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Original Article

The Role of Agricultural Tourism in Sustainable Rural Development (Case Study: Mazandaran Province)

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Abstract

Purpose- Agritourism provides a sustainable substitute that supports international initiatives to address environmental issues and the increasing depletion of natural resources. The aim of this research is to investigate the role of agricultural tourism in sustainable rural development.

Design/methodology/approach - The present study is a mixed research (qualitative-quantitative) type that was designed in two stages. In the first stage, In order to identify and extract the factors affecting the role of agricultural tourism in sustainable rural development, 18 semi-structured interviews were conducted with experts in this field using purposive sampling method and considering the theoretical saturation index of data. Second stage: In the second stage, in order to ensure the accuracy of the first stage process and observe changes, exploratory factor analysis was performed without any initial division for the factors extracted from the first stage. Exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis were used in data analysis. The statistical population of the study at this stage was villages with agricultural tourism potential in the four cities of Tonekabon, Nowshahr, Sari, and Babol, which were selected based on a stratified random sampling method with proportional assignment, with a total of 320 people.

Findings- The results of the second-order confirmatory factor analysis also showed that among the second-order factor loadings, the economic and infrastructure structure (0.94) has the greatest impact, followed by the political and institutional structure (0.87), the social and educational structure (0.76), and the human and climatic structure (0.69) respectively, which have the least impact on the main structure (the role of agricultural tourism in sustainable rural development).

Practical Implications- Since Mazandaran province has high tourism potential, the results of this study can help policymakers to formulate an appropriate program in the field of agritourism in line with the sustainability of rural communities.

Originality/Value- This study works towards sustainable development by providing a complete strategy for the development of agricultural tourism, and this study has attempted to fill the gaps and gaps in previous studies.

Keywords: Agricultural Tourism, Sustainable, Rural Community, Mixed Research, Mazandaran Province.

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1. Introduction

Agritourism is an important element of sustainable development and rural transformation. (Sakharam Kale, 2025). The integration of agriculture and tourism has significantly advanced the application and promotion of agricultural technologies, such as intelligent greenhouses, precision agriculture, and other technical innovations. These developments have enhanced the intelligence and precision of agricultural production, thereby fostering the growth of green agriculture (Wang et al., 2023).

Moreover, this integration promotes the diversification and efficiency of agricultural development by leveraging the synergies between agriculture and tourism resources. Through this process, agricultural resources are utilized more fully and efficiently. To meet the demands of tourists, agricultural producers increasingly prioritize the quality and safety of their products, adopting green and organic production methods. This includes reducing the use of fertilizers and pesticides, which, in turn, mitigates agricultural non-point source pollution. Additionally, the integration of agriculture and tourism facilitates the extension and expansion of the agricultural value chain, such as the processing of agricultural products and the development of rural tourism offerings, further advancing the green and sustainable development of agriculture (Ayyildiz and Koc, 2024).

Rural areas' distinctive recreational value is being diminished by the unregulated effects of human activity, fast urbanization, and massive infrastructure expansion, which are all destroying the natural and social landscapes of rural areas (Fong et al., 2017). Agritourism provides a sustainable substitute that supports international initiatives to address environmental issues and the increasing depletion of natural resources (Paniccia and Baiocco, 2021). Despite being a 1elatively new tourism market, agritourism has expanded significantly in most developed countries, while agricultural attractions continue to gain popularity in developing nations (Baipai et al., 2022). Agritourism, which is a subset of rural tourism, is an innovative strategy that transforms farms into tourism destinations or diversifies farming activities to offer entertainment, education, recreation, hospitality, and on-farm product sales (van Zyl and van Der Merwe, 2021). Agritourism significantly contributes to sustainable rural development by safeguarding indigenous knowledge and traditional practices while also stimulating economic growth and preserving agricultural heritage. Additionally, it fosters fair and equitable relationships within local communities (Baipai et al., 2024; Ciolac et al., 2019). Beyond these benefits, agritourism aligns with key United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as zero hunger (SDG2), climate action (SDG 13), and responsible consumption and production (SDG 12), by merging agriculture with tourism (Dionizi and Kercini, 2025; Yusuf and Wulandari, 2023).

While agritourism holds significant potential, it often faces early-stage development challenges, such as limited support from national tourism policies and inadequate coordination of various stakeholders, facilities, and resources (Pérez-Olmos and Aguilar-Rivera, 2021).Pérez Moreover, in many tourism-related areas, short-term profit usually takes precedence over long-term sustainability and strategic planning, which might have negative consequences (Kazlouski et al., 2020).

Agritourism presents both opportunities and challenges on the path to sustainable tourism. Lately, researchers have been paying closer attention to it, recognizing its potential to address global challenges (Kataya, 2021; Popescu et al., 2023). However, major research gaps exist, notably concerning how to create and operate sustainable models of agritourism and how these models may sustain themselves (Paniccia and Baiocco, 2021). Essentially, agritourism farms form a vibrant tapestry of rural stakeholders−including non-profits, local enterprises, and governmental bodies−and the tourists who seek authentic rural engagements (Jamshidi et al., 2017; Ammirato et al., 2020).

