Original Research Article

Exploring the Role of Ecolodges on the Culture Domain

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Abstract | The growing desire of tourists to gain authentic cultural experiences has created unique opportunities for the tourism industry and in particular ecotourism. The growth of ecotourism has brought challenges to the local communities and destination management organizations. Thus, securing the interests of stakeholders and managing cultural impacts has become an inevitable necessity for the preservation and development of cultural assets and manifestations. This study aims to investigate the role and effects of ecolodges in regenerating culture, using the thematic analysis method. Purposeful snowball sampling procedure was used to find out and explore the experts' opinions. Data were collected through interviews and continued until saturation and coding reliability. Finally, the pattern of the effect of ecolodges is recognized from the cultural aspect. Findings showed that the effectiveness of ecolodges begins with the promotion and preserving of the culture of host communities and through certain steps, leads to the destination sustainability. Ecolodges have positive cultural impacts on the host community and guests due to adopting a cultural approach in planning and management of tourism activities, and negative impacts of ecotourism. Therefore, the management of this socio-economic institution needs a deep understanding of indigenous culture and a master plan. Also, the ecolodges have a significant difference with other tourist accommodation facilities, because they manage impacts on the indigenous communities and destinations. Therefore, their quantitative development require the observance of the principles of ecotourism, strict and comprehensive supervision by the government, associations, and ecolodge founders.

Keywords| *Cultural Tourism, Ecotourism, Ecolodge, Cultural Impacts, Cultural Development, Sustainable Development.*

Introduction| Monotonous urban life, formal and organized relationships, apartment dwelling and mechanical life, a deep and limited view of a field of work lead to loss of identity, so the need to self-knowledge and return to local culture and traditional

life has become reveal. Yeoman et al. ascribe this to an increasing desire to visit new places, which in turn has been stimulated by an emergence of newly accessible destinations in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and the Pacific (Fennell, 2008). With the development of tourism destinations and increasing interest in travel, the branches of tourism become more diverse, and different sections are added to it. People also tend to visit different regions and communities, among which unfamiliar areas with different cultures such as historical places and neighborhoods of cities, rural

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areas, and new indigenous and unknown destinations are more attractive for tourists.

The World Tourism Organization asserted that cultural tourism accounted for 37% of global tourism, and forecast that it would grow at a rate of 15% per year. Cultural tourism is one of the types of tourism that includes a wide range of tourists and due to its important role in preserving the culture and history of different communities deserves special attention (Kamari, Hossini, Veiseh & Mostaghimi, 2020). Ecotourism is one of the most valuable branches of tourism and ecolodges are one of the most effective tools for managing cultural tourism and attracting interested tourists, maintaining and observing the principles of ecotourism that play a significant role in the development of local communities and their participation in tourism activities. In tourism studies, there are always concerns about the unintended effects of culture and the disappearance of culture. Issues such as the destruction of traditional and indigenous cultures, the destruction of subcultures, the commodification of culture, the spread of drugs and prostitution, the conflict and anomalies caused by the aggressive culture that has destructive cultural effects. The present study focuses on the importance of the impact of ecolodges as a new socio-economic institution on tourism destinations and examines their managed effects on the culture and development of communities. Strengthening and developing the idea of ecotourism by ecolodges, while helping to inform tourists about the effects of presence in the host local community and the impact of this presence on the bio-cultural diversity of the region, provides the conditions for preserving and reviving indigenous cultures. This study analyzes the effects of ecolodges on the culture of host communities from the perspective of professional ecolodge managers, scientific and academic experts, as well as managers and experts of the executive body. The main question of this research is: What are the impacts of ecolodges on the culture of the host community and its surroundings?

Conceptual Framework
• Culture
The word culture refers to science, knowledge, literature, education, and scientific and literary works of individuals or nation and also means a book that presents the words of a language and their description. Perhaps the reason for choosing this word for a vocabulary is that a language expresses the spiritual, intellectual, and social life of a nation (Kazemi, 2007).
According to the British anthropologist Edward

Burnett Tylor Culture is that complex whole that includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws, morals, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. It also emphasizes the cultural differences indicating that each region can have a different culture from other regions of that country.

Culture is the main cause of social differences, in the absence of which it will be the same everywhere (Papoli Yazdi & Saqai, 2013). The scope of culture has been considered along with the human's social life. The growth and development of culture depend on interaction with other cultures; the wider human relationships, the greater the opportunity for the creation and formation of culture. Culture causes the emergence of talents and flourishment and plays an important role in the formation of human societies (Rezvani, 2007).

