



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

***STAKEHOLDERS' PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS  
ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN ALAMOUT, IRAN***

**AZITA ASADI**

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**STAKEHOLDERS' PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS  
ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN ALAMOUT, IRAN**

**By**

**AZITA ASADI**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,  
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**July 2014**

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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to

My beloved husband for all of his endless support

&

Our clever sweet daughter for all of her kindness.



Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment  
of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

**STAKEHOLDERS' PERCEPTIONS AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS  
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**AZITA ASADI**

**July 2014**

**Chairman: Abdullah bin Mohd, PhD**

**Faculty: Forestry**

The traditional lifestyles, conservative mindsets, a reluctance to see change in their natural environment and low education of rural communities are barriers to the development of ecotourism. As such, the consequential dearth of facilities that result in potential ecotourism destinations is a deterrent to tourists. The Alamout area of Iran possesses natural and historical attractions but remains undeveloped for these reasons.

The ecotourism industry is very closely related to the visitors, local communities and resource managers and it is imperative that they, as stakeholders, must show support for as well as interest and involvement in ecotourism and its development for the industry to be successful.

In many literatures, it has been shown that most researchers have focused on the locals while some have considered visitors but too little attention has been paid to the area of ecotourism development support and involvement through investigations of the points of view of different stakeholders.

Three core theories were combined to achieve synergy between stakeholders' perception of impacts, their intention to be involved in and give support to Ecotourism development in the area. Both the Theory of Reasoned Action and Theory of Planned Behaviour were used to derive the concept of intention and behaviour through respondents' attitude and perceptions. Social Exchange Theory explicates each person's involvement in different activities concerning the advantages and tangible or intangible profits. Stakeholders Theory posits that an industry's success depends on its ability to manage relationships with its stakeholders and explains that people try to care for and conserve everything which has value for them.

First, positive and negative impacts derived from literature were discussed and finalised with administrators relevant to this study area. Then data were collected from visitors to four major tourism sites in the Alamout area and from members of

the local communities living in the six villages around these sites during the period from June to September 2011. Structural equation modelling was used to find the relation between items and their high level latent variables using AMOS.

Of the study population, 451 persons completed the questionnaire including 236 visitors and 215 locals. In both groups, males were dominant due to cultural attitudes. Local communities mostly consisted of white beard leaders and high council members of the villages and their jobs were highly dependent on natural resources, such as agriculture and gardening. Visitors were mostly young students or small families working in government organizations.

Outcomes of the study indicate that a positive relation exists between total positive impact perceptions and intentions to be involved in Ecotourism development among the visitors and locals. Results of both models indicate a negative statistically significant relation between total negative impact perceptions of visitors and locals and their intentions to be involved in Ecotourism development.

Visitors and locals expressed high support for Ecotourism development. They expressed support for establishing infrastructure and indicated their agreement with establishing a domestic museum and organising traditional festivals. They believed that Ecotourism has a vital role to play in the future and agreed that the Tourism organization should plan for Ecotourism development in the Alamout area.

Abstrak tesis dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**PERSEPSI DAN SIKAP PIHAK BERKEPENTINGAN TERHADAP  
PEMBANGUNAN EKOPELANCONGAN DI ALAMOUT, IRAN**

Oleh

**AZITA ASADI**

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Cara hidup tradisional, pemikiran konservatif, satu keengganan untuk melihat perubahan dalam persekitaran semula jadi mereka dan pendidikan tahap rendah bagi komuniti luar bandar adalah kekangan kepada pembangunan ekopelancongan. Oleh yang sedemikian, kekurangan berterusan bagi kemudahan telah menyebabkan destinasi ekopelancongan yang berpotensi menjadi penghalang kepada para pelancong. Kawasan Alamout di Iran mempunyai tarikan semula jadi dan sejarah tetapi masih lagi tidak dibangunkan disebabkan sebab-sebab yang dinyatakan.

Industri ekopelancongan sangat berkait rapat dengan pelawat, komuniti setempat dan pengurus sumber dan ianya sangat imperatif bagi mereka sebagai pemegang saham untuk menunjukkan sokongan selain minat dan penglibatan dalam ekopelancongan dan pembangunannya untuk menjayakan industri ini.