In addition, agritourism creates various benefits for private farm households and provides a source of increased diversification and sustainability in rural areas (Ciolac et al., 2019; Adamov et al., 2020, Karampela and Kizos, 2018). This activity can provide an additional source of income for farms, allow to reduce farms' exposure to risk, and to create jobs opportunities and multifunctional production systems providing various benefits for society. In addition, agritourism can be one of the factors contributing to sustainable development

(Ciolac et al., 2019) and is of large and increasing policy relevance all over Europe (Streifeneder and Dax 2020). Agritourism is widely acknowledged to be highly developed in Austria (Dax et al., 2019), Italy (Galluzzo 2018), Poland (Germinario et al., 2023), Romania (Adamov et al., 2020), Switzerland (Lal et al., 2023), and various other countries (Grillini et al., 2022; Hegarty and Przezborska 2005).

Rural tourism and Agricultural tourism are recognized as one of rural areas' most crucial pillars of sustainable development. This form of tourism, with an emphasis on leveraging the cultural and natural attractions of rural regions, plays a vital role in creating employment and income opportunities for local communities while also preserving rural heritage and enhancing the quality of life for residents (Torabi et al, 2025).

The rural areas of Mazandaran Province are considered one of the most important agricultural hubs of the country due to its many capabilities and capacities, including fertile land and vast plains, suitable climate, and sufficient water resources. The province is also known as one of the most important and most visited tourist destinations in the country. However, the predominant type of tourism activity in this destination is both leisure and accommodation tourism; while this region, due to its numerous potentials and capacities, is susceptible to the development of countless types of tourism with special interests, including agricultural tourism. The increase in the urban population and their interest in experiencing traditional livelihoods, as well as the desire to escape from everyday life and connect with nature, has also created the best opportunity for this type of tourism in rural areas. Therefore, this research was conducted with the main aim of investigating the role that agricultural tourism can play in the sustainability of rural communities in Mazandaran province.

2. Research Theoretical Literature

Tourism is a rapidly growing and expanding activity with various impacts on different industries, serving as a significant factor in the economic and socio-cultural development of various regions (Dehghani et al, 2024). One of the ways to attract tourists is agricultural tourism. Agricultural tourism refers to visiting a farm for educational or recreational purposes. Agricultural tourism is related to family farms and depends on the activities of farmers who seek to diversify their income and create resilience against economic instabilities in the field of agricultural markets and climate change (Whitt, 2019). Also, the development of agricultural tourism means diversifying tourist attractions in tourist destinations and increasing the resilience of these destinations against the risks of tourism markets. Agricultural tourism increases farmers' income by providing recreational, educational services and selling agricultural products in farm markets (Mohammadi and Yaqoubinia, 2024).

The literature (Meraner et al., 2015, 2018; Germinario et al., 2023) highlights that agritourism diversifies farm activities, reducing risks and increasing profitability. In developing economies, small farms, susceptible to climate change, face potential issues with yield, investment, and competition from agricultural holdings (Addinsall et al., 2017). Also, diversified farms are more flexible in responding to future consumer needs in order to maximize profits (Meraner et al., 2015). A farm is considered diversified if its main resources are also used for activities other than core agricultural production (Meraner and Finger, 2019). In addition, agritourism (along with the provision of certain social services by farms, services for the production of energy from alternative sources, horse business and direct sales of produced products) is one of the directions of diversification of farm activities (Meraner et al., 2018). At the same time, agritourism (as well as the rental of land and buildings) is classified as structural diversification (Van der Ploeg and Roep 2003). Farm diversification is an important aspect of agricultural and rural development policy in Europe (Vroege et al., 2020).

Factors that influence the non-agricultural diversification of farms identified in the literature include environmental considerations, the characteristics of the farmer and the farm itself, the type of farm, and the consideration of risk (Meraner et al., 2018). In addition, a higher diversification of farms in a specific region can be favourable for the development of agritourism at other farms in the region too as there are positive spillover effects (Vroege et al., 2020). We can obtain a positive result for the country agricultural development through achieving the goals of sustainable development by combining the efforts of various sectors of the country economy, in

particular agriculture and tourism (Ambelu et al., 2018). In its turn, agritourism is considered to be one of the most affordable types of tourism (Lazarieva 2017). Overall, tourism ranks among the most profitable global industries and is a key driver of socio-economic development, also in rural regions.

One of the main factors enhancing sustainable development in regions is the value attached to cultural and natural heritage of rural areas which in its turn can encourage rational and systematic use of agricultural resources. In rural areas, agritourism is seen as an opportunity to diversify farm activities, a profitable channel to sell local agricultural produce/craft goods/services, and a possibility of employment on the farm for local residents, which contributes to the restoration of sustainable rural development (Ammirato and Felicetti 2014). The Tourism as a multidisciplinary industry is one of the key drivers of regional development (Plzakova 2022).

Agritourism policy development differs across nations, and this shapes the sustainability of the industry within the region. Mangwiro et al (2025), demonstrate the differences in policy development and implementation across six Southern African countries. They emphasize important factors like infrastructure, institutional support, stakeholder engagement, national policy frameworks, and monitoring systems. The authors advocate for a more cooperative strategy, including private-sector-led agritourism groups and interministerial taskforces to improve governance and spur industry growth.

Similar challenges exist in Tamil Nadu, where Sennimalai et al (2025), point out that limited public awareness and weak licensing laws are holding agritourism back. They propose the establishment of a dedicated agritourism development committee, alongside educational initiatives and training programs, to formalize governance and equip local stakeholders.