People with different cultures work and live together and exchange culture in organizations (cultural, social, educational, economic, etc.). Also, population displacement, such as migration and tourism, paves the way for the transfer of culture and cultural exchanges. In the present era, when tourism is expanding as a cultural and social phenomenon, it has brought its own cultural consequences for societies (Navid Adham, Hajiani, Bonyanian, Bay, Nowrouzi, Delbari, 2018). Therefore, the role of tourism as one of the forms of social communication in the formation of culture, evolution, and cultural excellence of human beings and societies is undeniable. Ecological resorts as a nascent institution in particular, are effective in creating and facilitating this type of cultural impact.

• Ecolodges
According to the World Tourism Organization, 37% of international tourism is culturally motivated and estimates that this share will increase significantly. The increasing growth of cultural tourism has attracted the attention of planners and policymakers of the world tourism industry. This type of tourism, its trend and impact on the formation of Iran development plans can be clearly seen (Saghaii & Khooshast, 2012). In tourism with a cultural approach, the tourist seeks to encounter cultures and get to know them. Facing culture means gaining true knowledge of where a place is and who its inhabitants are. However, the important question is what is the intention of the cultural tourist from this knowledge? The intention of tourism with a cultural approach is a kind of familiarity that leads to cultural self-knowledge. Such acquaintance is possible when watching historical and cultural monuments in tourism is not only for the purpose of increasing

information and satisfying historical curiosities behind closed doors. Tourism with a cultural approach is a way to get to know one's self and others (Beheshti, 2020).

Ecotourism is one of the most valuable branches of tourism that aims to travel and live in a wise way with the least negative effects on culture, society, environment, and the most benefits for different parties. The applicants for this type of travel those who are interested in choosing trips in the heart of local communities and natural areas to bring them closer to a different quality of life (Faraji Rad & Ehsani, 2011). In scientific ecotourism, special attention is paid to interaction with local people and simple and unpretentious facilities are preferred over luxury and standard facilities. Ecotourism is accompanied by the active participation of the guest in the search for experience and learning, and the guest values this experience (Zahedi, 2014). Ecotourism operates quite differently than other sectors of the tourism industry because ecotourism is defined by its sustainable development results including environmental conservation, educating visitors about sustainability, and benefiting local people. (Wood, 2002, 7). One of the basic features of ecotourism is paying special attention to local communities and preserving their customs and culture (Zeppel, 1998). In this regard, ecolodge is one of the most effective tools that while maintaining and observing the basic principles of ecotourism, has a significant role in the development of local communities and the participation of indigenous people in tourism activities.

Ecolodges are recognized as one of the most important tools for the realization, organization, and management of ecotourism. The professional managers of ecolodges seek the proper use of the natural and human environment in order to gain the pleasure and satisfaction of the guests, to gain the benefit and support of the local community from this kind of activity. Therefore, tourists, in coordination with the management of the accommodation, need to prepare themselves for the correct presence in the social and natural environment and remain faithful to the restrictions and rules of this environment. Ecolodges are one of the types of tourism facilities, cultural, and economic institutions and a tool to support and develop ecotourism and cultural tourism. The ecolodges are established in natural and indigenous environments in order to provide services for travelers and tourists while respecting environmental, cultural, social and economic sustainability and they are compatible with local architecture, historical context and natural appearance of the region. The structure

of these lodges has been created, revived, or exploited in the native space to pave the way for the presence of tourists to experience living in the natural and indigenous environment while maximizing interaction with local communities and paying attention to the diversity of climate and nature (Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts, 2019).

Ecolodges are a relaxing places to provide accommodation and hospitality services to tourists and travelers who love the environment and an indigenous lifestyle. These accommodations as an institution and business are usually run by locals. Their body and decoration design are appropriate to the region, have a special style and traditional architecture, and they serve in accordance with the local culture and geography. In these accommodation centers, traditional dishes are usually prepared using local ingredients and products and served in traditional dishes to acquaint guests with the culture of food, local food and drinks, to experience different flavors and tastes. Also, the management and staff of ecolodges help tourists to interact with local people in order to familiarize tourists with local customs while having leisure and sightseeing in the area so that the guests are immersed in the culture of the host community and learn the indigenous culture and knowledge of the region. The different types and forms of these accommodations can include a native house, a cottage canopy, a caper, a rock house, a black tent, an old castle and inn, a natural camp, and even a village. The most important functions of an ecolodge can be the design and architecture, food and drink, decorations and arrangements, introduction of local rituals and ceremonies, helping the environment, implementing the style of hospitality and hospitality in the lodge and providing health, and welfare services. Ecotourism has attracted the attention of many tourists in recent years and accounts for a significant percentage of the tourist population. Ecotourism has attracted the attention of many tourists in recent years and accounts for a significant percentage of the tourist population. The establishment of ecolodges in recent years in the historic areas of cities and rural areas of Iran has increased significantly. According to the published statistics, more than 2000 units have received official licenses until the middle of 2020. This rapid growth, which is similar to the tourism uprising of the 1970s in industrialized countries, has played a key role in the development of rural areas economically, socially, and culturally (Bowe & Marcouiller, 2007) and has encountered the Iranian tourism industry with a new phenomenon. Because historical urban areas and rural areas have many hidden natural, cultural and historical

assets and values that can be offered and introduced to tourists, it seems that the establishment of ecolodges to provide services and provide opportunities for tourists to interact with local communities in these areas, has a variety of effects on culture, cultural change and development of these areas.

