

Decisive determinants shaping nomadic tourism future development: The case of Shabsavan tribes in Iran

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Decisive determinants shaping nomadic tourism future development: The case of Shabsavan tribes in Iran / Nemati, Vali; Makian, Sarasadat; Hanifezadeh, Farid; Qezelbash, AMIR HOSSEIN. - In: JOURNAL OF GLOBAL HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM. - ISSN 2771-5957. - ELETTRONICO. - 2:2(2023), pp. 156-176. [10.5038/2771-5957.2.2.1026]

*Availability:*

This version is available at: 11583/2990769 since: 2024-07-14T10:55:43Z

*Publisher:*

journal of Global Hospitality and Tourism

*Published*

DOI:10.5038/2771-5957.2.2.1026

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August 2023

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### Recommended Citation

Nemati, V., Makian, S., Hanifezadeh, F., & Qezelbash, A. H. (2023). Decisive determinants shaping nomadic tourism future development: The case of Shabsavan tribes in Iran. *Journal of Global Hospitality and Tourism*, 2(2), 156-176. <https://www.doi.org/10.5038/2771-5957.2.2.1026>

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### Revisions

Submission: Feb. 26, 2023; 1st Revision: Apr. 04, 2023; 2nd Revision: May. 16, 2023; Accepted: Jun. 14, 2023

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# Decisive determinants shaping nomadic tourism future development: The case of Shabsavan tribes in Iran

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# Decisive Determinants Shaping Nomadic Tourism Future Development: The Case of Shabsavan Tribes in Iran

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## Abstract

Nomadic livelihood is one of the earliest human ways of life, still practiced in some parts of the world. Since adventurous tourists are looking for new experiences, nomadic tourism in the postmodern era is gaining attention, considering nomads' unique lifestyles, customs, clothing, and other cultural features. Consequently, countries with nomads can diversify their tourism industry and the local economy in the future. However, Iran's nomadic community is experiencing unfavorable living conditions and insufficient financial resources, necessitating a shift in nomadic livelihood patterns. This study aims to identify and prioritize the factors that influence the development of nomadic tourism as a supplementary livelihood for Shabsavan nomads in Ardabil. Data were collected following 19 semi-structured interviews. Purposive sampling was used to select participants. Based on the thematic analysis of interviews, 42 influencing factors were identified. These factors were classified into 12 themes, with seven motivating factors (social capital, government activism, infrastructure availability, environmental capability, economic capability, cultural capital, and nomadic community empowerment) and five hindering factors (demographic, environmental, institutional, knowledge, and cultural barriers) included. Friedman's test was used to rank the importance of influencing factors. This study provides a model for nomadic tourism development.

**Keywords:** nomadic tourism, Iran, Shabsavan nomads, thematic analysis, Friedman test

## **Introduction**

Since the beginning of human civilization, nomadic life has been one of the earliest forms of social existence. The most distinctive feature of the nomadic community is its way of life, particularly its seasonal migration, which distinguishes it from rural and urban communities (Zarghami, 2016). Nomads, having a tribal-based social structure, their livelihood depends on livestock husbandry and their seasonal migrations are motivated by the need to find pasture for their livestock (Fallahatabar, 2016). The world's nomad population is between 30 and 40 million (Iranomadstours, 2019). Most nomads live in Central Asia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Iran. According to the 2008 census, Iran's nomadic population is estimated at 1.2 million people, or approximately 1.7% of the country's total population (Nomads Affairs Organization, 2021). Nomads live in 104 tribes in different parts of Iran. The most populous tribes are the Bakhtiari, Qashqai, and Shabsavan, living in Iran's southwest, south and northwest. Nomads play a significant role in the Iranian economy despite their small population. They are responsible for 5% of agricultural products, 20% of livestock and dairy products and 35% of Iranian handicrafts (Mirvahedi & Esfandiari, 2017).

Due to several environmental issues, such as climate change, drought, increased temperature, floods and a loss of balance between livestock and pastures, the livelihoods of nomads in Iran have changed dramatically in recent decades (Cheraghi, Porsaeed, Samani, Arayesh, & Vahedi, 2020). Several socio-economic issues have contributed to this lifestyle's decline, including the collapse of tribal structures, unemployment, the lack of interest among youth in continuing their nomadic lifestyle, economic difficulties and the inefficiency of traditional pastoralism (Karami, Akbarian Ronizi, & Jabbari, 2021; Taheri, Poursaeed, Eshraghi-Samani, & Arayesh, 2022). Given the previously discussed issues and the significant proportion of the nomadic people involved in dairy and red meat production, if nomadic communities' livelihoods are not diversified, other aspects of society's food security will be jeopardized (Rashednasab & Ahmadvand, 2018). Preserving the socio-cultural identity of Iran's nomads is critical because they date back thousands of years; they are an integral part of Iranian history (Taghiloo & Mousavi, 2015).

As discussed above, their livelihoods could be at risk and disappear. Therefore, the Iranian tourism industry may lose some of its share of the postmodern tourism market, comprising tourists willing to travel to the nomadic regions to discover the culture and way of life and have authentic experiences (Shekari, Ziaee, Faghihi, & Jomehpour, 2022). In addition, the transition of nomads' livelihoods from conventional livestock toward another way of life that can meet their daily needs is critical to sustainable income. Rashednasab and Ahmadvand (2018) argued that it is essential to diversify nomadic livelihoods, which includes strengthening and developing family businesses, marketing and ensuring the purchase of nomadic products, and developing nomadic handicraft production.

Nomadic tourism supports nomads' livelihoods by focusing on and taking advantage of nomads' cultural and traditional assets (Ghanbari, Rezaie, & Mansori Daneshvar, 2014). As part of Iran's ethnic heritage, nomadic communities may benefit from tourism by diversifying the economy and tourism products. With their natural and cultural characteristics, nomadic areas can stand among the most appealing tourist destinations (Ziaee, et al, 2017). Since nomadic tourism is an initiative to preserve and revitalize the culture of the nomads (Bakhshizadeh, Hosseinpour, & Rostamalizadeh, 2011), this paper identifies factors contributing to the future development of nomadic tourism so that it may be revitalized and flourish. As this type of tourism is unique in

terms of its nature and location, identifying these factors is essential to ensuring its better development. On the other hand, characteristics of nomadic communities, such as local customs, traditions associated with this way of life, and rituals left over from the past among the tribes and nomadic groups, constitute a valuable heritage that must be preserved. This emphasizes the importance of the future development of nomadic tourism. Therefore, we chose the Shabsavan nomads of Ardabil province as a case study to identify and prioritize the factors influencing the future development of nomadic tourism.

