people's hospitable nature lead to specific intimacy in local lodges compared to hotels in Iran. Based on findings, tourists feel fresh and relaxed, connect to man-made and natural environments and receive different travel experience.

#### **2-4. Conceptual Framework of Eco-lodges' Landscape**

According to the theoretical investigations and research findings, the three factors of Accommodation services (human), human and natural can be considered as indicators of the three sides of the landscape charter of eco-lodges' infrastructure.



**Fig. 1: Constituent factors of eco-lodges' landscape from view of tourists**

Source: Research findings Adapted with Feizi and Asadpour (2013)

By data analysis, it is evident that factors such as local food, health, security, privacy and cost-effectiveness refer to objective services which contribute to the improvement of the cultural landscape of the eco-lodge similarly a natural environment indicator that expresses human-to-nature interaction illustrates the impact of objective factors such as the intimate interior design and environment as well as presence of agricultural land nearby local lodges which enable tourists to observe and experience farm work and form the perception of the environment.

On the other hand, the subjective and human related factors of the landscape, indicate perceived generalities and emotional atmosphere of the landscape that appear in interactions of tourist with locals which depicts the main form of confrontation between host and guest culture, and the perceived sense by tourist from interacting with natural and man-made environment and locals. The derived model of eco-lodges' landscape represents an ideal model



of human to nature and human to human interaction which ultimately leads to the landscape perception. Based on the early suggestion of the researcher, the emphasis on local lodges and eco-lodges would enable the development of accommodation infrastructures in tourism.

#### **3-4. Proposed model of Spiritual Landscape**

Regarding figure (1), landscape perception is a spectrum that exists on the other side of objective factors and against subjective factors. In other words, objective factors lead to subjective factors. At the beginning of the research, the researcher presented a series of semi-structured interviews. Due to the emergence of eco-lodge phenomenon, there are still many people who do not have the experience of staying in local lodges. Therefore, the interviewees were selected purposefully and to question about their experiences.

The interviewees' experiences varied in locations and had a significant dispersion as some in the north and south and others in central, eastern and western cities of Iran experienced staying in an eco-lodge. In general, a number of interviewees explain the differences of accommodation in eco-lodges mentioning elements such as local interior design and the possibility of observing and experiencing farming in farmland nearby an eco-lodge, and several express different and sometimes contradictory emotions. For instance, some explained feeling more secure because of the residence of the native landlord's in the same lodge. On the other hand, others mentioned dissatisfaction with privacy and security due to residence of the local family of eco-lodge owner in same accommodation.

Considering the qualitative nature of the present research and the involvement of tourists' feelings and perceptions, similarly the research literature emphasizes on the conditional perceptions of tourists regarding eco-lodges. As stated above, the same concept that creates a sense of calm and security in a number of tourists (staying in an eco-lodge where the lodge owner family accommodates in the same place), may cause the insecure feeling in others. On the other hand, the lack of quality monitoring and quality control by the government organs and related organizations to eco-lodges caused uncertain implementation of health issues in eco-lodges. Subsequently, tourists' objections to health condition and cleanliness of the bed and rooms in northern and southern regions were comparatively more than the eco-lodges located in central and western Iran (04A, 09A, 10A, 17B).

In general, the majority of interviewees (1,2,3,4,5,6,8,9,11,13,14,15 and 16) illustrated to the differences of this type accommodation comparing to their previous hotel experiences and claim that this helped them to understand and learn about the tourism destination culture like food, music, dialect and etc... and indicate that lacking of technology and having more interactions with the nature and local environment and people assisted their refreshment process. Therefore, after identifying the eco-lodges' landscape factors from the viewpoint of tourists, the researcher attempt to adapt the dimensions of spirituality in tourism (Shafia and Sabaghpour Azarian, 2016) with mentioned indicators of eco-lodges' landscape (Table 2).

