

FEASIBILITY OF RURAL TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN THE VILLAGE OF SEYYED HASSAN IN SHUSHTAR

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ABSTRACT: *Currently, tourism has become one of the most important components of economic development and welfare of the most countries and it is anticipated that soon this industry will be the largest industry and economic activity in the world. In fact, tourism is a complex economic activity that has penetrated all pores of human life. Due to this, attention to the various capacities and strategies of tourism can have very positive aspects for creating advancement and replacing new sources of revenue rather than other sources, especially oil resources; So that development of it for developing countries facing with problems like high unemployment rate, constraints of exchange resources and mono-product economy has a great importance. In this industry, Religious appeals, shrines and holy places every year attracts a large number of tourists. This has a lot of economic, social and physical benefits for religious tourists in the community. For this purpose, planning with strategic approach can be one of the methods to utilize these opportunities for areas with religious and cultural capacities. The current research has investigated this issue with an applied- developmental approach and by combination of descriptive-analytic and field methods for the purpose of feasibility and development of this industry in the central part of the village of Seyyed Hassan and the village of Shahid Modarres Shushtar in Khuzestan province that have a high capacity from aspect of attracting religious tourism due to their special situation. This research studies the 305 residents of the village, and completes appropriate information and investigates them by using ArcGIS, SWOT, and EXCEL models and software. The results has demonstrated that the vulnerability of the village of Seyyed Hassan is high in terms of tourism development. Prominences and benefits of Seyyed Hassan village is very high. Distribution and reallocation of resources in rural areas regarding the limited opportunities and high weaknesses are vital. Also, Shrine of Seyyed Hassan and natural landscapes are considered as advantages for tourism development. It is emphasized the optimal use of these factors on the development of religious and natural tourism and ecotourism. Among the weaknesses, inadequate facilities and residential facilities, amenities, services and transportation were a priority that these issues as tourism development barriers have been removed with the participation of local people and the public and private sectors. From external threats, water and soil pollution, the rural environment by tourists are considered as external threats. In general we can say that if the country religious tourism wants to achieve stability and play positive role in the lives of rural people, needs to determine and develop specific strategies, environmental management, development of local participation, clear rules and strong, sustainable marketing and realistic plan.*

KEYWORDS: Rural Tourism, Feasibility, SWOT, Village of Seyyed Hassan.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism industry has significant economic and social effects and play an important role in social welfare and economic growth of host country (Walker and Walker, 2011). Creating jobs

and achieving sustainable and proper revenue and also cross-cultural understanding in consensus of international peace are of economic and social Impacts of this industry. Statistics presented by World Tourism Organization indicate that tourism has important effects on the global economic system. International tourism revenues in 1998 accounted for amounting to 8% of the world total export earnings and 37% of exports in the service sector and regarding 4 to 5 percent growth of this industry in the 90s, the income from this industry in 2010 and the number of tourists reached more than 55.1 trillion dollars and more than one billion people, respectively (Madhoshi and Naserpour, 2003). To create a comprehensive and sustainable development as well as new sources of revenue to replace the oil resources we need to use all the features and functionalities. In this context, the development of tourism industry which economists know it as the third dynamic and growing economic phenomenon after oil and automotive and it is considered as the country's basic need (Madhoshi and Naserpour, 2003: 27). The tourism industry has expanded in the last decade with rapid growth rates and has been a significant source of income for many developing countries. But Iran despite its high potential, allocated a tiny proportion of this world's business (Ranjbarian, 2006). It is worth noting that tourism is an industry that has been influenced by many economic, social, cultural, and civil factors and affects the many national and regional development aspects. Anyway, attracting greater numbers of tourists is not a process without problems, especially in this time that travel preferences are always changing. Despite the variety of options related to locations or tourist attractions, tourists often are not able to cope with such a huge amount of choice (Petrevska and Koceski, 2012). On the other hand, as tourism market are increasingly being competitive, the importance of customer retention is also increasing. Studies show that 5% increase in customer retention can increase profits 25% to 85% during customer lifetime. In addition, marketing costs of retaining existing customers are very lower than to acquire new customers (Toyama and Yamada, 2012). In marketing literature, empirical evidence suggests that satisfaction is a strong indicator of repeating purchase and recommending products or services to others. According to this point that satisfaction of tourists is one of the most important competitive factors and is the best indicator for guaranteeing future earnings growth, the satisfaction of tourists is seen as an important measure for assessing the quality of work. The more providing satisfaction and normative expectations of tourists, the more development and realization of tourism. If tourists are satisfied with their vacation experience, they will likely return to the same destination and encourage other people to go to that destination (Toyama and Yamada, 2012). Given the foregoing, it can be withdrawn that today tourism is considered the world's most valuable money maker industry that government officials should work better with a national commitment in this way. These efforts can cause tourist attraction, the introduction of the country in the world and improving GDP growth. Sustainable tourism development policy is today a general approach which is considered by government to long-term tourism become ecologically acceptable and financially self-sufficient and useful and promising in terms of social and moral perspectives for local communities. So, tourism must be a part of the natural, cultural and human environment to maintain a balance between them. Tourism focuses on community involvement in planning and trying to involve residents in the benefits of development. Principally, tourism policies should promote the living standards of people in visited regions and help providing their needs. Shrines are of the basic concepts of modern life and tourism. Movement of tourists is created by visiting religious places. Increasing demand for religious tourism is a social progress and is considered as an essential affair in modern life. Religious tourism is one of the interesting events and sample in local communities, in a way that Cohen says:

