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Strategies for Sustainable Tourism Development in Ramhormoz County Based on Iranian-Islamic Progress Documents and Leadership Perspectives

ABSTRACT

This study was conducted with the aim of formulating strategies for the sustainable tourism development of Ramhormoz County based on Iranian-Islamic progress documents (such as the Horizon 2025 Vision Document and the Second Phase of the Islamic Revolution Statement) and leadership perspectives. Ramhormoz County, with its rich historical, natural, cultural, and religious potential, possesses substantial capacity for tourism development; however, it faces challenges such as weak infrastructure, the absence of comprehensive planning, environmental threats, and insufficient promotion. This research employed a mixed-methods approach (qualitative and quantitative). In the qualitative phase, using grounded theory and thematic analysis, data derived from three main sources (national upstream policy documents, leadership statements, and interviews with tourism experts) were analyzed. In the quantitative phase, the final model was validated using structural equation modeling (SEM) and a researcher-developed questionnaire. The qualitative findings led to the extraction of a paradigmatic model consisting of six main components: causal factors (geopolitical position, significance of tourism impacts, and environmental concerns), contextual factors (stakeholder participation, education and research, and cultural promotion), intervening factors (good governance, financial management, technology, safety, and security), core factors (foresight, justice and equity, and resource sustainability), strategies (planning and policymaking, marketing, total quality management, monitoring and evaluation, and resource protection), and outcomes (well-being and quality of life, enrichment of Iranian-Islamic culture, tourist satisfaction, and resource conservation). Quantitative results indicated that all relationships in the model were statistically significant, and the goodness-of-fit index (GOF = 0.658) confirmed desirable model fit. Finally, operational strategies were proposed in various domains, including the development of a strategic document, strengthening local participation, developing sustainable infrastructure, targeted marketing, host community training, and establishing a monitoring and evaluation system. These strategies provide a framework for advancing sustainable tourism development in Ramhormoz in alignment with Iranian-Islamic values and in support of national macro-level goals.

Keywords: Sustainable development, tourism, Iranian-Islamic documents, leadership perspectives.

Introduction

Tourism has evolved into one of the most influential sectors of the global economy, shaping patterns of development, employment, socio-cultural exchange, and regional competitiveness across both developed and developing nations. As argued in recent economic research, the travel and tourism industry constitutes one of the largest and most dynamic components of the service economy, generating far-reaching multiplier effects and acting as a strategic engine of national development [1]. This significance is especially evident in emerging economies, where tourism not only accelerates economic growth but also diversifies income sources, stimulates entrepreneurship, and promotes balanced regional development.

Empirical findings from Ethiopia, for example, demonstrate a robust positive relationship between tourism expansion and national economic growth, highlighting the sector's capacity to contribute meaningfully to GDP and employment [2]. In the Iranian context, tourism is increasingly recognized as a vital development mechanism, despite facing structural, managerial, and infrastructural challenges that necessitate strategic planning and evidence-based policymaking.

The rapid growth of tourism worldwide has encouraged governments to adopt new policies that strengthen competitiveness, improve destination management, and align national tourism strategies with global sustainability frameworks [3]. Comparable transformations in travel patterns, digitalization, and visitor expectations have also intensified the need for innovative and inclusive development models. Analyses of global tourism policy indicate that long-term success relies not only on economic incentives but also on coherent planning, institutional capacity, and multi-stakeholder governance structures [4]. Furthermore, economic assessments demonstrate that tourism fosters local economic development by stimulating demand for goods and services, supporting small businesses, and generating diverse employment opportunities at regional and community levels [5]. The role of tourism in strengthening consumption-driven economic cycles is also emphasized in studies showing that tourists act as major consumers whose expenditures shape the economic performance of host destinations [6].

In Iran, the potential of tourism as a catalyst for sustainable economic and socio-cultural transformation has been repeatedly highlighted. Historical, natural, and cultural resources across the country offer a strong foundation for both domestic and international tourism development. However, the realization of this potential requires integrated planning and data-driven strategies that account for regional contexts and national priorities. Comprehensive tourism plans—such as the Khuzestan Provincial Tourism Plan—provide initial foundations for understanding resource capacities, spatial distribution of attractions, and infrastructure needs [7]. Yet, persistent gaps remain in operationalizing these plans, especially in regions with high cultural value and ecological vulnerability. This justifies the need for targeted studies that propose sustainable, contextually grounded development roadmaps.

A growing body of literature emphasizes that tourism cannot be reduced to purely economic metrics. Sustainable tourism development requires a holistic approach that incorporates environmental stewardship, community well-being, social justice, and cultural preservation [8]. In many destinations, pressures arising from unmanaged tourism growth—such as environmental degradation, resource overuse, and erosion of cultural identity—underscore the importance of adopting sustainability-oriented policies [9]. The literature on sustainable tourism further underscores that development must extend beyond economic objectives to address long-term system survival, resource conservation, and intergenerational equity [10]. Similarly, Iranian scholars argue that balanced and comprehensive development should replace narrow economic growth models, ensuring that social, cultural, and environmental dimensions are adequately integrated [11].

Cultural tourism represents another essential dimension of sustainability. The promotion of cultural identity, heritage protection, and community participation is regarded as central to advancing sustainable tourism outcomes in culturally rich societies [12]. Research also confirms that the literature on sustainable tourism has progressively shifted from economic performance to the broader socio-cultural and ecological implications of tourism [13]. These discussions align with Iran's national aspirations, which emphasize endogenous development, cultural resilience, and the preservation of Islamic-Iranian values. Indeed, the *Second Phase of the Revolution Statement* (2018) places strong emphasis on cultural renewal, social justice, entrepreneurial empowerment, and modernization rooted in national identity [14]. Tourism, in this intellectual

framework, functions as a strategic vehicle for cultural diplomacy, interregional solidarity, and economic revitalization grounded in local values.

Tourism also contributes to employment generation and poverty reduction. Empirical studies conducted in Iran demonstrate that the sector has substantial capacity for direct and indirect job creation across various skill levels [15]. In economically distressed or peripheral regions, tourism can stimulate new livelihood opportunities, support micro-enterprises, and strengthen rural economies. International evidence likewise supports the role of tourism as an enabler of local economic growth, with studies from China illustrating the transformative effects of tourism investments on regional development trajectories [16]. Comparative studies between Iran, Turkey, and China reveal that tourism not only induces economic expansion but also significantly influences trade, investment patterns, and competitiveness indices [17]. These findings reinforce the need for Iran to mobilize its tourism potential strategically to strengthen economic diversification, especially in the face of global uncertainties and economic sanctions.

Alongside economic dimensions, tourism functions as a platform for entrepreneurship and innovation. Recent research highlights the importance of social entrepreneurship within the tourism sector, particularly in promoting inclusive development and empowering marginalized groups, including people with disabilities [18]. Innovative marketing practices are increasingly recognized as essential tools for enhancing visitor engagement, destination branding, and competitive differentiation. For instance, studies on sports tourism demonstrate that modern marketing strategies—when properly implemented—can significantly increase visibility and tourist inflows while improving service quality [19]. Similarly, health tourism has emerged as a growing area of interest in Iran, requiring appropriate policy frameworks, infrastructure improvements, and targeted marketing strategies to meet international standards and consumer expectations [20, 21]. As medical and wellness tourism continue to expand globally, Iran must adopt evidence-based models to enhance competitiveness and attract regional and international clientele [22].

Smart tourism and digital transformation represent another major frontier in modern destination development. Narrative analyses indicate that despite substantial progress in technological adoption, Iranian destinations such as Mashhad still face notable challenges in implementing integrated smart tourism management systems [23]. The digitalization of tourism services—particularly in information systems, reservation platforms, and digital marketing—is essential for improving visitor experience, operational efficiency, and sustainable resource management. In parallel, global scholarship underlines that tourists today behave not only as observers but also as active consumers whose expectations shape service innovation and destination design [6, 24]. To respond to these evolving dynamics, tourism strategies must incorporate digital capabilities, innovative governance models, and participatory planning approaches.

Environmental sustainability remains an indispensable pillar of tourism planning. The degradation of natural ecosystems, water scarcity, biodiversity loss, and pollution threaten the long-term viability of many destinations, particularly in ecologically sensitive regions like Khuzestan. Literature argues that sustainable tourism must ensure both environmental conservation and community well-being, aligning ecological protection with social and economic goals [9]. Studies conducted in Iran emphasize that tourism development must prioritize environmental protection, resource stewardship, and adherence to ecological capacities [25]. The foundational principles of sustainable resource utilization highlight that conservation is not merely an ecological necessity but an ethical responsibility toward future generations [8]. These concerns are especially

pronounced given Iran's environmental vulnerabilities, including climate stress, water resource challenges, and habitat degradation.

Iran's diverse tourism potential at the global scale has been repeatedly documented, demonstrating unmatched cultural heritage, natural landscapes, and historical depth [26]. To harness this potential, tourism investment strategies must be carefully designed to mobilize capital, mitigate risks, and encourage private-sector participation. Studies on tourism-designated areas in Tehran reveal that investor confidence is heavily influenced by governance quality, infrastructural adequacy, and regulatory transparency [27]. These findings highlight the importance of institutional support and coordinated planning, especially in underdeveloped regions that seek to attract investors and international tourists. Additionally, integrating research-driven approaches into tourism planning processes ensures that policies align with local strengths, ecological realities, and cultural assets.