## Literature Review

### *Nomadic Tourism*

The concept of nomadic tourism is based on mobility, allowing visitors to have unique experiences of moving from one location to another (Lindawati, Damayanti, & Putri, 2021), such as traveling along the paths of nomadic communities and seeing the unique social and cultural aspects of nomads. Tourists seeking natural and historic nostalgia have gravitated toward nomads and nomadic tribes (Ghanbari et al., 2014). Therefore, the capacity to develop nomadic tourism at any location is an opportunity. However, pure and traditional nomadic lifestyles are progressively forgotten in the face of elements such as modernism. Nomadic tourism is a strategy to conserve and enliven the nomads' culture (Bakhshizadeh et al., 2011). Tourists travel to the nomadic community's territory to see the nomads' way of life and learn about their cultural characteristics (Eftekhari, Imani Tayyebi & Farhadi Uonaki, 2021), experiencing the intact natural attractions found in nomadic areas (Karami et al., 2021) and staying for a while in a destination with portable equipment and amenities (Laksmi, Rahmanita, Brahmantyo, & Nurbaeti, 2021).

Unique characteristics of nomadic areas, such as cultural heritage, include local and nomadic customs, types of housing, music, local languages, moral and spiritual values (Lotfi, Mosazadeh, & Jorablo, 2019), local food, dance, and culture, which attract tourists to nomadic living (Karami et al., 2021). As Tiberghien (2020) implies, nomadic cultural landscapes, food, homestays, and ethnic art can give visitors an authentic tourism experience. Nomadic tourism development strategies can attract more tourists to the region while maintaining environmental sustainability, benefiting numerous stakeholders, particularly the nomadic community (Laksmi et al., 2021). Although not widely practiced, nomadic tourism has developed at some destinations. Only limited research on this type of tourism has been conducted globally (Gantemur, 2020; Laksmi et al., 2021; Tiberghien, 2020; Tiberghien, Bremner, & Milne, 2018; Yu & Goulden, 2006), making the examination of this subject beneficial.

Tiberghien (2020) claims that developing authentic tourism products and experiences based on nomadic culture and traditions in Kazakhstan allows local stakeholders to renew their territorial and cultural identities while encouraging the international distinction of authentic eco-cultural tourism practices. Furthermore, Tiberghien et al. (2018) argue that authentic tourism experiences for tourists visiting Kazakhstan are in the geographical imagination (nomadic cultural landscapes), purchased crafts by tourists (nomadic ethnic art) and performative areas (nomadic homestay and nomadic food). They acknowledge the importance of authenticity in the planning and developing Kazakhstan's tourism, as well as local community participation and empowerment. Laksmi et al. (2021) believe that tourism development based on nomadic tourism supports and equalizes Indonesia's economy. International tourists regard Mongolia's nomadic lifestyle as an attractive,

unique, educational and safe destination that offers natural beauty, a nomadic lifestyle and traditional festivals (Yu & Goulden, 2006). Gantemur (2020) remarks in another study that nomadic tourism is beneficial in conserving Mongolia's natural and cultural landscape. The empowerment of nomadic culture is essential to reaching a successful nomad-based tourism development.

### ***Nomadic Tourism in Iran***

Changing attitudes toward nomadic living, the dearth of economic benefits, cultural and environmental issues, a breakdown of social relationships, and lack of government assistance, on the one hand, and the country's expansion and development, on the other hand, make this lifestyle more difficult for nomads in Iran (Mirvahedi & Esfandiari, 2017). Iranian nomads have used agriculture, horticulture, handicraft production and tourism as complementary economic actions. Their survival procedures have shaped their existence, retaining a distinctive lifestyle that combines nomadism, ruralism, and urban life in different forms. Despite the difficulties of these tribes' nomadic lifestyles in Iran, the simplicity and openness of their way of life make them demanding to outsiders (Noroozi, 2021). The need to change development perspectives in nomadic communities is felt by leveraging their cultural and traditional assets to address economic challenges (Ghanbari et al., 2014). Tourism development in nomadic areas of Iran can lead to economic evolution and diversification, job creation, income, a drop in willingness to leave this type of livelihood, infrastructure improvements and, eventually, more economic benefits for nomadic communities (Rezaie, 2018).

Iran has a considerable nomadic and rural population, accounting for approximately 29 per cent of the total population. Iran's strategic location and climatic conditions have shaped various nomadic tribes and their flourishing culture (Beigi, Ramasht, & Azani, 2014). As a result, there is a long and rich history of nomadism and livestock-based livelihood in Iran, which nomads continue to practice today (Noroozi, 2021; Zarei, Hazeri, & Alinejad Salim, 2019). Iranian nomadic communities are spread across large and diverse geographical areas, resulting in great cultural diversity (Yazerlo, Saeedi, & Abdoli Sani, 2013). With its diverse climatic conditions, cultural and natural attractions, and local customs, Iran has the potential to develop nomadic tourism. The main characteristics of rural Iranian nomads concerning tourism are the economic, socio-cultural, ethnographic and geographic aspects of their way of life, as well as their housing, costumes, rituals, art and seasonal migration (Noroozi, 2021). Encouraging nomadic tourism can promote sustainable benefits and livelihood for nomads by leveraging existing potential in nomadic areas and communities' cultural, climatic and social structures (Ghanbari et al., 2014).