Tourists who stay in the destination and the local habitat and communicate with the host people, create changes in quality of life, value systems, division of labor, family relationships, attitudes and behavioral patterns of host society.

Religious tourism is one of the new phenomena in the universe and its origin lies in the pilgrimage. Researchers have recognized the relationship between these two. Iran with 98 percent Muslim and having more than 5 thousand shrines, the tomb of saints and religious centers has very good capacity to develop tourism and internal and external religious tourism, so that according to the available statistics, in no country this number of the tomb, shrine and religious buildings does not exist. That's why Iran is one of the countries that has the capacity to attract tourism and religious pilgrimage. In addition the shrine are everywhere, they can be an oasis features. Name, symbols of hundreds/thousands of villages are discussed in this field that in addition to the moral and spiritual influences in any geographical location, are also source of economic, social and cultural changes. Shushtar in Khuzestan province, has many monuments that religious works constitute the vast majority of them. So using this potential rooted in religious beliefs, religious tourism in the concept of specialization beyond dependence on the time and leisure, can be human geography important factor in the development of tourism, creating focus and cultural landscape. Religious tourism today, in the field of earning income and also preservation of the cultural heritage has been considered by different countries. Religious tourism can be developed internally to regional development, increase employment and in national aspect it can result in increasing income and preservation of cultural heritage. Religious tourism of Seyyed Hassan village, like other villages having religious sites has been investigated in this study. Because now the expansion of tourism in the rural environment has positive and negative effects and can cause cultural, social, economic and physical development of in village environment through influence on all aspects of rural life. Rural areas because of the landscape, natural attractions and different capabilities in attracting tourists exhibit variety and diverse forms of tourism that are different from each other based on the criteria and segmentation rules as well as some of their different features. Seyyed Hassan village located in the city of Shushtar, according to Imamzadeh Seyyed Hassan has faced with the development of religious tourism in the village in recent years. Hence, evaluation and feasibility of the village from socio-economic, and physical point of views are of utmost importance. It should be noted that from total number of rural shrines, 5392, 1029, 1147 of them are related to the shrines, religious leaders and residences, respectively and there are also about 151 religious places of other religions in the country. 36 of which are in rural areas (Rezvani,; 2008: 302). Khuzestan province has long been the cradle of civilization and culture and has had rich functionality. Seyyed Hassan village is located near the shrine (Seyyed Hasan), therefore, given the importance of this particular village, main objective of the research is intended to feasibility survey of religious tourism in the village. In other words, to achieve the goals of research, analytical and descriptive statistics have been used that at this stage according to the available information, attractions, tourist services and effects the status of religious tourism on the village development have been studied. And then in the next stages of research to analyze information and provide strategies for rural religious tourism development, SWOT analysis method is used. According to the survey conducted on the internal and external environment of the village of Seyyed Hassan, a list of weaknesses, opportunities and threats are identified and by the opinions of people, tourists, authorities about any of these issues and then analyzing, priorities were identified and finally to remove or analysis of weaknesses, threats, strengthening and improving the strengths, opportunities associated with development of religious tourism in rural areas are studied and appropriate strategies will be presented.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Approach of this research is developmental-applied and the research method is a combination of descriptive and analysis methods. Library and field data collection was done by developing a questionnaire and determining the validity and reliability of data. Also, to complete information, the Statistical Yearbook of the province and relevant organizations including Organization Cultural Heritage and Tourism were used. Due to the nature and methodology, the analysis of data was performed using SWOT model.