Dalam sorotan kajian, ianya telah menunjukkan yang kebanyakan pengkaji telah mengfokuskan kepada orang tempatan manakala beberapa pengkaji mengambil para pelawat tetapi sangat sedikit perhatian diberikan kepada bidang sokongan pembangunan ekopelancongan dan penglibatan menerusi pengkajian pandangan pemegang saham yang berbeza.

Tiga teori utama telah digabungkan bagi mencapai sinergi antara persepsi impak pemegang saham, hasrat mereka untuk melibatkan diri dan memberi sokongan kepada pembangunan ekopelancongan dalam kawasan tersebut. Kedua-dua teori 'Reasoned Action' dan teori 'Planned Behaviour' telah digunakan untuk mendapatkan konsep hasrat dan tingkah laku menerusi sikap responden dan persepsi. Teori Penukaran Sosial menghuraikan setiap penglibatan individu dalam aktiviti yang berbeza berkaitan dengan kelebihan dan keuntungan ketara atau tidak ketara. Teori Pemegang Saham mengandaikan yang kejayaan industri bergantung kepada keupayaannya untuk menguruskan hubungan dengan pemegang sahamnya dan menerangkan yang orang ramai akan cuba untuk menjaga dan memelihara semua yang mempunyai nilai bagi mereka.

Pertamanya, impak positif dan negatif yang diperolehi daripada sorotan kajian telah dibincangkan dan dimuktamadkan dengan pentadbir yang relevan bagi kawasan kajian. Kemudian data telah dikumpulkan daripada para pelawat kepada empat kawasan utama pelancongan dalam kawasan Alamout dan daripada ahli komuniti setempat yang hidup dalam enam kampung berdekatan dengan kawasan ini semasa tempoh bermula Jun sehingga September 2011. Model persamaan berstruktur telah digunakan untuk mencari hubungan antara item-item dan pemboleh ubah terpendam bertahap tinggi mereka menggunakan AMOS.

Bagi populasi kajian, 451 individu menghabiskan borang kaji selidik termasuklah 235 pelawat dan 215 orang tempatan. Bagi kedua-dua kumpulan, lelaki adalah dominan disebabkan sikap kebudayaan. Komuniti setempat kebanyakannya terdiri daripada ketua berjanggut putih dan ahli majlis tertinggi bagi kampung-kampung dan kerja mereka adalah sangat bergantung ke atas sumber semula jadi seperti pertanian dan berkebun. Pelawat kebanyakannya adalah pelajar muda atau keluarga kecil yang bekerja dalam organisasi kerajaan.

Dapatan daripada kajian menunjukkan yang wujudnya hubungan positif antara persepsi dan hasrat keseluruhan impak positif yang terlibat dalam pembangunan ekopelancongan dikalangan pelawat dan orang tempatan. Hasil daripada kedua-dua model mendapati secara statistiknya terdapat hubungan negatif yang signifikan antara jumlah impak negatif persepsi bagi pelawat dan orang tempatan dan hasrat mereka untuk terlibat dalam pembangunan ekopelancongan.

Pelawat dan orang tempatan menyatakan sokongan yang tinggi bagi pembangunan ekopelancongan. Mereka menyatakan sokongan bagi mewujudkan kemudahan infra struktur dan menunjukkan persetujuan mereka bagi mewujudkan muzium domestik dan menganjurkan festival tradisional. Mereka percaya yang ekopelancongan memainkan peranan yang penting kepada masa depan dan bersetuju yang organisasi pelancongan patut merancang untuk pembangunan ekopelancongan dalam kawasan Alamout.



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Laudation is due the most High, the most Glorious, Whose worship bridges the Gap and whose recognition breeds beneficence. Each breath inhaled sustains life, exhaled imparts rejuvenation. Two blessings exist in every breath, each due a separate salutation.

Whose hand and tongue is capable  
to fulfil the obligation of thanks to him?

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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 21 July 2014 to conduct the final examination of Azita Asadi on her thesis entitled "Stakeholders' Perceptions and Attitudes Towards Ecotourism Development in Alamout, Iran" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACHB	Alamout Cultural Heritage Base
A.H	Anno Hegirae (Hijri Year)
CFA	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
EFA	Exploratory Factor Analysis
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
SCI	Statistical Centre of IRAN
SEM	Structural Equation Modelling
SESRIC	Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries
SET	Social Exchange Theory
SHT	Stakeholder Theory
TPB	Theory of Planned Behaviour
TRA	Theory of Reasoned Action
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development
WTO	World Tourism Organization

## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

Increasing populations worldwide need more food; therefore agricultural fields are cultivated more and more to supply extra food resources. In many developing countries most of the ranges and forest lands have been converted into agricultural lands during the last few decades (Lambin & Geist, 2006; Turner *et al.*, 2007). The situation has become problematic as these developing countries did not have the management knowledge or expertise to practise sustainable land use. Lands were exploited gradually by people who became more dependent on natural resources and changed the land-use from natural forest and ranges to agriculture fields and gardens (Barraclough & Ghimire, 1990; Sunderlin *et al.*, 2005). Unfortunately these areas are left uncultivable after one or two years as a result of prolonged drought for several years. This situation is reminiscent of shifting agriculture which leads to the removal of soil nutrients after a period of cultivation.

In addition, over-grazing in these degraded areas has had an adverse impact on the already affected area where soil erosion has moved huge masses of sediment to accumulate behind the dams that provide water for irrigation. Such a scenario of land degradation has become common in many underdeveloped or developing countries with poverty problem (Sunderlin *et al.*, 2005). For example, local community ignorance of sustainable land use and extreme poverty in Pakistan has led to watershed destruction (Shah, 2008).

Vegetation cover removal by rural people has also negatively affected the Earth and increased Carbon Dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emission, which is an important environmental indicator for sustainable development (Boggia & Cortina, 2010; Powell & Ham, 2008).

In most Middle East countries the ratio of the rural population is high. This leads to local communities being deeply dependent on the physical resources to supply their primary needs. On the other hand, economic threats and poor international investment cause more poverty for people in this part of the world due to resource limitation. Therefore, local people in these countries modify the land-use in line with the requirements for survival under the complex geographic environment and developing circumstances (Larson & Ribot, 2007).

#### 1.1 Background

Iran is one of the largest countries in the Middle East with a population of more than 70 million, 30% of which live in the rural areas (SCI, 2011). The main income sources of these large groups of people are agriculture, fishing and animal husbandry. Generally they rely greatly on the natural resources. Low standard of living and insufficient income from these traditional agricultural activities cause migration and rural depopulation resulting in economic and social problems.

Alamout, one of the well-known historical areas, is located between the North and central part of Iran. The local people are unaware of the environment problems and benefits. Lack of alternative projects for improving income has put natural resources under tremendous pressure. On the one hand, the local community requires food and income for their livelihood but on the other hand, the government is not able to support all the people in the country.

This situation jeopardizes natural resources conservation and biodiversity. Introducing a new proposition which has less impact on the environment would reduce the damage to natural resources. However, this proposal should involve three pillars of sustainable development. The first is ecological soundness, the second is economic viability and the third is social equitability (Altieri & Nicholls, 2008; Giddings *et al.*, 2002; Lawrence, 2005).

The International Ecotourism Society (2009) describes Ecotourism as responsible travel to natural area which is one of the best suggestions to protect natural resources and meeting human needs, simultaneously (Stronza, 2007). Nature-based tourism in comparison with other kinds of recreation could create good job opportunities and income in exchange for relatively less investment. It is also a win-win strategy for conservation and development (Wai, 2005) and enhancement of local community life by providing better job and entrepreneurial opportunities (Asadi & Kohan, 2011; Cengiz, 2007).

Participation of local communities should be considered for any ecotourism activities to improve the economic and social situation of the area. Many researchers believe that without involving rural communities in any ecotourism project it is less likely to succeed (Lai & Nepal, 2006; Ryan, 2002; Tsaur *et al.*, 2006). Abdullah *et al.* (2008) in their research on Taman Negara National Park of Malaysia argued that a cooperative management between stakeholders which cause increase local communities involvement can lead to a sustainable use of resources.

Many regions in Iran possess rich historical and natural attractive landscapes with high potential for tourism development and growth (Alavi & Yasin, 2000). Qazvin province has located more than one thousands of historical, cultural and natural heritage and ranks first in the number of registered monuments in the country (Qazvin Government, 2010a). In particular, Alamout possesses great potential for ecotourism due to the following factors:

- great weather,
- high mountains with attractive landscapes,
- diversity of flora especially medicinal and aromatic herbs,
- natural lakes,
- forest reserves,
- historical monuments,
- mineral water springs,
- large fruit gardens and
- harvesting festivals

However, despite all these attractions in Alamout and in many other destinations in Iran, which are ideal for ecotourism, lack of support and inefficient management plans for ecotourism have been barriers to the development of tourism in these destinations. As suggested by Sheykhi (2004) arguable issues in leisure and tourism as a growing phenomenon require sustainable thoughtful planning and investment. He confirmed that scarce on adequate planning in Iran tourism industry will lead to uncertainty of consumer needs, expectations, fashions and the like.