Health tourism represents a rapidly expanding niche globally and within Iran. Research on health villages and integrated wellness destinations emphasizes the need for specialized marketing models that highlight health-oriented experiences, natural healing resources, and high-quality services [21]. This sector has significant potential for economic diversification, especially in regions endowed with therapeutic landscapes, mineral springs, herbal resources, and traditional medicine practices. Similarly, medical tourism—when supported by international-standard facilities, professional competencies, and targeted policies—can position Iran as a competitive regional hub [22]. Combined with smart tourism technologies and advanced destination management systems, health and medical tourism could substantially enhance Iran's international tourism profile.

In addition to economic and technological aspects, sustainable tourism planning must incorporate broader philosophical and developmental concepts. Iranian scholars emphasize that sustainable tourism should align with the principles of balanced development, endogenous growth, cultural authenticity, and human-centered progress [11]. Such viewpoints resonate with the *Second Phase of the Revolution Statement*, which stresses spiritual elevation, ethical governance, youth empowerment, and knowledge-based development as central pillars of national progress [14]. Tourism, therefore, represents not only an economic engine but also a cultural-civilizational strategy that can reinforce national identity, social cohesion, and intergenerational equity.

The economic effects of tourism extend far beyond simple revenue generation. Studies show that tourism stimulates trade, foreign exchange earnings, and service-sector dynamism in developing economies [28]. Moreover, insights from comparative analyses across Iran, Turkey, and China confirm that tourism significantly influences macroeconomic indicators and business development patterns [17]. In regional contexts such as Khuzestan, whose historical and cultural assets remain underutilized, sustainable tourism development represents a unique opportunity to achieve economic revitalization, job creation, and cultural preservation simultaneously.

Given these complex and interconnected dynamics, tourism development must integrate sustainability principles, local capacities, cultural authenticity, environmental constraints, digital transformation, and innovative governance. Scholars argue that strategic tourism planning—when informed by comprehensive data and inclusive participation—serves as the cornerstone of destination success [25]. Today, sustainable tourism is understood as a multidimensional system that requires resilience, adaptability, environmental justice, and long-term vision [10]. Accordingly, Iran must adopt integrated frameworks that address socio-economic disparities, environmental vulnerabilities, and managerial inefficiencies.

The purpose of this study is to design a comprehensive, sustainability-oriented strategic framework for tourism development in Iran by integrating environmental, cultural, economic, social, and governance dimensions grounded in Islamic-Iranian principles.

Methodology

This study was conducted using a mixed-methods approach (qualitative–quantitative) and, in terms of purpose, follows a fundamental–applied orientation. The research methodology was selected based on Islamic principles to ensure alignment with Islamic epistemology while also remaining scientifically valid for the academic community.

The objective of the qualitative phase was to design a proposed model for sustainable tourism development aimed at realizing the Iranian–Islamic model of progress. The qualitative methods employed included grounded theory (to extract indicators of sustainable tourism development) and thematic analysis (to extract indicators of the Iranian–Islamic model of progress). The qualitative statistical population consisted of qualitative texts (upstream policy documents, leadership statements, and the foundational model of progress) and tourism experts with a minimum of four years of academic and professional experience. Sampling for the qualitative phase included purposive sampling for document selection and snowball sampling for selecting ten experts. Data collection instruments in the qualitative phase included semi-structured interviews with experts and document analysis (review of 240 Persian sources and 140 English-language sources).

Quality assessment included:

- Method triangulation (interviews and document analysis).
- Observance of grounded theory principles (theoretical sensitivity, methodological coherence, and theoretical sampling until theoretical saturation).
- Use of independent coders and achieving intercoder agreement in thematic analysis.

The objective of the quantitative phase was to validate the proposed model derived from the qualitative component. The quantitative methods used included confirmatory factor analysis (to validate measurement models and convergent validity) and structural equation modeling (SEM) using the partial least squares (PLS) method (to assess model fit). The quantitative statistical population consisted of 30 tourism experts familiar with the Iranian–Islamic model of progress, and sampling was judgmental (non-probabilistic). The data collection instrument was a researcher-developed questionnaire.

Reliability: Cronbach’s alpha and composite reliability (CR) values greater than 0.7.

Convergent validity: Average variance extracted (AVE) values greater than 0.5 and statistically significant factor loadings.

Table 1

Convergent Validity and Reliability

Construct	Cronbach’s Alpha	CR	AVE	t-value	Factor Loading (λ)
Islamic–Iranian Progress Indicators					
Social Justice	0.807	0.853	0.540	22.937	0.709
Social Security	—	—	—	26.110	0.700
Social Order	—	—	—	37.820	0.793
Social Cohesion	—	—	—	51.720	0.850
Social Welfare	—	—	—	14.615	0.595
Scientific Independence	0.827	0.887	0.665	28.343	0.767
Human Capital	—	—	—	20.289	0.680
Knowledge & Technology	—	—	—	81.125	0.910
Research & Development	—	—	—	77.597	0.883
Political Independence	0.829	0.880	0.596	37.116	0.777
Political Justice	—	—	—	17.502	0.689

Political Cohesion	—	—	—	45.276	0.815
Political Stability	—	—	—	36.181	0.795
National Security	—	—	—	23.134	0.778
Economic Independence	0.629	0.799	0.570	21.641	0.713
Economic Justice	—	—	—	36.334	0.814
Economic Welfare	—	—	—	35.180	0.734
Cultural Independence	0.780	0.860	0.607	19.957	0.679
Religion & Beliefs	—	—	—	48.505	0.852
Spirituality	—	—	—	64.675	0.853
Values & Ethics	—	—	—	32.617	0.718
Islamic–Iranian Model Achievement	0.926	0.935	0.603	—	—
Sustainable Tourism Development Indicators					
Stakeholder Participation & Cohesion	0.777	0.870	0.692	25.882	0.769
Tourism Education & Research	—	—	—	92.621	0.833
Tourism Culture-building	—	—	—	75.242	0.889
Resource Conservation Foresight	0.580	0.782	0.549	64.553	0.866
Justice & Equity in Resource Use	—	—	—	21.181	0.712
Resource Sustainability	—	—	—	9.396	0.626
Tourism Resource Protection	0.869	0.911	0.719	48.273	0.822
Quality of Life	—	—	—	62.522	0.863
Cultural Enrichment	—	—	—	71.036	0.894
Tourist Satisfaction	—	—	—	38.184	0.811
Good Tourism Governance	0.808	0.867	0.570	53.693	0.847
Tourism Science & Technology	—	—	—	17.884	0.640
Financial Management	—	—	—	38.916	0.837
Sense of Place	—	—	—	19.839	0.629
Safety & Security	—	—	—	34.427	0.792
Geopolitical Dimension	0.821	0.892	0.733	41.139	0.844
Tourism Impacts	—	—	—	93.661	0.902
Environmental Concerns	—	—	—	59.975	0.821
Tourism Planning & Policy	0.837	0.876	0.512	83.584	0.844
Tourism Marketing	—	—	—	33.519	0.793
Total Quality Management	—	—	—	42.562	0.810
Resource Management	—	—	—	6.015	0.414
Monitoring & Evaluation	—	—	—	21.268	0.611
Environmental Management	—	—	—	26.913	0.703
Tourism Transport Management	—	—	—	20.428	0.691

Scope of the Research

Geographical Scope: Islamic Republic of Iran.

Temporal Scope:

- Documents from 2010 onward, and leadership statements from 2011 onward.
- Data collection conducted during 2024 and 2025.

Findings and Results

In this section, the indicators of sustainable tourism development were extracted using the grounded theory method and based on three sources:

1. Content analysis of documents related to tourism development;
2. Content analysis of leadership statements;
3. Interviews with tourism experts.

After collecting the documents (such as the *Tourism and Cultural Heritage Development Vision Document* and the national five-year development plans), the analysis process commenced with open coding. For this purpose, an identification system was defined:

D: indicates the document; A, B, C: document number; numbers (1, 2, 3, ...): key point number; Ar: article; No: note; Cl: clause.

Example: DA4-Ar92 means “the fourth key point of Article 92 of the first document.”

In open coding, the key points of the documents were selected and initially extracted as primary codes. These codes were then categorized into more abstract units called “concepts.” Finally, the concepts were placed under “subcategories.” The output of this process is presented in separate tables for each document (for example, Document A: Cultural Heritage and Tourism Development Vision Document identified as DA).

In the first part, the textual data obtained from seven national upstream policy documents of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the field of cultural heritage, tourism, and development were analyzed. Using the grounded theory method and going through the three stages of open, axial, and selective coding, the concepts, categories, and ultimately the paradigmatic model of sustainable tourism development in Ramhormoz County were extracted.

In this stage, all sentences, expressions, and key clauses related to tourism were extracted from the documents and conceptually coded as initial codes. This process resulted in identifying 460 open codes from the seven examined documents. For example, the phrase “inadequate utilization of the vast volume of historical, cultural, and natural heritage” from the vision document was converted into the open code DA1: proper utilization of the vast historical and cultural heritage of the county. This process was carried out separately for all documents.

In the second stage, open codes were categorized based on conceptual similarities into concepts and then subcategories. This stage resulted in the formation of 26 subcategories derived from the 460 open codes. For instance, the open codes DA1, DA2, DA13, DA45, and DA55 were all placed under the concept “sustainable use of national cultural heritage” and subsequently within the subcategory “sustainability of tourism resources.”

