

RESIDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS TOURISM IMPACTS: A CASE STUDY OF SHIRAZ, IRAN

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This article investigates the residents' attitudes toward tourism impacts in Shiraz, Iran. The study demonstrates that there are broadly similar attitudes towards tourism impacts among the local leaders and residents. According to the results, the favorable attitudes are found to be linked with its sociocultural impacts, while environmental and economic matters are found to be the least favorable in terms of the perceived impacts of tourism. The *t*-test analysis of the study indicates that there is no significant difference between the leaders' attitudes in both districts of Shiraz. Results drawn from focus group discussion with the local residents also show that the residents have positive attitudes toward tourism impacts on their communities.

Key words: Resident attitudes; Community perceptions; Tourism impacts; International tourism

Introduction

Tourism has been identified as one of the primary industries with the potential to assist local communities in developing economic diversity. However, tourism is not a panacea for economic decline (Byrd, Bosley, & Dronberger, 2009). The term "tourism impact" has been gaining increasing attention in the tourism literature. A number of studies in recent years have examined residents' attitudes towards tourism impacts, and it continues to be an important issue (Dong-Wan & William, 2002). A major reason for rising interest in the area has been the evidence that tourism leads not only to be positive, but also has the potential for negative, outcomes at the local level (Lankford & Howard, 1994). Huang and Stewart (1996) indi-

cated that tourism may change residents' relationships to one another and to their community. It is generally felt that residents' attitudes toward tourism impacts are likely to be an important planning and policy consideration for tourism development (Ap, 1992). Fisher (2005) also states on importance of community perception as an effective element in processes of community development. Understanding tourism impacts also is vital for community participation as an important tool for successful tourism planning (Marzuki, 2008). Hence, understanding tourism impacts is important in order to maintain sustainability and long-term success of the tourism industry (Diedrich & García-Buades, 2008).

Numerous studies on residents' attitudes of tourism impacts have been conducted (Andereck,

Valentine, Knopf, & Vogt, 2005; Andriotis, 2009; Ap, 1992; Brown & Giles, 1994; Byrd et al., 2009; Choi & Sirakaya, 2005; Devine, Gabe, & Bell, 2009; Gursoy, Jurowski, & Uysal, 2002; Johnson, Snepenger, & Akis, 1994; Kaltenborn, Andersen, Nellemann, Bjerke, & Thrane, 2008; Liu, Sheldon, & Var, 1987; Liu & Var, 1986; Nicholas, Thapa, & Ko, 2009; Pipinos & Fokiali, 2009; Ryan & Montgomery, 1994; Seid, 1994; Sheldon & Aben-oja, 2001; Sheldon & Var, 1984; Sirakaya, Teye, & Sonmez, 2001; Teye, Sirakaya, & Sönmez, 2002; Upchurch & Teivane, 2000; Vargas-Sánchez, Plaza-Mejia, & Porras-Bueno, 2009). Although these studies have been performed to identify residents' attitudes toward tourism, most studies directed at residents' perceptions of tourism have been conducted in the West (Dong-Wan & William, 2002). However, tourism impacts are often different in communities (Godfrey & Clarke, 2000). Thus, the relevance of the findings in the Iranian context may not be fitting. To date, very little research has examined residents' perceived impacts of tourism in Iran. Hence, there is limited understanding of residents' attitudes of tourism impacts in Iran. As Moscardo (2008) discussed, the lack of understanding of tourism impacts can be a factor for underdevelopment of tourism in Third World countries. Therefore, understanding of tourism impacts is vital to achieve sustainable tourism development in Iran.

Literature Review

Residents' attitudes have been studied extensively in the literature. Much of the recent literature on the development of world tourism has been concerned with the tourism impacts on the community (Akis, Peristianis, & Warner, 1996). Smith and Krannich (1998) found that a direct relationship exists between tourism development and negative attitudes towards tourism held by community residents (Nicholas et al., 2009). Williams and Lawson (2001) argued that studying residents' attitudes towards tourism impacts would help tourism planners to select those developments that could minimize the negative impacts and maximize the positive impacts of tourism. A number of studies have examined residents' attitudes towards tourism impacts. The results of such studies sug-

