Linking Tourism Businesses with Local Producers and Its Role in Safeguarding Destination Economic Benefits: An Analytical–Comparative Review and Policy Implications for Iran



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Abstract: This study aimed to analytically and comparatively examine the mechanisms through which tourism businesses can be linked with local producers, assess the contribution of these linkages to retaining and distributing economic benefits within tourism destinations, and derive policy implications applicable to Iran. The study employed a qualitative analytical–comparative review design. Academic and institutional sources published between 2010 and 2026 were identified through Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and relevant organizational repositories. From 684 initially identified records, 126 duplicates were removed and 558 records were screened. Following title, abstract, and full-text assessment, 72 documents met the inclusion criteria, comprising 54 peer-reviewed articles and 18 institutional or policy publications. Data were extracted using a structured review protocol and analyzed through thematic coding, axial coding, cross-context comparison, and policy-oriented synthesis. The analysis indicated that destination economic benefits were strengthened when tourism enterprises were systematically connected to local producers through direct procurement, contractual purchasing, producer cooperatives, aggregation mechanisms, local certification, destination branding, culinary and handicraft integration, digital supplier platforms, and supplier-development programs. Stronger linkages were associated with reduced economic leakage, greater local income retention, wider participation of SMEs, more diversified producer income, stronger multiplier effects, and enhanced destination resilience. However, fragmented production, inconsistent quality, inadequate certification, weak logistics, limited finance, poor market information, unfavorable payment conditions, and institutional fragmentation constrained local participation. Comparative evidence showed that integrated destination value-chain governance produced more durable outcomes than isolated purchasing initiatives. Strengthening tourism-local producer linkages can improve the territorial retention and distribution of tourism-generated value, but effective implementation requires coordinated interventions addressing production capacity, procurement, logistics, standards, finance, digital connectivity, branding, and cross-sector governance; for Iran, destination-level value-chain coordination offers a practical framework for converting tourism demand into broader local economic development.

Keywords: Tourism businesses; local producers; local procurement; destination economic benefits; economic leakage; tourism value chain; sustainable tourism; Iran

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1. Introduction

Tourism is increasingly recognized not merely as a service sector centered on mobility, accommodation, hospitality, and leisure consumption, but as a complex economic system whose developmental significance depends on the extent to which tourism expenditure becomes connected to productive activities within the destination. The economic contribution of tourism is therefore determined not only by visitor numbers, length of stay, or aggregate spending, but also by the structure of relationships linking tourism businesses to local suppliers,

producers, entrepreneurs, workers, and supporting institutions. From this perspective, destinations derive stronger and more durable benefits when tourism demand stimulates local agriculture, food processing, handicrafts, retail activity, transportation, cultural production, digital services, and small-enterprise development rather than relying heavily on external supply chains. The sustainability and competitiveness of tourism destinations are consequently inseparable from their capacity to create economic linkages across sectors and to retain a substantial proportion of tourism-generated value within the local economy [1, 2].

Destination competitiveness has traditionally been discussed in terms of resources, infrastructure, service quality, accessibility, branding, governance, and the capacity to provide distinctive visitor experiences. More recent interpretations, however, increasingly emphasize the internal economic architecture of destinations and the resilience of the business ecosystems through which tourism activity is organized. A destination may perform well in attracting tourists while remaining economically vulnerable if a large proportion of food, merchandise, services, technology, finance, and operational inputs is sourced from outside the destination. In such circumstances, gross tourism expenditure may overstate the actual developmental value retained locally. Conversely, stronger local production linkages can reinforce destination competitiveness by generating differentiated products, authentic experiences, resilient supply networks, and broader community support for tourism development [3, 4]. Economic resilience in tourism businesses is particularly important in periods of crisis, demand volatility, or disruption, because businesses embedded within diversified local networks may be better positioned to adapt their sourcing strategies, mobilize local knowledge, and sustain economic circulation within destination communities [5, 6].

The relationship between tourism businesses and local producers is especially important because tourism simultaneously creates direct consumer demand and intermediate business demand. Hotels, restaurants, guesthouses, tour operators, attractions, event businesses, and other tourism enterprises purchase substantial quantities of goods and services required for their daily operations. These purchases can either reinforce local economic systems or contribute to economic leakage, depending on where suppliers are located and how value chains are structured. Local procurement enables tourism businesses to redirect part of their operating expenditure toward farmers, food processors, craftspeople, rural entrepreneurs, service providers, and micro and small enterprises within the destination. Such relationships can generate stable markets for local producers, diversify income sources, increase employment, improve enterprise capabilities, and extend tourism benefits beyond the conventional boundaries of the hospitality sector. The potential for these linkages is particularly significant in rural and peripheral destinations, where tourism may coexist with agriculture, food production, crafts, traditional industries, and community-based enterprise [7, 8].

Rural tourism offers a particularly clear example of the interdependence between tourism and local production. In rural destinations, visitors frequently seek landscapes, food, cultural heritage, traditional products, local lifestyles, and experiences that are directly connected to locally embedded productive systems. Consequently, the separation of tourism policy from agricultural, rural-development, and small-business policy may weaken the economic potential of tourism. Community-based and agribusiness-oriented approaches demonstrate that rural tourism can support food security, local entrepreneurship, and productive diversification when destination planning intentionally connects tourism demand with local economic activities [7]. Theme routes, culinary routes, cultural itineraries, and similar forms of territorial product development can further strengthen these relationships by transforming dispersed local producers and attractions into interconnected tourism offerings that encourage visitors to travel through and spend within a broader local area [9]. In this sense, local producers are not only suppliers to tourism businesses but may also become part of the tourism product itself.

Culinary tourism illustrates this dual role particularly well. Locally produced foods can serve as inputs purchased by accommodation and food-service businesses while simultaneously functioning as destination attractions, cultural symbols, and elements of place identity. Culinary experiences can strengthen local marketplaces by increasing demand for agricultural products, processed foods, traditional recipes, and small-scale food enterprises, thereby providing a mechanism through which visitor expenditure reaches producers more directly [10]. Similar processes occur in handicrafts, where locally made products can connect cultural heritage, visitor consumption, and small-enterprise income. These linkages are particularly valuable when local products are clearly differentiated from imported or externally manufactured substitutes and when tourists are able to identify the territorial origin and cultural significance of what they purchase. Tourism value creation therefore depends not only on service provision but also on the capacity to embed local production, culture, and entrepreneurship within the visitor economy.

The development of local tourism value chains also depends strongly on entrepreneurship and business-model innovation. Tourism micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises often operate under resource constraints, uncertain demand, limited access to finance, and high levels of competition. Nevertheless, they are important intermediaries between visitor demand and local production because they frequently purchase from other small enterprises and adapt products to local market conditions. Business-model approaches can help tourism enterprises identify how local resources, partnerships, and value propositions may be transformed into commercially viable products [11]. The experience of tourism MSMEs also shows that intangible resources such as knowledge, intellectual capital, local identity, and social or spiritual values can shape their capacity to compete and integrate into specialized tourism markets [12]. Social entrepreneurship is similarly relevant, particularly in rural destinations where the objective extends beyond firm-level profitability to include community participation, livelihood improvement, local empowerment, and the creation of shared economic value [13].

The capacity of tourism enterprises to establish effective local linkages is also influenced by managerial knowledge, workforce competencies, and organizational innovation. Tourism businesses require the ability to identify suitable local suppliers, evaluate product quality, coordinate purchasing, manage contracts, communicate demand specifications, and integrate local products into service design and marketing. Knowledge management has therefore become an important factor in tourism enterprise competitiveness, especially where firms operate in dynamic environments requiring continuous adaptation and collaboration [4]. Human-resource competencies likewise shape the ability of tourism organizations to engage effectively with changing business models and stakeholder networks [14]. Innovative work behavior and absorptive capacity further determine whether hospitality and tourism businesses can recognize external knowledge, incorporate new ideas, and redesign their operations in response to emerging market opportunities [15]. These capabilities are highly relevant to local sourcing because collaboration with small producers often requires adaptation rather than simple replication of conventional procurement routines.

Financial and managerial systems are equally important for sustaining such relationships. Tourism enterprises need accurate accounting information, cost analysis, cash-flow control, and performance monitoring if they are to compare local procurement alternatives, assess supplier arrangements, and manage the financial implications of new sourcing models [16, 17]. The economic feasibility of local procurement cannot therefore be assessed solely in terms of nominal purchase price. Transaction costs, delivery reliability, inventory requirements, product quality, payment conditions, and the reputational or experiential value of local products also influence purchasing decisions. Modern management systems capable of capturing these broader dimensions can help businesses

identify when local sourcing contributes not only to sustainability objectives but also to commercial resilience and competitive positioning.