Research collection tools

Due to the nature of the research, data collection was in the form of library, documents, field and experimental works and based on observations, questionnaire and statistical methods were done. According to further information available, the attractions, religious tourism, facilities and services and the status of religious tourism of Seyyed Hassan village and its impact on community development have been studied. And then in the next stages of research, to analyze the information and provide strategies for tourism development, SWOT method has been used. Firstly, according to a survey conducted on the internal and the external environment of the village, a list of weaknesses, opportunities and threats were identified. And then by the opinions of the people collected by questionnaire, the weighting of each of the issues and then calculating and analyzing them, the priorities were determined and finally to overcome or minimize weaknesses and threats and to strengthen and improve the strengths of opportunities associated with the expansion of religious tourism of the village, appropriate strategies have been proposed.

Strategic planning process of religious tourism in the village of Seyyed Hassan

Strategic planning process to develop religious tourism sector of Seyyed Hassan village has been designed with four stages of strategic planning process.

1. Matrix of external (opportunities and threats) and internal (strengths and weaknesses) factors
2. The analysis of strategic factors
3. The matrix of internal and external factors and quantitative strategic planning matrix
4. Appropriate strategies for the development of religious tourism in the village of Seyyed Hassan.

Stages of implementation of SWOT analysis

After the identification, assessment and classification of internal and external factors, EFX tables ((Extend factor Evaluation Matrix) are used to identify the economic, social, cultural, ecological, institutional factors and IFE (Interned Factor Evaluation Matrix) to assess internal factors, strengths and weaknesses of the system. In margin of SWOT matrix based on expertise, appropriate strategies for each of the WT, SO, WO, ST sectors are proposed.

Formation of matrix, strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities (developing strategies)

Within the framework of development of strategies, assessment stage includes tools that rely on data from the external and internal environment evaluation and summarized analysis of strategic factors that compares the opportunities and external threats with internal strengths and weaknesses. For this purpose, external factors in the SWOT matrix were compared with each other to the possible strategies be developed. Rural religious tourism development planning strategies for the village of Seyyed Hassan were developed in 3 steps which will be described in the following article.

The first step - determining the available opportunities and threats

In this step, opportunities and threats identified in the field of religious tourism of the village were placed in the process of evaluating the external environment in SWOT matrix rows.

The second step - determining the available strengths and weaknesses

In this step, strengths and weaknesses identified in the field of religious tourism of the village were placed in the evaluation of internal environment in SWOT matrix columns.

The third Step - Developing SO, WO, ST, WT strategies

In this step, the internal strengths and opportunities, internal weaknesses and external opportunities, internal strengths and external threats, and internal weaknesses and external threats are compared with each other and the result of them were graded in the cells related to strategy group of strengths-opportunities (SO), weaknesses-opportunities (WO), strengths-threats (ST), weaknesses- threats (WT), respectively.

Providing strategies and solutions for religious tourism of the village

1. Offensive strategies (=SO)

In strategies that focus is on the strengths of internal and external opportunities, the following strategies to take advantage of the available benefits to develop religious tourism in the village are presented.

- Emphasis on the development of religious tourism because of the advantages of commodities for the development of tourism in the studied villages.
- Efficient and targeted use of the increasing incentive of travel between the urban and vicinity with the neighboring cities (Bavi, Ahwaz, Shushtar, Masjed Soleyman) in direction of taking advantage of the attractions and tourism products in order to create employment and income for rural residents and prevent migration to the city.
- Identifying and taking advantage of natural attractions is another relative merits of tourism.
- The use of experienced specialists in order to create employment and income for the village residents and preventing migration to the city.
- The use of experts and experienced people in order to create cooperative arrangements and also promote tourism education through various meetings with Seyyed Hassan village people.

-Creating coordination between governmental and nongovernmental organizations, people and entrepreneurs.