In contrast, Iran's neighbours such as Turkey and Armenia had a better managing plan for their tourism section. The Turkish government has focused on the tourism industry as one of the priority strategies for economic growth for the last two decades. Their share of tourism receipts in gross domestic product (GDP) grew 33.8% between 1965 and 2002 (Gunduz & Hatemi-J, 2005).

In addition, unstable policies and religious limitations in some countries discourage many foreign tourists from visiting these beautiful regions (Prihanto, 2003). Religious beliefs have an important role in the community and daily life of most Middle East countries, therefore in some Islamic countries (e.g. Brunei, Iran, and Saudi Arabia), the tourism industry is seen as having the potential to violate Islamic religious and cultural values and traditions, and tourism has not been a major development economic and development priority (Ghaderi & Henderson, 2012; Zamani-Farahani & Musa, 2012).

Political bans such as the world embargo which have been imposed on Iran by US in recent decades has caused an economic depression and therefore agencies are not able to import new facilities such as aeroplanes and as a result, there are accessibility problems for potential foreign tourists to Iran.

Professor O'Gorman (2007) believes that despite all the cultural heritage and natural attractions of Iran, most Europeans, for example, do not know about this country due to lack of advertising and marketing (Sadigh *et al.*, 2007).

## **1.2 Tourism in Alamout**

Based on the Strategic Development Plan, Alamout area is considered as one of the priorities for the development of tourism in the Qazvin province (Qazvin Government, 2010b). In this regard, the Land use plan of Qazvin has focused on improvement of Alamout roads as the main action, including the completion of Alamout-Tonekabon path which will connect Alamout to the north of Iran, and improvement of Qazvin-Rjaeidasht route to facilitate the accessibility of Alamout to Qazvin city.

Also in the cultural sector of this plan, heritage conservation is emphasized by improvement in Alamout native celebration such as harvesting of horticultural crops (hazelnuts, cherries and blueberries).

In the tourism sector, a particular attention has given to tourism projects around the Ovan Lake (natural landscape point) and the Zarabad village (cultural-religious



significance). There are also discussions for strengthening of the Alamout Cultural Heritage Base (ACHB), registration of Cultural Landscape of Alamout in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and promote the local industries such as weaving rugs through education and investment support (Qazvin Government, 2013) .

During discussion sessions with native managers of Alamout tourism sector, they confirmed an increasing growth on Alamout visitors in recent years. However the statistics were not so clear and precious, especially for other area, such as Ovan and Zarabad which don't have any gate or entrance ticket.

At the same time, local people have exposed their interest of accepting visitors in the area. Some of residents has changed their houses or modified their gardens in order to provide accommodation or eating services to the visitors. "Rasuli Guest House" can be nominated as the initiative model; a destroyed rural house, which has been renovated by financial and technical support of ACHB and prepared for the reception and accommodation of local and foreign visitors (Figure 1-1). Now, there are some other garden-restaurants in the entrance of the castle gate offering services to tourists.



**Figure 1-1: A Guest house in Alamout**

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

Although the Alamout area has the natural, historical and environmental potential for developing ecotourism and some people spend their holidays in this area to enjoy nature and other attractions, there are some limitations and barriers in the development of Ecotourism in this location.

One of the main obstacles is the traditional way of thinking and lifestyle in the rural communities which cause oppositions with any changes. Most of the current inhabitants are old and illiterate who are not familiar or aware of new projects, such as ecotourism, or its benefits and profits. This is because the younger active manpower has been attracted to the cities. Selected results of a recent census in Iran (2011) indicate a substantial movement of population from rural to the urban areas (SCI, 2011). Lack of facilities and difficult conditions in the rural areas, where harder work produces less income, has been driven the youngers and able to seek better opportunities to many cities of Iran, including Tehran, the national capital.

Population of East Alamout district, formerly called Roudbar-E-Alamout, was 9801 people based on last general census. Moalem-Kelayeh, the only city of this district, which consider as a big village, is only inhabited by 16.4% and rest are rural residents (SCI, 2011). The statistical annual of Qazvin (2011) reveals that despite of high literacy rate in cities, most of the villagers especially in far areas such as Alamout, are illiterate.