Table 2

Formation of Subcategories from Open Codes in Documents

Row	Subcategory	Brief Definition of Subcategory	Examples of Related Open Codes
1	Tourism Education and Research	All activities related to human resource training and knowledge production in tourism.	– Training specialized staff (DA69) – Expansion of archaeological research (DA77) – Knowledge exchange (DB1-Cl3)
2	Safety and Security in Tourism	Ensuring infrastructure safety and creating a sense of security for tourists.	– Improving air and road safety (DA73) – Enhancing aircraft and airport safety (DF2-Ar161) – Insurance coverage for facilities (DD1-Ar181)
3	Tourism Marketing	Promotional activities, image-building, and familiarizing target markets with attractions.	– Changing perceptions of Iran in target markets (DA53) – Introducing the history and civilization of Iran (DA35) – Promoting the image of Islamic Iran (DA29)
4	Tourism Planning and Policymaking	Developing strategic programs, regulations, and macro-policies in tourism.	– Developing the strategic tourism development document (DG1-Ar100) – Adopting decisions appropriate to national status (DA47) – Developing a comprehensive transportation plan (DF2-Ar163)
5	Sustainability of Tourism Resources	Wise and renewable utilization of natural and cultural resources.	– Proper use of historical buildings (DA45) – Sustainable use of natural resources (DD2-Ar104) – Principled use of natural resources (DC2-No81)
6	Conservation of Tourism Resources	Protection, restoration, and safeguarding heritage from deterioration.	– Physical and technical protection of heritage sites (DA44) – Preventing unauthorized land-use change (DD1-Ar156) – Wetland conservation (DF2-Ar193)
7	Good Governance in Tourism	The manner of management, legislation, and participation of public and private institutions.	– Deregulation and reducing government intervention (DA49) – Privatization of rail transport (DF1-Ar164) – Legal groundwork (DE1-Ar114)
8	Well-being and Quality of Life	Impacts of tourism development on local economy, employment, and community welfare.	– Creating employment and foreign exchange revenues (DA38) – Meeting psychological needs of society (DA36) – Increasing per capita income (DA39)
9	Science and Modern Technologies	Utilization of up-to-date technologies in tourism management and marketing.	– Establishing an integrated information system (DA67) – Low-consumption technologies (DE12-Ar3) – Integrated incident information system (DF1-Ar163)
10	Cultural Enrichment of Islamic Iran	Strengthening national-religious identity through tourism to foster unity.	– Strengthening national unity (DA37) – Enhancing interaction among local cultures (DE1-Ar121) – Promoting the culture of self-sacrifice (DG2-Ar86)

11	Total Quality Management	Standardization and continuous improvement of tourism services and infrastructure.	– Standardizing accommodation facilities (DA70) – Improving service quality (DA71) – Standardizing air navigation (DE1-Ar28)
12	Tourism Financial Management	Attracting, allocating, and managing financial resources and investment.	– Continued investment in facilities (DA8) – Attracting foreign investment (DA52) – Using municipal revenues for restoration (DD1-Ar166)
13	Stakeholder Participation and Cohesion	Collaboration among government bodies, private sector, and local communities.	– Cooperation of all agencies (DA66) – Participation of Islamic councils (DD3-Ar156) – Integrated management involving beneficiaries (DF8-Ar193)
14	Sustainability Monitoring and Evaluation	Monitoring impacts and controlling tourism activities based on carrying capacity.	– Environmental assessment of projects (DD1-Ar105) – Environmental impact evaluation (DG2-Ar38) – Utilization based on ecological capacity (DF2-Ar148)
15	Geopolitical Dimension of Iran	Utilization of the country's strategic and geographical advantages.	– Using geographical position (DB2-CI4) – Leveraging territorial advantages (DE22-Ar28) – Strengthening position in the air transport network (DF1-Ar164)
16	Environmental Concerns	Environmental threats and challenges arising from development or other activities.	– Air pollution in tourism provinces (DC2-No82) – Water resource pollution (DC1-No83) – Overhunting (DE3-Ar11)
17	Importance of Tourism Impacts	Attention to cultural, social, and economic consequences of tourism.	– Encroachment on historical sites (DA11) – Slow processes for heritage protection (DA14) – Presenting embedded cultural values (DA25)
18	Justice and Equity	Fair distribution of tourism benefits and costs across generations and regions.	– Reducing social inequalities (DA40) – Ecological balance (DC4-No82) – Equal access to cultural spaces (DE1-Ar124)
19	Sense of Place in Tourism	Creating spaces and architecture with Iranian–Islamic identity and authenticity.	– Structural harmony with Islamic architecture (DD1-Ar156) – Use of Iranian–Islamic symbols (DE1-Ar113) – Renovation based on Iranian architectural patterns (DF1-Ar194)
20	Environmental Management of Resources	Operational management of key resources such as water, energy, waste, and forests.	– Energy consumption management (DE2-Ar11) – Waste management (DE3-Ar11) – Integrated water resource management (DF3-Ar140)
21	Tourism Transportation Management	Development, modernization, and integrated management of transportation systems.	– Modernization of air fleet (DE18-Ar28) – Development of rail transport (DG1-Ar57) – Provision of road transport fleets (DF7-Ar163)

At this stage, by considering the relationships among the subcategories and drawing upon Strauss and Corbin's paradigmatic model, the main categories and the final model of sustainable tourism development were mapped.

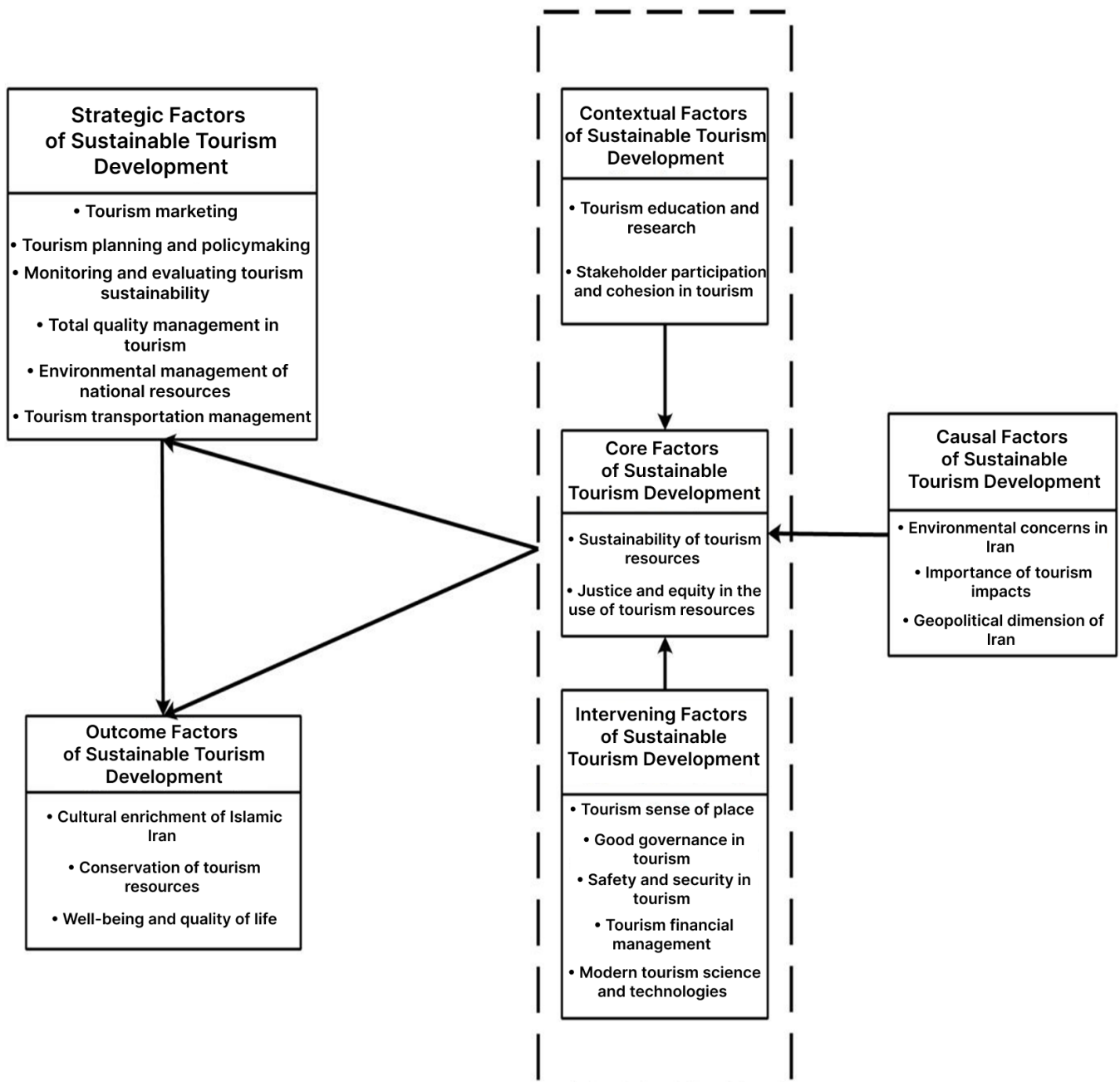
Table 3

Formation of Main Categories from Subcategories

Main Category	Constituent Subcategories	Description of Role in the Model
Causal Factors	– Geopolitical dimension of Iran – Environmental concerns – Importance of tourism impacts	These factors act as the primary motivations and underlying reasons for moving toward sustainable tourism development. On one hand, the country's unique position and capacities, and on the other hand, environmental threats and the need to preserve heritage, constitute the causes that generate action.
Contextual Factors	– Stakeholder participation and cohesion – Tourism education and research – Good governance in tourism – Tourism financial management – Safety and security in tourism	These factors provide the necessary conditions and environment for realizing sustainable development. Without effective governance, adequate financial resources, trained human capital, and social participation, implementation of strategies would not be possible.
Intervening Factors	– Modern science and technologies – Tourism sense of place – Environmental management of resources – Tourism transportation management	These factors serve as facilitators or inhibitors influencing the implementation process. For example, the use of technology may accelerate development, whereas improper resource management may become a serious barrier.
Strategies (Strategic Factors)	– Tourism planning and policymaking – Tourism marketing – Total quality management – Sustainability monitoring and evaluation – Sustainability of tourism resources – Conservation of tourism resources	This category represents the core of the model and includes all actions and measures designed and implemented to achieve the goals. These strategies emerge directly from the contextual environment and are formed in response to the causal factors.
Outcomes	– Well-being and quality of life – Cultural enrichment of Islamic Iran – Justice and equity in resource use	These are the desirable results obtained from the successful implementation of strategies within a suitable context. The ultimate goal of sustainable tourism development is the realization of these outcomes, which encompass both material (well-being) and spiritual (identity and justice) dimensions.