A more structured governance approach is evident in Austria, as analyzed by Quendler (2018), who examine the country's adherence to global agritourism values while maintaining a distinct local identity. The incorporation of quality standards, marketing strategies, and cross-sector collaboration into the national policy framework demonstrates the importance of aligning global standards with locally adapted regulations. These studies emphasize the importance of institutional support, regulatory frameworks, and policy development in ensuring the viability of agritourism. While some regions face policy gaps in agritourism, others have well-structured governance systems that drive rural development. For long-term success, a combination of clear licensing mechanisms, stakeholder-driven governance, and alignment with broader agricultural and tourism policies is essential.

Quendler et al (2024), examine Austria's incorporation of global agritourism principles, as promoted by the Global Agritourism Network Committee, to maintain a unique local identity in accordance with international norms. The nation successfully strikes a balance between national policies and international frameworks by promoting agricultural diversity, showcasing local resources, and offering authentic experiences. The study highlights the importance of structured guidelines, strategic marketing, and cross-sector synergies in ensuring the sustainability of agritourism.

The results of the research studies show that there are many diverse and numerous factors that are effective in the development of agricultural tourism. Some of these factors are general and are the same in most regions, but some other factors differ depending on the region under study and the characteristics of the region. Therefore, considering the very high potential of Mazandaran, as mentioned earlier, and the capacity of this province for all types of tourism, especially agricultural tourism, it is necessary to first identify the factors that affect the development of agricultural tourism in order to achieve sustainability in this province, and ultimately develop a sustainable agricultural tourism model for this province. This study works towards sustainable development by providing a complete strategy for the development of agricultural tourism, and this study has attempted to fill the gaps and gaps in previous studies.

3. Research Methodology

The present study is Applied in terms of purpose and paradigm, mixed research (qualitative-quantitative) with an exploratory approach, which aims to identify factors affecting the development of agricultural tourism and its role in the sustainable development of rural communities. In the first stage, in order to identify and extract the factors affecting the development of agricultural tourism in line with sustainable development, 18

semi-structured interviews were conducted with experts in this sector, including faculty members, researchers, managers, and experts in the tourism sector in the Agricultural Jihad Organization and the Cultural Heritage and Tourism Organization in Mazandaran Province, using the purposeful sampling method and taking into account the theoretical data saturation index. The criteria for selecting interviewees were work experience, as well as studies in the field of agricultural tourism, and familiarity with Mazandaran province and its tourism and agricultural potential. After conducting interviews, factors affecting the development of agricultural tourism were identified using content analysis methods during open and focused coding stages.

Interviews with each of the experts studied continued until the theoretical saturation point of data and the main goal of the research was achieved, the duration of the interviews was between 60 and 120 minutes. The validity of the research was achieved by examining different perspectives in a way that the study was conducted at different times and places and with experts from different groups. Attention to different times and places was to avoid any bias in data collection, and considering people from different groups was also done in order to achieve more reliable data (Hariri, 2006). To increase the reliability of the research, an audit trail was prepared. To strengthen the validity of the research, an effort was made to use peer-to-peer discussions (researchers who had experience conducting qualitative research) in the data analysis process as much as possible and to avoid the involvement of personal judgments and values in the content analysis of the interview texts (Panahi et al, 2018). Thematic analysis was used to analyze and process the data obtained from the interviews. In the present study, the expert panel members were a group of university professors, researchers, managers, and experts in agritourism, rural tourism, and rural development, including 18 people nationwide.

Second stage: In this stage, the components extracted from the previous stage were re-evaluated by experts in the form of a questionnaire to ensure whether the extracted components had the necessary capability to measure the research objectives or not. For this purpose, to ensure the validity of the research tool, the opinions of some expert experts were received. In this way, the content and face validity of the questionnaire was confirmed. Since these people were experienced experts, the content validity of the questionnaire was ensured and its reliability was calculated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.82, which indicates the high and desirable reliability of the research tool.

The questionnaire used had closed-ended answers that were scored on a Likert scale (five-choice) from 1 to 5 (Nazaripour & Zakizadeh, 2022). Therefore, in the second stage, in order to ensure the accuracy of the first stage process and observe changes, exploratory factor analysis was performed without any initial division for the factors extracted from the first stage. Exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis were used in data analysis. This means that first, the main components of the research were identified through exploratory factor analysis, then the significance of the relationship between the latent variables and the items was tested using first-order confirmatory factor analysis, and then, using second-order factor analysis, the ranking of these variables was examined based on their effect on the formation and explanation of the main structure (the role of agricultural tourism in sustainable rural development). To test the model fit, indices such as the incremental fit index, the adaptive fit index, the goodness of fit index, and the root mean square error of estimation index are used. The statistical population of the study at this stage was villages with agricultural tourism potential in the four cities of Tonekabon, Nowshahr, Sari, and Babol, which were selected based on a stratified random sampling method with proportional assignment, with a total of 320 people.