Digital transformation is increasingly reshaping these relationships. Tourism businesses now use websites, social media, online booking systems, digital marketing, business platforms, data analytics, and emerging technologies to access customers and coordinate commercial activities. Digital marketing has become particularly important for increasing visibility, reaching niche markets, and supporting tourism business sustainability [18, 19]. Small and medium-sized tourism enterprises can also use online business platforms to overcome geographical limitations and establish new commercial relationships, although adoption depends on technological capabilities, perceived usefulness, organizational readiness, and access to digital infrastructure [20]. For local producers, digital platforms can reduce information asymmetry by making products, prices, capacities, and contact information visible to tourism enterprises. In rural destinations, electronic tourism development can also connect fragmented local businesses and communities more effectively to wider tourism markets [21].

Emerging technologies may further alter destination value chains. Blockchain has been proposed as a mechanism for increasing transparency, traceability, and trust within tourism business models, potentially improving coordination among multiple actors in complex tourism ecosystems [22]. Artificial intelligence is likewise becoming central to discussions of productivity, business value, decision-making, and future competitiveness in tourism and hospitality [23]. AI-enabled systems may assist tourism enterprises in demand forecasting, supplier selection, inventory management, personalization, and operational optimization, thereby influencing the manner in which local sourcing decisions are made. From a governance perspective, intelligent destination systems can support coordinated planning, data-driven resource allocation, and more responsive destination management [24]. AI-based approaches are also increasingly linked with circular-economy objectives, suggesting that technology can help tourism systems reduce waste, optimize resource use, and strengthen sustainability-oriented business networks if organizational resistance and implementation barriers are effectively addressed [25].

Technological development, however, does not eliminate the importance of physical and social relationships. Virtual reality and other digital marketing tools can enhance destination promotion and consumer experience, but the economic benefits generated by increased demand ultimately depend on how expenditure is distributed through destination businesses and supply chains [26]. Similarly, business intelligence and improved relationships between knowledge-producing institutions and industry can strengthen organizational decision-making, innovation, and knowledge transfer [27]. For tourism destinations, this suggests that digital innovation should be connected to local economic-development objectives. Supplier databases, digital procurement platforms, data-sharing systems, and destination-level market intelligence may be more valuable when they are explicitly designed to reduce coordination failures between tourism businesses and local producers rather than being used exclusively for visitor-facing marketing.

Sustainability provides another central rationale for strengthening local linkages. Tourism businesses face increasing expectations to reduce environmental impacts, improve social responsibility, support local communities, and align their activities with sustainable development objectives. Environmental leadership can influence employees' green behavior and embed sustainability more deeply within tourism organizations [28]. At destination level, sustainability is increasingly interpreted through the broader framework of the Sustainable Development Goals, linking tourism with employment, responsible consumption, community development, environmental protection, and inclusive economic growth [2]. Local sourcing may contribute to these objectives by shortening some supply chains, supporting community livelihoods, creating demand for locally embedded enterprises, and

reinforcing destination identities. Nevertheless, local sourcing should not be assumed to be inherently sustainable; its contribution depends on production methods, logistics, labor conditions, resource use, and the distribution of value among participants.

The economic-development dimension is especially relevant for countries seeking to use tourism as a mechanism for income generation and regional development. Evidence from Iran and comparable tourism economies indicates that tourism can contribute to economic growth, but the magnitude and distribution of benefits depend on broader economic and institutional conditions [29]. In destinations such as Qeshm Island, sustainable tourism and ecotourism have been discussed in relation to foreign-exchange earnings and local economic development, emphasizing the need to connect tourism development strategies with the productive capacities and distinctive resources of the destination [30]. Such contexts demonstrate that tourism policy cannot be reduced to attracting visitors; it must also determine how tourism-generated demand supports local enterprise, employment, production, and investment.

Iran is particularly relevant to this issue because many of its tourism destinations possess significant agricultural, culinary, handicraft, cultural, ecological, and rural resources that could be more closely integrated with tourism businesses. Rural tourism areas in provinces such as Gilan, Kermanshah, and Kurdistan demonstrate the importance of social entrepreneurship, electronic tourism, business resilience, and local participation in strengthening destination economies [6, 13, 21]. However, the existence of local resources does not necessarily guarantee that tourism businesses will purchase from local suppliers or that tourism expenditure will circulate effectively within the destination. Fragmented production, weak coordination, uneven standards, insufficient digital integration, limited marketing capacity, and institutional separation between tourism, agriculture, handicrafts, and rural development can restrict the economic benefits captured locally.

The development of more integrated tourism economies therefore requires attention to institutional and organizational relationships. Local communities need mechanisms through which they can participate in tourism not merely as wage labor but also as producers, suppliers, entrepreneurs, and business partners. Community engagement and business innovation can strengthen the contribution of rural tourism to sustainable development when communities possess meaningful roles in value creation and decision-making [8]. At the same time, businesses need stable and commercially workable supply arrangements. This makes coordination mechanisms such as producer associations, destination-level supplier networks, quality-support programs, digital directories, local product certification, business-to-business events, and procurement partnerships especially important.

The broader concept of destination resilience reinforces this argument. Tourism businesses operate within interconnected systems in which shocks affecting transportation, global supply chains, consumer preferences, technology, or environmental conditions can rapidly influence business continuity. Local supplier diversification can provide an additional source of adaptability where external supply systems become costly or unreliable. Economic security in tourism therefore involves not only firm-level financial strength but also the resilience of relationships among businesses and their surrounding economic environment [3]. Rural tourism-business resilience likewise depends on social, institutional, market, and local-resource conditions rather than on internal business characteristics alone [6]. Stronger producer-business networks can consequently be viewed as both a local-development mechanism and a resilience strategy.

At the same time, tourism businesses must continue to innovate in how they define and communicate value. Business-model tools emphasize that destinations and enterprises need to identify specific customer segments, value propositions, channels, partnerships, revenue structures, and key resources if they are to transform local

assets into economically viable tourism products [11]. Local producers can occupy several positions within such models: they may act as suppliers, co-creators of experiences, retailers, cultural interpreters, or destination-brand partners. The ability to convert these relationships into higher local value added depends on strategic management, organizational learning, workforce competencies, and effective marketing [14, 15]. Digital communication further enables businesses to tell the stories of local products and producers, potentially increasing tourists' willingness to purchase authentic goods and experiences [18].

The expansion of smart and technologically enabled tourism adds a further layer to this debate. Intelligent destination governance, artificial intelligence, blockchain, and digital platforms can potentially improve coordination, transparency, forecasting, and market matching across tourism value chains [22-24]. However, technology creates developmental value only when it strengthens economically meaningful relationships. A destination may become technologically sophisticated while continuing to rely on external suppliers and allowing much of its tourism revenue to leak outward. The policy challenge is therefore to align digital transformation with local economic-development goals. This includes using technology to identify local suppliers, forecast tourism-business demand, improve inventory coordination, certify product origins, facilitate payments, monitor procurement, and strengthen local marketplace access [20, 25].

Despite the increasing attention to tourism sustainability, competitiveness, resilience, digitalization, rural development, and enterprise innovation, the specific relationship between tourism businesses and local producers remains fragmented across multiple bodies of literature. Some studies focus on community-based tourism and rural entrepreneurship, others emphasize digital transformation, competitiveness, accounting, resilience, culinary tourism, or sustainable business models, and still others examine destination governance and economic development. Consequently, there remains a need to bring these perspectives together around a central economic question: how can tourism demand be structurally connected to local production so that a greater proportion of tourism-generated value is retained within the destination? This question is particularly important in countries such as Iran, where tourism destinations frequently possess substantial local productive resources but may lack the institutional and market mechanisms required to connect them systematically with tourism businesses.

Accordingly, the aim of this study is to analytically and comparatively examine the mechanisms through which tourism businesses can be linked with local producers, assess the role of these linkages in retaining and distributing economic benefits within tourism destinations, and derive contextually relevant policy implications for strengthening such relationships in Iran.