Figure 1

Paradigmatic Model of Sustainable Tourism Development from the Perspective of Documents Related to Tourism Development



This section is dedicated to the analysis of statements delivered by the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution of Iran between 2011 and 2018 on topics related to sustainable tourism development (including the environment, handicrafts, tourism, cultural heritage, and natural resources). The analytical approach is grounded theory, conducted through systematic coding (open, axial, and selective). The final purpose of this analysis is to extract a conceptual model of sustainable tourism development based on his views. In this section, the coding process is presented in detail, and ultimately the final model—based on causal, contextual, intervening, strategic, and outcome factors—is illustrated. Data analysis was carried out in three primary stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Each of these stages is described separately below.

In this stage, statements from Friday prayer sermons, public meetings, and other speeches by the Supreme Leader that were related to components of sustainable tourism development were examined, and the key points were extracted. For each key point, an initial (open) code was defined. These codes represent the preliminary and raw concepts embedded in the statements. To systematize the process, specific identifiers were used:

- **SL (Supreme Leader):** indicates statements by the Supreme Leader.
- **Year identifier:** year in which the statement was delivered (e.g., 97 for 2018).
- **Numeric identifiers (1, 2, 3, ...):** represent the number of the key point extracted.

For example, SL97-1 indicates the first key point from his statements in 2018.

The open coding process for each year is presented in detailed tables, and below is a summary of the formation of concepts and subcategories from the statements of each year.

Table 4

Summary of Open Coding for Statements in 2018 (SL97)

Identifier	Initial Coding	Concept	Subcategory
SL97-1	Optimization of tourists' experience by relevant organizations	Tourist experience enhancement	Tourist satisfaction
SL97-2	Role of religious tourism in strengthening unity among the Islamic Ummah	Strengthening Islamic unity	Cultural enrichment of Islamic Iran
SL97-3	Managing the use of the country's natural opportunities and attractions	Tourism attraction management	Tourism resource management
SL97-4	Neighborhood with fifteen countries and proximity to international open waters	Iran's territorial position	Geopolitical dimension of Iran
SL97-5	Sensitivity of Iran's geographical position	Iran's territorial position	Geopolitical dimension of Iran
SL97-6	Value of natural assets in reinforcing national self-identity	Cultural identity-building	Cultural enrichment of Islamic Iran
SL97-7	Economic diversification through natural assets	Systemic perspective in tourism policy and planning	Tourism planning and policymaking
SL97-8	Importance of human capital in national progress	Tourism human resource management	Tourism resource management

From the analysis of statements in this year, eight initial codes, seven concepts, and five subcategories were extracted, all of which were newly identified.

Table 5

Summary of Open Coding of Statements in 2017 (SL96)

Identifier	Initial Coding	Concept	Subcategory
SL96-1	Preservation of life-support systems	Well-being of natural ecosystems	Well-being and quality of life of host communities
SL96-2	Collective responsibility in reducing environmental impacts	Responsibility in tourism	Good governance in tourism
SL96-3	Participation of officials in protecting natural capital	Stakeholder participation in tourism	Stakeholder participation and cohesion
SL96-4	Government's duty to protect natural capital	Government efficiency and effectiveness in tourism	Good governance in tourism
SL96-5	Importance of natural capital in improving quality of life	Human flourishing and well-being	Well-being and quality of life of host communities
SL96-6	Informing people about the characteristics of provinces	Public awareness regarding tourism	Tourism culture-building
SL96-7	A multidimensional perspective and attention to complementary activities	Systemic perspective in tourism policy and planning	Tourism planning and policymaking
SL96-8	Attention to future capacities and the country's potential	Attention to future generations in tourism	Foresight in conservation of tourism resources
SL96-9	Preservation of the country's biodiversity	Conservation of authentic Iranian biodiversity	Conservation of tourism resources
SL96-10	Managing national wealth in terms of human capital	Tourism human resource management	Tourism resource management

From the analysis of statements in this year, 10 initial codes, 10 concepts, and 8 subcategories were extracted, among which 8 concepts and 6 subcategories were newly identified.

Table 6*Summary of Open Coding of Statements in 2016 (SL95)*

Identifier	Initial Coding	Concept	Subcategory
SL95-1	Climatic diversity of the country and the importance of vegetation cover in preserving it	Conservation of authentic Iranian biodiversity	Conservation of tourism resources
SL95-2	The role of government in protecting natural capital and the environment	Government efficiency and effectiveness in tourism	Good governance in tourism
SL95-3	Natural capital as national wealth	Shared ownership of tourism resources	Justice and equity in resource use
SL95-4	Respecting natural capital for public use	Social justice	Justice and equity in resource use
SL95-5	Protecting natural capital as a competitive advantage	Conservation of national natural resources	Conservation of tourism resources
SL95-6	Systematic planning in utilizing capabilities	Development of tourism policies and programs	Tourism planning and policymaking
SL95-7	Importance of storytelling in Sacred Defense tourism	Interpretation of Islamic–Iranian heritage	Tourism culture-building
SL95-8	Enhancing tourists' experience and developing their awareness	Tourist experience enhancement	Tourist satisfaction
SL95-9	Importance and role of media in promoting Sacred Defense tourism	Effective tourism advertising	Tourism marketing
SL95-10	Importance of natural capital in improving communications	Promoting the image of Islamic Iran	Tourism marketing

From the analysis of statements in this year, 10 initial codes, 10 concepts, and 7 subcategories were extracted, among which 7 concepts and 2 subcategories were newly identified.

The stopping criterion in data collection and analysis within grounded theory is achieving “theoretical sufficiency,” meaning the point at which new data no longer generate new categories or concepts and only contribute to confirming and enriching previously identified categories. The process of reaching theoretical sufficiency in this study is shown in the following table:

Table 7*Process of the Emergence of Concepts and Subcategories up to the Boundary of Theoretical Sufficiency*

Year of Statements	Number of Open Codes	Number of Concepts	Number of New Concepts	Number of Subcategories	Number of New Subcategories
2018	8	7	7	5	5
2017	10	10	8	8	6
2016	10	10	7	7	2
2015	10	9	1	8	0
2014	30	22	9	12	3
2013	12	11	1	9	1
2012	16	10	2	9	0
2011	9	8	2	6	1
Total	105	87	37	64	18

As shown in the table above, moving from 2011 toward more recent years, the number of new concepts and categories initially increases. However, beginning in 2015, the number of new concepts and categories sharply declines, and the data increasingly contribute to completing and enriching the previously identified categories. This trend indicates that by the end of coding the 2018 data, the model had reached theoretical saturation and the required level of sufficiency.

