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Assessment and evaluation of tourism activities with emphasis on agritourism: The case of simin region in Hamedan City

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ABSTRACT

Tourism in general and agritourism specifically have been highlighted as important means of improving and developing the sociocultural and economic status of rural communities during the last few decades. As a sustainable development strategy in rural areas, agritourism has increasingly attracted more attention from policy-makers, scholars and officials. The aim of this research was finding a localized but generalizable model by means of assessment and evaluation of important tourism gardens in Simin Region located in Hamedan City, which is a region with numerous tourism gardens, especially agritourism ones. The research methodology consisted of grounded theory and interview with four involved groups, namely experts, urban managers, residents and tourists who were familiar with the region. The interviewees were selected by snowball sampling and MAXQDA software was used for analysis of the concepts and facilitating the coding process. The results show that inclination toward small and temporary businesses in the field of agritourism is more prominent in Simin Region. Therefore, considering the existing agricultural capacities of the region, establishment and development of agritourism can help the farmers as a complementary activity in the agricultural sector. Also, if the presented solutions are properly implemented in this region, they can lead to other advantages of agritourism realization such as creation or strengthening of spatial branding, development of infrastructures and services, creation of more capacities for attracting tourists and economic prosperity.

1. Introduction

The decline of rural communities is an undeniable fact and a worldwide problem resulting from global efforts for expanding urbanization and industrial development (Liu and Li, 2017). Villages are home to a major portion of populations especially in developing countries (Azizpour et al., 2012). During the past few decades, rural communities have been facing numerous challenges including migration climate change, energy problems, migration, underpriced commodities and economic decline (Lane, 1994: Hjalager, 1996; Wei et al., 2019: Hamilton et al., 2015: Faulkner et al., 2019). Poverty, unemployment, traditional production methods with low efficiency and the vulnerability of villagers' production and income sources against natural hazards are also among the most important economic challenges in rural regions (Azizpour et al., 2012).

The residents of these areas are in dire need of solutions and strategies which can help them better deal with various challenges especially economic problems. So far, a number of measures have been taken or initiated to this end among which agritourism that is known for its great potential for generating income, efficient use of available assets and low impact on the environment and cultural heritage (Barbieri, 2013; McGehee, 2007), seems an appropriate strategy for achieving this aim. Following the Great Depression, public interest in rural recreations gained momentum in the 1930s and 1940s. The 1960s and 1970s in return saw a big change in agritourism with activities such as helping with harvesting and stable works, horse riding and animal grooming becoming common attractions. During the 1980s and 1990s, the popularity of farm life for tourists surpassed that of commercial tours (Shabani, 2018). On the other hand, the difficulty of earning enough money by farming to support a family has compelled many farmers to promote this activity (Vogt, 2013). The popularity of farming as a form of agritourism with unique features is still on the rise (Santeramo and Barbieri, 2017). Development of agritourism can undoubtedly help a country's economy and generate income and it is essential for preservation of yields, fruits, fishes and plants (Shishir, 2017). Agritourism has many economic and non-economic (ecological and sociocultural) positive outcomes including sustainable agriculture, improvement of farmers' quality of life and access to various markets (Kim et al., 2019).

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Similar to many parts of Iran, Hamedan City especially Simin Region is located at the center of fertile agricultural lands, gardens and water ources. However, like the other rural areas of Iran, Simin Region faces numerous challenges such as lack of employment opportunities, poverty, health problems, soil erosion, lack of appropriate participatory mechanisms, city-village inequalities, etc. (Pourtaheri and Nemati, 2012; Hashemi et al., 2012). The results of a 2016 census carried out by the Statistical Center of Iran indicates that most rural residents of this region have migrated to cities. Given these factors, a change in the form or nature of agriculture and the related activities in the region seems necessary (Buller and Hoggart, 2017). One of the ways to make such a change in the nature of agriculture is promotion of tourism, which can increase the economic efficiency of agriculture according on many studies (Yi et al., 2019; Qing, 2016; Sidali et al., 2015). Therefore, this research sought to determine why land use policies in the form of tourism activities must change in the area of study. This study also attempted to determine what should be included in the tourism policies of this region and the outcomes of these policies. To this end, the authors tried to (1) infer and specify the pivotal phenomenon of tourism for the purpose of vision building and strategic development of the area under study, (2) to provide a comprehensive, localized and contextual model of the pivotal phenomenon that can encompass all the involved social, cultural, physical, functional, environmental, economic and historical dimensions to the extent possible and (3) to determine the required infrastructural and developmental measures and analyze the possible outcomes (the most important of which are economic, according to the literature) via presenting the economic model of the region in the process of tourism implementation.

2. Agritourism concept

Agritourism is widely defined as visiting agricultural environments, such as farms or gardens, for leisure, recreation or educational purposes (Arroyo et al., 2013; Tew and Barbieri, 2012). Barbary et al. propose that combination of tourism activities with agriculture forms such concepts as farm tourism, rural tourism, etc. Research has indicated that agritourism can be an appropriate name for this type of activity (Barbieri et al., 2016). Agricultural tourism falls under the rubric of rural tourism, i.e. it is a special subset of rural tourism as a broad concept. (Clarke, 1999; Nilsson, 2002; Santana-Jiménez et al., 2015). Today, agritourism is considered a rectifying factor for the unbalanced economy of agriculture and an emotional and nostalgic return to rural roots for modern citizens. Activities such as watching or participating in farm works, purchasing agricultural products directly from farmers, spending a night or two at farms and learning about farms and their products have created a relatively large target community. The aim of agritourism is creating an income source for farmers, establishing a tourism destination for tourists and providing learning opportunities and healthy enjoyment for visitors (Schaneman, 2010). Different definitions have been proposed for agritourism a number of which have been provided in Table 1.

Table 1
Definitions of agritourism.

Researcher(s)	Definition
Boris Frumkin 2019)	Agritourism is broadly known as a complementary activity to agriculture and it enables farmers to welcome and cater for tourists and visitors at their farms.
Sgroi et al. (2018)	Agritourism can create jobs for all members of farmer families and provides services in rural regions for people who are after a place to eat and spend time.
Roman (2015)	Agritourism is related to recreational and leisure-time activities at a farm which provides various recreational and touristic services.
Haugen and Storstad (2012)	Agritourism means creating farm-based jobs that provide different forms of tourism services such as residence, food, activities and experiences.
Firlej and Niedziółka (2007)	Agritourism is a non-agricultural entrepreneurship and is an extra or alternate income source for farmer families.
Marques (2006)	Agritourism is a special type of rural tourism in which a farmer's house becomes integrated with his/her agricultural properties and the farmer allows visitors to take part in farming or complementary activities.
Che et al. (2005)	Agritourism refers to any type of agricultural activity that involves retailing of or services related to agricultural products directly at the production place to the public.
Sonnino (2004)	Agritourism involves hosting activities by farmers and their family members which need to be connected and must complement agricultural activities.
Wall (2000)	Agritourism provides tourism opportunities at working farms.
McGehee (2007), McGehee et al. (2007)	Agritourism refers to any rural investment that includes both environments of a farm and a commercial component of tourism.