2. Methods and Materials

This study employed a qualitative analytical–comparative review design to examine how linkages between tourism businesses and local producers contribute to the retention, circulation, and distribution of economic benefits within tourism destinations and to derive policy implications applicable to the Iranian tourism sector. The analytical–comparative approach was selected because the phenomenon under investigation extends beyond the assessment of a single tourism industry relationship and involves interconnected dimensions of destination supply chains, local sourcing, small and medium-sized enterprises, agricultural and handicraft production, community participation, tourism leakage, value-chain integration, and destination governance. Accordingly, the study combined structured review procedures with thematic and cross-context comparative analysis in order to identify recurring mechanisms, institutional arrangements, implementation barriers, and policy instruments through which tourism expenditure can be more effectively connected to locally produced goods and services. The unit of analysis

consisted of scholarly publications and institutional or policy documents addressing linkages between tourism enterprises and local producers in different destination contexts. The review covered material published from 2010 through 2026 in order to capture both established approaches to tourism-local economy integration and more recent developments concerning sustainable tourism, inclusive value chains, local procurement, resilient destination economies, and community-based production systems. The initial search generated 684 records. Following removal of 126 duplicate records, 558 documents remained for title and abstract screening. At this stage, 397 documents were excluded because their principal focus was unrelated to economic linkages between tourism businesses and local production, leaving 161 documents for full-text assessment. A further 89 documents were excluded because they did not provide sufficiently detailed empirical, conceptual, comparative, or policy evidence concerning local sourcing, producer-business relationships, tourism value chains, economic leakage, or destination-level benefit retention. The final analytical sample therefore consisted of exactly 72 documents. Of these, 54 were peer-reviewed journal articles and 18 were institutional reports, policy documents, or analytical publications issued by international, national, or destination-level organizations. The sample incorporated evidence from both developed and developing tourism destinations and deliberately included studies from Europe, Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East to permit comparison across differing institutional, economic, geographic, and tourism-development conditions. Documents were included when they addressed at least one substantive relationship between tourism businesses, including accommodation establishments, restaurants, tour operators, visitor attractions, or other tourism service providers, and local producers such as farmers, food processors, artisans, handicraft enterprises, fisheries, rural enterprises, cooperatives, or other locally embedded suppliers. Studies dealing exclusively with tourist demand, destination marketing, employment generation, or community attitudes without examining production, procurement, supply-chain, or value-chain relationships were excluded. The resulting sample was sufficiently heterogeneous to permit identification of both context-specific experiences and recurrent structural patterns relevant to the formulation of policy recommendations for Iran.

Data were collected through a structured document-review protocol developed specifically for the objectives of the study. Academic literature was identified through searches of Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and relevant tourism, development, and rural-economy databases and publication repositories. Institutional evidence was obtained from publications produced by international development and tourism organizations, government agencies, destination management institutions, and organizations concerned with local economic development, sustainable tourism, agricultural value chains, and small-enterprise development. Searches were conducted using combinations of English terms including “tourism businesses,” “local producers,” “local sourcing,” “local procurement,” “tourism supply chain,” “tourism value chain,” “local food and tourism,” “tourism and agriculture linkages,” “tourism and handicrafts,” “economic leakage,” “local economic benefits,” “destination economy,” “community-based tourism,” “inclusive tourism value chains,” “local enterprise development,” and “tourism multiplier.” Persian-language searches used conceptually corresponding combinations related to tourism businesses, local production, local supply chains, handicrafts, agricultural products, rural tourism, local entrepreneurship, economic leakage, and the retention of tourism revenue at destination level. A standardized extraction form was used to ensure consistency in the collection of information from all 72 documents. For each source, the review recorded publication characteristics, country or destination context, type of tourism activity, category of local producer, form of business-producer linkage, mechanisms of market access, procurement arrangements, intermediary structures, governance arrangements, reported economic outcomes, constraints on local participation, facilitating conditions, and proposed policy interventions. Particular attention was given to

evidence concerning the proportion of tourism expenditure retained within destinations, substitution of imported or externally sourced inputs with local products, opportunities created for micro and small enterprises, stability of producer demand, shortening of supply chains, development of producer cooperatives and networks, improvement of product quality and standardization, access to finance and infrastructure, and the role of destination institutions in coordinating buyers and suppliers. A separate comparative coding component was incorporated into the extraction form to distinguish between direct procurement relationships, cooperative and collective supply arrangements, intermediary-based models, integrated tourism-agriculture or tourism-handicraft networks, destination branding arrangements, local-product certification systems, farmers' or artisans' markets connected to tourism demand, and digitally mediated business-to-producer linkages. The document-review tool also captured barriers repeatedly identified in the literature, including fragmented production, inconsistent quantity and quality, seasonality, inadequate logistics, limited bargaining power of producers, weak market information, informality, insufficient certification, financial constraints, dominance of external suppliers, and limited institutional coordination. To enhance the analytical relevance of the review for Iran, a final section of the extraction protocol classified each identified mechanism according to its potential transferability to the Iranian context, taking into consideration the structure of domestic tourism enterprises, the predominance of small-scale producers, the importance of agricultural and handicraft production in many tourism destinations, regional disparities, institutional fragmentation, and the need to increase the local retention of tourism-generated income.

The collected material was analyzed through an integrated thematic and comparative analysis conducted in several iterative stages. Initially, the full analytical sample was subjected to open coding to identify concepts describing the ways in which tourism businesses interact economically with local producers. Codes were generated for direct purchasing, contractual supply, local food procurement, handicraft retailing, cooperative marketing, producer aggregation, business-to-business networking, quality upgrading, certification, logistical coordination, capacity building, financial support, digital market access, destination branding, and institutional facilitation. The initial codes were subsequently grouped into broader analytical categories representing the principal mechanisms through which stronger tourism-production linkages affect destination economies. Particular emphasis was placed on mechanisms associated with local income retention, reduction of economic leakage, expansion of market opportunities for local enterprises, diversification of producer income, increased tourism multiplier effects, greater resilience of destination supply chains, and wider distribution of tourism benefits among local actors. In a second stage, axial coding was used to examine relationships among linkage mechanisms, enabling conditions, barriers, and economic outcomes. This process allowed the analysis to distinguish between the existence of a business-producer relationship and the institutional and market conditions required for that relationship to generate durable economic benefits. For example, local procurement was analyzed not simply as purchasing from geographically proximate suppliers but as an economic process influenced by production capacity, quality standards, aggregation mechanisms, logistics, contractual stability, access to information, bargaining relationships, and institutional support. The analysis therefore considered both the direct effects of purchasing locally and the broader structures through which tourism expenditure circulates within a destination economy.

The comparative stage examined similarities and differences across destination types, geographical settings, levels of economic development, and forms of tourism. Evidence from mature tourism economies was compared with evidence from developing and emerging destinations in order to determine which mechanisms were broadly transferable and which depended heavily on specific institutional conditions. Particular comparisons were made between rural and urban destinations, mass-tourism and small-scale destinations, agricultural and handicraft

supply chains, and destinations characterized by strong versus weak coordination between tourism enterprises and producer organizations. Cross-case synthesis was used to identify recurrent patterns in successful linkage models. These patterns included the presence of intermediary or coordinating organizations, aggregation of small producers, establishment of predictable procurement arrangements, improvement of standards and product consistency, development of destination-specific brands, integration of local products into the visitor experience, and supportive public policies capable of addressing market failures that individual tourism businesses or producers could not resolve independently. Negative or unsuccessful cases were also examined in order to identify circumstances in which nominal promotion of local sourcing did not translate into meaningful local economic benefits, particularly where tourism enterprises remained dependent on large external distributors or where local producers lacked the scale, organization, quality assurance, finance, or logistical capacity required to enter formal tourism supply chains.

In the final analytical stage, the findings were synthesized into a policy-oriented framework for Iran. Rather than transferring international practices mechanically, each recurring intervention was evaluated in terms of its institutional feasibility, expected contribution to local economic benefit retention, requirements for implementation, and compatibility with the characteristics of Iranian tourism destinations and local production systems. Policy implications were derived by comparing international evidence with structural issues relevant to Iran, including fragmented relationships among tourism enterprises and producers, the small scale of many agricultural and handicraft suppliers, uneven product standards, limited organized procurement channels, inadequate market information, and the need for stronger coordination among tourism, agricultural, rural-development, handicraft, municipal, and private-sector institutions. The synthesis consequently focused on policy measures capable of strengthening both the demand side and the supply side of local tourism value chains, including organized local procurement mechanisms, producer networks and cooperatives, supplier databases, contractual and digital marketplaces, quality and certification support, destination branding, financial and technical assistance, and institutional arrangements for continuous coordination between tourism businesses and locally embedded producers. Throughout the analysis, conclusions were retained only when they were supported by recurrent evidence across multiple documents or when context-specific findings provided a clearly identifiable mechanism relevant to the analytical objectives of the study. This procedure enabled the review to move beyond descriptive summarization and to develop a comparative explanation of how tourism-local production linkages can contribute to safeguarding and distributing economic benefits within destinations and how these mechanisms may be adapted to the institutional and economic conditions of Iran.