Literature review

A review of the research shows that this subject area has received less attention from researchers and few studies and researches have been done and published. Yousefi and Sharifi (2014) in a study aimed at studying and analyzing the social and cultural impacts of tourism development, while stating that not much research has been done at the national level in this area. They conclude that attracting people's participation in tourism activities, teaching effective communication and conflict resolution, and informing tourists in various ways, are ways to reduce the negative effects and strengthen the positive effects of tourism. Therefore, they consider it necessary to plan for the compilation and publication of content in written form and CD. These measures, both as an advertisement tool for tourism purposes and as an information tool, can bring awareness and education to tourists to prevent undesirable behaviors and also, to increase the ease and speed of the development process, to attract the opinion of the host community to activities in the field of tourism and to accompany them in this direction. This article does not mention the institution in charge of implementing these strategies. Ajza Shokuhi et al. (2013) in another research to study the effects of tourism on the quality of life of the host community have studied the impacts of tourism on the host community in the city of Bandar-e-Turkmen. They suggest factors to improve the social and cultural effects of tourism such as public relations and communication with other ethnicities, familiarity with local customs, creating a positive view of local customs and culture, the importance of local customs among residents, and self-esteem. They believed that these factors are positive for paving the way for introducing the culture and customs of the region.

It was also stated in this article that tourism in the city of Bandar-e-Turkmen can improve and enhance the social and cultural aspects of residents' lives. However, no appropriate measures have been taken to strengthen and support this process. Amini and Zeydi (2015) in a study examined the cultural effects of tourism in rural areas from the perspective of the local community of Abyaneh village. The results were summed up in such a way that, although tourism development did

not contribute to the "continuity" of local culture, it also posed threats. However, the cultural "ruptures" created are not at critical and irreparable levels. This article considered the continuation of tourism in Abyaneh village to require proper management and optimal policies. According to researchers, tourism has many advantages, but if its activities are carried out without proper and principled planning and management, it will conflict with its original purpose and philosophy; because the social and cultural effects of tourism cause undesirable changes over time. This requires monitoring the way and extent of rural tourism development and plans to guide them in a principled and rational way in the future to support cultural heritage and achieve the necessary conditions for the preservation of local populations. Shojaee and Farajzadeh (2016) in another study have examined the impact of cultural tourism on the cultural interaction between tourists and the host community. Tourism has an important role in creating cultural change in the region and has socio-cultural effects on tourists and the host community. It also causes cultural changes that are called the interaction between the tourist and the people of the host community, the researchers said in the article. Therefore, tourism development in host regions can provide positive social and cultural effects and consequences, including improving social services and facilities, paying attention to and preserving patterns of indigenous culture, strengthening cultural exchanges, and increasing knowledge and commitment to indigenous culture. Researchers believe that tourism can have direct or indirect effects on the culture of the host community. The encounter of tourists and host communities who may have had little prior knowledge of each other's culture and may have had a different and vague mental image before and this ambiguity will be effective in recognizing, discovering, adapting, accepting, or rejecting the two sides by the parties. This article also deals with the negative social and cultural effects of tourism development but there is no discussion about how to manage and who is the trustee.

In their research, the authors focused on the effects of tourism on the host society and culture. These effects include tourist perception of the host community and culture, and improve image of the cultural reputation of the host communities, introducing and promoting new values and practices, and reviving traditional arts and crafts and indigenous arts, as well as regional balance as major positive impacts. On the other hand, the same researchers have summarized the main negative effects of tourism on the culture and the host society in the

following six items, which are the commercialization and degradation of cultures, reducing the value burden and concepts of customs and commodification of culture, increasing the conflict between the lifestyles of the local community and tourists, the evolution of the local language, new patterns of local consumption, and increasing the risk of social harms (Williams, 1998).

The study of the research background with the subject of studying the effects of tourism shows that although it is a unique subject, due to the conditions and differences in each region, it has special dimensions. Therefore, new research is still needed. Another critique of the effects of tourism is that researchers pay little attention to the social and cultural effects. On the other hand, the lack of a governmental destination management organization in order to manage the effects of tourism and the study of this institutions (like ecolodges) as one of the most important and effective actors has not been studied and analyzed. Especially in recent years, with the special support and government development program and with the expansion of ecolodges and the creation of a local institution for planning and managing tourism activities, the role of this institution in the field of environmental culture and its surroundings has not been studied.