3. Review of the related literature

Issues related to development of agritourism can be categorized into six groups: (1) distance from major population centers, (2) comprehensive national and regional policies, (3) awareness and education, (4) product marketing, (5) customs and traditions and (6) rules and regulations (Rezvani et al., 2016). Agritourism is known for and utilized because of its remarkable capacity to generate additional income with relatively little investment, optimum use of existing assets and minimal impact on the local environment and heritage (Barbieri, 2013; McGehee, 2007). Evidence shows that agritourism farms usually have a higher economic gain compared to other farms (Schilling et al., 2014).

On the other hand, providing recreational opportunities is one of the most suitable tools for improving the sustainability of farms and the environment, utilization of good farming practices and invigorating rural regions (Flanigan et al., 2015; Fagioli et al., 2014). Agritourism can establish a positive relationship between rural and urban areas (Streifeneder, 2016; Zhang and Yang, 2011) and help increase the sustainability of rural communities and help preserve cultural heritages and landscapes via creating jobs and generating income for rural residents, especially women (Potočnik-Slavič and Schmitz, 2013; Streifeneder, 2016; Zhang and Yang, 2011), since mostly women are responsible for activities related to the residence of tourists such as guiding them around, explaining animal husbandry and agricultural activities as well as preparing food and snacks (Rieder et al., 2009; Muhlisin et al., 2020). The benefits of agritourism include direct income, job opportunities, economic exchange between rural and urban areas, multiplication of gains especially for small-scale direct investments, increased diversity of economic activities and increased awareness about economic potentials. The additional revenue generated through agritourism enables farmers to renovate and modernize the infrastructures of their farms and keep them running (Giourga and Loumou, 2006; Mahaliyanaarachchi, 2017). In an agritourism process backed by efficient management, resources do not merely become commodities or services; rather, they become regenerated as renewable resources. This reproduction and development of resources is an internal mechanism for formation and preservation of local heritages (Chiodo et al., 2019).

Agritourism is tightly linked to local communities and provides opportunities for creating sustainability in rural areas and economically supporting rural regions (Adamov et al., 2020). Other advantages of agritourism include creation of job opportunities, improvement of ecology in destroyed rural regions and preservation of rural identities and heritages (Calza et al., 2018). In addition to creating economic gains and generating extra income, agritourism has many social advantages which include living in a stress-free environment, enjoying a healthy life, preserving rural lifestyles and local traditions, educating consumers as well as promoting traditional values and hospitality practices among different ethnic groups (Shaken et al., 2020; Getz and Carlsen, 2000;

Tew and Barbieri, 2012; McGehee and Kim, 2004). Agritourism can improve the natural environment, enrich native cultures and improve quality of life for farmers and consumers alike (Choo and Petrick, 2014).

While agritourism is indeed an income source, the main function of a farm is production of agricultural products (Stotten et al., 2019). Agritourism activities vary in different countries and regions, but they all share one feature: recreational services provided by certain sections of farms or agritourism companies (Arru et al., 2019).

Agritourism has been used as a means of diversification of income sources in the United States for more than two decades (McGehee at al., 2007; Amanor-Boadu, 2013). In Mallorca, one of the most popular islands in Spain, farm resorts focus on providing isolated comfort. Some of the best agritourism sites in Mallorca are located in the middle of orange gardens and serve guests with fresh local meals (Mahaliyanaarachchi, 2017). In Germany's tourism economy, agricultural-rural tourism has its own separate section and the government pays special attention to the development of this business and improvement of the related services (Nilsson, 2002). In 2009, more than 25,000 German farmers were involved in the field of agritourism and this generated a turnover of 943 million euros (Sidali et al., 2009). In Italy, Tuscany was one of the first regions to become a popular agritourism destination via conversion of the rural abodes into guest houses (Mahaliyanaarachchi, 2017). In recent years, agritourism has attracted the attention of Iranian officials as well. Because of their diverse climate, culture, religion, ethnicity and socio-economic conditions, Iranian villages have the potential for performing a wide spectrum of agritourism activities. Agricultural and rural tourism in Bavanat County, rosewater making and flower harvesting in Qamsar City, tulip plains and flower gardens of Kerman, Saffron harvesting in South Khorasan and Razavi Khorasan, the itinerant lifestyle of the nomad Kurds in North Khorasan and the harvest festival in the northern parts of Iran are among the many activities that can become agritourism attractions (Zareei, Rafiei Darani & Hatami, 2019). Instances and different types of agritourism activities can be seen in detail in Table 2.

Table 2
Different agritourism activities.

Source	Agritourism Activities
Sznajder et al. (2009)	Staying at farms, staying at huts, agricultural hotels, self-service bed and breakfast, agricultural camping, agricultural hotel special services, home-cooked meals, stores, restaurants, visiting production processes, participation in production processes, horticultural therapy, cultural tourism, direct sales of products at farms, selecting the type of sales, corporate and farm stores, farm zoo, recreations and leisure time, weekend holidays, holiday resorts, visiting parks and gardens, excursion of agritourists in the region, corn and soybean mazes, on-foot and car tours, hiking, horse riding, large-field sports, new local games, hunting, fishing, animal-assisted therapy, treatment with herbal and organic medicines, special diets, small health resorts, historical/old farms, historical villages, agricultural museums and folk art, local festivals and celebrations, agricultural resorts
Mahaliyanaarachchi (2017)	Staying at farms, guided tours, catering, selective purchase, roadside stalls, wildlife observation, hunting, fishing, horse/donkey riding, harvest festivals, camping, canning tours, cooking and winemaking classes
Agriculture and Water Strategic Research Center of Iran's Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (2019)	Restaurants, eateries and bakeries, farm huts, motels and camps, birthday parties, natural fruit juice making, ice-cream making, flower crown making, canned cheese making, yield harvesting and fruit picking, flower picking, spinning, helping with herding, feeding animals, drying and collecting products, milking, plowing and planting, tree pruning, weeding, sheep shearing, nature tours, fireworks, playing with pets, hiking and cycling, horse riding, fishing, exhibition of old objects and farm furniture, farm museum, festivals and dramatic plays, cooking lessons for making traditional and local foods, farm works educational tours, handicraft learning, watching veterinaries at work, watching birds

