

Community Leaders' Perceptions towards Socio-cultural Impacts of Tourism on Local Communities

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ABSTRACT This paper illustrates the community leaders' perceptions toward socio-cultural impacts of tourism in Shiraz, Iran. Particularly, it focuses on the differences in leaders' perceptions between the Old and New Districts of Shiraz. The study proves that there are broadly similar views among the community leaders from both districts of Shiraz. However, a distinct minority believes that some cultural problems arise from tourism development.

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is genuinely powerful for change in the local community, particularly in social and cultural life. A number of studies in recent years have examined host residents' perception of the socio-cultural impacts of tourism on their community (Fen et al. 2007; Haley et al. 2005; Haukeland 1984; Milman and Pizam 1988). A major reason for rising interest is due to the evidences that tourism not only leads to positive, but also has the potential for negative outcomes at the local level (Lankford 1994). Huang and Stewart (1996) indicated that tourism may change residents' relationships with one another and their community. It is generally felt that the community perception toward the socio-cultural impacts of tourism are likely to be an important planning and policy consideration for successful tourism development (Ap 1992). Most studies directed at residents' perceptions of tourism and community-based planning have been conducted extensively in the west (Brown and Giles 1994; Haley et al. 2005; Ritchie 1993). Thus, the application of them to the Iranian context may not be appropriate (Aref et al. 2009). Meanwhile, understanding the community perception can help to access community support or opposition for continued tourism development. Gursoy and Rutherford (2004) suggested that tourism developers need to consider the perception and attitude of residents before they start investing scarce resources. Understanding of community perception towards tourism impacts have the potential for building community capacity (Moscardo 2008, p. 86).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Tourism Impacts on Local Communities

Tourism impact is one of the most popular topics in tourism studies involving communities. Kream (2001) states tourism impacts have been positive or negative, depending on the community and each impact differs by community (Kream 2001). However not all types of tourism activities have the same impacts on every community (Godfrey and Clarke 2000). Tourism is undoubtedly important at a local, national and international level. However, it should not form the core element of a community's economy but is better suited to play a supplementary role to help diversify community economic activities (Godfrey and Clarke 2000). Tourism has become a source of income generation for many local communities seeking ways to improve their livelihoods. It is clear that tourism and its impacts in local communities is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that encompasses economic, social, cultural, ecological, environmental and political forces (Singh et al. 2003).

2.2 Socio-Cultural Impacts of Tourism

The socio-cultural impacts has been debated extensively (Colantonio and Potter 2006). Indeed the socio-cultural impacts of tourism are often very different and varied, based on individuals or groups in local communities (Godfrey and Clarke 2000). There is no doubt that tourism is a constant aspect of human life (Ivanovic 2009). Socio-cultural elements on the other hand, also

play important roles in the contribution of tourism in local communities. Socio-cultural impacts of tourism can be more difficult to assess as they are more of a subjective or qualitative measure of impacts on a destination in contrast to quantitative economic measurement (Mason 2003). Tourism can be important in increasing a community's access to information as well as new language skills and knowledge. It is important in giving community confidence and identity (Smith and Robinson 2006). The key aspects of socio-cultural impacts of tourism in local communities are related to the community's quality of life and sense of place (Godfrey and Clarke 2000). Tourism is a powerful agent for a community's social and cultural change (Ivanovic 2009). It promotes the local community's interest in expanding their education and "how to" knowledge while seeking to provide better tourist services (Nyaupane et al. 2006). Furthermore, interaction between local residents and tourists brings in new ideas, values and lifestyles, as well as motivations for both economic and socio-cultural progress (Liu 2003). Socio-cultural impacts of tourism needs careful consideration, as impacts can either influence community positively or negatively. The influx of tourists brings diverse values to the community and influences behavior and family life (Kreag 2001). Tourism also can play a role in revitalizing community culture and traditions and enhancing a sense of community in local heritage (Godfrey and Clarke 2000, p. 26). Tourism has been linked with increased awareness of other's cultures, practices, behavior, values and heritage. It helps local communities and visiting tourists gain a better knowledge of each other's languages through interaction (Singh et al. 2003).