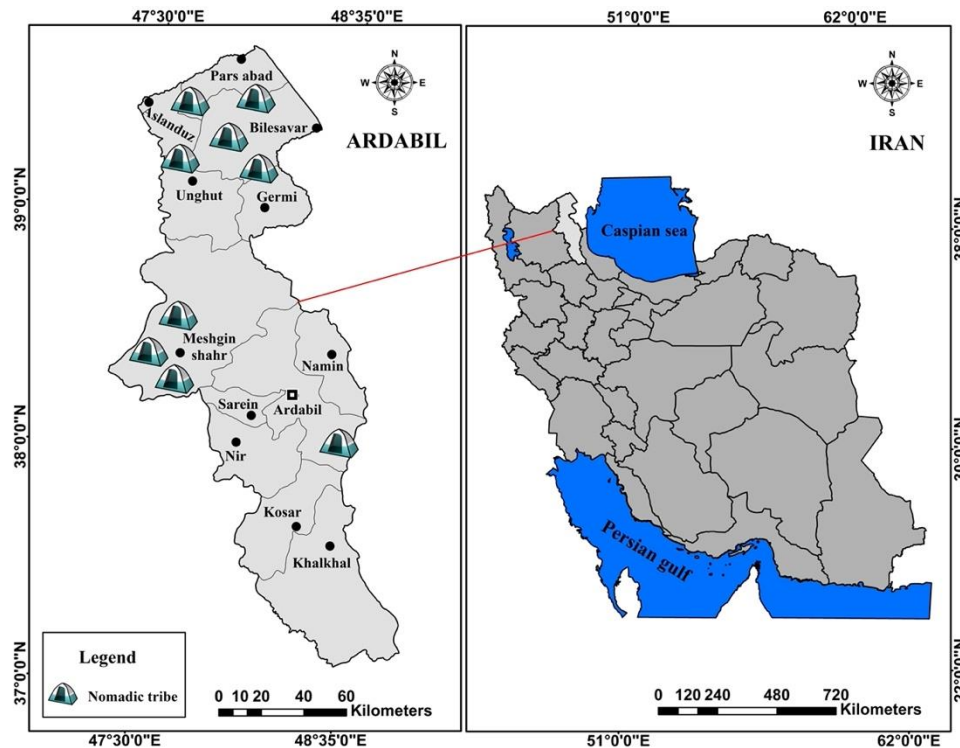
Iran is one of the few countries where seasonal migration continues as in the past, and Iranian nomads maintain their customs alive (Yazerlo et al., 2013). Different racial groups with various customs and the lengthy history of this way of life form the basis for developing nomadic tourism in Iran. In this sense, nomadic tourism is one of Iran's newest sub-branches of tourism (Zarei et al., 2018). Lor, Kurdish, Turkish, Baluch, Arab and Turkmen tribes have customs and cultural traits that attract tourists and are essential in developing nomadic tourism (Karami et al., 2021; Noroozi, 2021). They hold national and religious celebrations and rituals, as well as local sports, music, and other activities that appeal to fans of national culture (Mirvahedi & Esfandiari, 2017). Tourists can interact with and accompany nomads during migration, experience nomadic lifestyles, stay in tents, and learn about their historical and behavioral characteristics, unique lifestyles, and

livelihood patterns. Given these characteristics, Noroozi (2021) believes that nomadic tourism has much potential as a supplementary and diversifying activity in Iran's nomadic regions. Given the importance of the economic contribution of tourism to Iran (Khoshkhoo et al., 2017) and the country's need to differentiate itself as a tourist destination in the internationally competitive environment, using nomadic tourism's potential in less-traveled areas needs to be considered by Iranian authorities to attract domestic and international tourists to introduce the nomadic cultural heritage (Eftekhari et al., 2021).

## Methodology

### *Study context*

This study focused on the Shabsavan tribe in Ardabil province, where nomadic life has a lengthy history (see Figure 1). The province's nomadic community comprises several tribes. With its long and rich history and unique socio-cultural qualities, the Shabsavan tribe is one of the most prominent and well-known tribes in the Ardabil and Iran's northwestern provinces (TehranTimes, 2017). Animal husbandry is the most typical employment of these Turkish-speaking people who still live a nomadic lifestyle in different regions of Ardabil province. Shabsavans are Iran's third most populous nomadic tribe, with 44 clans living in different zones of the province (Bakhshizadeh et al., 2011). Besides livestock as their basis of income, they are even involved in agriculture and handicrafts (Arzani, 2019). To illustrate, they weave traditional textiles such as carpets, Jajim, and Glim (Sumak) (Afrough, 2020). Tourists are drawn to their rich history, way of life, customs, and traditions (TehranTimes, 2017).



**Figure 1.** Location of Ardabil Province and Shabsavan Nomads (Source: Authors elaboration)



### **Data Collection**

Key informants with personal experiences, attitudes and perceptions about the research topic were interviewed using semi-structured interviews (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019) to better understand the future of nomadic tourism and determine the factors influencing its development. Semi-structured interviews were used to uncover intellectual and strategic development indicators. They can make the scope and framework of marketing decisions and tourism promotion more transparent, assisting policymakers in comprehending the issues. The authors believe that semi-structured interviews are appropriate as they can extract a significant amount of lived experiences and updated information (Galletta, 2013) from the examining group over a specific time. Finally, the analysis of interviews may give a deeper perspective to future planners in decision-making institutions and organizations to find what does not seem well-discovered and find appropriate and intelligent solutions for it (Moura, Eusébio, & Devile, 2022).

Purposive sampling was used to randomly select sampling units within a population segment with the most information on the topic (Guarte & Barrios, 2006). The following criteria were used to select participants: knowledge of the subject under study, involvement in related research, participation in nomadic tourism activities and familiarity with nomadic livelihood characteristics. The number of interviews was not predetermined. We interviewed until the study reached theoretical saturation, and no new information was found (Saunders et al., 2018). One author conducted the interviews in the fall and winter of 2020 in Ardabil province, home to the Shahsavan tribe. As a member of the Shahsavan tribe, this author had a better understanding of nomadic life and the ability to communicate in Turkish, which significantly facilitated the interview process.

Due to the constraints imposed by Covid-19, interviews were conducted both in-person and via telephone. In the beginning, the interviewers informed the participants about the purpose of the study. The main questions were asked, supplemented by additional questions to clarify the given concepts due to the semi-structured interview. Finally, interviewees were also asked to help resolve any ambiguities by providing additional explanations for any required aspects. The interviews lasted about 30 to 35 minutes on average. Table 1 summarizes the participants' demographic characteristics. This study had 19 participants, including university professors, experts from the Ardabil Province General Directorates of Nomadic Affairs and the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism Organization (CHTO), nomadic tourism tour operators and Shahsavan tribe members.