3. Findings and Results

The literature-selection process was conducted through consecutive identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion stages. The database and institutional-source searches initially yielded 684 records related to the economic relationships between tourism businesses and local producers. These records covered a broad range of themes, including tourism supply chains, local procurement, tourism-agriculture linkages, handicraft commercialization, destination value chains, community-based tourism, economic leakage, local enterprise development, and tourism multiplier effects. After removal of 126 duplicate records identified across databases and publication repositories, 558 unique records remained for title and abstract screening. During this stage, 397 records were excluded because their substantive focus did not correspond sufficiently to the research objectives. The most common reasons for exclusion included an exclusive focus on tourist satisfaction or destination

image, general employment effects of tourism without consideration of local production linkages, tourism marketing studies unrelated to supplier relationships, environmental sustainability without an economic supply-chain dimension, and community-attitude studies that did not examine the relationship between tourism enterprises and locally embedded producers. Consequently, 161 documents were retained for full-text assessment.

The eligibility assessment focused on whether each document provided sufficiently detailed empirical, conceptual, comparative, or policy evidence concerning relationships between tourism enterprises and local producers and whether it contained identifiable findings regarding local sourcing, supply-chain integration, market access, economic leakage, destination-level income retention, local enterprise participation, or relevant governance mechanisms. Of the 161 full-text documents assessed, 89 were excluded. Among these, 27 discussed tourism-led local development only at a general level without analyzing producer-enterprise relationships, 21 addressed local economic impacts without identifying mechanisms through which tourism businesses sourced goods or services locally, 18 provided insufficient methodological or analytical detail, 13 focused primarily on tourism employment rather than production and procurement relationships, and 10 were excluded because the available text did not provide adequate evidence for thematic or comparative coding. The final analytical sample therefore consisted of 72 documents. The final sample included 54 peer-reviewed journal articles and 18 institutional reports, policy documents, or analytical publications. The evidence covered multiple geographical regions and destination types and incorporated experiences from both advanced and developing tourism economies. This diversity allowed the analysis to distinguish broadly recurring mechanisms from context-dependent interventions and provided an appropriate evidential basis for deriving policy implications for Iran.

Table 1. Article Selection Process and Composition of the Final Analytical Sample

Stage of review	Number of records/documents	Records excluded	Main basis for retention or exclusion
Records identified through database and institutional searches	684	—	Records potentially relevant to tourism businesses, local producers, local sourcing, tourism value chains, tourism-agriculture linkages, handicrafts, economic leakage, and destination economic benefits
Duplicate records removed	684	126	Duplicate publications identified across databases, repositories, and institutional sources
Unique records screened by title and abstract	558	397	Records excluded when the primary focus was unrelated to tourism-local production linkages, procurement, value chains, or destination-level economic benefit retention
Full-text documents assessed for eligibility	161	89	Documents assessed for substantive evidence concerning local sourcing, producer-business relationships, supply-chain mechanisms, economic leakage, market access, or destination governance
Full-text documents excluded for general local-development focus without explicit producer-business linkage	161	27	Tourism-local development discussed without identifiable supply-chain, procurement, or producer-enterprise mechanisms
Full-text documents excluded for reporting economic impacts without linkage mechanisms	134	21	Economic outcomes reported without explaining how tourism expenditure was connected to local producers
Full-text documents excluded for insufficient methodological or analytical information	113	18	Insufficient evidence for reliable thematic and comparative coding
Full-text documents excluded because of exclusive or dominant focus on employment	95	13	Employment analyzed without substantive attention to local goods, services, producers, or procurement

Full-text documents excluded because adequate analytical content was unavailable	82	10	Evidence insufficient for extraction of relevant mechanisms, barriers, or policy implications
Documents included in the final analytical sample	72	—	Documents meeting the substantive and analytical inclusion criteria
Peer-reviewed journal articles in the final sample	54	—	Empirical, conceptual, comparative, or review-based academic studies
Institutional reports, policy documents, and analytical publications in the final sample	18	—	Evidence from tourism, development, rural economy, enterprise-development, and destination-management organizations

As shown in Table 1, approximately four-fifths of the initially identified material was removed before the final synthesis, indicating that the review employed a relatively restrictive interpretation of relevance. Only 72 of the original 684 records, equivalent to approximately 10.5% of the initially identified material, satisfied the final analytical requirements. The most substantial reduction occurred during title and abstract screening, when 397 of 558 unique records were removed because the relationship between tourism businesses and local production was either absent or peripheral. Full-text assessment further reduced the pool from 161 to 72 documents. Importantly, exclusion at the full-text stage was not based simply on whether a publication discussed tourism and local development; rather, the study required sufficient evidence to identify the mechanisms through which tourism demand became connected to locally produced goods and services. This distinction was central to the analytical purpose of the review because general increases in tourist expenditure or employment do not necessarily demonstrate that a destination retains a larger proportion of tourism-generated value. The predominance of peer-reviewed studies in the final sample strengthened the academic basis of the synthesis, while the inclusion of 18 institutional and policy-oriented documents expanded the analysis toward implementation instruments, governance arrangements, and practical interventions that are often underrepresented in academic studies.

The thematic synthesis demonstrated that the economic relationship between tourism businesses and local producers operates through several interconnected mechanisms rather than through a single model of local procurement. The most frequently identified mechanism was direct local sourcing, through which hotels, restaurants, accommodation establishments, tour operators, attractions, and other tourism businesses purchase food, beverages, handicrafts, furnishings, cultural products, and other inputs directly from producers located within or near the destination. Direct sourcing was generally associated with greater retention of tourism expenditure because a larger proportion of business purchasing remained within the local economy instead of being transferred to external wholesalers, national distributors, or imported-product supply chains. However, the review also demonstrated that direct procurement alone was rarely sufficient to create stable producer participation. Successful local sourcing typically depended on complementary arrangements involving aggregation, coordination, quality assurance, logistics, market information, and predictable demand.

A second major mechanism involved producer organizations, cooperatives, associations, and intermediary structures that aggregated the output of small-scale producers. These arrangements were particularly important in destinations where individual farmers, artisans, food processors, or home-based enterprises were unable to satisfy the volume, consistency, packaging, timing, or administrative requirements of formal tourism businesses. Aggregation mechanisms reduced transaction costs for tourism enterprises because hotels and restaurants could purchase through a coordinated supplier rather than negotiate with numerous very small producers. At the same time, collective arrangements strengthened the bargaining capacity of producers and created opportunities for joint logistics, certification, marketing, storage, and quality control. The evidence further showed that local products

generated greater economic value when they were incorporated not merely as business inputs but as visible components of the visitor experience. Local food menus, branded destination products, craft demonstrations, farmers' markets, culinary routes, cultural retail spaces, and producer visits increased the possibility that local production would become part of destination differentiation and therefore generate both direct sales and broader marketing value.

Digital intermediation and business-to-business platforms represented a more recent but increasingly important linkage mechanism. Digital supplier directories, online marketplaces, purchasing platforms, and destination-level databases reduced information asymmetry between tourism businesses and producers by making local supply more visible and enabling businesses to identify qualified suppliers. Although such mechanisms were not uniformly developed across all destinations, they were particularly relevant where fragmented producer structures and weak information flows prevented otherwise feasible transactions. The evidence also identified certification, local-product branding, technical assistance, and supplier-development programs as mechanisms that facilitated market entry for producers. These interventions addressed a central structural problem identified across the sample: tourism businesses often expressed willingness to purchase locally but required assurance regarding food safety, product quality, delivery reliability, packaging, pricing, and continuity of supply.