4. Research methodology

This research was a qualitative and applied study. The main purpose was developing a grounded model for strategic development of Simin Region in terms of tourism. This type of goal setting can present the tourism model and activity as a tool for the development of and vision building for Simin Region. To this end, the grounded theory methodology was used. The goal of grounded theory is discovering patterns and processes and understanding the social interactions of a group of individuals in the real world (Polit and Beck, 2008). Given that the strategies of sustainable development of natural regions are the result of interactions between the different groups of stakeholders and an outcome of their preferences, such methodology is suitable for understanding this phenomenon. Grounded theory is a systematic methodology involving construction and development of theories through methodical gathering and analysis of data. This methodology is implemented through continuous interaction between data gathering and data analysis (Strauss and Corbin, 1994). In this research method, data gathering begins with description of the condition and the researcher collects a lot of information about individuals, places, actions and events without looking for a specific pattern or making judgements (rich description stage). Then, the researcher complements his/her description with numerous interviews, films, photos, documents, statistics and figures (Corbin and Strauss, 2014) (Fig. 1).

5. Sampling method and sample size

The sampling method in this study was targeted snowball sampling. For collection of the required data, semi-structured and face-to-face interviews were conducted with four groups of people namely experts, urban managers, local residents and tourists until theoretical saturation was achieved. Prior to conduction of the interviews, the study area was surveyed by the authors for one year. The interviews were conducted between 22nd of June and 22nd of September 2019 and lasted for an average of 25 min. More than 20 managers and experts were interviewed in total. The interviewed experts specialized in agriculture, tourism, urban design, pedology and urban planning and had sufficient knowledge of the study area. The interviewed managers were the ones whose decisions affect the projects that have been and will be implemented in the region, including the heads of cultural heritage and tourism departments, the regional water organization, the agricultural jihad, the environment organization and the housing foundation. Interviews with the local residents and tourists were conducted during 6 visits: 10 interviews with men and 10 interviews with women who were 18–55 years old. A number of the interviews were conducted with the residents who owned gardens or lands for examination of their willingness to engage in tourism activities.

6. Data analysis

Coding is used for analysis of the data collected in the process of grounded theory. During coding, the collected data are analyzed,

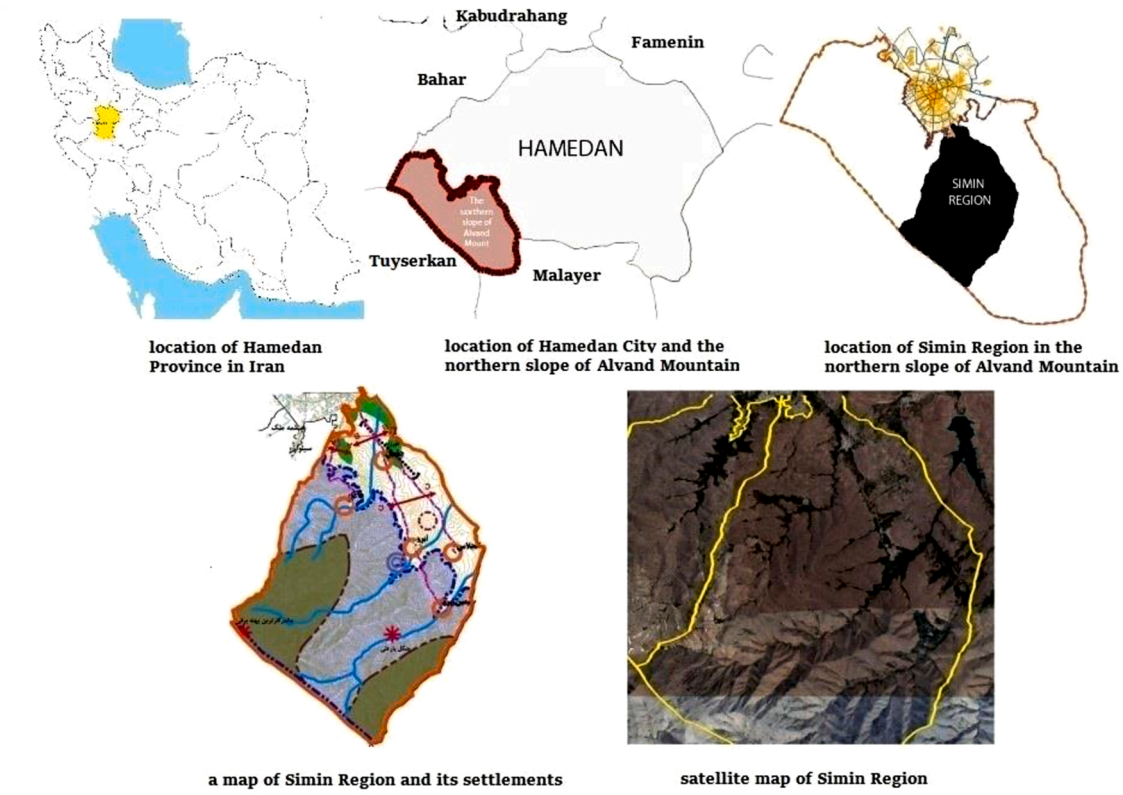

Fig. 1. The geographical location of Simin Region.
(source: Northern Slope of Alvand Mountain Research and Organization Project, 2018).

conceptualized and finally juxtaposed in a new way (Flick, 2009). According to Corbin and Strauss (2014), the coding procedure has three stages: open coding, axial coding and selective coding. These stages are not necessarily separate but complement one another.

During open coding, events, actions and interactions are compared and contrasted and tagged for the purpose of finding similarities and differences. In this stage, data are fractured, analyzed, compared and conceptualized. Conceptualization means that each section of interactions, theories and ideas that are in the related texts get extracted (Corbin and Strauss, 2014). During axial coding, links are established between the concepts and categories that are dervied from the open coding stage. The basis of this linking process in axial coding is identification of one core category and classification of other similar codes as its sub-categories (Corbin and Strauss, 2014). Finally and during selective coding, a theory is constructed with a number of abstract codes and there is no need to code new data. At this stage, the codes have become theoretically saturated. These codes are juxtaposed in a logical way based on the coded categories in the first two stages and then the core category is selected. The core category can be selected in two ways: selecting one of the available categories or determining/constructing a new category. Regardless of the method, selecting a core category at this stage requires accurate analysis of the collected data during the first two stages (ibid.). MAXQDA software was used in this study to facilitate coding. Upon coding, 216 concepts (phrases perceived from the interview texts) were grouped into 36 subcategories (with the total frequency of 362) and 12 main categories. The extracted categories were placed into four types, namely (1) conditions (causal, contextual and intervening), (2) main categories, (3) strategies and (4) consequences according to Strauss and Corbin's model (1998). Then, the grounded model of the study was developed.