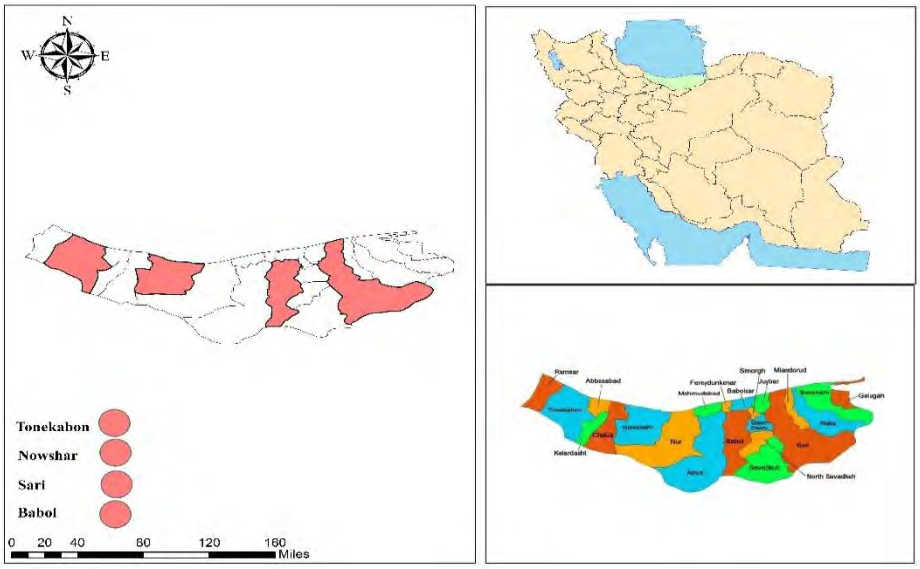

Figure 1. Map of the Study Area

4. Research Findings

The characteristics of the panel of experts are given in Table 1. As shown in the table, out of the total of 18 panel members, 10 were faculty members, 2 were managers of the agricultural tourism sector in Mazandaran province, 3 were experts in the agricultural tourism sector, and 3 were researchers in this sector. Also, in terms of education level, 13 people had a PhD and 5 had a master's degree. The fields of study of the subjects studied were tourism, agricultural management, agricultural development, rural development, tourism management, management, economics, and sociology.

Table 1: Profile of the expert panel members

Organizational Position	Education	Work Experience	Organizational Position	Education	Work Experience
Faculty member	PhD	20	Faculty member	PhD	28
Faculty member	PhD	22	Manager	PhD	25
Faculty member	PhD	18	Manager	Masters	27
Faculty member	PhD	15	Expert	Masters	12
Faculty member	PhD	25	Expert	Masters	10
Faculty member	PhD	12	Expert	Masters	14
Faculty member	PhD	15	Researcher	PhD	8
Faculty member	PhD	20	Researcher	PhD	10
Faculty member	PhD	10	Researcher	Masters	6

After initially summarizing the data and removing redundant and repetitive sentences from the interview sentences regarding factors affecting agricultural tourism in the direction of sustainable rural development, the initial concepts were recorded in the interviews and case documents. After that, the initial concepts were summarized in the open coding stage, which resulted in 4 subcategories, which are presented in Table 2. In this stage, more than 46 concepts and ultimately 4 subcategories were extracted.

Table 2- Data summarization process in the open coding stage of factors affecting agricultural tourism in line with sustainable rural development

Central components (dimensions)	Concepts
Natural and climatic factors	The possibility of exploiting agricultural attractions throughout the year, the diversity of agricultural products, religious possibilities, historical possibilities, natural attractions, the location of the region in terms of proximity and access to population centers, its prominence as an agricultural hub in the region, the attention of local people to sustainable development and preservation of the environment and natural resources, the degree of interference of tourism activities with agricultural operations, the creation of pristine and natural environments in the village for the development of agricultural tourism,
Human and socio-cultural factors	The possibility of participating in agricultural and livestock activities (direct experience of agricultural activities), the presence of educated farmers familiar with tourism, farmers' willingness to educate, farmers' willingness to provide recreational services to tourists, having handicrafts, having special customs and traditions, the level of awareness and information provided by farmers in the field of agricultural tourism and entrepreneurship, the spirit of hospitality and friendliness of the residents of the region, educating tourists by distributing educational packages in order to preserve the environment of the village, farm and natural resources by providing solutions, educating farmers in the field of preserving and restoring pastures and natural resources in various ways
Economic and infrastructure factors	Travel costs due to communication routes, the possibility of purchasing cheaper products, the possibility of purchasing agricultural products, the existence and abundance of tourist accommodations, the existence of shopping and entertainment centers, the region's susceptibility to investment and planning of agricultural tourism, farmers' financial resources for investing in tourism, increasing the number of agricultural tourism tours, providing facilities for cultivating new agricultural and garden products and medicinal plants, the excessive growth of second homes in villages, land speculation and increasing prices of agricultural land, the supply of local foods and livestock products, Asphalt road or highway access
Management and institutional factors	The existence of health and medical services, the level of attention paid by the (local) government to planning and investing in the tourism sector, informing and advertising about the many touristic capabilities and attractions of the region, creating a suitable platform for the participation and investment of the private sector in agricultural tourism activities, holding agricultural festivals and events, cooperation and coordination between institutions and organizations involved in agriculture, tourism and rural development, resolving the problems of farmers on national lands, transferring and issuing licenses for wasteland with agricultural potential and talent, introducing quality agricultural tourism sites and suitable facilities to tourists, compiling a booklet in the form of introducing the region's agricultural tourism attractions to promote

4.1. Exploratory factor analysis of factors affecting agricultural tourism towards sustainable rural development

Data for factor analysis are used that have the necessary qualifications for this task. For this purpose, Bartlett's test with KMO coefficient is used, if the KMO value is higher than 0.5, factor analysis can be used with confidence. This coefficient in the present studies is equal to 0.763, which is a suitable figure, Bartlett's test is also significant at the 99% level (Table 3).