Table 2. Major Linkage Mechanisms between Tourism Businesses and Local Producers and Their Economic Effects

Linkage mechanism	Operational form	Main economic mechanism	Principal destination-level benefits	Key conditions for effectiveness	Common limitations
Direct local procurement	Hotels, restaurants, guesthouses, attractions, and tour operators purchase directly from farmers, artisans, processors, and local enterprises	Replaces externally sourced inputs with locally produced goods and redirects business expenditure toward destination-based suppliers	Greater local income retention, stronger tourism multiplier effects, producer market access, reduced economic leakage	Consistent quality, reliable delivery, appropriate volume, competitive pricing, business-producer communication	Small production scale, seasonal supply, unstable quantity, quality inconsistency, weak logistics
Contractual purchasing arrangements	Formal or semi-formal purchase agreements between tourism businesses and local suppliers	Increases predictability of demand and enables producers to plan production and investment	Income stability, reduced market uncertainty, stronger business relationships, increased producer investment	Contract clarity, trust, payment discipline, production planning, agreed quality standards	Power imbalance, payment delays, producers' limited negotiating capacity, dependence on individual buyers
Producer cooperatives and supplier associations	Collective organization of farmers, artisans, food processors, or other small producers	Aggregates supply and lowers transaction costs for tourism businesses while strengthening producers' bargaining position	Economies of scale, collective marketing, improved negotiating power, shared logistics and certification	Effective governance, member coordination, financial management, institutional support	Weak management, internal coordination problems, uneven member capacity, limited access to working capital
Local aggregation and intermediary models	Collection centers, wholesalers, destination coordinators, local distributors, or specialized intermediaries connect fragmented producers with tourism businesses	Resolves mismatches between small-scale supply and formal tourism purchasing requirements	Improved supply continuity, lower procurement costs, broader producer participation, improved logistics	Transparent intermediation, storage facilities, transport, inventory coordination, appropriate margins	Excessive intermediary margins, weak transparency, possible reduction in producer share of final value

Local food-tourism integration	Local agricultural and processed-food products incorporated into restaurant menus, hospitality procurement, culinary tourism, festivals, and food experiences	Converts agricultural production into both a tourism input and an experiential tourism product	Diversified farm income, destination differentiation, increased food expenditure retention, rural linkages	Food-safety standards, culinary integration, storytelling, branding, seasonal planning	Food-standard compliance, seasonality, perishability, limited processing and packaging capacity
Tourism-handicraft integration	Tourism businesses display, purchase, commission, or facilitate direct sales of locally produced crafts and cultural goods	Links visitor consumption directly with local cultural production	Artisan income, preservation of traditional skills, place branding, increased visitor expenditure within the destination	Authenticity, product adaptation, market access, retail space, quality improvement	Imitation products, imported substitutes, weak marketing, uneven quality, low bargaining power of artisans
Destination branding and local certification	Certification marks, geographic identity labels, local-product brands, and destination-origin schemes	Makes locally produced goods recognizable and differentiates them from non-local substitutes	Higher perceived value, price premiums, consumer trust, stronger destination identity	Credible standards, monitoring, coordinated marketing, producer compliance	Certification costs, weak enforcement, consumer confusion, fragmented branding initiatives
Farmers' markets, craft markets, and producer sales spaces	Dedicated physical spaces where tourists purchase directly from local producers	Shortens the value chain and increases the producer's share of final visitor expenditure	Direct sales revenue, entrepreneurship opportunities, reduced intermediary dependence, visitor-producer interaction	Accessible locations, visitor flow, market organization, product diversity	Seasonality, uneven visitor demand, limited scale, dependence on destination footfall
Business-to-business digital platforms	Digital supplier directories, procurement portals, destination marketplaces, and electronic matching systems	Reduces search costs and information asymmetry between buyers and local suppliers	Increased visibility of producers, lower transaction costs, access to new buyers, improved purchasing transparency	Digital literacy, updated supplier information, platform governance, verification mechanisms	Digital exclusion, weak adoption by small producers, limited platform management capacity
Supplier-development and capacity-building programs	Training, mentoring, technical assistance, quality upgrading, packaging improvement, certification support	Improves producers' ability to satisfy tourism-business requirements	Greater participation of SMEs, improved product quality, business formalization, access to higher-value markets	Continuing support, business-oriented training, access to finance, coordination with buyer requirements	Short-term projects, insufficient follow-up, training disconnected from real purchasing opportunities
Integrated tourism value-chain governance	Destination institutions coordinate tourism enterprises, producer groups, municipalities, agriculture agencies, and support organizations	Addresses coordination failures across multiple sectors and aligns local supply development with tourism demand	Systemic reduction in leakage, stronger local networks, improved resilience, more equitable benefit distribution	Clear institutional leadership, shared data, cross-sector coordination, long-term policy commitment	Fragmented authority, institutional competition, weak accountability, discontinuity of programs

Table 2 demonstrates that the effectiveness of tourism-local producer linkages depends less on the existence of an isolated purchasing transaction and more on the development of an enabling system around that transaction. Direct local procurement represents the most immediate mechanism for retaining tourism expenditure within a destination, but the comparative evidence showed that it becomes substantially more effective when accompanied by producer aggregation, contractual predictability, quality upgrading, logistics, and market coordination. Small producers often possess products that could satisfy tourism demand but remain excluded from formal purchasing systems because they cannot individually provide the quantity, reliability, documentation, packaging, or payment

conditions expected by tourism enterprises. Consequently, cooperative structures and destination-level intermediaries frequently serve as bridging institutions between fragmented local production and comparatively concentrated tourism demand. The findings also show that economically stronger linkage models extend beyond back-of-house procurement. When agricultural products, foods, crafts, and cultural goods become visible parts of the visitor experience, they generate a dual effect: they substitute for externally sourced business inputs while simultaneously creating additional visitor expenditure opportunities. Branding, certification, markets, culinary tourism, craft retailing, and producer visits therefore increase the economic significance of local sourcing by transforming local production into a component of destination identity. The more recent emergence of digital platforms adds another coordination mechanism by addressing information failures, although their effectiveness depends on producer digital capacity and reliable institutional management. Overall, the reviewed evidence suggests that the most successful destinations adopt an integrated value-chain approach in which purchasing, producer development, marketing, standards, logistics, and destination governance are treated as mutually dependent components rather than separate policy domains.

The comparative review identified a recurring set of structural barriers that limited the capacity of local producers to capture tourism-generated economic value. The most common supply-side constraints concerned production scale, consistency, seasonality, quality assurance, packaging, certification, logistics, and working capital. Small farmers and artisans often operated with limited production capacity and irregular output, while tourism enterprises required continuous supplies, predictable volumes, standardized products, and established delivery schedules. This created a structural mismatch between locally fragmented supply and commercially organized tourism demand. In food-related supply chains, perishability and seasonality intensified these problems, particularly where destinations lacked storage, processing, cold-chain, transportation, or aggregation infrastructure. Quality requirements were another recurrent issue. Tourism businesses, especially larger hotels and formal restaurants, frequently required standardized food-safety procedures, invoices, packaging, certification, and traceability that informal or semi-formal producers could not readily provide.

Demand-side and organizational barriers were equally important. Tourism businesses sometimes preferred large established distributors because they provided consolidated purchasing, credit arrangements, standardized documentation, and lower transaction costs. Local sourcing could therefore appear administratively expensive even when local products were price competitive. Procurement managers might also lack information about available local suppliers or assume that local products were unreliable. Where purchasing decisions were controlled by national headquarters, hotel chains, or external management companies, destination-level managers often had limited authority to change suppliers. The review consequently indicated that local economic leakage cannot be explained only by insufficient local production; it may also result from procurement routines, corporate standards, risk perceptions, and organizational preferences within tourism businesses.

Institutional fragmentation emerged as a third major barrier. The development of local tourism supply chains frequently requires cooperation between institutions responsible for tourism, agriculture, rural development, trade, handicrafts, small enterprises, municipalities, vocational training, standards, finance, and destination management. In many settings, these sectors operated independently, resulting in parallel programs that failed to connect producers with actual tourism demand. Capacity-building programs were particularly ineffective when producers were trained without corresponding engagement from buyers. Conversely, business campaigns encouraging local purchasing had limited impact where producers lacked the technical and financial resources required to meet

procurement standards. The strongest cases therefore involved coordinated interventions addressing supply and demand simultaneously.

The economic effects associated with stronger tourism-local producer linkages were multidimensional. At the immediate level, local procurement increased sales revenue accruing to destination-based farmers, artisans, food processors, and micro and small enterprises. At the destination level, the effects extended to greater circulation of expenditure, lower import or external-sourcing leakage, diversification of local livelihoods, entrepreneurship development, and stronger intersectoral relationships. Producer income generated through tourism could subsequently be spent on local labor, transport, services, inputs, and household consumption, producing additional rounds of economic circulation. Although the magnitude of multiplier effects varied substantially across destinations, the reviewed evidence consistently indicated that the structure of tourism expenditure was as important as the total volume of tourism expenditure. A destination attracting large numbers of visitors could continue to experience substantial economic leakage if accommodation, food, retail goods, construction inputs, and other tourism-related purchases were supplied externally. Conversely, destinations with smaller tourism economies could generate more inclusive local benefits where tourism demand was systematically connected with local production.