**Table 1.** Participants' Profile

| Participant   | Degree |                   | Occupation     |        | Relatedness to the nomadic community (Shahsavan tribe) |            |
|---------------|--------|-------------------|----------------|--------|--|------------|
|               | PhD    | Bachelor's degree | Faculty member | Expert | Member   | Non-member |
| <b>Number</b> | 17     | 2                 | 11             | 8      | 9  | 10         |

### **Data Analysis**

This study conducted a thematic analysis to display and classify the data according to similarities and differences based on coding, making connections between different parts of the data and

categorizing them into themes. Thematic analysis is appropriate for studies that seek to discover new patterns based on interpretations (Alhojailan, 2012). To increase the reliability of findings, we thoroughly documented the analysis process to be transparent. A rigorous thematic analysis produces reliable and informative findings (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017).

We applied a three-step coding system developed by Corbin & Strauss (1990) (open coding, axial coding and selective coding) to reveal factors influencing nomadic tourism's future development. Two authors transcribed, translated and coded the interviews. The third author supervised the coding process. The data analysis began with open coding, conceptualizing and categorizing phenomena by comprehensively examining the data (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2009; Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019). The open coding stage aims to create categories and allocate the most appropriate and valid codes (Boeije, 2002). After carefully studying each interview's transcriptions, we assigned titles to all the experts' key points. After reviewing the interviews, we made the necessary changes to the assigned titles. The open codes were initially large (around 90-100). Undertaking several reviews and merging similar codes conceptually close to each other, 42 open codes were finally identified as concepts.

We performed axial coding after open coding. Axial coding looks at the connections between the concepts and categories developed in the first step (Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019) and reassembles data into separate codes by open coding (Moghaddam, 2006). The codes discovered in the open coding step were classified into similar groups called axial codes (Altinay & Paraskevas, 2008). Compared to the previous step, the number of codes decreased significantly. Twelve axial codes were created as themes. The next step was to create selective codes based on previous research and items obtained through open and axial coding. Selective coding combines the categories developed, elaborated, and intertwined during axial coding into a single theory (Vollstedt & Rezat, 2019) and more significant categories (Dwyer & Gill, 2012). Consequently, we developed two selective codes: motivating and hindering factors of nomadic tourism development.

The final step consisted of developing a questionnaire consisting of 42 codes identified in the first phase. Each code represents a factor influencing the future development of nomadic tourism. The questionnaires were distributed to the same experts who participated in the interviews. Each expert was asked to compare and rank 42 items according to their perceived importance. Ranks were assigned to each item by experts ranging from 1 to 42. Friedman's test was then used to analyze the responses in SPSS. Friedman, a nonparametric statistical test, compares the mean of the items and evaluates differences, determining the importance of each factor from the respondents' point of view (Golghamat Raad, 2019). The Friedman test revealed assymp. Sig values of 0.000, which indicates that there is a significant difference between items. Accordingly, the respondents' rankings varied significantly, indicating a difference in the perceived importance of the factors affecting the development of nomadic tourism.

All authors contributed to interpreting the findings, assuring that their communal knowledge and expertise guided the manuscript. The coding process was carried out by two authors, as previously mentioned. To ensure the validity of the coding process, they followed the same rules to maintain an organized and consistent process. The findings were also reviewed by two tourism-related university professors who are familiar with nomadic tourism, and they recommended changes to improve the findings' credibility and reliability, particularly with respect to the coding assignments.

## Findings

The findings of the thematic analysis are presented below (Table 2). The analysis identified 42 open codes that represent the factors influencing the development of nomadic tourism in Ardabil province. Then axial coding was performed to identify the main themes resulting in twelve axial codes, including social capital, government activism, infrastructure, environmental capability, economic capability, cultural capital, local empowerment, demographic, environmental, institutional, knowledge and cultural barriers. Finally, the obtained codes were divided into two final selective categories (motivating and hindering factors) to understand better the factors influencing nomadic tourism's future development in Ardabil province. Table 2 presents factors affecting the development of nomadic tourism based on Friedman test results (means of each item).

**Table 2.** Thematic Analysis of Semi-Structured Interviews

| Example of a quote  | Concepts   | Rank | Themes              | Factors           |
|---|--|------|---------------------|-------------------|
| The country's economic situation must be improved, and it is necessary to maintain a global relationship. As a result, we must join the international system.                             | Generalized relationship                             | 9    | Social capital      | <b>Motivating</b> |
| To develop nomadic tourism among nomads, we ensure tourists do not cause inconvenience and positively impact their income.  | Generalized trust                                    | 16   |                     |                   |
| The safety of tourists is important; sometimes, tribes disagree over pastures, livestock, and other issues. They seek revenge and create insecurity, either consciously or unconsciously. | Sense of security for tourists                       | 7    |                     |                   |
| NGOs should act as facilitators, persuading nomads to bring fewer animals to the pastures and solve their economic problems through tourism.  | Institutional participation                          | 39   |                     |                   |
| Despite their different thoughts and behaviors, nomads must be educated to respect and communicate with tourists. The same is true for tourists.  | Social tolerance                                     | 17   |                     |                   |
| Nomadic tourism can be developed with financial support, policies, investments, and infrastructure.   | Policymaking for nomadic tourism                     | 14   | Government activism |                   |
| If we want to develop nomadic tourism, we must involve the local community; otherwise, they will consider tourism an obstacle in their lives.   | Culturalization of nomadic communities about tourism | 31   |                     |                   |
| We must document what the previous generation possessed and use and publish it if possible.   | Documentation of nomadic life by relevant bodies     | 33   |                     |                   |