7. Area of study

Located in the west of Iran, Hamedan is one of the historical cities of the country replete with natural and rural attractions and potentials. The city faces the heights of Alvand Mountain from the south. With a total area of 11,239 ha, Simin Region is located on the northern slope of Alvand Mountain (26 % of the total area of the northern slope). The area of study has been delimited based on criteria such as accurate determination of the drainage divides and urban areas. According to the latest census carried out in 2016, a total number of 6117 people live within this area in five settlements (Chashin, Abru, Simin Abru, Khaku and Enjelas). Simin Village has a homogeneous stone fabric, a stepped and foothill structure, narrow sloped stony passages and unique old public bathhouses. Regarding its natural landscape, the area of study has nomadic rangelands, medicinal plants, springs, rivers, gardens, valleys and natural forests. Other natural features such as rare birds and natural view corridors as well as manmade constructs such as petroglyphs, traditional textures, old bathhouses and different stone mines have added to the touristic value of the area. At the national scale plans, the tourism potentials of the area have been determined as agritourism (highest priority), cultural tourism, nomadic tourism and geotourism. The area was selected for study because of these features and potentials.

8. Findings

As it was mentioned in the research methodology section, the collected data were analyzed using Strauss and Corbin's three-stage model (1998) which consists of open coding, axial coding and selective coding. The coding was performed line by line using MAXQDA software.

Open Coding: During the open coding stage, 362 phrases from the interview texts were coded into 216 concepts. Table 3 shows some of the

concepts resulting from this stage for better understanding of the coding method.

Axial coding: The axial category was identified through review of the available concepts and juxtaposition of closely-related and similar concepts. Table 4 shows the results of this coding stage.

Selective coding: During the selective coding stage, categories are juxtaposed and systematic relations are established between them. Then, major categories are linked to one another around the core category and within a paradigmatic (grounded) model. The obtained model visually describes the categories and their relationships. This process is essentially the fusion of the core category and refinement of its branching structures. Such model can be presented as a formal model or chart which is conceptual at the same time. Fig. 2 shows the grounded model developed in this study.

9. Discussion of results

Considering that one of the goals of this study was identifying and inferring the axial tourism phenomenon in the study area in line with vision building and strategic development of the region, the core category was found out to be agritourism based on the results of the interviews. These results indicated that agritourism, with 26 % share from the total frequency, confirms the statements in national plans and this indicates that agritourism is the axial phenomenon in discussion of the region's tourism.

Regarding the second goal of this study, which was developing a comprehensive, local and grounded model for the axial phenomenon (agritourism) that is capable of covering all social, cultural, physical, environmental, economic and historical aspects, the model presented in the findings section (Fig. 2) was developed.

The results of the interviews indicated that Simin Region can support numerous agritourism activities including residential agritourism, food

Table 3
The results of the open coding stage.

Sentence/Phrase of Interview Text	Concept
"Those ecotourist guys, those who are expert in this field, they should come here and create a place, for example in the mosque, for educating people through the village council or the village head or the village Imam."	Using organizations and facilitative means
"The people's presence in holidays"	A place for spending holidays
"Their young ones won't be unemployed anymore."	Job opportunities
"They should allow tourists to spend a short or long time, for example, one or two days, at the riverside."	Availability of residence in the region
"Markets and sales spaces should be established in the villages, with the same construction materials."	Establishment of local markets
"The thing that comes to mind is the farmable area of the region."	Farmable lands
"Another point is the springs there and the very good water."	Numerous water sources
"The nomads can provide the tourism lands."	Nomads of the region
"The slope in this region is very different and this shows that you can do different kinds of farming in its different parts."	Unique topography of the region
"The vast fruit gardens along the path from Chashin to Simin"	Vast gardens
"You can plant medicinal herbs in the region and they are self-seeding."	Medicinal plants
"We have the noodle soup and the tarkhineh soup."	Local foods
"It's been 4 or 5 years that they're planning to construct a sewage system but they haven't done it yet."	Sewage problem
"It's good for mountaineering too because the valley path is cool."	Hiking and mountaineering potential
"The walnuts grown there are rather good."	High-quality walnuts
"The culture of welcoming tourists must be developed here."	Necessity of developing tourism culture

Table 4
Final derived categories and subcategories.

Concept	Subcategory	Category	Type of Category
Temporary residence at riverside, staying in nature, staying at farms and gardens	Residential agriculture	Agritourism	Axial phenomenon
Serving local foods, offering local products, using agricultural products, availability of various products, availability of animal products in the region, availability of garden products, high-quality fruits, availability of processed products, fish farming, availability of local products	Food services agriculture		
Helping with fruit picking, helping with harvesting, participation in agricultural activities, participation in gardening activities, participation in product processing, permission for picking fruits	Participative agritourism		
Direct sales of products, purchasing products from villagers	Direct sales		
A place for spending weekend holidays, recreational characteristic of the region, visiting rural areas, walking in nature, visiting farms, creating forest parks	Recreational agriculture		
possibility of mountaineering and ecotourism in the region, potential for horse and donkey breeding, snowing and snow sports, potential for hiking and mountaineering, beautiful birds such as finch, highlands, high cliffs, high peaks	Sport agriculture		
Unique plant species, herb processing, livestock and ranching, medicinal plants	Health agriculture		
Valuable architecture, historical places, valuable rural fabric, stone architecture of villages, attractive architecture of villages, old/ historical villages	Cultural tourism		
	Educational agriculture		

(continued on next page)

Table 4 (*continued*)