The unemployment rate in Qazvin province was reported 11.2% in 2010 which is higher than average rate of whole country. Therefore people in rural area of Alamout depend more and more on nature for their daily life. Moreover, continues years of drought have led to great reduction of the vegetation cover in Alamout.

The topography and climate situation is another natural barrier to establishing large industrial projects in the rural area. Despite of the delightful weather of summer, the winter snow blocks most of the road of area. Besides, more than % of the area has covered with mountains and deep valleys (Fattahi *et al.*, 2013) .

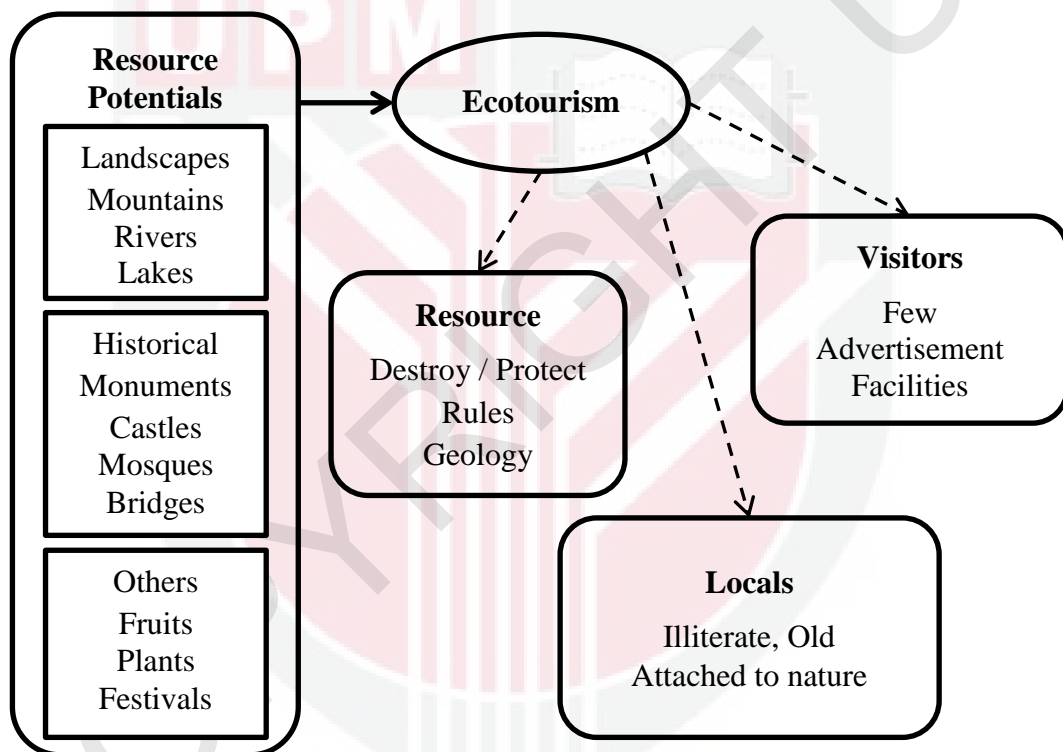
Another barrier to the development of ecotourism in Iran is related to the laws and legislation. The Iranian constitution stipulates that all natural resources belong to all the people of the country and are under the control of the government, but villagers have had a long traditional domination over the lands around their villages. Unspecified owners of public lands around the villages invariably make it very difficult to implement any public projects in these areas. The local communities have a deep connection with their natural resources and are afraid of losing their source of food. Therefore they are opposed to these areas being used for public purposes.

However, there are also other critical aspects that hamper the development of ecotourism in these areas, among them being the lack of information on visitors' expectations, their behaviour and needs. No study has been done to investigate visitors' attitudes and intention to revisit the area in Iran. On the other hand, the main question is: How much support will both visitors and locals give to develop ecotourism in the area? Do they intend to support such development?

A research on Domestic tourism in Iran, found a distinct growth of tourism activities in the household consumption basket, which caused greater focus on the development of appropriate tourism products and new attraction. This study declared that Iranian tourism decision-makers should consider these limitations in the development plans (Ghaderi, 2011).