Research method

This research has been planned and implemented in order to analyze and extract the pattern of effects on the local host community. This research has been conducted with a qualitative approach. Therefore, the researcher has only an approximate idea or goal and does not seek to manipulate the desired phenomenon (Patton, 2002). Thus, it explores, describes, and understands the complex nature of human experiences.

Sampling Method

According to the study purpose, the selection of samples and their number in this qualitative study depends entirely on the objectives and type of study. Therefore, the participants in the interviews were selected from individuals who are a direct and rich source of knowledge and experience about the concept of ecotourism or the phenomenon of ecolodges. These include experts and scholars including academic professors and researchers in the field of tourism as first group, managers of ecolodges with more than 5 years of experience in the field of ecotourism as the second one. The government managers and experts from the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicraft Organization with more than 10 years of experience as third group, who have been selected for interview.

Sampling in this study first started purposefully with a small number of well-known experts and then continued as snowball sampling. Initially, five ecolodge managers, academic experts, and executives were interviewed and then asked to nominate other people to participate in the study. Interviews were conducted with the aforementioned groups until the saturation threshold was reached (so that no new information or content was obtained from the interviews). But to achieve the reliability of the research and increase more commonalities without adding new categories or changing topics, interviews with more experts continued. In total, interviews with 22 scientific and executive experts were conducted as follows on the subject of research. The number of executive experts (EE) in this interview is 6; the number of managers and specialized government experts (GE) participating in the interview was 8 and the number of academic experts (AE) participating in the interview was 8. However, some of these people can be placed in two or all three groups. The demographic characteristics of the participants is shown in Table 1.

Data collection method and research tools

In this study, the interview method was used to collect information. First, a set of semi-structured interview questions was prepared. Then the questions were reviewed with the cooperation of experts and specialists and were reviewed and corrected and finally approved. In conducting this research, in addition to observing ethical considerations, including introducing the researcher, explaining the goals and methods of conducting the research, obtaining verbal consent from the participants before recording the interviews, protecting the confidentiality of the participants' information and authorizing them to leave the study at any time. Considering the coincidence with the Covid-19, in coordination with the participants, a large number of telephone interviews, communication via the internet, and if desired, individuals in accordance with health protocols were held in person in their offices. The duration of each interview was between 45 and 90 minutes. The basis of the conversation is first understanding the objectives of the research and getting acquainted with the theoretical foundations of the interviewee on the topic of ecotourism and the phenomenon of resorts. Then they were asked about objectives of the institution and about the effects of ecotourism on the culture of the host and guest were interviewed.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the participants in the research interview. Source: author.

No.	Code	Gender	Education	Group
1	GE1	Female	Ph.D.	Governmental Expert
2	AE1	Male	Ph.D.	Academic Expert
3	EE1	Male	M.Sc.	Executive Expert
4	EE2	Male	M.Sc.	Executive Expert
5	AE2	Female	M.Sc.	Academic Expert / Executive Expert
6	AE3	Male	Ph.D.	Academic Expert
7	EE3	Male	Ph.D.	Executive Expert / Academic Expert
8	GE2	Male	Ph.D.	Governmental Expert / Academic Expert
9	GE3	Male	Ph.D.	Governmental Expert
10	EE4	Female	Ph.D.	Executive Expert
11	GE4	Male	Ph.D.	Governmental Expert
12	GE5	Female	M.Sc.	Governmental Expert
13	AE4	Male	Ph.D.	Academic Expert / Governmental Expert
14	GE6	Male	Ph.D.	Governmental Expert
15	GE7	Male	Ph.D.	Governmental Expert
16	AE5	Male	Ph.D.	Academic Expert

Interviews analysis method

Data analysis was performed using the qualitative content analysis (Theme analysis). Thus, all interviews with managers, experts, and pioneers were recorded. The topics were converted to transcript in Word software. The texts were then read several times. Then the Word file was entered into the MAXQDA 20 qualitative analysis software to extract concepts and themes. By reviewing the text phrases word for word and identifying its semantic units, the initial codes were extracted and open coding was performed. In open coding, many concepts are obtained which were named based on the researcher's inference. Of course, this naming is closely related to the data. The process of open coding continued until new information was extracted from the text and all concepts were found and hidden in the text with confident coding (70 concepts). Then, with axial coding, the concepts or codes that had similar and common concepts in terms of content were named as a single subcategory or category. These categories are known as subcategories. Axial coding that shows the patterns embedded in the text is more abstract. The codes, therefore, reveal a deeper description of the text. Finally, by categorizing subcategories with closely related concepts, a new category was revealed in the main categories, which can be revealed as the main themes (9 themes) of the role of ecolodges in the field of culture, which is the result of selective coding. Table 2 shows the themes