Table 3. Principal Barriers, Enabling Conditions, Economic Outcomes, and Policy Responses Identified in the Review

Analytical dimension	Recurrent finding	Effect on tourism-local producer linkage	Economic implication for the destination	Policy or managerial response
Fragmented small-scale production	Numerous producers operate individually and supply limited volumes	Tourism enterprises face high transaction costs when purchasing from many separate suppliers	Local products are bypassed despite being available, increasing expenditure leakage	Support cooperatives, producer networks, collection centers, and supplier aggregation mechanisms
Irregular quantity and seasonal availability	Output varies across periods and producers	Businesses cannot depend on local sources for continuous supply	Reliance on external wholesalers and imported substitutes remains high	Seasonal procurement planning, storage, processing, aggregation, and multi-producer supply systems
Inconsistent product quality	Local products may differ in size, specification, packaging, or quality	Businesses perceive higher procurement risk	Producers remain excluded from higher-value tourism markets	Quality standards, technical support, grading systems, common packaging, and supplier-development programs
Certification and food-safety limitations	Producers may lack formal certification, traceability, or required documentation	Formal hotels and restaurants cannot or will not source locally	Informal producers cannot access stable institutional demand	Subsidized certification, food-safety training, simplified compliance mechanisms, testing and advisory support
Weak logistics and transportation	Small producers lack efficient collection, delivery, storage, or cold-chain systems	High delivery costs and inconsistent timing reduce competitiveness	External distributors retain market advantage	Shared logistics, local distribution hubs, refrigerated transport, collection schedules, destination warehouses
Limited access to finance	Producers lack working capital for expansion, packaging, equipment, and certification	Producers cannot adapt output to tourism-business requirements	Tourism demand does not translate into local productive investment	Credit facilities, microfinance, revolving funds, guarantees, equipment grants, purchase-order financing
Weak bargaining position of producers	Small suppliers negotiate individually with larger tourism businesses	Prices and payment terms may favor buyers	A limited share of tourism value reaches producers	Collective negotiation, model contracts, payment standards, cooperative marketing, producer representation
Delayed payment by tourism enterprises	Small suppliers may face long payment periods	Working-capital pressures discourage continued supply	Local supplier participation becomes unstable	Prompt-payment rules, digital invoicing, contract enforcement, short settlement cycles

Limited market information	Tourism businesses do not know which local suppliers exist, while producers lack information about tourism demand	Potential buyers and suppliers fail to connect	Economically feasible local transactions do not occur	Supplier directories, procurement databases, business-to-business fairs, digital marketplaces
Established dependence on external distributors	Businesses prefer established national or international wholesalers	Local producers face high entry barriers	Tourism revenue exits the destination through external supply chains	Local procurement targets, supplier-development partnerships, purchasing incentives, destination procurement programs
Corporate procurement policies	Chain hotels and centrally managed businesses may use approved external suppliers	Local management has limited purchasing autonomy	Local sourcing opportunities are structurally restricted	Negotiate local procurement quotas, create approved local supplier schemes, integrate local purchasing into corporate sustainability policies
Weak producer-business trust	Buyers question reliability and producers question fairness or continuity of demand	Relationships remain short-term and transactional	Investment in local supply capacity is discouraged	Long-term contracts, buyer-producer forums, pilot purchasing programs, transparent standards
Institutional fragmentation	Tourism, agriculture, handicraft, SME, municipal, and trade bodies operate separately	Supply-development activities are poorly connected with tourism demand	Public support produces limited destination-level economic integration	Establish destination-level coordination mechanisms and cross-sector tourism value-chain bodies
Insufficient producer capacity	Producers may lack business, pricing, packaging, marketing, or digital skills	Market access remains limited even when demand exists	SMEs capture a smaller proportion of tourism expenditure	Targeted training linked directly to real buyers and procurement requirements
Weak local branding	Visitors and businesses cannot clearly distinguish local from non-local products	Local products compete primarily on price	Destination identity and value-added opportunities are underused	Local-origin labels, destination brands, storytelling, geographic identity schemes
Imported or non-local imitation products	Non-local substitutes are marketed as destination products	Genuine local producers lose market share	Visitor expenditure may appear local while leaving the destination	Authenticity standards, origin labeling, certified local-product retail channels
Strong local procurement	Tourism businesses systematically purchase destination-based goods	Expenditure remains within local supply chains	Reduced leakage and stronger multiplier effects	Institutionalize procurement policies and monitor the share of local purchasing
Strong producer aggregation	Producers collectively supply tourism businesses	Scale and reliability constraints are reduced	More SMEs gain access to stable tourism demand	Support cooperatives, supplier alliances, and collection hubs
Integration of products into visitor experiences	Local food, crafts, agriculture, and production become tourism attractions or experiences	Producers receive both business-to-business and direct visitor demand	Increased value added, product differentiation, and destination expenditure	Develop culinary routes, craft experiences, producer visits, local markets, and tourism packages
Effective destination coordination	Institutions coordinate purchasing, producer support, standards, finance, and marketing	Barriers are addressed across the whole value chain	Broader and more durable local benefit retention	Establish destination value-chain governance structures with public-private-producer participation
Digital supplier connectivity	Businesses and producers exchange information through platforms and directories	Search and coordination costs decline	More local transactions become commercially feasible	Develop verified supplier platforms and integrate them with destination management systems
Stable contractual relationships	Producers have predictable demand over time	Suppliers can invest and improve capacity	Tourism contributes to longer-term local productive development	Encourage multi-season contracts, forward purchasing, and transparent purchasing agreements
Local economic diversification	Tourism demand supports agriculture, crafts, food processing, transport, and services	Benefits extend beyond core tourism establishments	Destination dependence on a narrow tourism sector is reduced	Integrate tourism planning with local economic and rural-development strategies

As summarized in Table 3, the barriers identified in the literature form an interdependent system. Fragmented production, inconsistent quality, insufficient logistics, inadequate finance, limited certification, and weak market

information reinforce one another and collectively reduce the competitiveness of local suppliers. This finding has an important policy implication: interventions directed at a single constraint are unlikely to produce sustained results. Providing training without expanding market access, for example, may improve producer capabilities but will not generate sales if tourism businesses retain established external procurement relationships. Similarly, encouraging hotels and restaurants to "buy local" will produce limited change if producers cannot guarantee volume, quality, documentation, or timely delivery. The evidence therefore supports a coordinated value-chain approach that simultaneously strengthens producer capacity and modifies the institutional environment of tourism procurement. The table also highlights that some barriers originate within tourism businesses themselves, including corporate purchasing rules, lengthy payment practices, preferences for consolidated suppliers, and limited information about local alternatives. Local economic development policies must consequently address both sides of the market rather than treating producer weakness as the sole explanation for leakage.

The findings further indicate that the most significant economic outcome of stronger linkages is not limited to an increase in direct producer sales. Greater local procurement changes the geographical distribution of tourism-generated value by increasing the share of expenditure that remains within the destination and circulates among local households and enterprises. This effect is reinforced when tourism demand stimulates additional investment in agriculture, food processing, crafts, transportation, storage, packaging, retail, and other supporting activities. Strong linkages may therefore contribute to economic diversification and reduce the tendency for tourism destinations to function as consumption enclaves disconnected from surrounding production systems. The comparative evidence also suggests that benefits are more widely distributed when policies specifically facilitate access for small and micro-producers rather than assuming that market growth will automatically generate inclusion. Without aggregation, standards support, financing, and coordinated market access, larger or externally connected suppliers may capture most tourism demand even in destinations characterized by substantial local productive capacity.

The cross-context comparison revealed three broad patterns of tourism-local producer integration. The first pattern can be characterized as market-led integration, in which individual tourism businesses independently establish relationships with producers because local products provide cost, quality, authenticity, or marketing advantages. This pattern was most viable when local suppliers were already commercially organized and capable of meeting formal purchasing requirements. Although market-led relationships could generate substantial benefits, their coverage was often selective because businesses tended to work with the most capable producers, leaving smaller enterprises outside the tourism value chain.