Table 3: KMO coefficient value and Bartlett's test for the studied samples

Test Name	
KMO	0.763
Bartlett's Test	9846.245
Sig	0.000

After ensuring that the data were suitable for factor analysis, Varimax rotation was used to obtain significant factors. The extracted factors are listed in Table (4). These factors collectively explain 61.05 percent of the variance related to the variables affecting factors affecting agricultural tourism in the direction of sustainable rural development. In simpler terms, paying attention to these six factors can explain 61.05 percent of the factors affecting the development of agricultural tourism in the direction of sustainable development. It is necessary to clarify that out of the total variables under study, 5 variables were excluded from the factor analysis process due to low factor loading and lower impact.

Table 4: Number of extracted factors along with eigenvalues, variance percentage, and cumulative percentage

Priority	Factor Name	Total Value	Percent Variance	Cumulative Percentage
1	Economic and infrastructure factors	6.98	13.97	13.97
2	Political and institutional factors	5.78	11.56	25.54
3	Social factors	5.77	11.54	37.08
4	Natural and climatic factors	4.99	9.98	47.07
5	Educational factors	3.65	7.31	54.38
6	Human factors	3.33	6.67	61.05

The factor loading status after rotation based on the inclusion of variables with factor loadings greater than 0.5 is shown in Table (5). As can be seen, there are six key factors that influence agricultural tourism in sustainable rural development.

Table 5: Variables related to each of the factors affecting the development of agricultural tourism in line with sustainable rural development and the amount of factor loadings obtained from the rotation matrix.

Priority	Factor Name	Variables	Factor Loading
1	Economic and infrastructure factors	Travel costs due to communication routes	0.685
		the possibility of purchasing cheaper products	0.714
		the existence and abundance of tourist accommodations	0.621
		the existence of shopping and entertainment centers	0.587
		the region's susceptibility to investment and planning of agricultural tourism	0.715
		farmers' financial resources for investing in tourism	0.698
		increasing the number of agricultural tourism tours	0.710
		providing facilities for cultivating new agricultural and garden products and medicinal plants	0.633
		Asphalt road or highway access	0.642
2	Political and institutional factors	Availability of health and medical services	0.701
		The level of attention paid by the (local) government to planning and investing in the tourism sector	0.621
		Providing information and advertising about the region's many tourism capabilities and attractions	0.521
		Creating a suitable platform for private sector participation and investment in agricultural tourism activities	0.589
		Holding agricultural festivals and events, cooperation and coordination between	0.554

Priority	Factor Name	Variables	Factor Loading
		institutions and organizations involved in agriculture, tourism and rural development	
		Solving the problems of farmers on national lands	0.632
		Releasing and issuing licenses for wasteland with agricultural potential and talent	0.694
		Introducing quality agricultural tourism sites with appropriate facilities to tourists	0.645
3	Social factors	Possibility to participate in agricultural and livestock activities (direct experience of agricultural activities)	0.635
		Having crafts	0.666
		Having special customs and traditions	0.521
		The hospitality and friendliness of the residents of the region	0.597
		Supply of local foods and livestock products	0.529
4	Natural and climatic factors	Possibility of exploiting agricultural attractions throughout the year	0.625
		The existence of a variety of agricultural products	0.712
		Having natural attractions	0.664
		Being known as an agricultural hub in the region	0.512
		Attention of local people to sustainable development and preservation of the environment and natural resources,	0.598
5	Educational factors	Creating a booklet introducing the region's agricultural tourism attractions for promotion	0.564
		The level of awareness and information of farmers in the field of agricultural tourism and entrepreneurship	0.645
		Educating tourists by distributing educational packages to preserve the village environment, farms, and natural resources by providing solutions	0.711
		Training farmers in the preservation and restoration of pastures and natural resources in various ways	0.632
6	Human factors	The existence of educated farmers familiar with tourism	0.551
		Farmers' willingness to provide recreational services to tourists	0.682
		The location of the region in terms of proximity and access to population centers	0.646

4.2. First order confirmatory factor analysis

In order to develop a model of factors affecting agricultural tourism in line with sustainable development, the identified latent variables (exploratory factor analysis stage) were analyzed using AMOS software through confirmatory factor analysis. The results are reflected in Figure 2 and Table 6. Based on the information obtained, the factor loadings of all observed variables were more than 0.5 and the variance between the relevant constructs and indicators was greater than the variance of their measurement error, resulting in acceptable reliability of the measurement model (Figure 2).

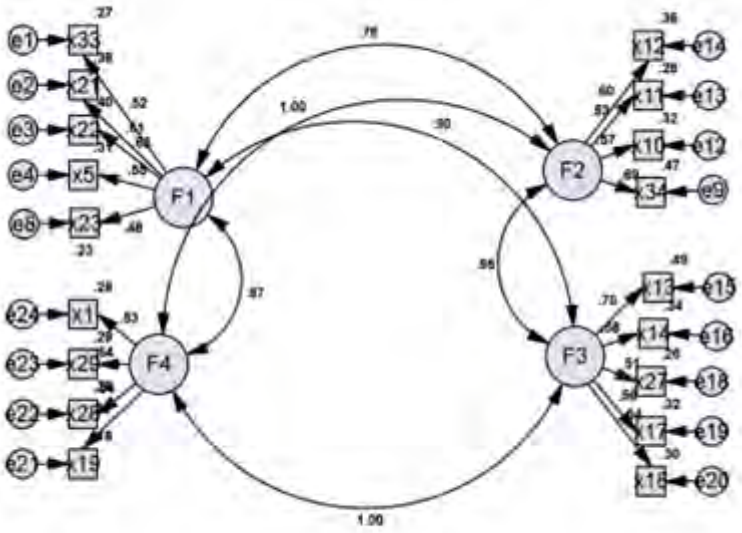

Figure 2: Fitted measurement model (first-order confirmatory factor analysis) based on standard coefficients

The research findings regarding the model fit test and various fit indices are reflected in Table 6. It is worth noting that if at least 3 to 4 of the fit-related indices are at an appropriate level, the model in question has a good fit.