gest that local residents are influenced by perceived impacts of tourism that can be divided into three categorical impacts: economic, social-cultural, and environmental (Gursoy et al., 2002). Residents' attitudes towards tourism impacts in a community can vary significantly. According to Sharma (2004), better attitudes towards tourism impacts among residents will result in more successful tourism development. Tourism development has the potential to create both positive and negative impacts in local communities (Byrd et al., 2009). Several studies indicated that people who have an economic gain from tourism perceive the more positive impact from it (Chon, 2000). As has been confirmed by Andriotis (2009), a balance of residents' attitudes of the costs and benefits of tourism is considered a major factor in tourist satisfaction and is, therefore, vital for the success of the tourism development (Andriotis, 2009). However, despite having many advantages, tourism also has negative impacts. A review of 329 case studies of tourism impacts in 92 countries identified a number of different negative impacts. Overall negative impacts of tourism have been reported in more than 80% of the 329 cases reviewed (Moscardo, 2008).

Economic Impacts

The economic impacts of tourism are the most widely researched impacts of tourism on community (Mason, 2003). As Horn and Simmons (2002) noted, the economic importance of tourism plays a role in determining residents' attitudes. Most studies also suggest that local residents usually support tourism as an economic development strategy (Gursoy et al., 2002). Economic impacts are easier to research in a local community because of the small size and generally visible impacts on national economic growth. It can be also an essential component for community development (Ashe, 2005). Undoubtedly tourism plays an important role in (a) the economic development of nations by stimulating the development of basic infrastructure, (b) contributing to the growth of domestic industries that supply the tourism industry, (c) attracting foreign investment especially in hotels, and (d) facilitating transfer of technology (Upchurch & Teivane, 2000).

Sharma (2004) states tourism creates employment opportunities in both developed and developing countries; however, the tourism impacts and implications of this employment are different in developed and developing countries (Sharma, 2004, p. 44). Tourism can have positive economic effects on local economies, and a visible impact on national economic growth. It can be also an essential component for community development (Ashe, 2005). The economic impacts of tourism are, therefore, generally perceived positively by the residents (Tatoglu, Erdal, Ozgur, & Azakli, 2000). Due to these positive effects, many communities have seen tourism as a promising opportunity for reducing problems of their communities (Andriotis, 2005).

Sociocultural Impacts

Although economic benefits are often assumed to largely improve the quality of life of residents, sociocultural factors may not always be as positive (Andereck et al., 2005). The sociocultural 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). The sociocultural impacts of tourism needed careful consideration, as impacts can either influence a community either positively or negatively. Influxes of tourists bring diverse values to the community and influence behaviors and family life (Kreag, 2001). Tourism can be influential in increasing a community's access to knowledge as well as new language skills and learning. It is important in giving community confidence and identity (Smith & Robinson, 2006). Tourism also is a powerful agent for 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, Morais, & Dowler, 2006).

Environmental Impacts

Most of the tourism-related literature on residents' attitudes to environmental issues have centered on residents' perceptions on the impact of tourism on the environment (Nicholas et al., 2009). In other ways, much of the literature on the

environmental impacts of tourism has been focused in the context of developed countries while there has been virtually no effort to explore these impacts in other countries (Colantonio & Potter, 2006). The environmental impacts of tourism on community can take the form of both the quality of the physical environment and access to these resources in which positive environmental impacts of tourism on a community include increased awareness of the environment and measures to protect the natural resources, the establishment of national parks or wildlife preserves, the preservation of historical buildings and monuments, as well as improved roads and other public facilities (Liu et al., 1987; Mason, 2003). Conversely, negative environmental impacts that are frequently highlighted include littering, overcrowding, traffic congestion, as well as pollution of water and soil along with the deterioration of natural resources as a result of the constructions of tourism services, such as erections of hotels (Liu et al., 1987; Mason, 2003). Information about residents' attitudes towards the environment is of particular importance for the sustainability of protected areas and indigenous communities (Nicholas et al., 2009).