- Preparation and utilization of the private sector supports to invest in tourism industry in the village of Seyyed Hasan through the clarification of government policies and local programs, taxation and banking facilities, etc.

- Religious tourism activities focusing mainly on the exploitation of resources in the village in order to earn income, create jobs and rural development.

ST diversification strategies

Diversification strategy focuses on the strengths of internal and external threats. Following strategies are presented to provide rural needs in order to eliminate the threats:

-Diversifying facilities, activities and tourism services in order to satisfy tourists and thereby increase the number of tourists in the village of Seyyed Hassan, as well as the use of different classes of people in different activities.

- Capacity of carrying tourism and determining the optimum population density in different locations in the village of Seyyed Hassan in order to reduce the pressure and overcrowding in these places and attractions and preventing the loss and destruction of them.

- Development of agricultural tourism in order to exploit the landscapes, fields, forests and farms in order to earn income and also prevent the destruction of vegetation and farms.

-Diversifying and developing advertisement programs to introduce cultural and natural attractions, and participate in other festivals, exhibitions and crafts actively.

- The development and equipping of tourist routes and creating signs, rules and regulations in these locations and preparing manuals for the training tourists and equipping and repairing Shrine of Seyyed Hassan.

-Taking advantage of the organization, rules and regulations in order to reduce the risks of ecological and environmental pollution in different areas and tourist sites.

- Securing the tourist sites of the village to prevent social offenses and other offenses.

WO revision strategies

In the revision strategic, while emphasizing the internal weaknesses, it is tried to utilize external opportunities to eliminate weaknesses of the tourism processing in rural areas. To this end, the following strategies will be presented.

- While revising the type and how to plan and government support for rural tourism areas, logic utilization of institutions, laws and support regulations for the development of infrastructure, facilities and various tourism equipment in rural areas are studied.

- Revisions to the distribution of facilities, services and tourist facilities and prioritizing the reallocation of these types of facilities in rural areas with high and medium tourist attractions such as the village of Seyyed Hassan.

- While revising the treatment and utilization of public participation in the development, preparation and implementation of projects and equipping rural areas studied in terms of tourist facilities and services, specialists and different institutions must do crucial measures in order to revive and develop these areas.

- Revision and development of relevant institutions and organizations in the village to educate people and tourists to take advantage of optimized and targeted benefits and positive effects tourists.

Defensive strategies (WT)

In this strategy, while emphasizing the elimination of vulnerability of the area, the following strategies will be presented.

- Holding seminars and meetings of "development of investment in rural tourism industry" by the village council with other universities and relevant authorities and entrepreneurs, inviting domestic and foreign investment and the creation of facilities and privileges in investments in construction, reconstruction of the tomb floor of Shrine of Seyyed Hassan and construction of residential complexes, recreational facilities such as Forest Park.

- Educating and informing people on how to deal with tourists and tourism in the village of Seyyed Hassan in order to avoid conflicts between tourists and people in the field of culture and customs, and other special places to be taught.

- Providing rules and regulations for optimal utilization of village attractions and tourism products and preventing degradation, pollution and loss in these areas.

- Facilitating and encouraging participation in the development of infrastructure, tourist facilities and earn income in this way and also the use of private sector participation in areas where people cannot participate or invest.

- To encourage people to travel to these villages and rural tourism development, by using tourism and marketing research on different aspects and different attractions of these villages should be identified and exploited in target advertisement markets.

This area is located in the area of ST: ST strategy that uses the strengths to avoid threats, supports this strategy to change attitudes.