Table 6: Model fit test using different fit indices

Index	X^2/df	P	IFI	CFI	GFI	RMSEA
Criteria	<3	>0.05	>0.090	>0.090	>0.090	<0.08
Calculated	1.628	0.072	0.92	0.94	0.91	0.051
Interpretation	Desirable	Desirable	Desirable	Desirable	Desirable	Desirable

Second-order confirmatory factor analysis-

After conducting the first-order confirmatory factor analysis, in this section, considering the causal effects in the conceptual model of the research and in order to examine the significance of the effect of each of the main latent variables and also to rank these variables based on their impact on the formation and explanation of the main structure (the role of agricultural tourism in sustainable rural development), a second-order confirmatory factor analysis was used, the results of which are shown in Figure 3.

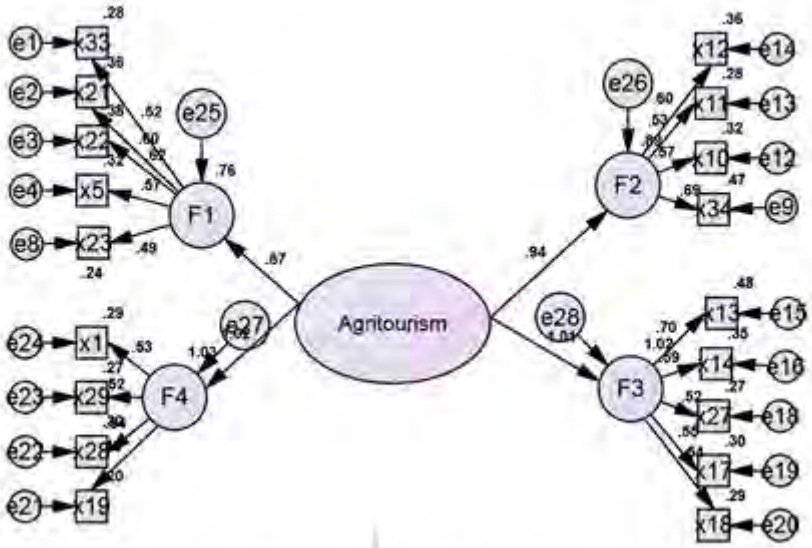

Figure 3: Fitted measurement model (second-order confirmatory factor analysis) based on standard coefficients

According to Figure 3, among the second-order factor loadings, the economic and infrastructure structure (0.94) has the greatest impact, followed by the political and institutional structure (0.87), the social and educational structure (0.76), and the human and climatic structure (0.69) respectively, which have the least impact on the main structure (the role of agricultural tourism in sustainable rural development).

Based on the results in Table 7, it is clear that the critical ratio (C.R.) values calculated for all four latent variables studied are more than 2.58 and, as a result, these latent variables have a positive and significant effect in explaining/forming the main structure of the research (the role of agricultural tourism in sustainable rural development). In other words, the four latent variables selected to measure the main structure of the research are correct and confirm the validity of the theoretical foundations used. On the other hand, based on the size/intensity of the standard coefficient values, which are the same as the beta values (or standardized regression coefficient) in regression analysis, it can be stated that the latent variables in order of influence in explaining/forming the main structure of the research are: economic and infrastructure structure, political and institutional structure, social and educational structure, and human and natural structure.

Table 7: Summary of results obtained from second-order confirmatory factor analysis

	B	S.E	Beta	C.R	P
economic and infrastructure structure	0.418	0.084	0.94	4.85	0.000
political and institutional structure	0.367	0.071	0.87	3.46	0.000
social and educational structure	0.294	0.063	0.76	3.24	0.008
human and climatic structure	0.235	0.073	0.69	2.98	0.003

According to Figure 3 and Table 7, since the critical statistic value of all four relationships is greater than 2.58, it can be stated that firstly, the questionnaire questions have high coherence for measuring the concepts in question, and secondly, at a confidence level of 99 percent, it can be expected that economic and infrastructural, political and institutional, social and educational, and human and natural factors are effective variables in sustainable rural development.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Previous research indicates that the development of tourism in general and agritourism in particular are

significant elements which can boost the local and regional economic growth in rural areas (Grillini et al., 2022; Hegarty and Przezborska 2005). Moreover, in many countries around the world, agritourism is viewed in terms of its positive impact on reducing rural population migration, increasing employment rates in rural areas, enhancing their economic attractiveness, and serving as a means of preserving cultural heritage and traditions (Germinario et al., 2023; Lal et al., 2023; Galluzzo 2018; Adamov et al., 2020). Policy can support that these opportunities are untapped. For example, Austria and other regions of the Alps supported successfully the widespread uptake of agritourism activities (Dax et al., 2019).