The above problems become even more insurmountable when it realized that there is no existing reliable information to indicate the perceptions of the local community toward ecotourism development and how they may react to the visitors that would come there. The potential economic and social outcomes have not yet been evaluated. In fact, it is not even known if the local community would support ecotourism development in Iran.

To sum up, the beautiful attractive area of Alamout has not been developed as an Ecotourism destination, due to the unidentified level of support from stakeholders. This study has focused on the local community and visitors' intention to be involved and support ecotourism development in the area based on their perceptions about this development's impacts. The summary of issues, potentials and problems of Alamout area has shown in Figure 1-2



**Figure 1-2: Summary of issues in Ecotourism development of Alamout**

#### 1.4 Gap in the Field

Different studies have been done on ecotourism as a sustainable approach to managing natural resources (Libosada Jr, 2009; Weinberg *et al.*, 2002; Winson, 2006). There has been much research showing the effects of ecotourism on the conservation of forests and mountain ranges from heavy utilization and destructive logging (Stronza, 2007; Wunder, 1999).

Most research on ecotourism has focused on one aspect or another and there has not been much research done that has taken a holistic view of the subject and investigated it on a macro level. Some have focused on sustainability on the social dimension; others have merely investigated only the economic or the environmental (Bonimy, 2008; Dyer *et al.*, 2007; King *et al.*, 1993; Puczko & Rätz, 2000; Sharma *et al.*, 2008; Spanou *et al.*, 2012; Zamani-Farahani & Musa, 2012; Zhang & Lei, 2012),

Individual stakeholder perceptions and attitudes have been widely investigated in much of the research. Most studies reviewed so far, however, suffer from the fact that they were focused only on one group, for example residents (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011; Andereck *et al.*, 2005; Dyer *et al.*, 2007; Holladay & Ormsby, 2011; Sirivongs & Tsuchiya, 2012) or visitors (Arabatzis & Grigoroudis, 2010; Chaminuka *et al.*, 2012; Weaver & Lawton, 2004). When referring to the amount of research conducted on individual stakeholder groups, limited research has been done to indicate the perceptions of different stakeholder groups.

Some studies investigating more than one stakeholder group have been carried out on perception of tourism among residents and tourists (Concu & Atzeni, 2012; Hearne & Santos, 2005; Puczko & Rätz, 2000), residents and entrepreneurs (Caneday & Zeiger, 1991; Pizam, 1978). But very little research has been done all stakeholders' perception of ecotourism development (Choi & Sirakaya, 2006; Tsaur *et al.*, 2006). In their comprehensive study of tourism impacts in rural eastern North Carolina, Byrd *et al.* (2009) concluded that stakeholders' perceptions differ from one group to another and therefore community planners and management organizations need to communicate with all stakeholders in the community.

In addition, most studies have focused on resident quality of life by investigating their perception of tourism impact (Andereck *et al.*, 2005; Gursoy *et al.*, 2002; Jurowski *et al.*, 1997; Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2012; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011a; Sirakaya *et al.*, 2002; Yoon *et al.*, 2001). However, far too little attention has been paid to ecotourism development support and intention to be involved by investigating different stakeholders' points of view.

Furthermore, in the case of Iran very few academic researchers have focused on the tourism industry. One research exists which investigated the residents' attitude and perception toward tourism development in Masooleh city in Iran (Zamani-Farahani & Musa, 2008) but ecotourism development support from visitors and locals' views was not studied.

## **1.5 Theoretical Background**

In ecotourism studies there are three important components consisting of resource, community, and tourism and each of them has a representative (Ross & Wall, 1999a, 1999b; Tsaur *et al.*, 2006). Administrator (Government, NGO ...) is the representative of the resource, while local people and visitors represent the community and tourism, respectively. Some scholars such as Choi & Sirakaya (2006) add other groups to these three main pillars, for example, tour operators and even community tourism responsible groups.

One of the main functions of ecotourism is the involvement of local communities in the satisfying experience of visitors by protecting the natural resources (Hall & Lew, 1998; Lovelock, 2002; Stabler, 1997; Torres Delgado, 2013). Figure 1-3 demonstrates this relationship in a graphical form.