**Table 4: Spiritual Landscape of Tourism Eco-Lodges Model**

<b>Spiritual Landscape</b>		<b>Concept</b>				
Subjectivity ↑ ↓	Spirituality Dimensions in Tourism	Achieving Spiritual Excellence	Reaching Meaning	Achieving Mutual Understanding		
	Factors of Eco-lodges' Landscape	Human-based	Service-based (man-made)	Service-based (man-made)	Nature-based	Human-based
Objectivity	Sub-Factors of Eco-lodges' Landscape	Feeling relaxed and refreshed	Local food, Cost-effective	Security, Privacy, health	Intimate environment	Interaction with host and locals

Source: Research Findings adopted with Shafia and Sabaghpour Azarian (2016)

According to above model, three dimensions of achieving mutual understanding, reaching meaning, and achieving spiritual excellence are considered through the process of tourism and spirituality conceptualization. This provides the proper context for the perception of spirituality in tourism by the use of mentioned three dimensions and through their defined details. Reaching mutual understanding is one of the dimensions of spirituality in tourism referring to the triple relationships of human and creator, human with human and human with the surrounded natural environment. Therefore, this leads to the fact that the utilization of new personal, social and environmental

relationships help for the development of the soul, the creation of a different experience and achieving deeper perception of surroundings and directly influence on the physical and emotional state of the tourist. The interaction of tourist with host and local people of the destination as well as the direct interaction with nature, the local interior design of the lodge and the understanding of the simplicity of this type of residency, pushes the tourist to re-evaluate and re-think early beliefs and values and cause human's profound communication and dialogue with creator. Hence, the behavior of tourist is a kind of unity with nature.

### **5. Discussion and Conclusion**

The perception of spirituality in a journey is a subjective matter that has always been associated with human creation but these subjective issues are transferred to objective matters once are behaved during the travelling thus can be analyzed in terms of objective concepts (Heelas & Woodhead, 2005). Conversely, other researchers believe that objective elements in journey are received by human and are rendered through a process and are revealed through subjective factors (Shafia & Sabbaghpour Azarian, 2016) and believe that reaching meaning is one of the dimensions of spirituality in tourism which means moving from the external components to the inner one through thinking and intuition, consequently meaning is a general and human soul based Which is a combination of external apparent and inner existential elements and reveals profound aspects of a phenomenon.

Therefore, achieving potential meaning and spirituality involves tourists' persistency for thinking and existence of proper platforms for transferring profound concepts. Service-based factors including accommodation services is one of the third indicators of eco-lodges' landscape in which plays a significant role for creating spiritual landscape. According to the findings of the research, security is an important indicator derived from visual and behavioral elements in local environment and leads tourists to have secured and wellbeing feelings. Likewise, consuming local food illustrates a kind of cultural confrontation and generates knowledge about the host's culture similarly provides a sense of cognition and understanding of the cultural values of the local community. Once the tourist is exposed to eco-lodge landscape starts an inner journey from objectivity to subjectivity and experience the mutual understandings of human to human and human to

nature and by re-thinking on prior believes may reach to the meaning and ultimately travel to the spiritual excellence and realization of the human spiritual mission. As excellence consists of two physical and spiritual aspects thus the quality of the eco-lodge landscape perception creates a sense of freshness, tranquility and self-knowledge in tourist.

The prophecy of the journey lies in its spiritual achievements and choosing eco-lodge as a travel accommodation provides the context for mutual relationships with human and nature, reaching meaning and excellence and lastly a spiritual understanding. This directly and positively influences tourists' quality of travel experience. Besides, spirituality is internal and subjective by nature that can be received and interpreted by tourist through the landscape indicators. Therefore, tourism is a tool that generates the possibility of the tourist's encounters with the eco-lodges' landscape and providing the opportunity of gaining of excellence, meaning and mutual understanding for the tourist.

To conclude, if landscape initiates to a sense of excellence, mutual understanding and perception of meaning, then it can be considered a spiritual landscape. In recent decades, economic and monetary emphasis of tourist destinations on accommodation infrastructure caused the neglect of its spiritual dimension but since eco-lodges have valuable potential for enhancing spiritual capacities of tourism, the financial profitability can come together with the realization of the journey's mission and it enables the spiritual perception of the tourist in different stages of travel. A journey that offers tranquility, comfort, physical and spiritual excellence is not only due to the quality of services and man-made gadgets in the environment, but it comes from the human relationship with creator and other human beings which leads him to experience harmony with nature. From this perspective, achieving cultural and sustainable development will be possible more than ever.

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