Agri tourism is a niche market where a small segment of customers from within the larger marketplace who have similar demographic, interests, buying behavior, and/or lifestyle characteristics. Also Agri tourism is a hybrid concept that merges elements of two complex industries—agriculture and travel/tourism—to open up new profitable markets for farm products & services as well provide a market for rural tourists and travelers. It is important to consider these factors in planning and developing agri tourism as a rural business.

This research sought to investigate the effects and role of agricultural tourism on sustainable rural development. The results of exploratory factor analysis showed that six key factors are influential as the effects of agricultural tourism on sustainable rural development. These factors collectively explain 61.05 percent of the variance related to the variables affecting factors affecting agricultural tourism in the direction of sustainable rural development. In simpler terms, paying attention to these six factors can explain 61.05 percent of the factors affecting the development of agricultural tourism in the direction of sustainable development. It is necessary to clarify that out of the total variables under study, 5 variables were excluded from the factor analysis process due to low factor loading and lower impact.

The results of the second-order confirmatory factor analysis also showed that among the second-order factor loadings, the economic and infrastructure structure (0.94) has the greatest impact, followed by the political and institutional structure (0.87), the social and educational structure (0.76), and the human and climatic structure (0.69) respectively, which have the least impact on the main structure (the role of agricultural tourism in sustainable rural development). Based on the results, it is clear that the critical ratio (C.R.) values calculated for all four latent variables studied are more than 2.58 and, as a result, these latent variables have a positive and significant effect in explaining/forming the main structure of the research (the role of agricultural tourism in sustainable rural development). In other words, the four latent variables selected to measure the main structure of the research are correct and confirm the validity of the theoretical foundations used. On the other hand, based on the size/intensity of the standard coefficient values, which are the same as the beta values (or standardized regression coefficient) in regression analysis, it can be stated that the latent variables in order of influence in explaining/forming the main structure of the research are: economic and infrastructure structure, political and institutional structure, social and educational structure, and human and natural structure.

The results of this study are consistent and consistent with the results of other researchers in various areas. In the section on the role of policy-making in the development of agricultural tourism towards sustainable development, the results of this research are consistent with the results of Mangwiro's et al (2025) research. In the economic and infrastructure sector, the results of this research are consistent with the results of the Sennimalai et al research in 2025. Regarding other identified factors, including social, educational, climatic, and natural factors, the results of this study are also consistent with the results of various researchers, including Ohorodnyk & Finger (2024), Mutanga (2025) and Chen (2025).

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Authors contributions

The authors equally contributed to the preparation of this article.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Original Article

نقش گردشگری کشاورزی در توسعه پایدار روستایی (مورد مطالعه: استان مازندارن)

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چکیده مبوسط

۱. مقدمه

در دهه‌های اخیر و به‌دنبال کاهش درآمد و اشتغال در بخش کشاورزی در مناطق روستایی، فعالیت‌های اقتصادی در مناطق روستایی رو به افول بوده است. عللی از قبیل پایین بودن قیمت محصولات کشاورزی، هزینه رو به افزایش ستانده‌های تولید کشاورزی، جهانی سازی و عوامل دیگر منجر به نزول درآمد و کاهش اشتغال در بستر روستا به‌ویژه بخش کشاورزی گردیده است، از سوی دیگر در شرایطی که در پایان قرن بیستم است، هنوز توسعه روستایی با مسائل و چالش‌های متعددی مواجه است؛ چراکه راهبردهای گذشته درزمینه توسعه روستایی موفقیت آمیز نبوده و نتوانسته مسائلی همچون فقر، اشتغال، بهداشت، امنیت غذایی و پایداری محیط‌زیست را تأمین کند. یکی از مهمترین رویکردهای مطرح شده در طی سالیان گذشته برای توسعه پایدار جوامع روستایی و همچنین ایجاد جریان مهاجرت معکوس به مناطق روستایی توسعه بوم‌گردی و گردشگری کشاورزی در نواحی روستایی است که می‌تواند به‌عنوان فعالیت اقتصادی مکمل باعث بازتوانی اقتصاد روستا شود. بنابراین این پژوهش با هدف بررسی نقش گردشگری کشاورزی در توسعه پایدار روستایی (مورد مطالعه: استان مازندارن) انجام شده است.

۲. مبانی نظری تحقیق

گردشگری کشاورزی یکی از جذاب‌ترین شاخه‌های صنعت گردشگری است که از اواخر قرن بیستم فعالیت‌های گردشگری به طور قابل ملاحظه‌ای در منطقه‌های روستایی همه کشورهای توسعه یافته افزایش یافته و توانسته نقش کلیدی در توسعه این مناطق بازی کند. گردشگری کشاورزی به عنوان یک راهبرد مهم برای فقرزدایی و ارتقای توسعه پایدار در جوامع روستایی پدیدار شده است. ادغام گردشگری کشاورزی در راهبردهای توسعه روستایی می‌تواند مزایای چند جانبه‌ای از جمله تنوع اقتصادی، حفظ فرهنگ محلی و بهبود روش‌های کشاورزی را به همراه داشته باشد. یکی از مزایای اصلی گردشگری کشاورزی، پتانسیل آن برای فقرزدایی در مناطق روستایی است. گردشگری کشاورزی همچنین از دیدگاه زیست‌محیطی منجر به حفاظت از زیستگاه‌های طبیعی و بوم نظام‌ها، حفظ منابع آب، بهبود دورنمای روستاها و زیرساخت‌ها می‌شود، از بعد فرهنگی باعث بهبود کیفیت زندگی، حفظ میراث فرهنگی روستا، آداب ورسوم اقلیت‌ها و فرهنگ‌سازی می‌گردد، ازنظر اقتصادی نیز یک فرصت سرمایه‌گذاری برای جامعه‌های محلی، افزایش درآمد، افزایش سهم در توسعه روستایی، اشتغال، تنوع فعالیت‌های اقتصادی، ایجاد ارزش افزوده و درنهایت موجب توسعه پایدار می‌گردد.