The second pattern involved facilitated linkage models in which destination organizations, development agencies, municipalities, business associations, producer cooperatives, or intermediary organizations actively connected suppliers with tourism enterprises. These models were particularly prominent where local production existed but coordination failures prevented effective transactions. Facilitation typically included supplier identification, buyer-producer meetings, training, aggregation, certification, product development, and assistance with contracts or logistics. Such models demonstrated that modest institutional intervention could sometimes unlock commercially viable transactions that had previously failed because neither individual businesses nor individual producers had sufficient incentives or resources to absorb the initial coordination costs.

The third and most comprehensive pattern involved integrated destination value-chain governance. In these cases, local sourcing was treated as part of destination development rather than as an isolated corporate social responsibility initiative. Tourism planning was linked with agriculture, rural development, cultural production,

enterprise policy, infrastructure, branding, and destination management. Local procurement targets, supplier-development programs, producer cooperatives, logistics systems, quality standards, local-product branding, markets, tourism experiences, and monitoring systems were combined within a coordinated institutional framework. This model generated the strongest potential for reducing leakage because it addressed multiple points at which tourism-generated value could leave the destination.

For Iran, the comparative evidence indicates substantial potential for strengthening the connection between tourism businesses and locally embedded production, particularly because many Iranian destinations possess agricultural products, traditional foods, handicrafts, cultural industries, and rural production systems that can be integrated more systematically with tourism demand. However, the findings also suggest that reliance on spontaneous market relationships is unlikely to be sufficient. The predominance of small-scale producers, fragmentation of supply, uneven standards, limited formal procurement channels, logistical constraints, and institutional separation between tourism and productive sectors create conditions similar to those in which facilitated and integrated linkage models were found to be most effective internationally.

The policy relevance for Iran is therefore concentrated in the creation of destination-level structures capable of transforming geographically local production into economically accessible tourism supply. This requires identification and registration of potential suppliers, assessment of actual tourism-business demand, establishment of producer clusters or cooperatives, development of purchasing and delivery systems, upgrading of standards, branding of destination-specific products, expansion of digital supplier directories, and creation of regular forums through which tourism enterprises and producers can negotiate commercial relationships. Public intervention should not replace market exchange but should reduce coordination failures, initial transaction costs, and capability gaps that prevent mutually beneficial relationships from emerging. In particular, policy should differentiate between sectors. Food and agricultural supply chains require greater attention to continuity, perishability, certification, storage, and transport, whereas handicraft and cultural-product linkages require stronger protection of authenticity, retail access, product presentation, branding, and integration with visitor experiences.

The findings also indicate that evaluation of tourism development in Iran should move beyond aggregate indicators such as tourist arrivals, accommodation capacity, or total expenditure. A more economically meaningful indicator is the proportion of tourism expenditure captured and recirculated within destination economies. Measuring local procurement by accommodation establishments and restaurants, the participation rate of local SMEs in tourism supply chains, the proportion of locally produced food and handicrafts sold through tourism channels, payment conditions for local suppliers, and changes in producer income would provide a clearer assessment of whether tourism actually strengthens local economies. From this perspective, the preservation of destination economic benefits is not simply a function of attracting more tourists; it depends on the architecture of the economic relationships through which tourist expenditure is transformed into local income, enterprise development, investment, and household welfare.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that strong linkages between tourism businesses and local producers can substantially improve the territorial retention of tourism-generated economic value, but these outcomes do not arise automatically from geographical proximity. Effective linkage depends on the alignment of tourism demand with local productive capacity through aggregation, standards, finance, logistics, information exchange, branding, contracting, and institutional coordination. Where these mechanisms are weak, even destinations with substantial agricultural, artisanal, and cultural production may experience high leakage because tourism enterprises depend on external supply systems. Where these mechanisms are strong, tourism functions not only as a service industry

but also as a demand-generating platform capable of supporting broader local production systems. This distinction provides the central analytical foundation for interpreting the policy implications of the review for Iran.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this analytical–comparative review show that the economic significance of tourism for a destination depends not only on the volume of visitor expenditure but also on the structure through which that expenditure is transmitted to local economic actors. The review demonstrated that linkages between tourism businesses and local producers operate through a set of mutually reinforcing mechanisms, including direct procurement, contractual purchasing, producer cooperatives, aggregation systems, destination branding, culinary and handicraft integration, digital business-to-business platforms, supplier-development programs, and cross-sector value-chain governance. Taken together, these mechanisms influence the extent to which tourism-generated income remains within the destination rather than leaking outward through external suppliers and intermediaries. This interpretation is consistent with broader destination-competitiveness research, which emphasizes that tourism performance depends on the capacity of destinations to combine resources, institutions, firms, knowledge, and supporting systems into a coherent competitive structure rather than relying solely on visitor attraction [1]. It also corresponds with sustainable-development approaches that treat tourism as a multi-sectoral economic activity whose contribution should be assessed through its wider relationships with local livelihoods, production systems, and community development [2].

A central result was that direct local procurement is the most immediate mechanism through which tourism businesses can increase destination-level income retention, but its effectiveness is conditional rather than automatic. Hotels, restaurants, guesthouses, attractions, and tour operators may create important markets for farmers, artisans, food processors, and small enterprises, yet these relationships remain fragile when local suppliers cannot satisfy requirements concerning quantity, quality, timing, documentation, and consistency. The findings therefore indicate that local sourcing should be understood as a coordinated value-chain process rather than as a simple preference for purchasing geographically nearby products. This conclusion aligns with research on rural and community-based tourism, which shows that local economic benefits become stronger where tourism is systematically integrated with agribusiness, food production, and community enterprise rather than functioning as a detached service economy [7, 8]. It also reflects evidence from Iranian rural destinations, where tourism-business resilience depends on wider networks of local resources, institutional support, and adaptive capabilities [6].

The review further found that producer aggregation and collective organization are particularly important where local production is fragmented. Individual small farmers, artisans, and household enterprises often lack the scale required to supply formal tourism establishments, whereas cooperatives, supplier associations, and aggregation centers can reduce transaction costs, improve logistics, and strengthen bargaining power. This is particularly relevant in rural destinations, where the economic structure is frequently characterized by numerous small producers and dispersed production. Studies of community-based tourism and rural entrepreneurship similarly emphasize that collective organization can strengthen local participation and enable communities to move beyond passive involvement toward more direct engagement in tourism value creation [8, 13]. The significance of such organization is also compatible with the broader logic of tourism MSME development, where access to knowledge, intangible capital, and cooperative capacities influences the ability of small businesses to enter specialized tourism markets [12].

Another major finding was that the strongest economic effects occur when local products are integrated into the visitor experience rather than being confined to back-stage procurement. Culinary tourism, craft markets, producer visits, local food routes, and destination-branded products can transform local production into a visible part of destination identity. This dual integration increases both business-to-business demand and direct tourist expenditure. The result is strongly supported by research on culinary tourism, which demonstrates that local food can strengthen local marketplaces while simultaneously reinforcing place identity and visitor experience [10]. Theme-route research similarly shows that geographically dispersed producers and attractions can be organized into coherent visitor itineraries that encourage spending across wider rural areas [9]. From a business-model perspective, such arrangements create a stronger value proposition because local resources become integral to the experience offered to tourists rather than remaining invisible inputs within hospitality operations [11].

The findings also highlight the importance of destination branding and local certification. Local products may lose their economic advantage when tourists and tourism businesses cannot distinguish them from non-local or imported substitutes. Certification, origin labeling, and destination branding can increase visibility, credibility, and perceived value while reducing the risk that externally produced goods are marketed as local products. This result is consistent with tourism-development models that emphasize the strategic importance of converting unique local resources into identifiable and marketable destination value [30]. It is also aligned with the wider competitiveness literature, where differentiation and resource specificity are considered essential to sustained destination advantage [1]. For Iran, this finding has particular relevance because many destinations possess distinctive agricultural products, culinary traditions, and handicrafts whose economic contribution may remain limited unless origin, authenticity, and destination identity are communicated effectively.

The review also found that digitalization can reduce coordination failures between tourism businesses and local suppliers. Supplier directories, digital marketplaces, business platforms, and data-sharing systems can make local production more visible, lower search costs, and facilitate matching between demand and supply. These results are supported by studies showing that tourism SMEs increasingly depend on online platforms to improve market access and operational efficiency [20]. Digital marketing also strengthens business visibility and can support sustainable competitiveness by expanding market reach and reducing dependence on traditional channels [18, 19]. In rural contexts, electronic tourism systems have similarly been identified as mechanisms capable of strengthening business development and connecting geographically dispersed actors [21]. Therefore, the role of digitalization in tourism-local producer relationships extends beyond consumer promotion; it can also support supply-side coordination, procurement, and business networking.