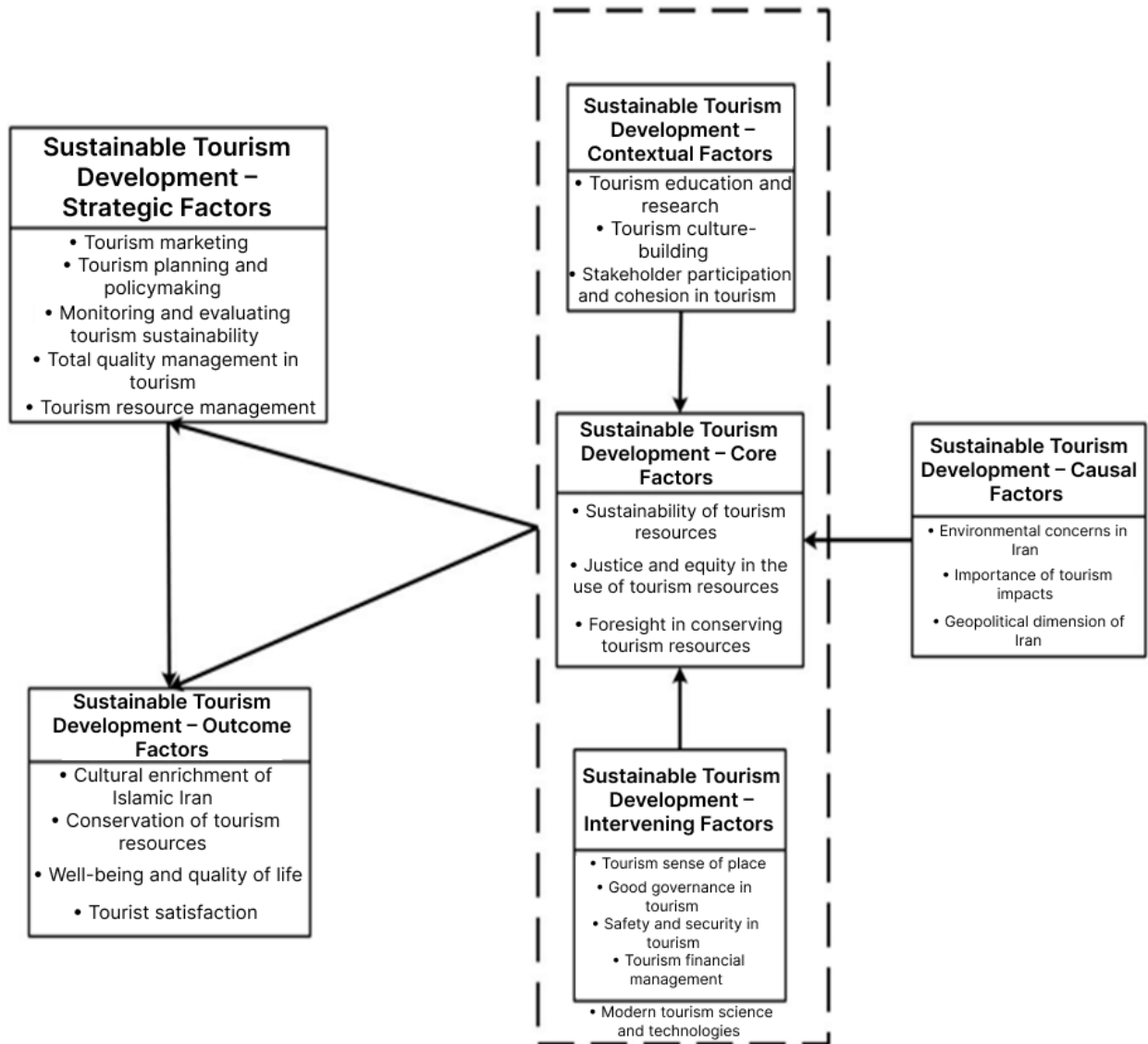
In the axial coding stage, the subcategories extracted in the previous phase were organized around a central axis and arranged into a paradigm model consisting of causal conditions, contextual conditions, intervening conditions, strategies, and consequences. This step helps clarify the relationships among categories and contributes to constructing the final model.

Table 8*Structure of Main and Subcategories in the Paradigm Model of Sustainable Tourism Development*

Paradigm Axis	Main Category	Subcategory	Number of Supporting Concepts
Causal Factors	Causes and motivations for sustainable tourism development	Geopolitical dimension of Iran	2
		Environmental concerns in Iran	3
Contextual Factors	Required context for realizing sustainable development	Stakeholder participation and cohesion in tourism	3
		Tourism education and research	2
		Tourism culture-building	4
Intervening Factors	Barriers and facilitators of sustainable development	Good governance in tourism	6
		Tourism financial management	1
		Sense of place in tourism	2
Strategies / Actions	Macro-level actions to achieve objectives	Tourism planning and policymaking	4
		Tourism marketing	3
		Tourism resource management	3
		Sustainability monitoring and evaluation in tourism	4
Core Factors (Intrinsic Qualities)	Fundamental principles governing sustainable development	Foresight in conserving tourism resources	2
		Justice and equity in the use of tourism resources	4
		Sustainability of tourism resources	2
Outcomes	Results and achievements of sustainable tourism development	Conservation of tourism resources	4
		Well-being and quality of life	4
		Cultural enrichment of Islamic Iran	3
		Tourist satisfaction	3

Figure 2

Paradigmatic Model of Sustainable Tourism Development from the Perspective of the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran



At this stage, through integration and refinement of the core categories, the “linear storyline” of the phenomenon is constructed. The final model of sustainable tourism development based on the Supreme Leader’s statements can be narrated as follows:

Sustainable tourism development in Iran—drawing upon the country’s distinguished geopolitical position and as a response to serious environmental concerns (causal factors), and within a context strengthened by collective participation, education, and cultural awareness (contextual factors), and by overcoming governance and managerial barriers through establishing good governance, proper financial management, and attention to the sense of place (intervening factors), and guided by core principles of foresight, justice, and sustainability (core factors)—requires adopting macro-level strategies such as systematic planning, smart marketing, integrated resource management, and continuous monitoring and evaluation

(strategies). These collectively lead to desirable outcomes, including resource conservation, enhanced well-being and quality of life, cultural advancement, and tourist satisfaction (outcomes).

This paradigmatic model provides a comprehensive and systematic framework for formulating sustainable tourism development strategies in Ramhormoz County and other regions of Iran, grounded in upstream policy documents and Islamic–Iranian perspectives. In this section, the textual data from leadership statements were analyzed using grounded theory across three stages: open, axial, and selective coding. In open coding, 105 initial codes, 87 concepts, and 64 subcategories were extracted. In axial coding, these subcategories were organized into a paradigm consisting of six main axes (causal, contextual, intervening, core, strategic, and consequential), and the final research model was constructed. This model illustrates the causal relationships among factors influencing sustainable tourism development and can serve as a roadmap for planners and policymakers. In the next chapter, based on this conceptual model, operational strategies for sustainable tourism development in Ramhormoz County will be developed.

This section is dedicated to analyzing the data obtained from semi-structured interviews with tourism experts. In line with the principles of grounded theory, the interviews were edited, transcribed, coded, and analyzed. The analysis process consisted of three stages: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. In open coding, raw data were converted into initial codes, which were then organized into broader and more abstract concepts and ultimately subcategories. In axial coding, relationships among categories were identified within a paradigm, and finally, in selective coding, the final research model was presented. This section explains all three coding stages in detail.

In this stage, the textual data from the interviews were carefully examined and initial codes were extracted. These codes were then grouped under broader and more abstract concepts, and each concept was placed under a corresponding subcategory. It should be noted that with each additional interview and the continuous comparison of findings, the concepts and categories became more coherent and complete. The open coding tables contained two main parts:

- Key points and initial coding
- Concepts extracted from initial coding and the resulting subcategories

These steps were performed separately for each interviewee in individual tables. Below, as an example, a summary of the open coding process for Interview 1 (Case A) is presented.

Interviewee: Faculty member, Islamic Azad University, Ramhormoz Branch (Case A)

Table 9

Key Points and Initial Coding, Case A

Identifier	Initial Coding	Interview Text
A1	Tourism as a means of foreign currency inflow	"In my opinion, the outcomes of sustainable development include economic development, especially under current sanctions, where tourism can bring foreign currency into the country and support economic growth..."
A2	Tourism growth without attention to cultural context of society	"...However, sustainability is very important. Paying attention to sustainable tourism in Iran is very important..."
...	...	...
A76	Developing appropriate policies for sustainable tourism development	"...If our policies are developed correctly and aligned with sustainability, we will achieve sustainable development..."

In the next stage, the extracted codes from Table (9) were conceptualized under shared categories. Many codes were classified under multiple concepts simultaneously. In total, from the first interview, 75 open codes, 35 concepts, and 20 subcategories were identified.

Table 10*Formation of Concepts and Subcategories from Interview Codes (Case A)*

Subcategory	Concept	Initial Coding	Identifier
Tourism education and research	Appropriate tourism training	The role of education in changing people's attitudes toward tourism	A25
Importance of tourism impacts	Importance of social and cultural impacts of tourism	Tourism as a factor contributing to corruption, immorality, etc.	A5
...	...	Tourism development without cultural sensitivity	A2
Sustainability monitoring and evaluation	Tourism monitoring and control	Monitoring sustainable tourism development by private sector and trade associations	A46
		Monitoring sustainable tourism development by the government	A47

A similar process was conducted for the remaining interviews (B through H). With each interview, new codes, concepts, and subcategories emerged or existing ones were enriched. Ultimately, after the eighth interview, theoretical sufficiency was reached, meaning that additional interviews did not contribute new categories or concepts to the model.

Table 11*Process of the Emergence of Concepts and Subcategories in Expert Interviews up to Theoretical Sufficiency*

Row	Interviewee	Interview Duration	Open Codes	New Codes	Number of Concepts	New Concepts	Number of Subcategories	New Subcategories
1	A	35 minutes	75	75	35	35	20	20
2	B	30 minutes	57	28	37	18	21	4
3	C	25 minutes	68	9	33	3	20	–
4	D	25 minutes	82	3	32	2	17	–
5	E	50 minutes	48	3	26	2	17	–
6	F	25 minutes	43	–	29	–	17	–
7	G	35 minutes	63	–	25	–	14	–
8	H	25 minutes	40	–	22	–	15	–

As shown in the table above, after the third interview, no new subcategories emerged, and after the sixth interview, no new concepts were added, indicating the attainment of theoretical sufficiency and data saturation.

