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**Analysis of Factors of Environmental Quality  
Effective in Branding Rural Tourism Destinations  
(Case Study: Ethno-Cultural Region of  
Avramanat in Provinces of Kurdistan and  
Kermanshah)<sup>1</sup>**

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**Extended Abstract**

The branding basis for all tourist destinations includes unique environmental characteristics which are also known as Factors of Environmental Quality. The reason why these features are called so is because the optimal quality of such environments will inevitably result in a better appreciation of such destinations which, in turn, will help develop tourism.

Delineating environmental quality as well as branding for rural tourist destinations helps in creating an enjoyable and memorable experience for the tourists. Other consequences which follow include the tourists' loyalty to a certain destination and, ultimately, the attraction of even more tourists which will lead to a boom in the tourism industry of the region.

Given the importance of this issue, the researchers of this study have endeavored to determine the role of environmental factors in the ethno-cultural area of

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<sup>1</sup> The present article is based on the Ph.D. thesis of the University of Tehran as "Analysis of factors of environmental quality Effective in branding rural tourism destinations".

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*Oramanat*. First, a qualitative content analysis was used to identify environmental factors; then, through correlation analysis, multivariate regression and path analysis, the contribution of each of these factors and its relationship with branding have been determined. Based on the results, the factor of socio-cultural environment has the highest impact of 0.45% (Including direct and indirect), and the natural environment factor had the least effect, i.e. only 0.26%, on the dependent variable (*Oramanat* tourist destination brand); the institutional, physical and economic factors are also 36/0, 32/0 and 16/0 respectively.

### **Objectives**

Nowadays, tourist destinations have to compete with other international, national, regional, provincial, municipal and local tourist destinations. The factors of environmental quality, including environmental education, cultural heritage attractions, the infrastructure of tourism and natural resources, have an important contribution to strengthening the competitiveness of the tourist destination. If goods and services are not as optimal in quality as tourists expect them to be, then tourists will visit other centers which provide them with better services.

Human habitats can be the most desirable factor in fulfilling the expectations of people. In other words, if the above-mentioned factors do not have optimal qualities in a certain person's living environment, then their low qualities will negatively influence that person's perception of space and his or her ultimate satisfaction with their living environment.

The important issue in planning for rural areas is the improvement of the environmental quality of tourist destinations within the context and framework of sustainable development goals because suitable environments are one of the most important factors for the selection of a tourist destination. These factors can be explained with the help of certain indices. For instance, tourism plans for rural areas should also take into account such other goals as sustainable development of the rural areas as well as the preservation of their natural environments.

The branding basis for all tourist destinations includes unique environmental characteristics which are also known as Factors of Environmental Quality. The reason why these features are called so is because the optimal quality of such environments will inevitably result in a better appreciation of such destinations which, in turn, will help develop tourism.

Delineating environmental quality as well as branding for rural tourist destinations helps in creating an enjoyable and memorable experience for the tourists. Other consequences which follow include the tourists' loyalty to a certain destination and, ultimately, the attraction of even more tourists which will lead to a boom in the tourism industry of the region.

Unfortunately, the quality of services in rural tourism has often been considered as a hindering issue, and this is not just for tourists, stakeholders or customers;

scientists and researchers have also been concerned with this issue and that is why 143 researches have been conducted on this issue between 2005 and 2016.

The concept of quality is closely and inevitably associated with satisfaction. This concept influences and is at the same time influenced by the loyalty of tourists/consumers. The findings of a large number of researchers confirm that this is an important issue. Thus, identifying factors of environmental quality greatly contributes to branding and as well as the marketing and ultimate development of tourism in these destinations.

Keeping this principle in mind that solving any problem requires a comprehensive understanding of the current situation, in this study, we endeavor to contribute to the development of rural tourism as well as its marketing and branding through the assessment of environmental quality factors, and the capabilities and attractions of the villages within study area. Therefore, the researchers of this study sought to identify and validate the factors of environmental quality of the ethno-cultural region of *Oramanat* in order to help the branding processes for the attractions of this rural area.

### **Methods**

Since the present research is originally the continuation of the research processes of the first paper (Published in the Journal of Rural Studies, in the Summer 96), the same content analysis methodology will also be used in this research for the identification as well as the validation processes of the factors and indices of effective environmental quality which are important for the branding of rural tourist destinations.

Due to the nature of the subject matter of this research, its methodology is a combination of several methods which are based on observations, interviews, surveys and statistical data which are taken from the Statistical Center of Iran.

Documentary and survey methods have been used in order to collect information in this research. Qualitative thematic analysis method was initially used in this study. This method is a useful way for the determination, analysis, and reporting of certain patterns in qualitative data. Moreover, this method includes a process through which scattered and divergent data are converted into rich and detailed data. This method used purposeful sampling which included 29 interviews (12 interviews with beneficiary local people and 17 interviews with tourists). The obtained results were then analyzed with MAXQDA software. The researchers then continued to validate the results and increase their reliability with the help of a quantitative method also known as Exploratory factor analysis.

Moreover, the sample population, i.e. people who were asked to complete the questionnaires which were designed based on the results of the analysis of interviews in the previous stages of the study, was considered to include 300 members for each group of participants, i.e. local people and tourists. Needless to say, researchers also took into consideration the fact that some of the questionnaires would probably not be returned to them. That is why the total number of questionnaires distributed among participants was 650. Ultimately,

the sample was calculated with the use of the Cochran formula and the result was 372.

In order to evaluate the contribution of factors and environmental quality indicators effective in the branding of rural tourism destinations in *Oramanat*, the results of the completed questionnaires completed by the respondents were summarized in two steps:

First stage - two-variable analysis: In this step, in order to test the research hypotheses, each of the independent variables is two-to-two with the dependent variable (branding for the destination); these variables have been analyzed based on the Pearson correlation coefficient (with respect to the distance of their measurement).

Second Stage - In this step, data analysis is performed as multivariate analysis; the following methods were used:

1. Regression analysis: regression analysis was used to determine the contribution of each independent variable to the dependent variable without considering the priority and delay between them.
2. Route analysis: Route analysis was used to determine the contribution of each of the independent variables to the dependent variable by considering the priority and the delay between them, which means an analysis to determine to what extent each of the independent variables, directly and indirectly, affects the dependent variable of the research.

## **Results & Discussion**

The branding basis for all tourist destinations includes unique environmental characteristics which are also known as Factors of Environmental Quality. The reason why these features are called so is because the optimal quality of such environments will inevitably result in a better appreciation of such destinations which, in turn, will help develop tourism. Delineating environmental quality as well as branding for rural tourist destinations helps in creating an enjoyable and memorable experience for the tourists. Other consequences which follow include the tourists' loyalty to a certain destination and, ultimately, the attraction of even more tourists which will lead to a boom in the tourism industry of the region.

Given the importance of this issue, the researchers of this study have endeavored to determine the role of environmental factors in the ethno-cultural area of *Oramanat*. First, a qualitative content analysis was used to identify environmental factors; then, through correlation analysis, multivariate regression and path analysis, the contribution of each of these factors and its relationship with branding have been determined. Based on the results, the factor of socio-cultural environment has the highest impact of 0.45% (Including direct and indirect), and the natural environment factor had the least effect, i.e. only 0.26%, on the dependent variable (*Oramanat* tourist destination brand); the institutional, physical and economic factors are also 36/0, 32/0 and 16/0 respectively.

**Keywords:** Environmental Quality, Branding, Tourism Destination, Path Analysis, Ethno-Cultural Region of Avramanat

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