Study Area

Iran is located at an intersection point between Asian, Middle Eastern, and European culture. Iran has an abundant wealth of natural and cultural assets, most of which are largely underexploited from a tourism perspective. According to UNESCO, Iran is ranked as one of the top 10 countries in the world in terms of tourism attractions. There are tens of thousands of historical monuments in Iran with more than 12,000 of them registered officially (Mashai, 2005). The cultural assets range from the era of the great Persian empires, extending back to some 10,000 years. Shiraz is the capital of the Iranian province of Fars, the ancient homeland of the Achemenian (ca. 549–330 B.C.E) and the Sassanian (ca. 224–651 C.E) dynasties. Shiraz is situated in the south western region of Iran, in the inlands that lie about 200 km from the Persian Gulf, at an elevation of 1,800 m above sea level (Figs. 1 and 2). Shiraz has a moderate climate and has been a regional trade center for more than a thousand years (Wikipedia, 2009).



Figure 1. Map of Iran.

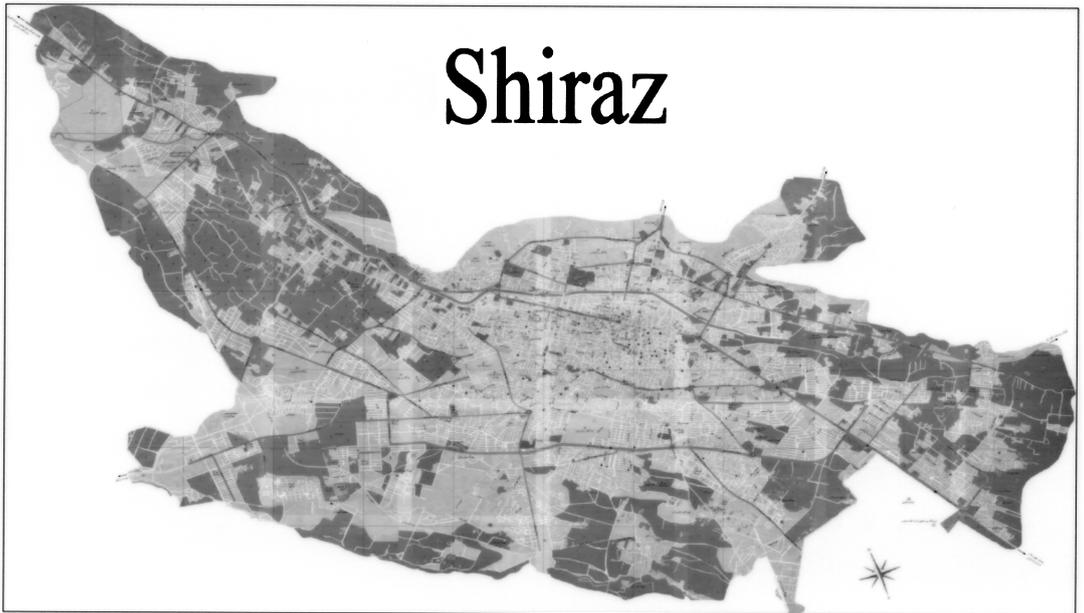


Figure 2. Map of Shiraz.

Shiraz has two districts: the old district and the new district. The new district has sprouted to the north and west of the old district. The most interesting buildings in Shiraz are located in the old district. The old district sat on the site of the original Shiraz founded in the first century of Islam's advent. Although the city's center has shifted to the newly built avenues of the modern town, the old district had never been abandoned and continued to exist side by side with the new district (Limbert, 2004). Shiraz has a population of more than 1 million people. Most of the city's population consisted of native Shiraz folks and people who had migrated from the other cities of Fars (Limbert, 2004). Shiraz has been selected as a city of literature by UNESCO and also it has been selected as a city museum of the Asia-Pacific region by ICOM (Cultural Heritage News Agency, 2006). As one of the oldest Iranian cities (more than 2,500 years old), Shiraz is listed as a World Heritage site. Throughout history, foreign visitors to Shiraz have praised the city's gardens, clear air, its wines, and the charm of its people. Iranians themselves, however, have long treasured Shiraz as a city of Islam. Its traditional Iranian name is Dar al-Elm (Limbert, 2004).