Concept	Subcategory	Category	Type of Category
Using the region for agriculture education purposes			
Vast walnut gardens, vast almond gardens, high-quality walnuts, availability of walnut and wheat, abundant amounts of walnuts, walnut as main product	Branding based on a specific product		
Desirable nature, favorable climate, vast gardens, agriculture farms, farmable lands, unique topography, expansive green spaces, diverse gardens, diverse flowers, lush gardens, beautiful gardens, natural view corridors, numerous gardens	Natural and environmental features	Environmental potentials	Contextual conditions
Numerous water sources, rivers and waterfalls, aqueducts and springs, permanent and seasonal rivers, Simineh Rood River	Nautical tourism		
Religious sites	Religious tourism		
Special minerals, mineralized geologic sites	Geologic properties	Other potentials of the current status of the region	Contextual conditions
Potential for rural tourism, potential for growing saffron, potential for growing grapes, potential for ecotourism and geotourism, saffron farms, nomads of the region, farmable lands	Other properties of the region		
Suitable distance from cities	Location and distance from Hamedan City	Location, access and transportation	Causal conditions
Access problem, transportation problem, lack of parking lots	Access and transportation		
frostbite problem, soil erosion problem, the problem of boars that attack fields and gardens	Gardens and soil erosion	Erosion, destruction and lack of temporal distribution of tourism activities	Causal conditions
Tourists majorly visit during the summer	Tourism in a specific season		
Sewage problem, mobile signal problem, water piping problem	Installations of the region	Installations and equipment of the region	Causal conditions
Lack of bathrooms	Equipment of the region		
Necessity of building temporary accommodations, establishing residential infrastructures, building residential places, establishing settlements, building ecotourism accommodations, providing ecotourism facilities, establishing residential camps	Strategies for improving residential agriculture	Tourism and agritourism strategies	Strategies
Necessity of building eateries, using local products, building traditional restaurants, building local restaurants, building halls and chambers, establishing livestock complexes, product processing, growing organic products, using modified seedlings, using modern farming and gardening methods	Strategies for improving food services agriculture		
	Holding tours in different seasons, designing touring loops, establishing efficient tourism, layering tourism activities, studying the types of visiting communities, studying the goals of visiting communities, temporal distribution of tourism, necessity of tourism in different seasons, fulfilling the needs of tourists, taking into account the tastes of tourists, tourism based on presence and passage, studying settlements as constellations		
	Strategies for improving participative agriculture		
	building entertainment places, necessity of building recreational centers, constructing cable car systems, creating exemplary farms, building diverse gardens, building greenhouses, designing safari parks, planting cool-region trees, creating exemplary garden, building botanical gardens, building model gardens, creating artificial forests, necessity of building parks, creating targeted gardens, creating targeted farms, modifying gardens		
	Strategies for improving		

(*continued on next page*)

Table 4 (*continued*)

Concept	Subcategory	Category	Type of Category
	recreational agriculture		
	Building ski resort, renting out gharries, horses and donkeys, mountaineering paths, building open public swimming pools, building cycling paths, providing air sports		
	Strategies for improving sport agriculture		
Building medicinal plant gardens, creating medicinal plant collections, offering herbal treatment services	Strategies for improving health agriculture		
Paying attention to the region's vernacular architecture, creating local markets, holding local festivals, reinforcing the region's identity, creating traditional markets, creating seasonal markets	Strategies for improving cultural tourism		
Necessity of improving tourism culture, using organizations and other facilitative means, establishing startups in the region, necessity of promoting the region, necessity of educational activities, using facilitation offices, paying attention to educational matters, using broadcasting for improving tourism culture, necessity of creating social infrastructures, necessity of improvement of education and culture, carrying out social studies, necessity of paying attention to all strata of the society, educating tourists, necessity of providing safety and security	Sociocultural issues	Sociocultural requirements of tourism	strategies
Necessity of building parking lots, necessity of building public bathrooms, necessity of creating infrastructures, necessity of building installations, paying attention to	Installations, equipment and infrastructures	Preliminary requirements of tourism	strategies

Table 4 (*continued*)

Concept	Subcategory	Category	Type of Category
healthcare issues, lighting in the region			
Building factories and concentrate production workshops, branding of walnut	Entrepreneurial measures	Economic development measures	strategies
Paying attention to carrying capacity, defining construction frameworks, creating investment opportunities, preventing landscape damages, setting environmental rules and regulations, identifying tourism sites, observing river frontage, determining macroscale and microscale plans, paying attention to environmental issues, producing SWOT matrix, preventing unauthorized land use change	Studying and reviewing the status quo	Studies and considerations	strategies
Creation of infrastructures as a result of tourism development	Infrastructural issues		
Job creation, economic prosperity, money flow, economic development, investment attraction, capital attraction, better sales of products, increased production, business development, increased land value, increased incomes, spatial distribution of travels	Economic issues		
Preventing migration, reviving the region's identity, providing food safety, establishing reverse migration, reviving the region's culture, reducing crimes, improving local culture	Sociocultural issues	Issues resulting from development of agritourism	Interfering factors
Risk of damaging the environment, risk of damaging national lands, risk of damaging nature, risk of polluting the environment, risk of harming plant species, risk of soil erosion, wastewater production problem	Environmental issues		