At this stage, by establishing connections among the subcategories identified in the open coding phase, the main categories were formed. The aim was to create a coherent relational network among all categories within a general paradigm or overarching model. Accordingly, the subcategories were grouped into the following six main categories:

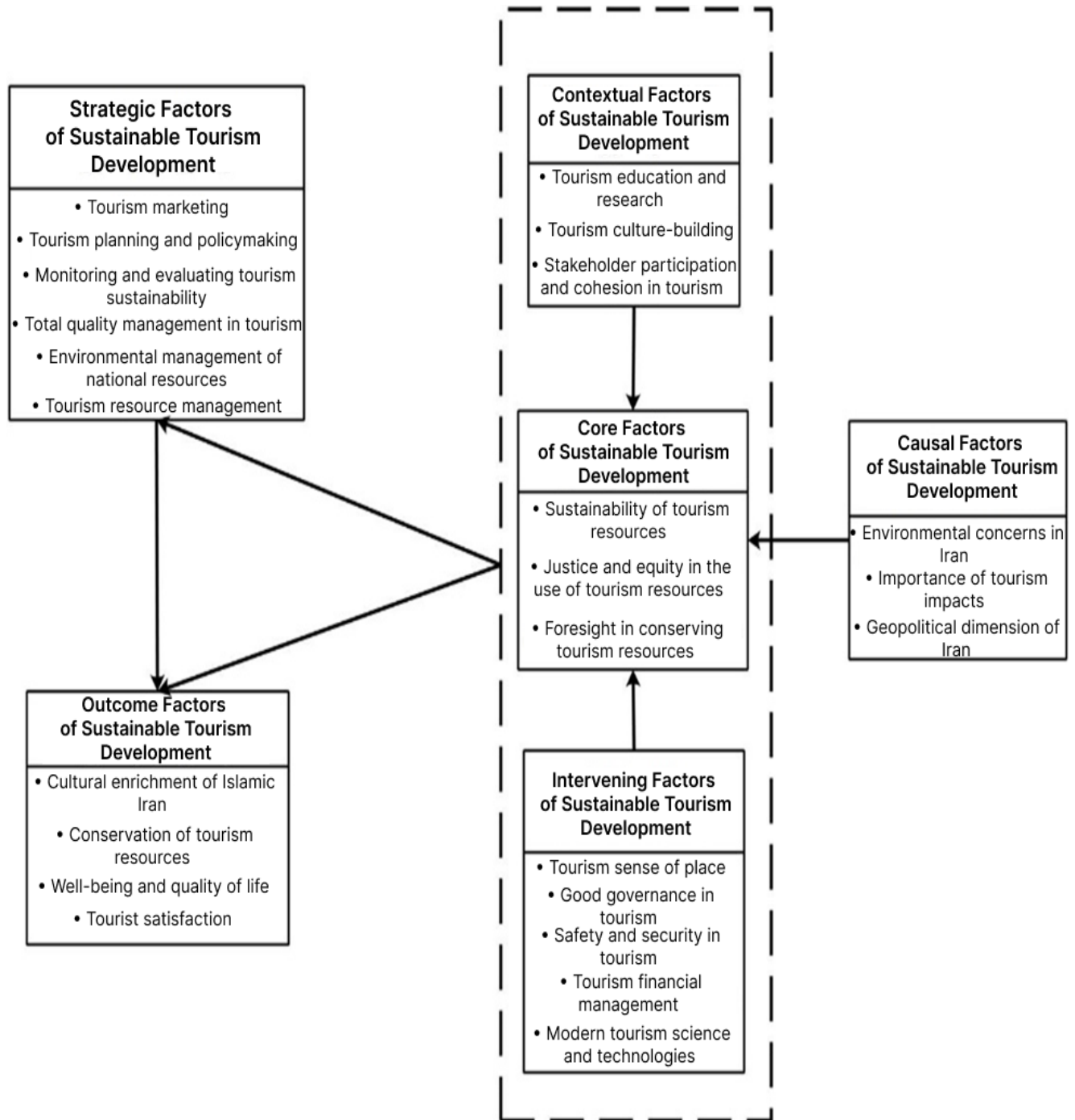
- Causal factors: conditions that lead to the formation of and attention to sustainable tourism development.
- Core factors: fundamental concepts and the central nucleus of sustainable tourism development around which other factors revolve.
- Contextual factors: environmental and contextual conditions that influence strategies and actions.
- Intervening factors: barriers or facilitators that operate along the path toward realizing sustainable tourism development.
- Strategies: actions and measures adopted to achieve sustainable tourism development.
- Outcomes: results and effects arising from the implementation of sustainable tourism development strategies.

Table 12*Subcategories and Formation of Main Categories in Interviews with Tourism Experts*

Axis	Main Category	Subcategory	Number of Concepts
Sustainable tourism development	Outcome factors	Conservation of tourism resources	3
		Well-being and quality of life	3
		Cultural enrichment of Islamic Iran	2
		Tourist satisfaction	4
	Strategic factors	Tourism planning and policymaking	3
		Tourism marketing	2
		Total quality management in tourism	2
		Tourism resource management	1
		Sustainability monitoring and evaluation in tourism	6
		Environmental management of national resources	4
	Contextual factors	Stakeholder participation and cohesion in tourism	3
		Tourism education and research	2
		Tourism culture-building	3
	Causal factors	Geopolitical dimension of Iran	1
		Importance of tourism impacts	2
		Environmental concerns in Iran	2
	Core factors	Foresight in conserving tourism resources	2
		Justice and equity in the use of tourism resources	2
		Sustainability of tourism resources	2
	Intervening factors	Good governance in tourism	6
		Modern tourism science and technologies	2
		Tourism financial management	1
		Sense of place in tourism	2
		Safety and security in tourism	1

In this final stage, a paradigmatic model based on the relationships among the main categories is presented. This model narrates the main storyline of the research and illustrates how causal, core, contextual, intervening, strategic, and outcome conditions are interconnected.

This model shows that sustainable tourism development in Iran is a complex and multidimensional process that requires national resolve, coherent planning, the participation of all stakeholders, and simultaneous attention to economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions, grounded in Islamic–Iranian values. In this section, the data obtained from eight interviews with tourism experts were analyzed using the grounded theory method. In the open coding stage, 478 initial codes were extracted and ultimately organized into 22 concepts and 15 subcategories. In the axial coding stage, these subcategories were grouped into six main axes (causal, core, contextual, intervening, strategic, and outcome factors). Finally, in the selective coding stage, the final paradigmatic model of the study was presented, depicting the relationships among these factors as a coherent system. This model can be used as a framework for policymaking and planning aimed at realizing sustainable tourism development in Iran, particularly with an emphasis on Islamic–Iranian principles and values.

Figure 3*Paradigmatic Model of Sustainable Tourism Development from the Perspective of Tourism Experts*

This network divides the themes extracted from the foundational model into five key domains (organizing themes) and specifies, for each domain, the indicators related to sustainable tourism development in Ramhormoz.

Table 13*Thematic Network*

Organizing Theme (Key Domain)	Main Basic Theme	Sub-basic Theme	Indicators of Realization for Sustainable Tourism Development in Ramhormoz (Strategies)
Cultural and religious progress	Cultural independence	Cultural assets, national identity	– Developing and promoting cultural tourism based on the authentic Islamic–Iranian heritage of Ramhormoz (such as customs, local music). Reviving and showcasing traditional architectural symbols and local dress in tourism structures. Using local stories and literature to create tourism experiences.
	Religion and beliefs	Tawhid (monotheism), resurrection, prophethood, imamate	– Developing religious tourism with an emphasis on local shrines and sacred sites. Promoting “spiritual tourism” centered on tranquility, reflection, and connection with nature based on a monotheistic worldview.
	Spirituality	Spirituality	– Designing nature-based tours that enhance spirituality and environmental ethics (such as “enjoining environmental good” practices).
	Values and ethics	Values and ethics	– Adhering to Islamic ethics in interactions with tourists (honesty, hospitality, benevolence). Promoting “responsible tourism” grounded in truth-seeking and justice-seeking in the presentation of local culture.
Social progress	Social justice	Social justice	– Fair distribution of tourism-generated benefits among all local residents. Creating equal employment opportunities for local women and men in the tourism industry.
	Social cohesion	Social participation	– Actively involving the local community in planning, implementing, and benefiting from tourism projects. Strengthening local cooperation and solidarity through tourism cooperatives.
	Social welfare	Ideal family institution, health	– Developing health tourism using the region’s natural potentials (mineral waters, medicinal plants). Designing family-oriented tourism areas that help strengthen the family institution.
	Social order	Rule of law, social oversight	– Establishing and enforcing clear regulations for tourism activities. Enabling public and media oversight of accommodation and tourism service providers to prevent corruption.
Economic progress	Economic independence	Economic independence	– Developing a knowledge-based and self-reliant tourism economy to reduce dependence on oil revenues. Creating a complete value chain of tourism services and products within the county.
	Economic justice	Economic justice	– Implementing a fair taxation system for tourism operators and equitably distributing revenues. Combating poverty and discrimination through creating sustainable jobs in the tourism sector.
	Economic welfare	Economic welfare	– Facilitating the entry of local entrepreneurs and investors into the tourism sector. Developing and revitalizing local markets and handicrafts associated with tourism.
Political and security progress	National security	National security	– Providing comprehensive security for tourists throughout all parts of the county. Strengthening the region’s defense and security capacity as one of the pillars of stability for tourism development.
	Political stability	Political stability	– Ensuring stability in laws and regulations related to tourism to attract investment.
	Political cohesion	Islamic unity	– Promoting Islamic unity and brotherhood in interactions with Muslim tourists from different countries.
Scientific and technological progress	Knowledge and technology	Knowledge and technology	– Using cutting-edge technologies (such as online booking platforms and augmented reality) to present attractions. Innovating in the creation and delivery of creative tourism products and experiences.
	Human capital	Human capital	– Training specialized, competent, and responsible human resources for the tourism industry. Identifying and supporting talents and innovative ideas in the tourism field.
	Research and development	Research and inquiry	– Conducting field research to accurately identify the potentials and challenges of tourism in Ramhormoz. Theorizing and producing indigenous knowledge on tourism development models tailored to regional conditions.
Environmental progress	Sustainability of resources and environment	Sustainability of resources and environment	– Efficient and equitable use of natural resources (water, energy) in tourism projects. Observing environmental considerations and safeguarding the rights of future generations in infrastructure development. Halting any activity that leads to environmental degradation or visual pollution. Developing “green tourism” with minimal carbon footprint and effective waste management.