The findings concerning emerging technologies reinforce this interpretation. Artificial intelligence, smart-tourism systems, and blockchain can improve forecasting, traceability, decision-making, and supply-chain transparency. The review suggests that such technologies may increase the feasibility of local sourcing by helping tourism businesses predict demand, manage inventory, verify product origin, and identify suppliers more efficiently. This interpretation is consistent with research emphasizing the growing business value of AI in tourism and hospitality [23] and with governance-oriented studies of intelligent destinations, where data-driven systems are seen as tools for improving coordination and destination decision-making [24]. Blockchain research likewise suggests that technology can reshape tourism business models by increasing transparency and trust among multiple actors [22]. AI-enabled circular-economy approaches further support the idea that digital technologies can help tourism businesses reduce waste and use resources more efficiently when organizational resistance is

appropriately managed [25]. However, the findings also imply that technology alone cannot guarantee local economic retention unless it is explicitly directed toward strengthening local business relationships.

The results further indicate that managerial and organizational capabilities are decisive for successful implementation. Tourism enterprises need knowledge-management capacity, competent employees, innovative behavior, financial management systems, and organizational flexibility to establish and sustain local supplier relationships. This interpretation is consistent with evidence showing that knowledge management contributes to tourism-business competitiveness [4]. It is also supported by research on workforce competencies in tourism, which emphasizes that sectoral performance depends on both generic and specialized business capabilities [14]. Similarly, innovative work behavior and absorptive capacity influence whether tourism and hospitality businesses can recognize and adopt new external knowledge [15]. Local sourcing often requires firms to adapt specifications, purchasing procedures, product design, logistics, and customer communication, making absorptive capacity particularly relevant.

Financial and accounting capacities are equally important because local purchasing may involve different transaction structures from conventional procurement. The findings suggest that managers need to assess not only unit prices but also delivery reliability, inventory requirements, transaction costs, payment periods, and broader destination value. Research on tourism accounting supports the importance of formal financial-management practices for tourism-service businesses [16], while modern accounting systems can strengthen tourism-management effectiveness through improved control and decision-making [17]. In practice, local sourcing may appear less attractive when only purchase price is compared, but it may generate additional value through differentiation, authenticity, supply-chain resilience, and stronger destination branding. Therefore, managerial accounting systems capable of incorporating these wider benefits may influence procurement choices.

A further important finding was that institutional fragmentation is one of the main barriers to stronger tourism-local producer linkages. Tourism, agriculture, handicrafts, rural development, municipalities, trade, finance, and SME support are often administered through separate institutional systems. When these sectors operate independently, local producers may receive training without access to buyers, while tourism businesses may be encouraged to purchase locally without having access to reliable suppliers. The strongest comparative cases therefore involved coordinated destination-level governance. This result aligns with community-based tourism research emphasizing that tourism development is more effective when local communities, businesses, and institutions participate in integrated decision-making and value creation [8]. It also reflects broader smart-tourism governance approaches in which destination management depends on coordination across multiple actors and data systems [24].

The findings also showed that stronger tourism-producer relationships can improve destination resilience. Reliance on distant or concentrated external suppliers may create vulnerability during disruptions, whereas diversified local supply networks can provide alternative sources of goods and services. This is consistent with research emphasizing the economic resilience of tourism businesses and the importance of adaptive capacity under changing market conditions [3]. Similar conclusions emerge from studies of rural tourism-business resilience in Iran, which highlight the interaction of social, institutional, and market factors [6]. Resilience in this sense is not simply a firm characteristic; it is partly a property of the local economic network in which firms are embedded.

The review further indicates that local economic integration should be treated as part of sustainability policy. The sustainability of tourism cannot be reduced to environmental management alone. It also includes inclusive economic participation, local enterprise development, and stronger distribution of benefits. Environmental

leadership and employee green behavior remain important dimensions of sustainable tourism-business practice [28], but the broader sustainable-development framework requires attention to social and economic outcomes as well [2]. Stronger local sourcing can support these objectives where it contributes to community livelihoods, local entrepreneurship, and more distributed economic gains.

For Iran, the findings suggest that tourism development policy should place greater emphasis on the internal structure of destination economies. Studies of tourism and economic growth indicate that tourism can contribute to broader national and regional development, but aggregate growth effects do not automatically reveal how benefits are distributed locally [29]. Similarly, development models for destinations such as Qeshm emphasize the importance of linking tourism to local economic development and foreign-exchange generation [30]. The present review extends this logic by showing that destination-level benefit retention requires practical mechanisms that connect tourism enterprises to local producers. This is especially important in Iranian rural areas where agriculture, handicrafts, traditional food production, and local entrepreneurship already provide a productive base that can potentially be integrated with tourism demand [13, 21].

Overall, the results support a shift from a narrow tourism-growth approach toward a destination value-chain approach. Attracting more visitors is economically beneficial only to the extent that the resulting expenditure is transformed into local income, productive investment, enterprise growth, and community welfare. Business innovation, digital platforms, smart technologies, managerial competencies, collective organization, branding, and institutional coordination all contribute to this process. Virtual-reality marketing and other advanced consumer-facing technologies may improve destination promotion and visitor experience [26], but their broader developmental value depends on whether increased demand strengthens local economic linkages. Similarly, business intelligence can improve the interface between knowledge systems and industry and can support better decision-making concerning partnerships and supply networks [27]. The major implication is therefore that tourism policy should treat local procurement and local production not as peripheral sustainability initiatives but as central components of destination economic strategy.

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. First, the review integrated academic studies, institutional reports, and policy-oriented publications that differed in methodology, geographical scope, and level of analytical detail, which limited the possibility of direct quantitative comparison across cases. Second, the evidence covered a wide range of tourism destinations and production systems, and some mechanisms identified as effective in one institutional context may not be directly transferable to another. Third, the review focused primarily on documented economic and organizational linkages and therefore could not fully capture informal transactions, household production, undocumented local sourcing, or non-market exchanges that may be important in some destinations. Fourth, because the study was analytical and comparative rather than meta-analytic, it did not estimate a pooled effect size for local sourcing on income retention, employment, or leakage reduction. Finally, the policy implications for Iran were derived from comparative evidence and structural interpretation rather than from primary data collected directly from Iranian tourism businesses and producers.

Future research should examine tourism-local producer linkages through primary empirical studies at the destination level and should quantify the proportion of tourism-business expenditure that is retained locally. Longitudinal studies could evaluate whether local procurement programs generate sustained changes in producer income, business resilience, and destination economic multipliers. Comparative research across different Iranian provinces would also be valuable because tourism structures, agricultural production, handicrafts, infrastructure, and institutional capacity vary substantially between destinations. Future studies should distinguish between food,

handicraft, service, and digital supply chains and should analyze the specific constraints affecting each. Network analysis could be used to map relationships among tourism businesses, producers, intermediaries, and public institutions, while input-output or social accounting approaches could estimate leakage and multiplier effects more precisely. Additional research should also assess the impact of digital procurement platforms, local certification systems, cooperative models, and destination-level coordination mechanisms through pilot interventions and quasi-experimental designs.

Tourism policymakers and destination managers should establish formal mechanisms for connecting tourism businesses with local producers rather than relying on spontaneous market relationships. Destination-level supplier databases, regular buyer-producer meetings, cooperative purchasing systems, local procurement targets, and verified digital marketplaces can reduce information and transaction barriers. Producers should receive targeted support in quality control, packaging, certification, logistics, pricing, accounting, and contract management, while tourism businesses should be encouraged to adopt procurement policies that recognize the wider economic value of local sourcing. Producer cooperatives and aggregation centers should be strengthened where fragmented production prevents individual suppliers from meeting business requirements. Local food, handicrafts, and cultural products should be integrated more visibly into visitor experiences through destination branding, markets, routes, festivals, and business partnerships. Public institutions responsible for tourism, agriculture, handicrafts, rural development, municipalities, and SME support should coordinate their interventions through destination-level value-chain structures with clear responsibilities and measurable economic indicators. Finally, evaluation of tourism development should include indicators such as the share of local procurement, number of local suppliers participating in tourism supply chains, changes in producer income, payment conditions, local value added, and the proportion of tourism expenditure retained within the destination.

Authors' Contributions

Authors equally contributed to this article.

Ethical Considerations

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