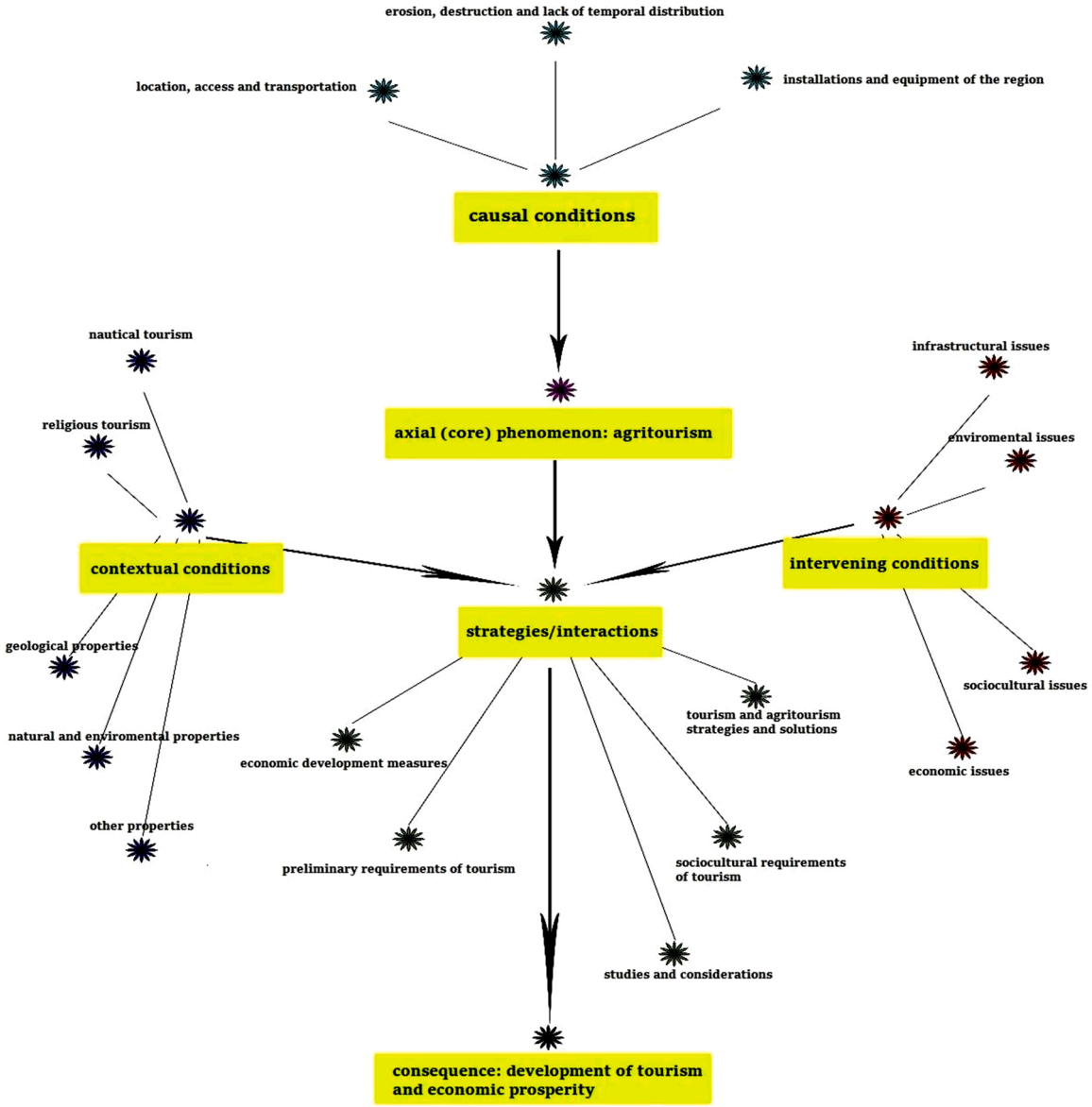

Fig. 2. The grounded model of the study.

services agritourism, participative agritourism, direct sales, recreational agritourism, sport agritourism, health agritourism, cultural agritourism, educational agritourism and branding of a specific product. These activities have been extracted from the interviews and in case of feasibility study, assessment and proper implementation, they can lead to the desired outcomes in the region, i.e. prosperity of tourism and economic development.

Chart 1 shows the frequency percentage of the core category and other categories of the model.

The frequency graph of other categories in relation to the axial phenomenon was drawn by NODEXL software based on Chart 1 .

Since agritourism was identified and inferred as the axial phenomenon based on the results of the performed analyses, this paper also analyzes the conditions and impact of the development of agritourism on Simin Region, especially in the agriculture section.

Conditional categories are the ones that affect the main category and lead to realization or development of the target phenomenon. Causal conditions can be identified based on the phenomenon itself, study of the available data and review of the events that temporally precede the phenomenon. The causal conditions of the selected region are:

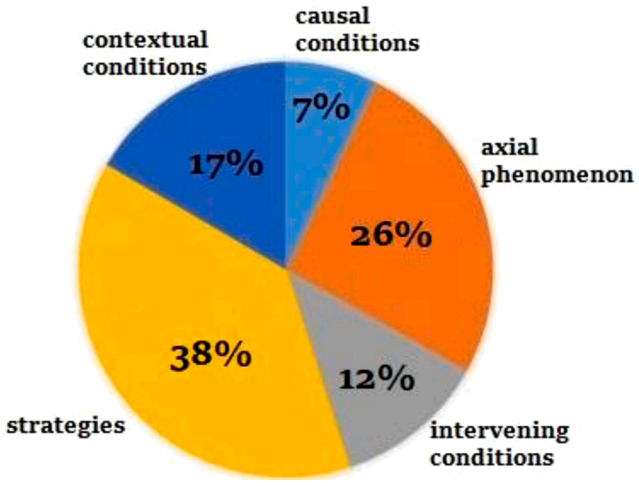

Chart 1. frequency percentage of the categories. (source: authors).

1 Location, access and transportation. Among these three conditions, access and transportation is more influential as a condition preceding the axial phenomenon. This means that unless the problem of roads and access is solved, proper measures are taken for preventing soil and land erosion and suitable installation and equipment are procured for the area, Simin Region will not be prepared for realization of the axial phenomenon, namely agritourism. The location of the region and the farms wherein agritourism is supposed to develop is important. Studies have shown that farms and areas close to central cities and provincial capitals are more suitable for agritourism (Bagi and Reeder, 2012). This category is of particular importance due to the sociocultural structure of Iran whose economic and political model relies on large cities and metropolises.
2 Erosion, destruction and lack of temporal distribution of tourism activities is the second causal condition in the region. Studies on tourism ecosystem services also emphasize the role of access and ecosystem qualities for tourism development (Sieber and Pons, 2015). If diminishment of the farms and gardens as well as soil erosion are left unchecked, they will reduce the agritourism capacity of Simin Region. Cavaliere (2017) has stated that there is a growing concern about the consequences of climate change for providers of agritourism activities. Lack of temporal distribution of tourism activities and the fact that agritourism in Simin Region is limited to a specific time can also make the residents unwilling to perform agritourism activities. Matei (2015) says that agritourism attracts the highest number of tourists during summertime, but in some areas agritourism flourishes in winter; also, there are areas whose agritourism is active throughout the whole year. Due to the cold and mountainous climate of Simin Region, winter agritourism takes priority.
3 Installations and equipment are also one of the most important causal conditions of agritourism in the region. Since Iran's is a government-driven economy, it is of particular importance to investors. Roman and Roman (2016) mention infrastructure as an important causal condition for setting up an agritourism farm. They also believe that acceptance of the idea, funding sources, environmental assets, population density, land shape and the area of protected lands are the other causal conditions of agritourism.

Contextual conditions are conditions that are present beforehand and affect strategies. The contextual conditions of the study area are (1) environmental potentials and (2) other potentials of the region including pristine nature, favorable climate, unique topography, natural view corridors, various water sources, geological sites and religious places. These conditions can affect any strategy that is to be presented for developing agritourism in the region as a complementary activity. The results of the interviews indicated that tourists would show more inclination toward agritourism regions only when a wide spectrum of complementary activities are available in those regions in addition to agritourism. In this regard, Lupi et al. (2017) emphasize factors such as landscape and other environmental features in formation and prosperity of agritourism. Poczta-Wajda and Poczta (2016) have also shown that there is a direct relationship between the popularity of agritourism and the capacity of a region for providing the visitors with the opportunity to visit nature and enjoy natural entertainments and activities. Pristine nature, special topography, attractive architecture and beautiful villages are among the main potentials of Simin Region which can bolster agritourism.