extracted from the interviews and their saturation steps. Preliminary study and comparison of the main themes resulting from selective coding of the opinions of the three groups of ecotourism managers, government managers, and academic experts (Fig. 1) show that the theme of "cultural interaction" in the group of university experts and "culture revival" in the group of government experts not mentioned, while the ecolodge management team has mentioned all the topics well in the interviews. On the other hand, groups of ecolodge managers and specialized government managers have covered an average of three topics in each of the interviews, while academic experts have mentioned less than two topics in their interviews.

Research findings

Following are the findings of the analysis and coding of 51 paragraphs of the text of the statements of the interview participants based on the research questions. In the first part, the results of the question about the purpose of the founders of the ecolodges are discussed, and then in the second part, the findings of their views on the effects of the ecolodges on the culture of the host communities and tourists are discussed. At the end of this section, the pattern of the impact of ecolodges on the culture of people and their guests will be presented.

• **Ecolodges have been established for cultural purposes**

The following analysis was obtained from the codes and the themes extract from interviews with experts about the

Participant No.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	Repetition
Participant code	EE1	EE2	AE2	AE3	GE3	GE2	EE4	EE3	GE4	AE1	EE6	GE1	AE4	AE5	AE6	GE7	GE5	GE6	AE8	AE7	GE8	EE5	
Themes	Repetition of the themes																						
Cultural purpose	1		2		3		4								5			6		7	8		8
Promoting culture					1		2				3		4		5	6				7			7
Respect to culture		1				2		3	4	5		6	7										7
Preserving the identity of culture					1		2		3					4	5						6		6
Revival of culture	1										2								3				3
Cultural interaction											1	2									3	4	4
Cultural development	1		2								3			4							5		5
Cultural transformation	1							2	3				4				5				6		6
Sustainable development	1		2		3		4				5				6			7		8	9		9
Number of themes	5	1	2	1	4	1	2	4	2	2	4	3	2	1	2	3	3	2	1	2	7	1	
New themes	5	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	

Fig. 1. Themes, their repetition and saturation in the interview with the participants. Source: author.

objectives of establishing and continuing the activities of ecolodges (Table 2).

Ecolodges have cultural goals for the community around them. From the perspective of the participants in this study, cultural goals have been stated as the first priority or one of the main reasons for the establishment of this institution. Given that many founders have cultural interests and backgrounds, and in their past experiences in dealing with foreign and domestic tourists, they were aware of the cultural attractions of their local communities, they have based this approach on starting and running their own business.

• **Ecolodges introduce and promote the indigenous culture of the region**

This study sought to determine the role of ecolodges in the field of environmental culture and community around the resort. In their comments, the participants described the ecolodges as introducing culture, the cultural background to tourists and indigenous people of the region. They also attributed their role to tourists and even indigenous youth in their greater knowledge of the historical background, customs, religious beliefs and local cuisine, intangible attractions, and cultural differences. The classification of conversations conducted with experts and the extracted content is presented in the table 3.

• **Ecolodges promote awareness and more respect of culture by tourists**

The analysis shows the effect of ecotourism accommodation on the observance of culture by guests and tourists who have a different cultural diversity from the host community. They follow the customs of that society. They become aware of their social responsibilities and become aware that indigenous peoples care about their cultural-religious issues (Codes EE2, GE2, EE3, AE4, AE1, GE1, AE4).

• **Ecolodges preserve the cultural identity of the local people**

This study examined the effects of ecotourism accommodation on the surrounding community and showed that this institution is effective in preserving the cultural identity of communities. The residences strive for the survival of indigenous architecture, the preservation of the region's identity, the preservation of cultural heritage, and the survival and preservation

Table 2. Codes and themes of ecolodges have cultural goals and approach for the surrounding community. Source: author.