Opportunity O

Threat T

Strength S

Weakness W

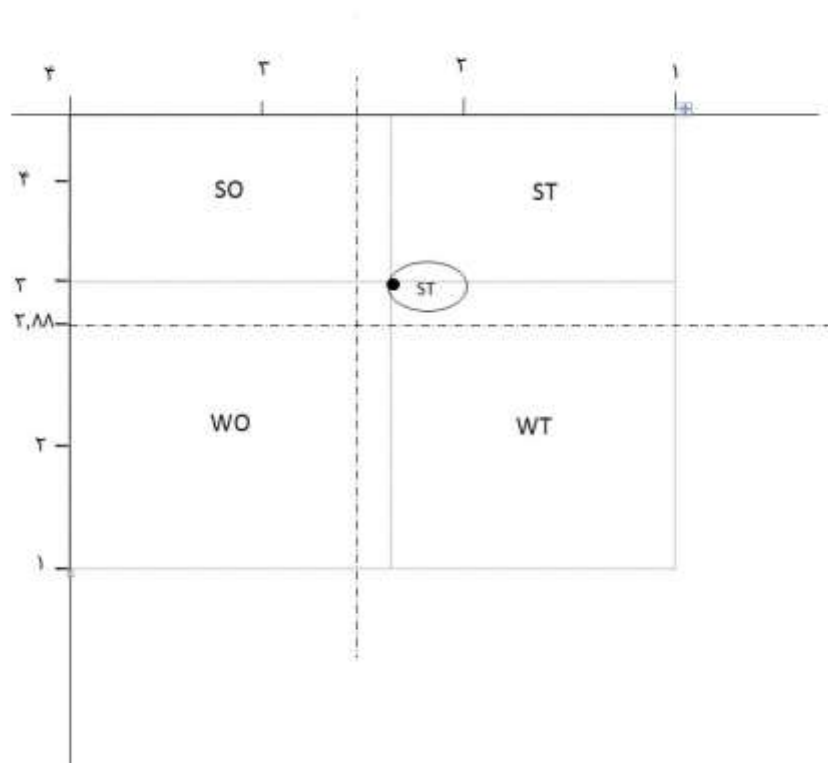
Opportunities (O)	Competitive/offensive strategies (SO)	Revision strategy (WT)
O₁ :Existence of much motivation in the community for visit and recreation	SO ₁ :Emphasis on the development of religious tourism due to high benefits for the development of tourism in the village of Seyyed Hassan	: WO ₁ Providing good drinking and sanitary water, and services
O₂ :Government attention to planning and investment in religious tourism	SO ₂ :Efficient and targeted use of the increased incentive for travel	: WO ₂ Logic using laws and support regulations
O₃ :Private sector investment in religious tourism	SO ₃ :Identifying and enjoying the natural attractions	: WO ₃ Revisions to the distribution of facilities
O₄ :Existence of skilled and experienced labor in cities of Shushtar, Bavi, Ahvaz	SO ₄ :Using experts SO ₅ : Coordination between organizations and people	: WO ₄ Revision of the use of public participation
O₅ :Increased attention and support from provincial officials in rural development with employment and income-earning approach	SO ₆ : Preparation and utilization of private sector supports	: WO ₅ Revision and development of relevant institutions and organizations in the village for education
Threats (T)	Diversification strategies (ST)	Defensive strategies (WT)
: T₁ Lack of facilities licensed by the state	: S ₁ Diversification of tourism facilities, activities and services	: WT ₁ Holding seminars and meetings and special privileges to rebuild the courtyard of Shrine of Seyyed Hassan
: T₂ Population density and being crowded	: S ₂ Capacity and determining the optimal level of population density in different places of tourism	: WT ₂ Education and informing village people dealing with tourism
: T₃ Contamination of soil and water resources	: S ₃ The development of agricultural tourism in order to exploit the sights	: WT ₃ Developing laws and regulations for the efficient use of tourism attractions and products and preventing water and soil pollution
: T₄ The decline of traditional and local culture, such as clothing, etc	: S ₄ Diversification and development of advertising programs : S ₅ Development and equipping of tourist routes	: WT ₄ Preparation and encouraging people for participation
	: S ₆ The utilization of the organization and regulations	WT ₅ .Increase of people incentive for travel
	: S ₇ Securing tourist sites	

IFE Table

Foreign strategic factors	Weight	Normalized weight	Points of status quo	Weighted point	Descriptions
Opportunities:					
O₁ :Existence of much motivation in the community for visit and recreation	4	0.138	4	0.552	
O₂ :Government attention to planning and investment in religious tourism	2	0.069	3	0.207	
O₃ :Private sector investment in religious tourism	3	0.103	3	0.309	
O₄ :Existence of skilled and experienced labor in cities of Shushtar, Bavi, Ahvaz	2	0.069	4	0.276	
O₅ :Increased attention and support from provincial officials in rural development	2	0.069	3	0.207	
Threats:					
T₁ :Lack of facilities licensed by the state	4	0.138		0.138	
T₂ :Population density and being crowded	4	0.138		0.276	
T₃ :Contamination of soil and water resources	4	0.138		0.138	
T₄ :The decline of traditional and local culture, such as clothing, etc	4	0.138		0.276	
Total	29	1	-	2.379	