|  |  |    |                          |
|--|--|----|--------------------------|
| We must understand the market and marketing to provide a suitable and distinctive product.   | Marketing and promotion for nomadic tourism                              | 34 |                          |
| Nomads will live a better life if policies change. To ensure the livelihood of the nomads, something must be done.   | Government policies to support nomads in developing nomadic tourism      | 8  |                          |
| Another threat, in my opinion, is health. It means that foreign tourists, for example, enjoy washing their faces at the edge of spring. However, they do not prefer to urinate behind rocks or bushes. They prefer access to the toilet. | Sanitation and hygiene (respect the sanitary instructions by the nomads) | 25 | Infrastructure           |
| The green road built around the Sabalan Peak will provide the infrastructure to develop nomadic tourism and allow nomads to enter the tourism industry.  | Nomadic tourism infrastructure   | 11 |                          |
| Nomads and tourists have easier access to nomadic areas thanks to improved transportation and roads.   | Transportation network and facilitating access to nomadic regions        | 42 |                          |
| Nomads have access to technology and can share their attractiveness.   | Use of technology by nomads  | 35 |                          |
| I used solar energy in a nomadic community a few years ago. To justify it, I explained to a foreign tourist that we had to cut down trees to supply firewood and that more firewood would be used as more tourists arrived.              | New energy (using the knowledge of local experts)                        | 41 |                          |
| For the new generation of tourists seeking this type of tourism, nomadic life, customs, and ecotourism attractions are tourism resources.  | Ecotourism attractions of nomadic destinations                           | 3  | Environmental capability |
| People are moving to more temperate and mountainous areas as the world becomes hotter and drier. Due to global warming, tourists flock to better climate conditions during the summer months.  | Climatic attractiveness of nomadic areas                                 | 4  |                          |
| Last year, I purchased 150 million Tomans (Iranian currency) from meat butchers and 150 million Tomans from nomadic supermarkets, showing that tourism will benefit various people in the area.  | Nomads' satisfaction with tourism revenue                                | 19 | Economic capability      |
| Germans and Spaniards entered the region seeking medicinal plants, collected them, and transported them to their home countries in exchange for money.   | The abundance of medicinal plants  | 29 |                          |

|  |   |    |                                  |                  |
|--|---|----|----------------------------------|------------------|
| It will be beneficial if the standard organization can enter this field and determine it in various forms.   | Branding of nomadic products                                    | 36 |                                  |                  |
| Tourists are drawn to nomadic food, organic quality, and living environment.   | Organic products of nomads                                      | 40 |                                  |                  |
| Mongolia and Asia Minor invest heavily in nomadic tourism.   | Taking advantage of the successful experiences of other regions | 27 |                                  |                  |
| If you do not support the attraction you invest in, there will be no nomadic tourism because of the loss of nomadic livelihood.  | Willingness to invest   | 12 |                                  |                  |
| Women with nomadic lifestyles are attractive because of their clothing, customs, and activities, while men are enticing due to their heavy outdoor activities.   | Attractiveness of the local clothing for nomadic women          | 5  | Cultural capital                 |                  |
| Tourists who live in urban areas and have no knowledge of the nomadic way of life should be presented with the attractions of this way of life in a very appealing and significant way.  | Attractiveness of the nomadic lifestyle                         | 2  |                                  |                  |
| These conditions, influenced by internal and external factors, might destroy nomadic life, identity, culture, and heritage, which must be preserved and revived.   | Preserving traditions from the disappearance by nomads          | 6  |                                  |                  |
| The guest receives the best tent space and the cleanest beds.  | Hospitality in the nomadic community                            | 1  |                                  |                  |
| Nomads must welcome guests. This is something that should be educated to young people. It is crucial to obtain training.   | Improving the capabilities of local actors                      | 38 | Empowering the nomadic community |                  |
| Children of nomads who are educated and seek jobs can enter the tourism industry and be successful.  | Training local actors about tourism development                 | 30 |                                  |                  |
| People from the nomadic community who are experienced, experts, and knowledgeable about tourism may serve as leaders.  | Activism of nomadic specialists                                 | 37 |                                  |                  |
| In all aspects, there must be training. Nomads and tour guides must be educated about tourists to succeed in nomadic tourism.  | Providing training for tour leaders                             | 32 |                                  |                  |
| Some parents are now willing to continue this way of life because they “don’t know how to live the other way.” However, when they die or get older, there are likely to be few children who want to continue this way of life. | Aging of nomads   | 24 | Demographic barriers             | <b>Hindering</b> |

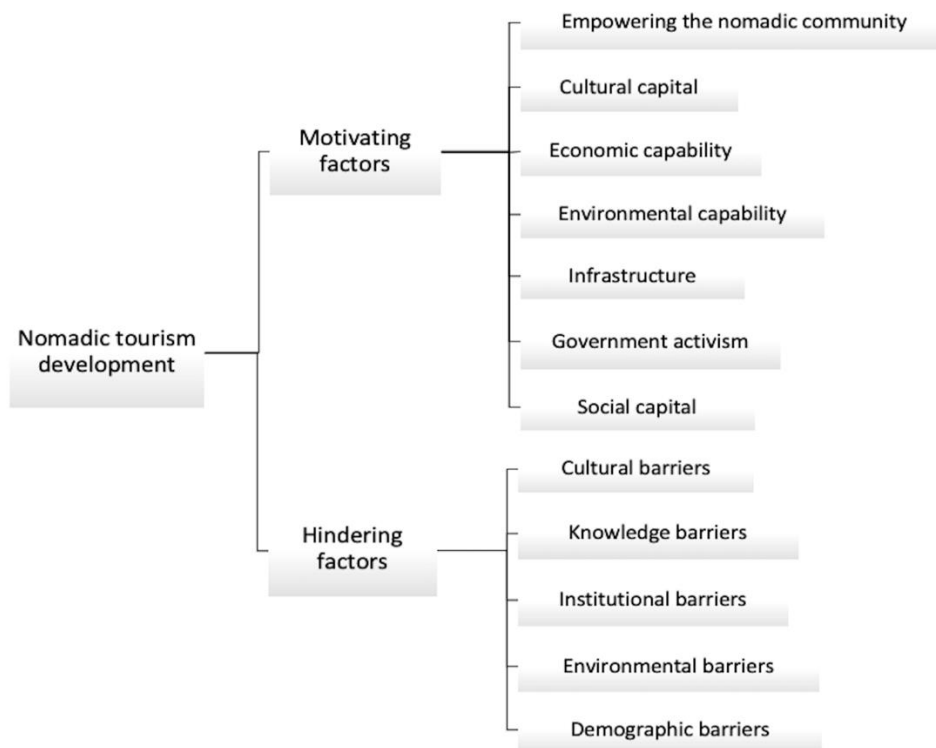
|   |   |    |                        |
|---|---|----|------------------------|
| This is a lifestyle that the new generation does not want to continue. This is becoming increasingly rare among city dwellers and nomads.   | Change in the nomadic way of life   | 10 |                        |
| Villages have started appearing in many places, taking over nomadic pastures, and the government has remained silent, hoping that the nomads will not protest.  | Loss of natural ecosystems  | 20 | Environmental barriers |
| Villages have appeared in many places, taking over nomadic pastures.  | Changes in pasture land use   | 18 |                        |
| According to existing policies, nomads voluntarily moved towards settlement and monogamy before and after the revolution.   | Residential policy (government policies regarding nomadic settlement)   | 15 | Institutional barriers |
| The government does not support this lifestyle, and the nomads are tired of this lifestyle due to the existing problems. As a result, nomads cannot see a bright future in increasing the number of nomadic families. | Lack of government support for nomads   | 13 |                        |
| Activities such as selling substandard and counterfeit goods devastate tourism and significantly impact the sales of nomadic goods.   | Lack of awareness of the impacts and consequences of tourism  | 26 | Knowledge barriers     |
| Nomads know much about livestock, plants and fodder but do not know about tourism. They know nothing about marketing or planning.   | Insufficient planning knowledge for tourism by nomads   | 22 |                        |
| New attitudes have influenced their lives (nomads), and they are no longer aware of ancient traditions.   | Gap in values   | 23 | Cultural barriers      |
| The main obstacle is the cultural situation of the nomadic community, which differs from the tourist culture. Conflict occurs at the collision of these elements.   | Destructive cultural impacts of tourism   | 28 |                        |
| An Iranian tourist asked about my parents' sleeping hours. I answered, "at 8 p.m.". This person informed his friends to schedule the party for 10 p.m. It was a shock.  | Weakening of tourism culture (Actions and behaviors beyond the norms and values of the nomadic culture by tourists) | 21 |                        |