Intervening conditions are structural conditions that belong to the phenomenon and affect strategies, either facilitating or limiting them in a specific way. The only intervening condition of the selected region is issues resulting from development of tourism and agritourism. Analysis of the interviews indicated that establishing tourism and agritourism activities would encourage the government to pay special attention to this region and this in return would lead to establishment of infrastructures following development of tourism. Also, more jobs would be created, production would increase, incomes would rise. Overall, the residents of the region would have many economic gains in such case said conditions would act as facilitative factors for reinforcing the axial phenomenon.

Although the role of establishing temporary accommodations and ecotourism camps and residential areas has been emphasized in analysis of the findings for economic prosperity, large businesses such as luxury shopping malls, fancy restaurants and specially-designed parking lots are not very popular in the field of agritourism, especially for the villagers and visitors of the region and Hsu's views (2005) confirm this finding. Also, there is the threat that the created advantages may lead to activities such as opportunistic mercantilism, land grabbing, unchecked constructions and density sale, which may act as limitative factors for the axial phenomenon. Belisle (1983) has pointed out that development of tourism in rural areas may lead to change of land use from farms to large recreational complexes. Another economic threat for the region is the possibility of non-natives or non-residents entering the area and taking advantage of the opportunities created by development of tourism in the region in such case the financial gains from development of tourism would not be used for supporting the local economy, especially the agricultural sector. Koutsouris et al. (2014) have also mentioned this threat for the rural highlands of Greek. Therefore, any agreement between the stakeholders would lead to better results if it is made by partnership and coordination with the local community (Garau, 2015).

Sociocultural factors can also be either facilitative or limitative of the axial phenomenon. If development of tourism leads to revival of the region's identity, improvement of the local culture and reduction of crimes, it would be facilitative but if it causes cultural conflicts, imports foreign cultures in a destructive way or estranges the region to its original identity, it would be limitative of the axial phenomenon. The results of the interviews highlight the importance of local festivals and events as well as local and seasonal foods in attracting tourists and promoting a positive sociocultural image of the region. Other researchers have mentioned this finding in their studies, including Goeller (2006); Bondoc (2009); Hatley (2009) and Mohd Said et al. (2012). Also, according to many individuals and experts in the field of tourism, holding festivals and events in natural and tourism areas in the region can strengthen sense of place and place attachment. This finding is consistent with the results achieved by Yeoman (2004) and Herawati et al. (2016) about the importance of strengthening the role of and empowering the local management and cooperative development in local communities for rural tourism. However, this finding contradicts the views of Srisomyong and Meyer (2015) who argue that agritourism exacerbates social conflicts and leads to many sociocultural changes.

Environmental issues can also play an important role in facilitating or limiting agritourism activities and they can affect strategies. It must be remembered that agritourism must be planned and executed with the aim of helping rural regions in achieving sustainable development and reviving their natural environments, without becoming a destructive factor for the ecosystem of those regions. Therefore, taking into considerations a region's carrying capacity and studying its environmental-physical potency can help minimize probable environmental damages. The results showed that due to lack of proper infrastructures for sustainable development of tourism in the study area, negative impacts on the environmental sustainability of the region are likely. This finding is consistent with the views of Naidoo and Sharpley (2015), but contradicts the views of Lupi et al. (2017); Petromana et al. (2016) and Flanigan et al. (2015), which can be attributed to the study area itself; management and control of the impacts of tourism on the environment and educating people about tourism is performed better in developed countries compared to developing ones. Thus, development of agritourism in a region can bring socioeconomic vitality and prosperity to that region, but it can lead to environmental degradation, uncontrolled construction, destruction of the wildlife and plant species, waste pollution and diminishment of the local culture if the farmers, residents and

tourists are not educated properly (Wojciechowska, 2014; Fathi Saghezchi et al., 2018).

Strategies are often devised based on actions and reactions that aim to control, govern and handle the target phenomenon. As it has been shown in Chart 1 and Fig. 3 , strategies have the highest frequency percentage. The results of the interviews indicated that realization and development of the axial phenomenon in the region is contingent on application of the strategies which themselves are affected by other categories. These strategies fall into five groups: (1) tourism and agritourism strategies and solutions, (2) sociocultural requirements of tourism, (3) preliminary requirements of tourism, (4) economic development measures and (5) studies and considerations. As Fig. 3 shows, most strategies are related to reinforcement and fulfillment of the potentials of tourism and agritourism and then to the sociocultural requirements. This indicates that the existing potentials of the axial phenomenon should be augmented through certain measures based on sociocultural considerations.

Accordingly, it seems that the economic development model of Simin Region can be formed based on agritourism and sustainable rural development. Attention to this approach can be seen in the works of Yeh (2015); Goeller (2006); Barbole et al. (2012); Jenkins (2014) and Byrd et al. (2009) as well. Development of new marketing strategies, added value and profits of agricultural production, employment in the agricultural sector, motivation for investment in the agricultural sector, diversification and strengthening of income sources via development of farm business, supporting production performance in farms, increasing farmers' skills and reduction of migration are the most important economic outcomes of development of agritourism in Simin Region. This finding is in line with the views of Tew and Barbieri (2012), who emphasize the role of marketing and development of farm businesses in economic prosperity through agritourism but is not consistent with the views of Torres (2003), who believes that development of tourism leads to reduction of agricultural production or decline of the demand for the products. The findings also show that the residents' tendency for establishing small and temporary businesses in the field of agritourism is stronger compared to large-scale or permanent businesses. Zhao (2009) and Parkar (2015) also believe that agritourism businesses are more inclined to remain small-scale. Considering the existing agricultural capacities of Simin Region, agritourism can complement the agriculture of the region and support the farmers. Demonja and Bacac (2011) have reported similar results in their study. Other advantages of realization of agritourism in the region are formation or promotion of spatial

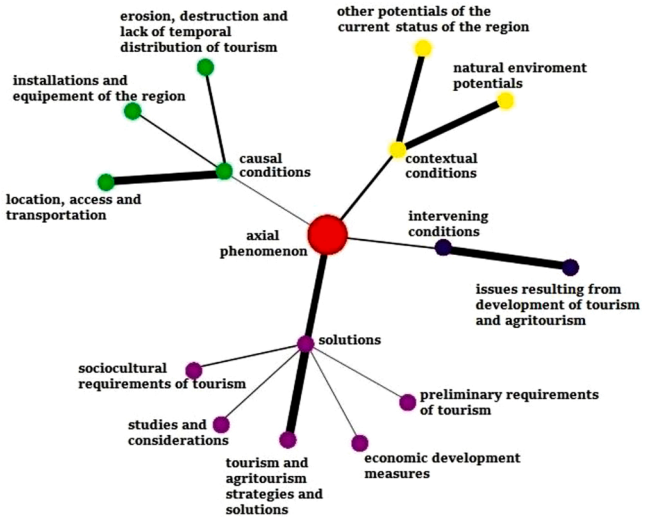

Fig. 3. The frequency graph of other categories in relation to the axial phenomenon.
(source: authors).

branding, infrastructural development, prosperity of service provision and development of the existing capacities for attracting tourists and finally economic prosperity. This finding is consistent with the views of Hernández-Mogollón et al. (2014). It was also found out that the participatory behaviors of the residents and users of Simin Region from the perspective of agritourism are motived economically rather than socioculturally, which can be partially attributed to the dependency of economic issues on political matters and the instability of the economic and political situation. This issue intensifies sense of ownership of land lots and the dependence of economy on lands in developing countries. Pongponrat (2012), however, has reported that social components have the greatest impact on participation in agritourism activities.