۳. روش تحقیق

پژوهش حاضر از نظر هدف و پارادایم، کاربردی و از نوع تحقیقات آمیخته (کیفی-کمی) با رویکرد اکتشافی است که با هدف شناسایی عوامل مؤثر بر توسعه گردشگری کشاورزی و نقش آن در توسعه پایدار جوامع روستایی انجام شده است.بنابراین پژوهش حاضر در دو مرحله طراحی شده است، در مرحله اول، به منظور شناسایی و استخراج عوامل مؤثر بر نقش گردشگری کشاورزی در توسعه پایدار روستایی، با استفاده از روش نمونه‌گیری هدفمند و با در نظر گرفتن شاخص اشباع نظری داده‌ها، ۱۸ مصاحبه نیمه ساختاریافته با متخصصان این حوزه انجام شد. مرحله دوم: در این مرحله، مؤلفه‌های استخراج‌شده از مرحله قبل، در قالب پرسشنامه توسط متخصصان مجدداً ارزیابی شدند تا اطمینان حاصل شود که آیا مؤلفه‌های استخراج‌شده قابلیت لازم برای سنجش اهداف تحقیق را دارند یا خیر. در این مرحله، به منظور اطمینان از صحت فرآیند مرحله اول و مشاهده تغییرات، تحلیل عاملی اکتشافی بدون هیچ تقسیم‌بندی اولیه برای عوامل

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استخراج شده از مرحله اول انجام شد .در تجزیه و تحلیل داده‌ها از تحلیل عاملی اکتشافی و تحلیل عاملی تأییدی استفاده شد. جامعه آماری مطالعه در این مرحله، روستاهای دارای پتانسیل گردشگری کشاورزی در چهار شهرستان تنکابن، نوشهر، ساری و بابل بودند که بر اساس روش نمونه‌گیری تصادفی طبقه‌ای با انتساب متناسب، در مجموع ۳۲۰ نفر از کشاورزان این شهرستان‌ها انتخاب شدند.

۴. یافته‌های تحقیق

پس از جمع‌بندی اولیه داده‌ها و حذف جملات زائد و تکراری از جملات مصاحبه در خصوص عوامل مؤثر بر گردشگری کشاورزی در راستای توسعه پایدار روستایی، مفاهیم اولیه در مصاحبه‌ها و اسناد موردی ثبت شدند. پس از آن، مفاهیم اولیه در مرحله کدگذاری باز خلاصه شدند، در این مرحله بیش از ۴۶ مفهوم و در نهایت ۴ زیرمقوله استخراج شد. نتایج تحلیل عاملی تأییدی مرتبه دوم نیز نشان داد که در بین بارهای عاملی مرتبه دوم، سازه اقتصادی و زیرساختی (۰/۹۴) بیشترین تأثیر و پس از آن به ترتیب سازه سیاسی و نهادی (۰/۸۷)، سازه اجتماعی و آموزشی (۰/۷۶) و سازه انسانی و اقلیمی (۰/۶۹) کمترین تأثیر را بر سازه اصلی (نقش گردشگری کشاورزی در توسعه پایدار روستایی) دارند.

۵. بحث و نتیجه‌گیری

تحقیقات قبلی نشان می‌دهد که توسعه گردشگری به طور کلی و گردشگری کشاورزی به طور خاص، عناصر مهمی هستند که می‌توانند رشد اقتصادی محلی و منطقه‌ای را در مناطق روستایی افزایش دهند، علاوه بر این، در بسیاری از کشورهای جهان، گردشگری کشاورزی از نظر تأثیر مثبت آن بر کاهش مهاجرت جمعیت روستایی، افزایش نرخ اشتغال در مناطق روستایی، افزایش جذابیت اقتصادی آنها و به عنوان وسیله‌ای برای حفظ میراث فرهنگی و سنت‌ها در نظر گرفته می‌شود. گردشگری کشاورزی یک مفهوم ترکیبی است که عناصر دو صنعت پیچیده - کشاورزی و سفر/گردشگری - را با هم ادغام می‌کند تا بازارهای سودآور جدیدی را برای محصولات و خدمات کشاورزی ایجاد کند و همچنین بازاری را برای گردشگران و مسافران روستایی فراهم کند. در نظر گرفتن این عوامل در برنامه‌ریزی و توسعه گردشگری کشاورزی به عنوان یک کسب و کار روستایی مهم است. در کنار عوامل مثبتی که گردشگری کشاورزی می‌تواند داشته باشد توجه به جنبه‌های پایداری محیط روستایی نیز می‌تواند بسیار موثر باشد و گردشگری کشاورزی می‌تواند سبب پایداری جوامع روستایی در مناطقی شود که به عنوان مقصد گردشگری کشاورزی شناخته می‌شوند. در این پژوهش این عوامل شناسایی شدند و نقش هریک مشخص گردید.

کلیدواژه‌ها: گردشگری کشاورزی، پایداری، جامعه روستایی، پژوهش ترکیبی، استان مازندران

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