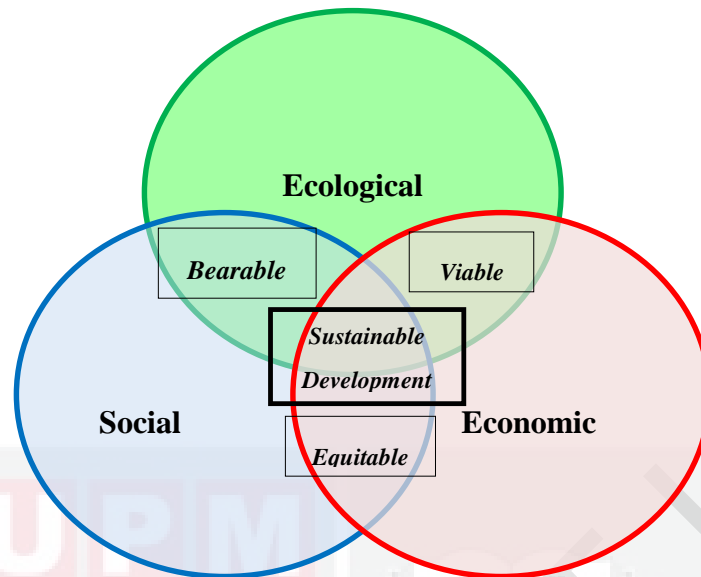


**Figure 1-3: Three components and stakeholders of Ecotourism**

*Adapted from (Tsaour et al., 2006)*

The most acceptable issue of Sustainable development is improving the present achievements while considering next generation needs. Sustainable development was officially conceptualized by the Brundtland Commission in the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) (WCED, 1987) publications which presented two pillar for sustainable development; environment and development concerns. Later, this model was extended and improved during Rio conference and thereafter, scholars have divided “development concerns” into two main aspects; Economic and Social (Gibson, 2001; Pope *et al.*, 2004; Rametsteiner *et al.*, 2011).

These three components of sustainability have been widely practised in tourism development researches. Most tourism researchers apply Ecological instead of Environmental, which express the natural resources impact with greater affect (Butler, 1999; Choi & Murray, 2010; Choi & Sirakaya, 2006; Gursoy *et al.*, 2002). Sustainable management three circles are presented in Figure 1-4.



**Figure 1-4: Three dimensions of sustainable development**

Three theories were adopted in this study to find out the relevant variables and their relationships. First one is Theory of Reasoned Action which explains the perception, intention and action. Theory of reasoned action is a classified model which asserts that behaviour is the instant antecedent of the corresponding behavioural intention. The behavioural intention itself is affected by attitude and subjective norms and both of them are influenced by beliefs and perceptions (Icek Ajzen, 1991; Lai & Nepal, 2006; Lepp, 2007).

Social Exchange Theory is the second which explicates each person's involvement in different activities concerning the advantages and tangible or intangible profits which are gained from that activity. However, this is a very complicated process and is difficult to understand the type of relationship and interaction (Ap, 1992; Latkova, 2008).

The third theory applied in this study is Stakeholder Theory, which posits that an industry's success depends on its ability to manage relationships with its stakeholders (Freeman, 1984). Stakeholder theory explains that people who share something in common try to care and conserve everything which has value for them (Marshall et al., 2010). Table 1-1 presents main core and usage of each theory in the tourism industry.

**Table 1-1: Summary of theories**

<b>Theory</b>	<b>Developer</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Main core</b>	<b>Factors that cover in research model</b>
Reasoned Action	Fishbein and Ajzen	1975	Attitude, Subjective norm	Perception, Intention
Social Exchange Theory	Emerson	1976	Involvement, profit	Involvement, Support
Stakeholder Theory	Freeman	1984	Manage divers constituent, parties relationships	Stakeholders involvement

## 1.6 Research Hypothesis

This study is going to find out the main stakeholders' intention to be involved and support ecotourism development in the area based on their perception about these development impacts.

The study framework proposed in Figure 1-5 demonstrates 14 hypotheses of this research.

- H1: There is a positive relationship between Visitors' Positive impacts perceptions and their intention to be involved in ecotourism development
- H2: There is a Negative relationship between Visitors' Negative impacts perceptions and their intention to be involved in ecotourism development
- H3: There is a positive relationship between Locals' Positive impacts perceptions and their intention to be involved in ecotourism development
- H4: There is a Negative relationship between Locals' Negative impacts perceptions and their intention to be involved in ecotourism development
- H5: There is a Positive relationship between Visitors' satisfaction of visit and their support of ecotourism development
- H6: There is a Positive relationship between Locals' intention to be involved in Ecotourism development and their support of ecotourism development
- H7: Gender has a moderate effect on Visitors' impacts perceptions and their satisfaction of visit.
- H8: Gender has a moderate effect on Locals' impacts perceptions and their intention to be involved in ecotourism development