10. Conclusion

This research posed a number of questions and attempted to answer them by setting different goals. In this study, a model was constructed by means of the grounded theory methodology to frame and explain the agritourism development strategies in Simin Region located in Hamedan Province. The results indicated that agritourism approach in the selected region is able to guide all social, cultural, economic, functional and managerial aspects of Simin Region with a strategic view of the subject of place. The fundamental condition is adopting an endogenous look at place, which can be explained within the framework of asset-based and context-oriented approach. Accordingly, the development strategies must be devised and implemented in five major groups: (1) agritourism, (2) paying attention to the sociocultural characteristics of tourism, (3) paying attention to the preliminary requirements of tourism, (4) economic development measures and (5) geographical and local considerations.

These questions and goals sought to clarify what impact the addition of tourism, especially agritourism, to land use policies in the region has in practice and what strategies are needed to better adapt it to the region's conditions. Accordingly, improving the existing access routes, creating easy access points, providing managed public transportation for short distances from the tourist sites, establishing temporary and permanent parking lots (with minimum interference with the natural environment of the region), preventing erosion of the natural resources via measures such as planting and developing medicinal and industrial plants, using new (clean) energies for preserving pastures and gardens, exploiting conservation agriculture, utilizing the indigenous knowledge and finally constructing the necessary facilities and infrastructures such as roads, pure water supply networks, power grids, telephone lines, etc. are the basic prerequisites for developing tourism, especially agritourism, in this region. The various agritourism potentials of the region were examined in detail in this paper. Also, it is suggested that short-term, medium-term and long-term tours and travel loops be held via combination of agritourism activities and other natural, social and cultural potentials for maximum use of these opportunities. There will certainly be intervening factors during the implementation of these policies, which will raise different challenges; but they can be addressed through trainings provided by NGOs, facilitator institutes, government agencies and the related professionals, especially agriculture promotion and development experts.

Finally, based on the literature of the study, practical experiences and the grounded model introduced in this paper, a generalizable model consisting of general strategies and measures required for strategic development of agritourism in regions with geographical, cultural, economic and environmental characteristics similar to those of the selected region has been proposed herein. Fig. 4 shows this model.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Omid Khairabadi: Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Resources, Software, Visualization, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing. **Hassan**

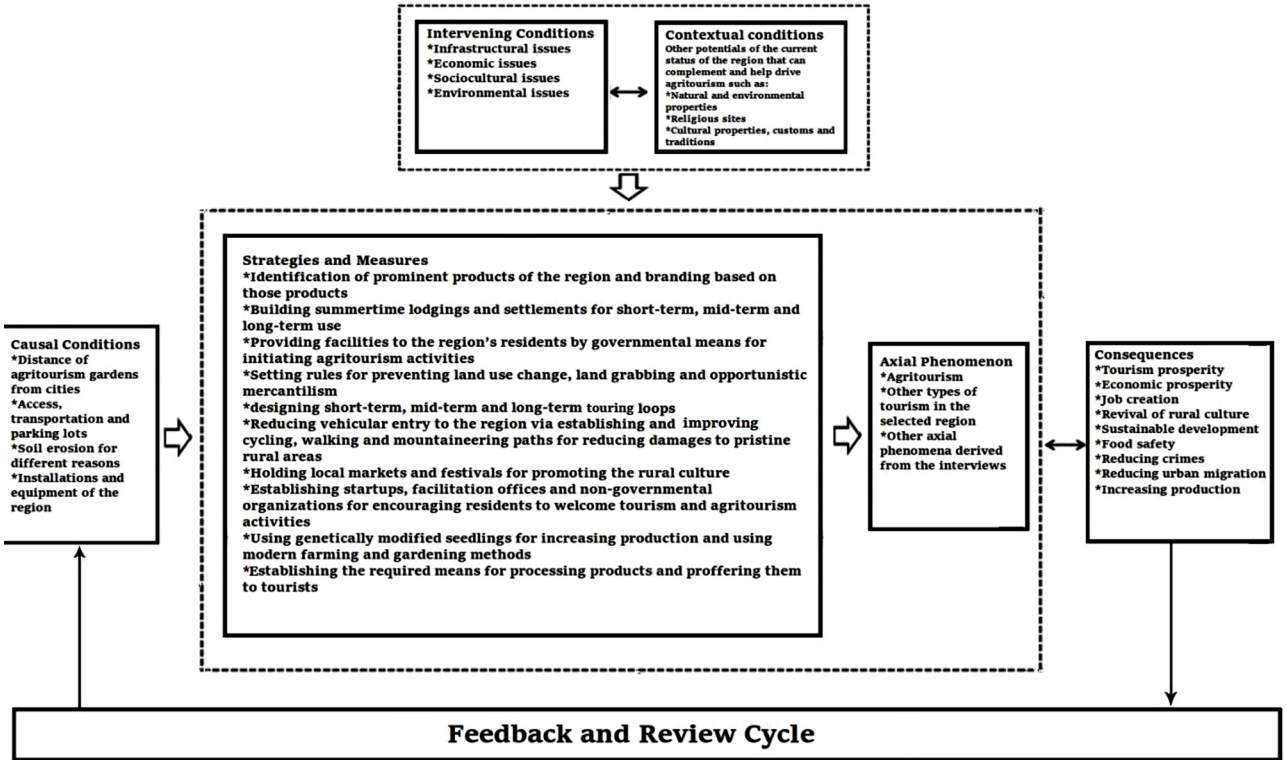

Fig. 4. The localized and generalizable model of agritourism.
(source: authors).

Sajadzadeh: Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Funding acquisition, Investigation, Methodology, Project administration, Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing. **Saheb Mohammadianmansoor:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Investigation, Project administration.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors report no declarations of interest.

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