**Source:** Authors Elaboration

## Discussion

The study aimed to identify and prioritize the factors influencing the future development of nomadic tourism among Ardabil province's Shabsavan nomads. 42 factors were identified using

thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews. These factors were divided into 12 categories, presented in Figure 2 as a model for nomadic tourism development. Seven factors, namely social capital, government activism, infrastructure availability, environmental capability, economic capability, cultural capital and nomadic community empowerment, positively contribute to nomadic tourism development. The remaining five factors are obstacles to nomadic tourism development, including demographic, environmental, institutional, knowledge and cultural barriers to nomadic livelihoods. Additionally, the Friedman Test (see Table 2) reveals that the most significant factors affecting the future development of nomadic tourism are the nomadic community's hospitality, the attractiveness of the nomadic lifestyle, and the ecotourism attractions of nomadic regions.



**Figure 2.** Nomadic Tourism Development Model (Source: Authors Elaboration)

***Motivating factors in developing nomadic tourism***

Social capital influences tourism development, supporting nomadic tourism by improving collective action and the destination's capacity to sustainably maximize benefits (Rodriguez-Giron & Vanneste, 2019). If the members of the nomadic community benefit equally from tourism, tourism development can strengthen social capital (Mirvahedi & Esfandiari, 2017). Tolerance and trust are two essential components of social capital in every society (Crowley & Walsh, 2021). Therefore, visitors' acceptance and tolerance of the host society and vice versa are crucial for the growth of nomadic tourism (Alaedini & Fathi, 2015). The level of trust between strangers is also important. The higher the level of trust, the more visitors will trust in the quality of services (Su & Fan, 2011), leading nomadic communities to be more confident in the benefits of tourism to their livelihood. Apart from the necessity for trust and tolerance between the host community and

tourists, mutual trust between the host community at the micro level and the host community and the government at the macro level is required to develop nomadic tourism (Nunkoo, 2015).

For tourism development, security always plays an important role (Sojasi Qeidari, Vazin, Moradi, & Erfani, 2021), especially in nomadic tourism, where nomads are sometimes in lesser-known areas. As a result, the Iranian government must improve its efficiency by ensuring that development benefits the nomadic community. In this regard, nomadic communities will contribute to regional security. NGOs can also effectively facilitate nomadic tourism development in Ardabil province by providing awareness and training to the Shabsavan nomadic community. NGOs play a critical role in improving tourism understanding by emphasizing development approaches that include community perspectives, host–visitor interaction, and prioritizing nature and cultural conservation (Kennedy & Dornan, 2009).

Regarding cultural capability, the nomadic lifestyle and natural landscapes of the nomadic regions make nomadic livelihood one of the most distinguished tourism attractions in Iran's urbanization era (Ansari, Heydari, Mojaverian, & Rastegar, 2019). The nomadic community has unique national and religious traditions, rituals, music, clothing, etc., which attract those interested in cultural and nomadic tourism (Yazerlo et al., 2013). Moreover, nomadic hospitality is one of the unique nomadic community characteristics that can act as a catalyst in this sector, ensuring and revving the blossoming of nomadic tourism. Thus, to attract tourists, the nomadic community's local and traditional culture must be revived (Eftekhari et al., 2021). Regarding environmental capability, we can observe that Iran is rich in natural assets and ecotourism attractions (Makian & Hanifezadeh, 2021). Iranian nomads live in the heart of this nature. The ability to develop nomadic tourism and the attractiveness of this type of tourism increased by combining natural attractions with social and cultural characteristics of the nomadic community, such as hospitality and lifestyle on the one hand, and the economic capabilities of nomadic livelihoods such as the abundance of medicinal plants (Bahmani et al., 2010) and organic products in the nomadic community on the other hand.

Local players play an essential role in developing nomadic tourism since tourism development projects fall without their participation (Aref, 2011). Local community members should specify tourism resources and how they can be developed to profit from them (Tukamushaba & Okech, 2011). The social credentials of local actors are vital in contributing to the long-term tourism development, establishing sustainable livelihoods and lowering environmental and socio-cultural issues (Kala & Bagri, 2018). Empowering local stakeholders would pave the way for greater actors' actions and improved engagement in the nomadic tourism development and sustainable livelihoods (Nunkoo, 2015). Again, in the same order, it will allow the nomadic community to access sources of wealth and result in their satisfaction with tourism revenue. For example, Shabsavan women, as members of the nomadic community, can contribute to the family's prosperity by producing and selling handicrafts and actively participating in tourism services (Farahani, Mohammadi, & Shabani, 2014). It is critical to provide the nomadic community members and tour leaders with training programs to enhance their capacity to engage in tourism as a complementary economic activity for the sustainable livelihoods of nomads (Kala & Bagri, 2018), deploying nomadic specialists interested in tourism in this sense. However, achieving the necessary qualifications by the nomadic community itself is impossible. The Iranian government and relevant institutions must initiate the necessary training and empowerment of the local community.