Subsequently, the diagram of this thematic network is drawn hierarchically. In this diagram, the overarching theme is placed at the top, and its relationship with the organizing, main, and sub-basic themes is clearly depicted. This figure enables a visual understanding of the relationships among the components. As a comprehensive roadmap, this thematic network can serve as the basis for formulating strategies, operational programs, and evaluation indicators for sustainable tourism development in Ramhormoz County, grounded in the authentic principles of the Islamic–Iranian model of progress. In total, from the thematic analysis of the foundational model, 35 sub-basic themes, 21 main basic themes, and 5 organizing themes were extracted. Collectively, these organizing themes constitute the overarching theme of realizing the Islamic–Iranian model of progress. After extracting these themes in various steps, the thematic network of realizing the Islamic–Iranian model of progress was derived as illustrated in Figure (4).

Figure 4*Thematic Network of Realizing the Islamic–Iranian Model of Progress*

Statistical analysis includes the classification, summarization, description, and interpretation of the collected information, which is carried out using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistical methods are used to determine and express the characteristics of the research evidence, and in one part, the indices of the research variables in the statistical sample are calculated and analyzed. Inferential statistics, using the data collected from the sample group, compute statistics and then, with the help of testing and estimation techniques, generalize these statistics to the population

parameters. In this study, the research objectives are dealt with using quantitative data and evidence, which are addressed in this section.

Descriptive statistics refer to a set of measures that can provide the researcher with an overall profile of the collected data. It should be noted that descriptive statistics cannot be used to generalize results to the total population; rather, these measures are used solely to present a general view of the study. In the present research, descriptive examination of the observations has been carried out by presenting the relevant tables and charts. The information related to the descriptive indices of the sample's demographic characteristics is presented in the following tables. These data show gender and educational level.

Table 14

Frequency Distribution of Research Units by Gender and Educational Level

Category	Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	26	86%
	Female	4	14%
	Total	30	100%
Educational Level	PhD	20	66%
	Master's degree	8	27%
	Bachelor's degree	2	7%
	Total	30	100%

Describing the variables is important because the results of model testing are based on the data and variables. The research data are measured on an interval scale. To describe the research variables, central tendency and dispersion indices have been used, which are described below.

Table 15

Descriptive Indices for All Research Variables

Normality indices	Standard deviation	Median	Mean	Sample size	Model variables
Kurtosis	Skewness				
-0.899	-0.103	0.766	3.20	3.193	30
1.485	-0.696	0.904	3.25	3.283	30
0.398	-0.335	0.891	3.20	3.207	30
-0.741	0.036	0.811	3.00	3.089	30
0.607	-0.703	0.856	3.25	3.208	30
0.137	-0.525	1.000	3.333	3.8267	30
1.625	-0.975	0.846	3.333	3.367	30
0.097	-0.565	0.930	3.625	3.592	30
0.734	-0.555	0.920	3.30	3.40	30
-0.051	-0.600	1.082	3.50	3.511	30
-0.176	-0.099	0.745	3.286	3.357	30

The values of descriptive statistics and central tendency indices, including mean, median, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis, as well as minimum and maximum values for each of the research variables, are reported in Table (18). Given the measurement scale of the variables (five-point Likert scale), the central tendency and dispersion indices have been

calculated. Providing descriptive statistics describes the status of each research variable and offers an appropriate view of the value range of the variables. Using the results of the above table, which includes central tendency and dispersion indices for the various variables, the following results are obtained:

a) Variables with a mean greater than the mid-point (greater than 3) and a positive semantic loading indicate that these variables are in a favorable and satisfactory situation. The lower the mean and median are from the mid-point, the more unfavorable and unsatisfactory the evaluation becomes. The results show that all 11 variables have been evaluated as favorable and satisfactory, because the mean value of the responses is greater than 3.

b) Since the skewness and kurtosis of a perfectly normal distribution are equal to zero, skewness and kurtosis values close to zero indicate that the data distribution is approximately normal. Furthermore, if the skewness and kurtosis of a variable are less than -2 or greater than +2, its distribution will not be absolutely normal. The results show that all research variables can be considered normally distributed.

Before entering the stage of testing the proposed research model, it is necessary to ensure the correctness of the measurement models for the exogenous and endogenous variables. This is done through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Figure () presents the confirmatory factor analysis model and the structural equations model in the standardized coefficient estimation mode. In this diagram, the numbers or coefficients are divided into three groups.

The first group consists of first-order measurement equations, which represent the relationships between latent variables (ellipses) and observed variables (questionnaire items) (relationships between ellipses and rectangles). These equations are referred to as first-order factor loadings.

The second group consists of second-order measurement equations, which represent the relationships between exogenous and endogenous variables and their dimensions. These are reported as second-order factor loadings.

The third group consists of structural equations, which represent the relationships among the main variables. These coefficients are referred to as path coefficients and are used to test hypotheses—although in this study, there are no hypotheses.

All factor loadings are greater than 0.4; therefore, none of the indicators are removed from the model. Model () in fact tests all measurement equations (first- and second-order factor loadings) and structural equations (path coefficients) using the t statistic. According to this model, a factor loading is statistically significant at the 95% confidence level if the t statistic falls outside the interval -1.96 to +1.96. The calculated t values for all factor loadings are greater than 1.96. Thus, the alignment of the questionnaire items in measuring the indicators can be considered valid at this stage.

Figure 5

Sustainable Tourism Development Model for Achieving the Islamic-Iranian Model of Progress in the Standardized Coefficient Estimation Mode

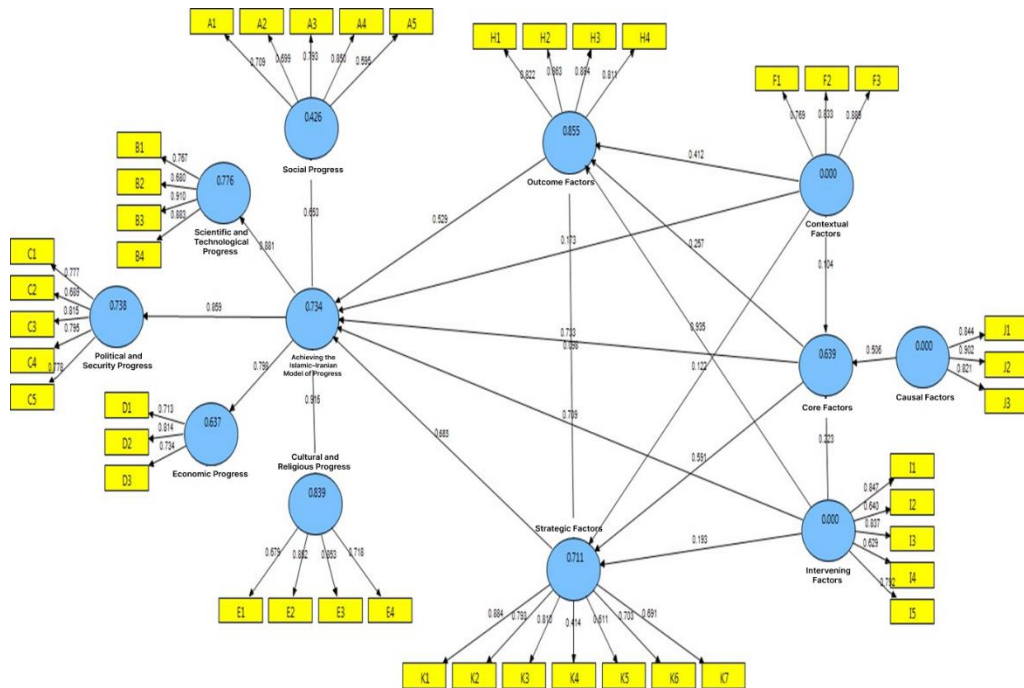
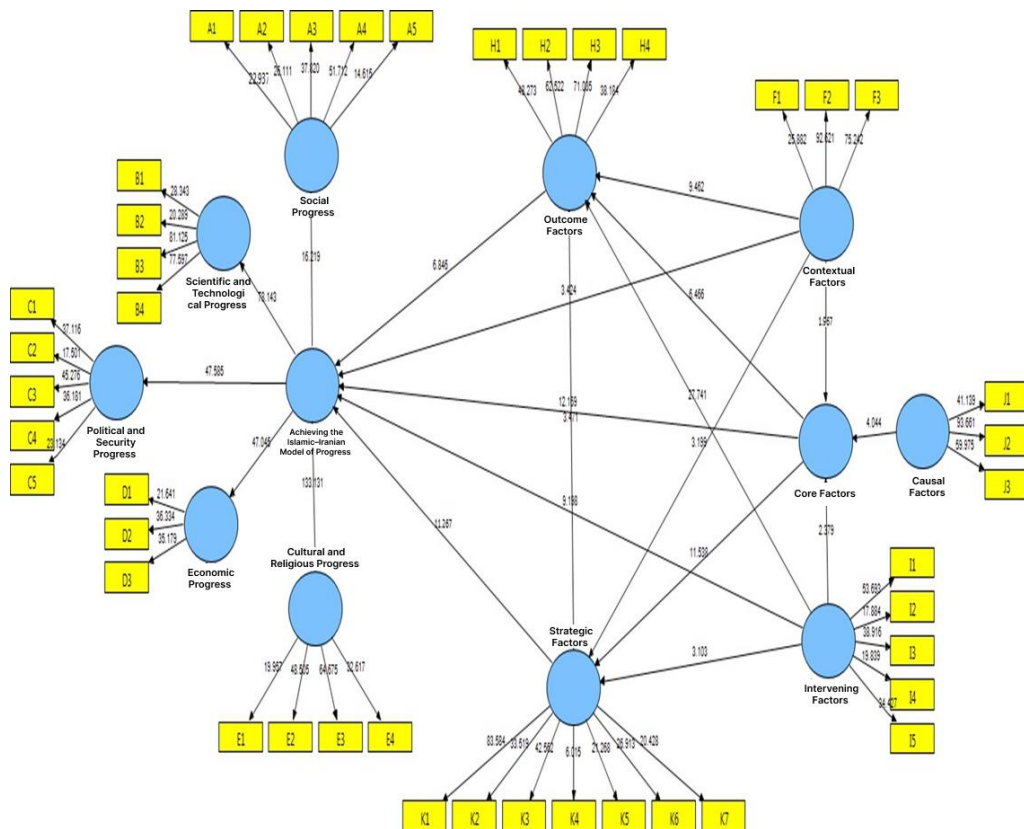