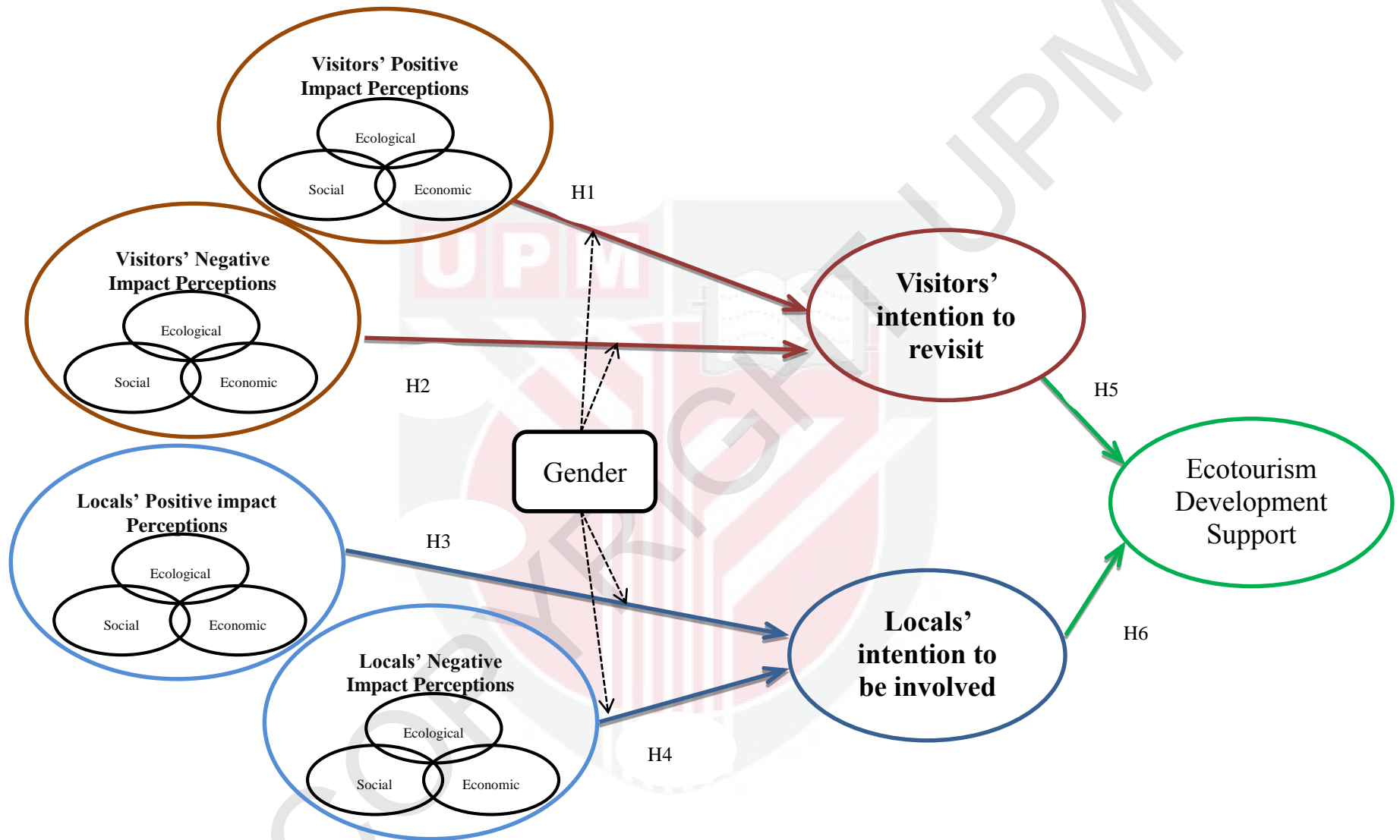


Figure 1-5: Study Framework

### **1.7 Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of this study is to ascertain stakeholders' support for ecotourism development in the Alamout area of Iran.

Sub objectives are:

1. To find out ecological, economic and social positive and negative impacts for ecotourism development in the area.
2. To examine the relationship between stakeholders' perceptions and intention of involvement in ecotourism development in the area.
3. To determine the visitors and local communities' support of ecotourism development in the area.

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