2.3. Community Perception towards Tourism Impacts

A number of studies in recent years have examined community residents' perception of the tourism impacts on their communities. Understanding and assessing tourism impacts in local communities is important in order to maintain sustainability and long-term success of the tourism industry (Diedrich and Garc a-Buades 2008). It is generally felt that community perception towards tourism impacts is likely to be an important planning and policy making component for successful tourism development (Ap 1992). The knowledge of community

perception towards tourism impacts is significant (Ap 1992). Different perceptions from different residents can provide insight into the nature and degree of tourism impacts towards the perspective of tourist destinations. The community perception towards tourism impacts are likely to be an important planning aspect for successful community development (Dong-Wan and William 2002). However, despite having many advantages, tourism also has certain negative impacts. A review of 329 case studies of tourism development in 92 different countries identified a number of different negative impacts from tourism. Overall negative impacts from tourism has been reported in more than 80% of these 329 cases reviewed (Moscardo 2008, p. 2). Although the significance of tourism for local communities is clear (Andriotis 2005), there has been a negligence of research towards the community's perception of tourism impacts in local communities in Shiraz, Iran. Numerous studies on residents' perception of tourism impacts have been conducted (Choi and Sirakaya 2005; McGehee and Andereck 2004; Sheldon and Abenoja 2001; Upchurch and Teivane 2000; Wang and Pfister 2008). But all these studies have been performed by western researchers. Thus, the relevance of the findings in the Iranian context may not be fitting. Godfrey and Clarke (2000) confirmed that tourism impacts are often very different for different groups or communities. To date, very little research has examined community residents' perceived impacts of tourism in local communities in Iran. A case in point is that local communities in Shiraz had never been studied (Aref et al. 2009). Thus, there is limited understanding of community residents' perception towards tourism impacts on local communities.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in 175 local communities in Shiraz, Iran. Shiraz is situated in the south-western region of Iran. Shiraz also is one of the most popular cultural tourism destinations in Iran with a long interesting history of the Roman Empire (Limbert 2004). For the purposes of the study, Shiraz is divided to two major areas: the Old Shiraz and the New Shiraz. Eighty-six communities are located in Old Shiraz, whereas 92 communities are located in New Shiraz. The research study uses questionnaires. Surveys are particularly useful to study tourism impacts.

Furthermore, according to Riley (1996), the majority of tourism research has relied on structured surveys. The data for this study was collected from community leaders. Community leaders in Shiraz were chosen as the sample population for this survey because they represent "the voice of the people of concern" (Eng and Parker 1994). The questionnaire was structured around a Likert scale. The items for community perceptions toward tourism impacts were taken from these studies (Lankford 1994; Pizam 1978). The respondents answered to each statement based on five scales. The value of each response for these items on the questionnaire is as follows: 1 = strongly disagree 2 = disagree 3 = not sure 4 = agree 5 = strongly agree. Dong-Wan and William (2002) recommended the use of a Likert type scale in tourism research due to its high validity. Then, the questionnaire was pilot-tested to have its content validated by several reviewers of Persian background. Statements for tourism impacts were tested for their reliability using Cronbach's alpha. To test the proposed objective, this study employed statistical techniques such as descriptive statistic and t-test. Means and standard deviations are the descriptive statistics used in discussing the distribution of responses gathered during the quantitative component of this study.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As noted earlier, the unit of analyses is divided by two districts; Old and New. Overall response rate was 48% from the Old district community and 52% from the New district of Shiraz. Of all the respondents, 26.36% stated that their highest level of education earned was a diploma and 42.86% had a bachelor's degree. More than 60% of the respondents had engaged in tourism activities.

Community leaders' perception towards socio-cultural impacts of tourism was measured using a 10 items, five points Likert types scale. Descriptive statistics reveal that respondents from both districts of Shiraz rated higher positive perception and lower negative perception towards tourism impacts. Table 1 shows community leaders' perception towards socio-cultural impacts of tourism. Based on the mean measures of impact item, the impact items associated with economic impacts have lowest scores and socio-cultural has highest score. Some of the most important social and cultural aspects