Excerpts from the interview (open codes)	Primary theme (axial codes)	Theme
The aim is to introduce culture, space, architecture, Iranian food, etc. But the government's facilitation of housing and lending has sent many people into the business. (Code EE1)	The goal is to introduce culture and so on.	Ecolodges have purposes, approaches, activities, results and cultural benefits for the surrounding community.
The early founders of ecolodges were more culturally inclined and did not receive loans, although costs were lower at the time. (Code AE1)	The early founders of ecotourism had a cultural perspective.	
The approach of cultural ecolodges, architecture, food, revitalization of the region and the existing body, revitalization of the environment, elements of culture and tourism learning responsibly. (Code EE1)	The approach of ecotourism is cultural and so on.	
Ecolodges pursue simultaneous cultural, economic, social, and environmental development. (Code EE1)	The development of ecolodges is for cultural purposes.	
The long-term goal of these businesses is different in different geographical areas. Some have less responsibility. In some areas, the economy is important, some are concerned with the two components of the economy and the environment, and others are concerned with cultural-religious activities. (GE2 code)	Ecolodges value cultural activity.	
The first priority is security - economic - cultural - social - environmental. Business models of ecolodges should be introduced to show that it is the guardian of security - economy - community culture - environment. (Code GE3)	The business model should protect the culture	
Guests and tourists with cultural diversity when entering the host community need to observe the customs and traditions of that community and have a sense of belonging to that area and must respect the environment and culture of other communities. (Code AE4)	Guests of the ecolodge need to respect the culture.	
Ecolodges act as a cultural activity, and the economy and income are its side-products. A multitask personality and multi-skill manager and a science expert are required. (Code EE6)	Ecotourism is a cultural activity.	
Created positive experiences for the visitor and the local community (when the guest leaves, awareness of the local community, culture and identity, the environment and biodiversity and animals, etc.) and created change in the guest. (Code AE5)	Guests need to be aware of the host culture when leaving.	
This business will create lasting benefits for the local people, including economic, social, cultural, political, and other benefits for the region as a whole. (Code GE8)	Accommodations provide sustainable cultural benefits and so on.	

of popular subcultures among local people (Codes GE3, EE3, AE1, GE7, GE5, GE8).

• **Ecolodges revive the culture of the local community**

In interviews with participants about the ecolodge's achievement for the local host community, participants emphasized the revival of traditional culture and skills such as handicrafts, especially their hospitality etiquette, ecological revitalization, and cultural elements. They also said that these institutions even revived parts of the canvas that had disappeared (Codes EE1, EE6, AE8).

• **Ecolodges promote cultural interaction between people and tourists**

The ecolodge aims to plan and operate to gain a lasting and enjoyable experience for the guest to interact with the local community to reveal cultural diversity and cultural issues through the right intercultural behavior. It is through communication that the rich culture of the region is recognized and the ability of young people to confront other cultures is increased, especially in healthy and real communication. Care is also taken not to dominate the subcultures (Codes AE8, GE1, GE8, EE5).

Ecolodges contribute to the cultural development of the region

This study showed that ecolodges contribute to cultural development in the region. Experts believe that ecolodges significantly contribute to the improvement of cultural indicators and increase cultural resilience in communities and against the prevailing global culture. This growth and development are especially evident in the adolescents, youth, and women of the village (Codes EE1, EE3, GE4, AE5, GE5, GE8).

• **Ecolodges transform the culture of guests and local people**

The results show that ecolodges, while providing basic training, try to provide pleasant experiences of local

Table 3. Codes and themes of ecolodge introduce and promote the local culture of the region.Source: author.

Excerpts from the interview (open codes)	Primary theme (axial codes)	Theme
The aim is to introduce culture, space, architecture, Iranian food, etc. However, the government's facilitation of housing and lending sent a lot of people to the business. (Code AE1)	Introducing culture	
Creating natural benefits by protecting wildlife, etc. Introducing and identifying its historical and cultural background and branding (brown bear) and encouraging the local community and tourists to support the environment and wildlife are effective. (EE2 code)	Introducing cultural background	
The guest also imagines his ecolodge at home. So the guest wants to be open-minded and get acquainted with the culture and religion of the region. Guests do not just travel for pleasure; they travel responsibly to learn responsible manners and lifestyles. (EE3 code)	The guest wants to get acquainted with the culture.	
Cultural ecolodges in the historic district of the City - Rural ecolodge, introducing the revitalization of rural communities, natural ecolodges in sensitive natural environments - Nomadic-cultural resort of the region. (Code GE3)	Ecolodge represents the culture of the region	
Education in order to recognize the cultural, social, food, clothing, hospitality, building, and having local architecture. Empowering local communities is one of the activities of the ecolodges(Code GE5)	Training to understand the cultural characteristics of local communities	
In addition to the issue of residency, ecotourism seeks to introduce culture, customs, religious beliefs, and local cuisine and intangible attractions, which prevents migration by creating jobs and distributing wealth. (Code AE4)	Ecotourism tries to introduce culture.	
With the launch of each ecolodge unit, in addition to covering the residential and catering infrastructure vacuum, they introduce our indigenous, local identity and culture due to the pattern and methods of technical, construction and architecture, etc. (Code GE7)	The ecolodge introduces our culture.	
Tourism means contradictions and tourism is a diverse industry. And this is an opportunity. The philosophy of tourism is to understand the differences and use them and the resilience of cultures in communities against global culture. (Code GE8)	Recognizing the contradictions of cultures	
Despite the ecolodge, many foreign and Iranian tourists have come to the region and got acquainted with the culture and nature of this region. (Code EE6)	Tourists are introduced to the culture of the region	
Everywhere in Iran, there are different cultures that can be introduced in the form of ecotourism and it does not matter where in the country they are located. Ecotourism is actually a name for resorts and includes everyone, and it does not matter if it is the north of the country or the west, east, and south. The important thing is that it introduces the culture of that region and it will not make any difference wherever Iran is. (Code EE6)	Introduces the culture of that area.	Ecolodges introduce and promote the indigenous culture of the region