IFE Table

Foreign strategic factors	Weight	Normalized weight	Points of status quo	Weighted point
Strengths (S):	4	0.056	3	0.168
S₁: Beautiful landscapes				
S₂: The mountains of Masjed Soleyman	4	0.056	3	0.168
S₃: The shrine (Shrine of Seyyed Hassan)	4	0.056	4	0.224
S₄: Easy and convenient access to the village	4	0.056	4	0.224
S₅: Vicinity to Shushtar, Masjed Soleiman, and Bavi	4	0.056	3	0.168
S₆: River	4	0.056	3	0.168
S₇: The local cultural customs	4	0.056	3	0.168
S₈: A quiet environment and without noise	4	0.056	4	0.224
S₉: The good market for the sale of rural products	4	0.056	3	0.168
S₁₀: The Forest Park	4	0.056	3	0.168
Weaknesses (W):	3	0.056	2	0.084
W₁: Inadequate facilities and staying equipment for tourists				
W₂: Inadequate health facilities and services	3	0.056	2	0.084
W₃: Not wanting of the shrine custodians to invest in the courtyard of the Shrine of Seyyed Hassan	4	0.056	1	0.056
W₄: Lack of expertise and trained labor in the village for tourists	3	0.056	2	0.106
W₅: Poor distribution of tourists in different seasons	4	0.056	1	0.056
W₆: Inappropriate environmental and physical infrastructure (such as roads and sewers)	4	0.056	3	0.0168
W₇: Lack of planning and investment in tourism in villages	4	0.056	3	0.0168
W₈: Lack of villagers' knowledge and their lack of awareness of the rise of religious tourism and its impact on the village	4	0.053	3	0.0168
W₉: Inadequate facilities and recreational equipment	3	0.056	2	0.084
Total	72	1	-	2.822



CONCLUSIONS

According to sources of the research theory and field studies carried out in order to provide religious tourism, rural development strategies and techniques by means of SWOT, tourism potentials and constraints were identified in the area under study and scientific answers and solutions to develop tourism were presented. With this description, results obtained can be provided in both qualitative and quantitative aspects:

1- The results of the qualitative aspects of each of the identified internal and external factors, suggest that:

A) The vulnerability of rural areas in terms of tourism development is very high.

B) Preferences and advantages of the village of Seyyed Hassan is very high.

C) The distribution and reallocation of resources in rural areas due to the limited opportunities and high weaknesses is vital.

2- Examining the results of the quantitative aspects of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats according to the priority table and grading the internal and external factors.

A: in the studied village: the Shrine of Seyyed Hassan and natural landscapes are as advantage of areas for tourism development that optimal use of these factors on the development of religious tourism and natural and echo-tourism are emphasized.

B: Also according to the results, among the weaknesses, inappropriate accommodation and welfare facilities, equipment and services, and transportation were a priority that in this context, they as tourism development obstacles will be eliminated and improved with involvement of local people and the public and private sectors.

C: In addition, among the external opportunities, by using components of the incentive for travel, the presence of nearby villages and cities, the maximum use of these cases in order to develop tourism can be done.

D: among the external threats, water, soil, and the environment pollution by rural people are considered as foreign threats. Defensive strategies have been presented to reduce these effects.

According to what was said, in general we can say that if the rural religious tourism wants to be stable and play a positive role in the lives of rural people, it needs to determine and develop specific strategies, environmental management, development of local participation, clear and strong rules, and realistic sustainable marketing plan.

In Table X that separation for a variety of strategies (WT, WO, ST, SO) has been developed, ST diversification strategies with the most points represents the best strategy in religious tourism of Seyyed Hassan village.

In this strategy, the diversification of facilities, activities and tourism services in order to satisfy tourists and thereby increasing the number of tourists in the country and carrying capacity and determining the optimum population density, preventing soil degradation and water pollution as well as diversification advertising programs to introduce the tourist attractions of the village, introducing Shrine of Seyyed Hassan, developing and equipping the Shrine of Seyyed Hassan, tourist routes and creating and installing signs and regulations, utilization of the operation of the laws and regulations in order to reduce hazards and environmental pollution and ecological advantage, securing tourist sites in the village are considered.

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