Developing nomadic tourism is impossible without developing infrastructure and superstructure. Nonetheless, one of the major constraints impeding tourism development in Iran is a lack of infrastructure (Nematpour et al., 2021). For instance, one of the challenges of nomadic tourism development is access to tourist areas (Lindawati et al., 2021). Roads to nomadic areas in Iran are ruined annually due to snow and rain in different seasons (Cheraghi et al., 2020); necessary restorations must be accomplished regularly. On the positive side, the Shahsavani nomads can use new energy sources, such as solar panels, which have been handed over to the nomadic community by the government, making them no longer use fuel for lighting or lighting heating. Establishing infrastructure in nomadic areas and improving sanitation and hygiene conditions should be prioritized (Jovanović, Janković–Milić, & Ilić, 2015). Without the administration's support, no tourism development will be successful (Liu, Dou, Li, & Cai, 2020).

The Iranian government should provide vital support to manipulate the potential of the Shahsavani nomadic community to develop tourism. Since the nomadic community and active small businesses in this field lack the necessary knowledge and financial resources to carry out marketing plans, the government's assistance can include monetary aid for nomadic livelihoods and the development of nomadic tourism and other initiatives such as advertising and marketing (Kubickova & Campbell, 2020). Meanwhile, the Iranian government can play a paramount role in educating nomads about the benefits of nomadic tourism and preparing them to host tourists by developing necessary plans and policies to facilitate nomadic tourism as a likely source of income. Developing nomadic tourism aids the Iranian nomadic community withstanding existing challenges and strains (Ziaee et al., 2017).

### ***Hindering Factors in Developing Nomadic Tourism***

Based on the findings, five factors slow down the development of nomadic tourism in Ardabil province, including demographic, environmental, institutional, knowledge and cultural barriers. In terms of demographics and social trends, the aging of nomads and changes in their lifestyles are two factors that could cause instability in nomadic livelihoods and, as a result, in the development of nomadic tourism (Rashednasab & Ahmadvand, 2018). Due to urban life convenience, Iranian nomadic youths are no longer interested in this type of life and have moved to settlements (Cheraghi et al., 2020). Those who maintain a nomadic lifestyle are often the elders of the nomadic community. Furthermore, nomads have accepted several urban life features because of their ties to the city and visitors. Consequently, many nomadic communities' beliefs, values, and cultural manifestations are fading, following the influence of monogamous life, which should be avoided (Riyahi & AbediniRad, 2012).

Tourism development may encourage nomads not to abandon their life because it is a unique way of life. Changes in the nomadic way of life and seasonal migration, easy access to urban areas for daily necessities, and selling animal products have resulted in less work in the summer, causing Iranian nomadic youths to travel to cities searching for new occupations. What makes nomadic communities less attractive to tourists regarding tourism development are changes in the livelihoods of nomads due to the lack of resilience in Iranian society (Ziaee et al., 2017), the destruction of culture and traditional customs, and the penetration of urban life habits such as clothes and food into the nomadic way of life (AL-Mohannadi & Furlan, 2019).

Regarding environmental barriers, tourism development in nomadic areas of Iran has resulted in environmental issues, which refer more to the use of pastures for tourism activities (Ghobadi & Moameri, 2021). For example, off-road driving damages Shahsavan nomadic pastures due to insufficient access roads, visitors' desire to reach pastures, and waste left in nature by tourists. In some cases, these communities lost nomadic livestock because of eating abandoned plastic in nature. In other words, Nomads' conversion of pastures to agricultural land or villagers' purchase of nomadic pastures and converting those to nomadic lands has reduced pastures and destroyed natural landscapes. The government's lack of lookout for nomads and assistance is one of Iran's most important problems inhibiting nomadic tourism development.

The Iranian government is responsible for making tourism decisions that are legitimate and accepted by the local people (Nunkoo, 2015). Still, nomads distrust the Iranian government due to insufficient government support or the deficiency in implementing administrative support programs (Tahmasebi, Badri, & Rezvani, 2016). There is a lack of assistance for livestock insurance, nomads' lack of access to nomadic product markets such as dairy, meat, and wool and non-implementation of government support programs related to nomadic livelihoods such as loans. For example, Shahsavan nomads are pushed to sell their products cheaper and earlier than the deadline due to the inability to maintain livestock or livestock products and not making enough profit. Nomadic settlement guidelines formulated by the government have in/unintentionally destabilized the livelihoods of nomads. They have experienced profound changes in socio-economic and cultural structures (Tahmasebi et al., 2016). Due to the Iranian nomadic settlement, the household's production and livelihood patterns have shifted from livestock to agricultural products (Amanullahi Baharvand, 2004). As a result of nomads' lack of agricultural knowledge and skills, production for nomadic community members is low, and nomads are forced to migrate to cities in search of suitable livelihood options.

Knowledge barriers are another important factor. Training villagers and nomads as a precondition for facilitating tourism activities plans in Iran has not been very productive due to inadequate knowledge of the responsible bodies (Author, 2021) and courses limited to superficially providing minimal skills. Hence, to take advantage of tourism opportunities, the nomadic community must have the training and awareness-raising programs appropriate to the nomad's way of life and provide them with the necessary skills to participate in tourism planning (Latip, Rasoolimanesh, Jaafar, Marzuki, & Umar, 2018). The Shahsavan nomads' lack of awareness of tourism benefits has led to a limited number of community members participating in tourism activities to a limited extent, and the rest are deprived of these benefits. Again, ignoring the negative impacts of tourism and the unmatched distribution of tourism benefits among members of the nomadic community can cause a loss of originality and authenticity of nomadic cultures. These outcomes would negatively affect the authenticity of nomads and their images as nomadic tourist destinations (Chang, et al., 2018).