life for guests and interaction with the local community to provide the opportunity to think and experience a responsible lifestyle and understand the original culture of the area. These conditions contribute to the learning and cultural transformation of the guests and to the locals in return (Codes EE1, EE3, GE4, AE5, GE5, GE8).

Ecolodges contribute to the sustainable development of the region (Fig. 2).

The ecolodges pursue simultaneous socio-cultural, economic, and environmental development. They interact with the local community on the principles of sustainable development. Because they consider long-term savings for the investment made, and it is justifiable from the perspective of sustainable development to preserve and develop the bio-cultural context of the region, therefore, their business models plan based on the balance and sustainability of the ecolodges are accountable to the people, nature, government, art and culture, and their owners,

otherwise they will fail in their goals (Codes EE1, AE2, GE3, EE4, GE1, AE6, GE6, AE7, GE8).

Discussion and conclusion

The culture of any society is the cause of the emergence of natural-cultural heritage. This heritage, in turn, creates cultural tourism, and by promoting culture, recognizing and paying attention to it, the cultural development of communities and sustainability can be achieved. Therefore, paying attention to culture and cultural effects in tourism planning and the impact of tourism on culture is of great importance (Yasouri & Safa, 2013). While cultures are continuous, they are also evolving. Therefore, in the process of tourism, some cultures will have the possibility of greater survival and stability, and others will have the possibility of more influence and change and will face threats (Qasemi & Nazeri, 2013). The results of the theme analysis of the interviews and the extracted themes show the positive and effective role of ecolodges
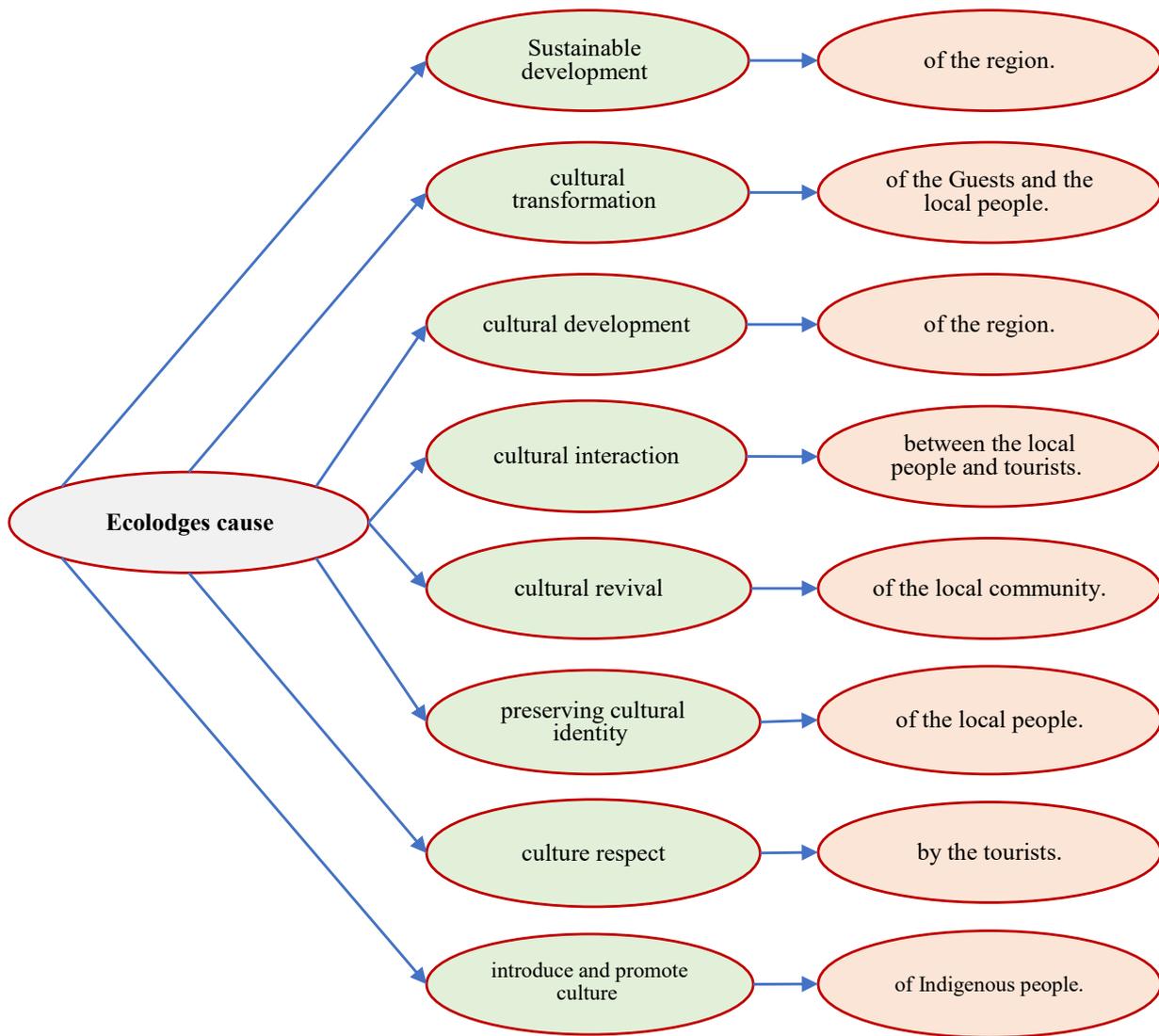
Fig. 2. Pattern of the impact of ecolodges on the culture of local people and their guests.. Source: Research Findings.