Figure 6

Sustainable Tourism Development Model for Achieving the Islamic-Iranian Model of Progress in the Significance (t-value) Mode



Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study offer a comprehensive understanding of sustainable tourism development by integrating structural, environmental, socio-cultural, and governance-related determinants within a unified conceptual model. The results confirm that sustainable tourism in Iran—particularly in regions with significant cultural and ecological value—requires a multidimensional framework that aligns local resource capacities with global best practices, national development strategies, and Islamic-Iranian principles. The structural relationships tested in the quantitative model demonstrated that all identified components—including causal, contextual, core, intervening, strategic, and outcome factors—significantly contribute to sustainable tourism development, reinforcing the robustness of the conceptual framework. These findings are consistent with the literature that highlights tourism as a complex system requiring dynamic interplay between economic, environmental, cultural, and governance dimensions [1, 11].

The results showed that causal factors, particularly Iran's geopolitical position, environmental concerns, and the growing importance of tourism impacts, exert significant influence on sustainable tourism development. This aligns with the argument that tourism development in emerging economies is strongly shaped by national resource endowments, strategic location, and environmental vulnerabilities [9, 26]. For instance, studies in Iran and comparable regional contexts emphasize that environmental degradation, water scarcity, and biodiversity loss impose constraints on tourism expansion, thus necessitating models that prioritize ecological conservation [8, 25]. The observed significance of geopolitical strengths also corresponds with global findings that link regional connectivity and international positioning to tourism competitiveness [5, 16].

The contextual factors, including stakeholder participation, tourism education and research, and culture-building, were also found to be essential for sustainable tourism development. This outcome is supported by literature demonstrating that community engagement, social cohesion, and participatory governance enhance the resilience and acceptance of tourism initiatives [12, 18]. Studies from Iran reveal that without active involvement of local communities and tourism stakeholders, even well-designed plans fail to achieve long-term sustainability [23]. Similarly, the importance of education and research is consistent with global findings that emphasize the need for capacity-building and knowledge transfer to support destination competitiveness [4, 24]. Moreover, culture-building emerged as a core contextual factor, reinforcing the role of cultural identity and heritage as drivers of sustainable tourism [12, 13].

The model also demonstrated the significance of core factors, including resource sustainability, justice and equity in resource use, and long-term foresight. These results correspond directly with the principles of sustainable tourism literature, which highlight that long-term system survival requires equitable access to resources, intergenerational justice, and environmental stewardship [9, 10]. The emphasis on justice and equity also aligns with Iranian scholarly perspectives that call for replacing purely economic growth models with balanced and comprehensive development frameworks [11]. Likewise, foresight in resource preservation reinforces the global shift toward anticipatory planning and resilience building, as emphasized in socio-ecological sustainability models [2]. These findings confirm that sustainable tourism cannot be achieved without a clear long-term vision that integrates environmental limits with strategic planning.

The study further revealed that intervening factors, including good governance, modern technologies, financial management, sense of place, and safety/security, significantly shape the effectiveness of tourism strategies. This aligns with the argument that governance quality is central to sustainable tourism development, particularly in regions where regulatory systems, investment climates, and institutional capacities remain in transition [3, 27]. The literature on technology adoption

similarly emphasizes that smart tourism solutions enhance destination competitiveness, improve resource efficiency, and optimize visitor experiences [21, 23]. Safety and security, another key intervening factor, are widely recognized as non-negotiable prerequisites for tourism growth in both domestic and international markets [20]. Additionally, the importance of the “sense of place” factor reinforces findings that architectural identity, cultural authenticity, and localized design contribute to visitor satisfaction and cultural sustainability [12, 13].

The strategic factors—including planning and policymaking, marketing, quality management, resource management, and sustainability monitoring—were shown to be central drivers of tourism development. These findings align with global tourism planning literature asserting that well-formulated tourism policies are essential for guiding investments, regulating environmental impacts, and coordinating stakeholder roles [4, 25]. Marketing strategies also play a pivotal role in enhancing destination visibility and attracting targeted tourism segments, as demonstrated in studies on sports and health tourism in Iran [19, 21]. The significance of monitoring systems further supports arguments that sustainable tourism requires systematic evaluation of ecological footprints, resource use patterns, and service quality [8, 9]. The integration of these strategic elements in the model demonstrates that sustainability depends not only on identifying key drivers but also on operationalizing them through coherent, evidence-based policies.

Finally, the outcome factors, including resource conservation, cultural enrichment, well-being and quality of life, and tourist satisfaction, confirm that sustainable tourism development generates multidimensional benefits. These outcomes are consistent with research showing that tourism promotes economic welfare, strengthens cultural identity, and enhances community vitality when guided by inclusive and sustainability-oriented policies [17, 28]. Studies from Iran indicate that tourism contributes not only to economic diversification but also to national cultural revitalization and regional stability [12, 14]. Furthermore, international research demonstrates that tourist satisfaction is influenced by environmental quality, cultural authenticity, and service excellence [5, 6]. The alignment between these findings and the results of this study reinforces the validity of the conceptual model and its applicability to tourism planning in Iran.

Taken together, the study’s results illustrate that sustainable tourism in Iran is best achieved through a holistic, integrated, and culturally grounded model that reflects global best practices while remaining responsive to national contexts. By confirming the interconnectedness of structural, environmental, socio-cultural, and governance factors, the present research contributes to both theoretical and practical discussions on tourism sustainability.

This study, despite its contributions, is subject to several limitations. First, the research focuses on a specific regional and national context, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other countries with different cultural, economic, or political environments. Second, the study relies on expert interviews, which, despite ensuring depth and rigor, may reflect subjective interpretations influenced by the participants’ professional backgrounds and experiences. Third, the quantitative phase, although robust, utilized a relatively small sample due to the specialized nature of the expert population, which may affect the statistical power of the structural model. Additionally, access to up-to-date regional tourism data was limited, requiring reliance on secondary sources that may not capture recent developments. Finally, although the model integrates a wide range of factors, additional variables such as climate adaptation, digital governance maturity, and global tourism shocks could further enhance the framework.

Future studies should expand the geographical scope of analysis to include multiple regions across Iran or comparative cases from other countries with similar cultural and environmental characteristics. Researchers may also explore longitudinal

designs to examine how sustainable tourism indicators evolve over time. Further investigations could incorporate a broader stakeholder base, including tourists, local residents, and private-sector actors, to enrich the diversity of perspectives. Additionally, future research could integrate climate resilience, smart governance, and digital transformation indicators into the sustainable tourism model. Applying big data analytics, GIS mapping, or simulation modeling could provide deeper insights into spatial and temporal dynamics. Finally, experimental or intervention-based studies could test the practical effectiveness of specific strategies proposed in the model.

Policymakers should prioritize integrated planning frameworks that align environmental protection, cultural preservation, and economic diversification. Local governments should strengthen community participation mechanisms to ensure that tourism development reflects local values and needs. Tourism organizations should invest in digital platforms, smart technologies, and innovative marketing strategies to enhance competitiveness. Capacity-building programs are essential, particularly in areas of hospitality management, environmental stewardship, and destination branding. Strengthening monitoring systems and transparent governance structures will help ensure accountability and long-term sustainability. Finally, collaboration between public agencies, private investors, and academic institutions should be encouraged to promote evidence-based decision-making and continuous improvement in tourism planning.

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Authors' Contributions

All authors equally contributed to this study.

Declaration of Interest

The authors of this article declared no conflict of interest.

Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants. Written consent was obtained from all participants in the study.

Transparency of Data

In accordance with the principles of transparency and open research, we declare that all data and materials used in this study are available upon request.

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