## Conclusions

The nomadic lifestyle is considered part of Iran's cultural heritage. Significant changes in recent years have impacted the livelihood of this community, leading to the abandonment of this way of life by many Shahsavan nomads. Tourism is a relatively new activity in most nomadic areas of Iran that can diversify nomadic livelihoods (Shekari et al., 2022). In this regard, the positive mindset of the Iranian government can facilitate the development of nomadic tourism. As findings,

the following factors are influential in this field: developing appropriate policies, creating a culture of tourism development among nomads, documenting the attractions of nomadic livelihoods to maintain, revive, and introduce this livelihood, marketing, and tourism promotion at the national and international levels. Moreover, to plan the future development of nomadic tourism among Shabsavan nomads in Ardabil province, the Iranian tourism authorities must give more sumptuous engagement to the nomadic community's hospitality and the attractiveness of the nomadic lifestyle in potential ecotourism attractions. Identifying areas needing development through affiliated international marketing can assist the local government in focusing on targeted development through nomads, reinforcing regional development in areas where the local government pays less attention to tourism.

Due to the proximity of the Shabsavan tribes to the Turkish border, less enticing regions will be promoted for maximum tourist attraction due to the development of the destination's image by newer marketing tools. Interactions between international tourists (e.g., Turks) and Iranians (e.g., Shabsavan nomads) benefit the co-creation of positive experiences due to culturally compatible aspects. Therefore, hospitality can be facilitated by reversing migration to rural areas and taking advantage of the job capacities created. The term Geographical proximity prepares a proper framework for marketing channels. Saxenian (1994, p. 104) mentioned, "despite a little doubt, geographical proximity still matters to foster and maintain business ties, helping to gather common-perceived bits of knowledge between cultural-background individuals". Based on the geopolitical relations that Iran and Turkey had during the decades, we can argue that face-to-face communication may facilitate non-codified knowledge transfer for more mutation in any probable business ties in postmodern tourism development. Effective communication between international communities can strengthen cultural, social, or even political affinities. The greater the degree of cultural affinity between societies in organizational and individual attributes, the greater the level of trust. Low levels of cultural proximity diminish the effectiveness of integrated communication unless a mediator enters the interaction field (Bruneel, Spithoven, & Maesen, 2007). In this regard, the role of local government is critical. In addition, several reflections on trust between communities indicate that a high level of trust encourages individuals to engage in social exchange and, as a result, transfers more knowledge and information (Ring & Van de Ven, 1992) to increase the level of economic promotion that tourism can bring to both sides. A proactive economy facilitates the mobility of communities and the integration of markets.

On the other hand, the nomadic community's lack of tourism knowledge results in significant difficulties in recognizing and exploiting appropriate opportunities for diversifying their sources of income, such as tourism (Kim, Park, & Phandanouvong, 2014), which was previously discussed as trust, bringing decent bilateral ties. In this regard, the Shabsavan nomadic community must be empowered by acquiring the necessary training and skills to use the tourism capacities of the nomadic community for tourism development and to enjoy the benefits. A knowledge-based and community-based approach is required to diversify income sources and maintain the nomadic livelihood system (Al-Oun & Al-Homoud, 2008). The tourism authorities should be at the forefront of the effort, which entails facilitating, educating, and empowering nomads to participate in tourism activities (Tukamushaba & Okech, 2011). Adopting this approach, the nomadic community can benefit from tourism activities. Iran's nomadic areas have the fundamental arms to develop tourism. However, it is preferable to begin tourism development in these areas where community members and local people will participate. It is necessary to identify and improve the quality of the nomads' lifestyle capacities and capabilities and try to best use these attractions to

develop nomadic tourism. It is also suggested that ethical codes be developed in nomadic areas of Iran to reduce the potential harms of tourism development in various cultural, social, and environmental aspects (Cole, 2007).

### ***Implications***

Few studies have been conducted on nomadic tourism; this study fills a gap in the existing literature for countries with strong cultural roots. Further, this study is one of the first to examine the future of nomadic tourism. The results might apply to the Iranian East Azerbaijan, Zanzan, and Gilan, where some nomads pursue the same lifestyle as the Shahsavan Tribe. In light of the study's findings, other nomadic regions of the country, as well as other potential tourist destinations, should be targeted for the development of nomadic tourism. Also, the model presented for the development of nomadic tourism can be used as a framework for other destinations interested in developing this type of tourism.

The findings are also useful for tourism authorities in Iran and other countries with nomads, as taking advantage of motivating factors and monitoring hindering factors can lead to the future development of nomadic tourism more appropriately. In this context, managers and decision-makers can make their future policies related to culturalization, marketing and promotion of nomadic tourism based on the results of Friedman's test obtained in this research. Thus, they should emphasize the nomadic society's hospitality, the nomadic lifestyle's attractiveness for tourists, ecotourism and climatic attractions of the nomadic destinations.

Homestay experiences can be offered to tourists to demonstrate the hospitality of nomads. This may include sharing meals, participating in cultural activities, and learning about nomadic traditions and customs. In addition, nomads can offer workshops on traditional skills and crafts. Tourists can gain insight into the lifestyle of nomadic people through this experiences. Through immersive experiences, cultural tours, and traditional activities, tourists can gain a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the nomadic lifestyle. Creating a calendar and a map showing the periods and locations of nomads throughout the year is recommended; however, a concise plan is necessary to prevent tourists from disrupting the nomads' lives. Different aspects of nomadic life must be documented and presented, for example through social media, in order to be shared with a wider audience. This allows for better understanding and appreciation of nomadic people's unique lifestyle and culture.

### ***Limitations and Future Research Directions***

Interviewees occasionally make statements unrelated to the study's purpose, as customary in interviews. As a result, some interviews spent hours completed to obtain the desired result. Another limitation is that, despite efforts to select experts from the region's nomadic community, the study's ability to interact closely with the interviewed nomadic communities and experts was severely impacted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Regardless of its implications, this study's geographical scope may limit its generalizability. Prospective studies should concentrate on other provinces with nomadic populations to be certain of this issue and gain external credibility. When planning future scenarios for tourism, it is also recommended that tourism authorities consider the factors that could affect future nomadic tourism development.

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