in the field of culture of the host community and have neglected the negative effects of tourism. Therefore, it can be concluded that according to the managers and experts, ecolodges have been established with cultural purpose and in order to introduce and recognize the cultural and natural heritage of the host people and to continue to operate. The effects of ecolodges start from the initial levels of introducing and promoting the culture of local communities and go through the stages of respect for the local culture by guests and hosts, to preserve the identity of traditional culture by residents, especially young people. The collective effort of regional actors to revive indigenous culture has led to a deeper understanding of it by the surrounding population and the strengthening of beliefs, enables proper intercultural behavior and cultural interaction between host and guest community, and contributes significantly to cultural development. It provides opportunity for deep experience of cultural learning and transformation for the hosts and guests, also simultaneous efforts for social, economic and environmental development will lead to sustainable regional development in the long term.

Based on the research done for managing the cultural effects of tourism, strengthening its positive effects as well as controlling and limiting the negative effects, various strategies are proposed. Looking at the results of the present study, it is possible to find ecolodges as a socio-economic institution and an activist in the region by launching an emerging business, while introducing ecotourism and ecolodges by content development, digital media, and social networks and

promote indigenous culture and tourism resources. This activity as an information tool can provide good awareness for tourists and guests and prevent the occurrence of inappropriate cultural behaviors and negative effects. Also, ecolodges can speed up the service process and make it easier with the participation of the local people in tourism activities. This partnership also creates an opportunity for interaction between people and tourists, provides guests with a different lifestyle and leisure experience, and reduces the opposition and non-cooperation of the host community and their conflict with tourists. One of the most important strategies to reduce the negative effects and strengthen the positive effects of the ecolodges is to create a culture for interaction in the surrounding communities. Creating coexistence opportunities in human communities can play an important role in the positive interaction between host and guest communities. Ecolodges, as an alternative to the national and local government, can enter the local community and interact with people by informing tourists and guests with prior information. All of this leads to cultural development and transformation. In the scientific literature of tourism, three factors, namely tourists, hosts and destination attractiveness, have always been considered effective in the development of tourism. However, the introduction of a factor, namely the ecolodges, can act cofactor beside the other factors

to provide more benefits to the local community, gain wider benefits and realize the impact of the existence of ecolodges in the development of the region. The use of sustainable development models in the management of processes and activities of ecolodges and simultaneous and coordinated attention to social, cultural, economic, and environmental dimensions in long term leads to the sustainable development of the region.

Achieving all of this requires comprehensive, long-term planning and a deep understanding of indigenous and regional cultures. In fact, from the participants' point of view, in order to play an effective role in ecolodges and improve their socio-cultural effects and changes in the region, government master plans and related popular and associations are inevitable, as well as continuous and effective review and monitoring and exploitation of ecolodges are essential. The development of sustainable tourism in Iran will continue to enjoy a cultural approach by attracting the participation of interested parties and investing in the creation of ecolodges by persons with cultural and social backgrounds because ecolodges can accelerate the development of cultural tourism, reduce the negative consequences and turn its threats into opportunities. Also, the lack of scientific studies on the subject of ecolodges in order to identify, the effects and consequences of this new phenomenon in Iran by academic researchers is the significance of this research.

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