Shiraz has been known as the poetic capital of Persia, because two of the greatest poets of the world (Sa'adi and Hafez) come from this city. The most popular tourism attractions of Shiraz include the tombs of Hafez, Sa'adi, Persepolis, and Khajue Kermani. The other famous tourist attractions are Shah Chiragh, Arg of Karim Khan, Vakil Bath, Vakil Bazaar, Aram Garden, Baba Kuehi, Bishapur, Pasargade, and Naqsh-e-Rutam. These are some of the more than 200 sites of historical significance of Shiraz, according to ICHHTO (Wikipedia, 2009). However, communities of Shiraz have seen much potential for tourism development and it is still considered that the process of tourism development has not been successful there.

Research Methods

This study examined residents' attitudes towards tourism impacts in local communities of Shiraz, located in Fars Province, Iran. For the purposes of the study, Shiraz is divided to two major areas: the old and the new districts. This study is based on

both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to investigate the residents' attitudes toward tourism impacts. The research study used survey questionnaires and focus groups discussion (FGD). Qualitative research methods nowadays are widely used in tourism research (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Lowe, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Walle, 1997). Furthermore, according to Riley (1996), the majority of tourism research has relied on structured surveys.

The questionnaire was structured around a Likert scale. The items for residents' attitudes toward tourism impacts were taken from previous studies (Belisle & Hoy, 1980; Haralambopoulos & Pizam, 1996; Lankford & Howard, 1994; Liu & Var, 1986; Milman & Pizam, 1988; Perdue, Long, & Allen, 1987; Pizam, 1978). Each statement was situated on a 5-point scale as recommended by Dong-Wan and William (2002) and Maddox (1985), with 1 representing a response of "strongly disagree" and 5 representing "strongly agree." To discover if different perception existed among the districts, *t*-test was conducted.

The data for this study were collected from residents and community leaders. Community leaders were chosen as the sample population, because they represent "the voice of the people of concern" (Eng & Parker, 1994). The major method used in this research to collect data is the use of questionnaires. To achieve the objectives also 10 FGD were held at a local mosque. FGD participants were selected from local residences who were engaged in tourism activities.

Finding of the Study

As noted earlier, the unit of analyses is divided by two districts: old and new. Overall response rate was 48% from the old district and 52% from the new district. Respondents were asked to rank their responses to the questions on tourism impacts on a 5-point agreement or disagreement scale. Descriptive statistics revealed that respondents from both parts of Shiraz rated higher on positive statements and lower on negative statements, indicating consistency in the direction of their perceptions.

As shown in Table 1, the perceived impacts of tourism by residents were measured by 20 impact

Table 1
Tourism Impacts

Type of Impact	Mean	SD
Sociocultural		
Increase of crime rates	2.70	1.02
Valuable experience to understand their culture	4.06	0.52
Encourages a variety of cultural activities	4.34	0.55
Cultural onslaught	3.38	0.94
Changes culture and local traditions	3.69	0.78
Valuable cultural exchange	3.95	0.64
Better health service	3.49	0.91
Negative impacts on social life	3.53	0.91
Opportunities to put culture on display	4.15	0.58
Restoration of historical buildings	4.49	0.52
Environmental		
Provides more parks and recreational areas	4.36	0.60
Provides convenient transportation	4.06	0.83
Destroy of natural environment	2.93	1.24
Traffic congestion, noise and air pollution	2.89	1.22
Crowded public places	3.21	1.08
Economic		
Economic benefits to local people and business	4.59	0.49
Creates employment opportunities	4.53	0.58
Increased standard of living	3.62	1.19
Increased prices of goods and services	2.03	0.80
Increases the value of real estate	2.46	1.10

items embodying both the benefits and costs of tourism. Based on the mean measures of impact items, the impact items associated with economic impacts had the lowest scores. Some of the economic impacts that were most favored by residents are as follows: “benefits to local people and small business” (4.59), “creates employment opportunities” (4.53), and “increase standard of living” (3.62). Following the economic impact of tourism, social and cultural aspects of tourism impact are evaluated relatively favorable. Some of the items comprising the factor of social and cultural 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 that are associated with crime rate and cultural onslaught were the negative impacts perceived by the leaders. The findings that show traffic congestion, noise and air pollution, as well as natural environment detriment, are the negative aspects of environmental impacts of tourism, which do not appear to be unexpected. Some of the environmental impacts that were most favored by the leaders are

as follows: “provides more parks and other recreational areas” (4.36) and “provides convenient transport” (4.06).