Table 1: Descriptive statistics of community perception towards tourism impacts

<i>Item statements</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. D</i>
<i>Socio-Cultural</i>	37.7	3.11
Increased the crime rate	2.7	1.02
Valuable experience to understand their culture and society	4.06	0.51
Encourages a variety of cultural activities by the local residents	4.34	0.55
Cultural onslaught	3.38	0.94
Change our culture and local traditions	3.69	0.78
The cultural exchange between residents and tourists	3.95	0.64
Better health services	3.49	0.91
Negative impacts on social life	3.53	0.91
Opportunities to put their culture on display	4.15	0.58
Provided an incentive for the restoration of historical buildings.	4.49	0.52

of tourism impacts that had been evaluated are: "valuable experience" (4.06), "encourages a variety of cultural activities" (4.34), "opportunities to put their culture on display" (4.15), and "provided an incentive for the restoration of historical buildings" (4.49). However, tourism impact items which are associated with crime rate, and cultural onslaught, are the negative impacts perceived by the leaders. In terms of socio-cultural impacts, the large majority of participants stated that tourism had positive effects on the cultural exchange of Shiraz. However, several participants commented on the negatives impacts of tourism on their communities. In terms of negatives impacts of tourism, some leaders from New districts expressed concern for loss in family interaction and sense of community among local communities. In the Old district, it was also found that there was a few leaders who believed that tourism can bring some negative effect on local culture; especially lay they emphasis on the loss of traditional culture. Table 1 show that respondents have rather positive perceptions toward socio-cultural impacts of tourism in their community. Most of the 10 attitudinal items had the maximum range from the minimum (1 point) to maximum (5 points), indicating a wide variation of individual respondents' perceptions of tourism impacts. The size of the standard deviations of the 10 statements also indicated a moderate spread around the theoretical mean. This study also attempted to prove whether the perceptions of the leaders in the Old district and New district of Shiraz are different significantly. The result of

Table 2: The T-test comparisons of districts of Shiraz according to the leaders' perception towards tourism impacts

Districts	N	M	SD	t	df	Sig
Old	84	37.19	2.548	-2.404	173	0.17
New	91	38.31	3.486			

the t-test shows that there are no significant differences of perception toward tourism impacts between Old and New districts of Shiraz (Table 2). According to the t-test results of equality of variance, there is no significant difference in perception between the leaders of between Old district and New district of Shiraz ($t = -2.404$, $p = 0.17$). The results of descriptive statistics show that in the Old districts ($M = 37.19$, $SD = 2.548$), while in the New district ($M = 38.31$, $SD = 3.486$), which indicated that the difference between the means is not significant. Meanwhile, the study demonstrates that there were broadly similar views among the community leaders from both districts of Shiraz. However, a distinct minority of the respondents highlighted several cultural problems arising from tourism impacts. Results show that these respondents strongly agreed that tourism provides many cultural benefits, but they were ambivalent about some cultural aspects of tourism. Furthermore, significant variation among respondents by demographic background is generally low. These findings provide support for previous studies (Andereck et al. 2005; Ap 1992; Cavus and Tanrisevdi 2003; Green 2005; Lepp 2007; Teye et al. 2002; Wang and Pfister 2008). It may be due to the facts that there are relatively limited social distance between community leaders and residents in local communities. Richards and Brod (2004) stated that limited social distance possibly offers residents more similar community objective to one other.

5. CONCLUSION

As have been mentioned by Moscardo (2008), the lack of understanding of tourism impacts can be a factor for underdevelopment of tourism industry in Third World Countries. Hence, the findings of the present study could help us to understand the relationship between community perceptions of tourism impacts and community support for tourism development. Based on the results of the study, however, it could be concluded that community leaders' perception towards socio-cultural impacts of tourism cannot be the only factor for underdevelopment tourism

industry in local communities of Shiraz. This findings is inconsistent with Hafeznia et al. (2007) who believed that in local communities of Iran; many people have negative perceptions especially about external tourism. In addition, the findings provide an introduction for discussion about relationship between tourism development and community leaders' perception towards tourism impacts. Gursoy and Rutherford (2004) suggested that tourism developers need to consider the perception of residents before they start investing resources in tourism development. Fisher (2005) also states on importance of leaders perception as an effective element in processes of community development. Overall results show that respondents strongly agreed that tourism provides many cultural benefits, but are ambivalent about the benefits of some cultural aspects of tourism

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