As shown in Table 1, all these suggest that the respondents had rather positive attitudes toward tourism impacts in their community. Differences among respondents were also observed (Table 2). Most of the 20 attitudinal items had the maximum range from the minimum (1 point) to maximum (5 points), indicating a variation of individual respondents’ attitudes toward tourism impacts. The size of the standard deviations of the 20 statements also indicated a moderate spread around the theoretical mean. The result of the *t*-test also showed that there were no significant differences of tourism impacts between the old and new districts. ($t = -2.531, p = 0.12$).

Table 2
The *t*-Test Comparisons of the Districts

Districts	<i>N</i>	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Sig.
Old	84	71.29	4.522	-2.531	173	0.12
New	91	73.55	6.949			

In response to this objective, the FGD also was performed. According to FGD most of the participation in both districts of Shiraz had positive attitudes toward economic of tourism impacts. In terms of sociocultural impacts only one pilot (in the new district) referred to sociocultural impacts of tourism as a bad phenomenon towards their local culture. However, all of the respondents said they had no doubts about the benefits of tourism, especially economic benefits, including employment and income. The respondents were then provided feedback on the long-term effects of tourism towards the community. Again, all respondents said they felt that the long-term effect of tourism on the economy had been positive. Additionally, all deem tourism to be a positive enhancer towards the community's future developments. In one pilot several participants stated that the local government holds a negative perception toward tourism development, because they were afraid of cultural change. In regards to environmental impacts of tourism, several respondents from the new district agreed that tourism has negative impacts towards the community's environment (e.g., tourist overflowing would lead to parking space problems near their homes). The local residents in the old district were accustomed to traffic and crowds because many people commute to work in the area. It is important to note that some of the findings in this study are better understood in light of research about residents' attitudes toward tourism. While data in many studies suggested that resident support for tourism is crucial, data in other studies indicated that residents tended to ignore, or cared very little for, the process in local communities (Allen, Hafer, Long, & Perdue, 1993; Lankford & Howard, 1994; Liu et al., 1987). Consistent with the findings, data in this study indicated high concern for the tourism process among the residents. Through FGD, in whole, the respondents felt that tourism has had a long-term positive impact on their communities. As equally important, all participants of the study from both districts agreed that tourism development not only had a positive impact on the locals' economy, but it also creates a positive impact on the infrastructure and social development. Those issues were some of the strongest and most favorable characteristics about tourism impacts reported in this study. Lastly,

FGD supported leaders' perceptions toward positive tourism impacts on the local community.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of community residents towards tourism impacts in order to gain a better understanding of their support for sustainable tourism development. The results showed that respondents strongly agree that tourism provides many cultural benefits, but are ambivalent about some cultural aspects of tourism; significant variation among respondents by demographic background is generally low. The study has also found that the community leaders perceived sociocultural aspects of tourism impacts most favorably than environmental and economic impacts. This result is rather unexpected because most of the researches indicated economic impacts of tourism as favorable for community residents (Tatoglu et al., 2000). The study also recognized no meaningful difference between the two discussed districts in terms of perceived tourism impacts. In conclusion, it can see some similarities between local residents and the leaders' attitudes towards tourism impacts. However, there are some differences evident between people in both districts of Shiraz, but they are not significantly important. The results from the *t*-test did not reveal significant differences between the two districts in terms of perceived tourism impacts. According to FGD, most of the participants in the both districts had overall positive attitudes towards tourism. As earlier discussed Moscardo (2008) believed that the lack of understanding of tourism is a factor for underdevelopment of tourism in third world countries. Hence, the findings help to understanding relationship between community perceptions of tourism impacts with support for tourism development. With consideration of all of these results, it can be discussed that community perception towards tourism impacts cannot be a factor for underdevelopment tourism industry in Shiraz, Iran. This finding is inconsistent with Hafeznia, Eftekhari, and Ramazani (2007), which they believed in Iran; many people have negative perceptions towards tourism impacts, especially about external tourism. Gursoy and Rutherford (2004) suggested that tourism developers need to consider the resi-

dents' perception before they start investing resources in tourism development processes. Therefore, the findings of this investigation can assist stakeholders and tourism developers in the implementation of tourism development strategies based on residents' attitudes.

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