

ATTITUDES OF LOCAL RESIDENTS TOWARD THE DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM IN A DEVELOPING SOCIETY: THE CASE OF TORQABEH, IRAN

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The purpose of this paper is to explore the attitude and perception of local residents toward tourism impacts and development in Torqabeh, one of the most popular tourism resort located in northeast of Iran. Two hundred and fifty households were randomly chosen as a sample of study and data were collected and analyzed with quantitative methods. The results of analysis revealed that local residents generally expressed a positive attitude toward tourism development in Torqabeh. There was evidence that Tourism-related job, community involvement in making decisions about tourism development, community attachment and length of residence are significant determinants of perceived tourism impacts and development. Furthermore, the study reinforces the need for inclusion of local people during future preliminary process of tourism planning in area.

Keywords: Tourism Development, Attitude, Perception, Torqabeh, Local residents.

INTRODUCTION

Despite this fact that , tourism has turned into a principal activity in most societies , predominantly a key driver of growth and a supplementary source of income for developing economies , however as Jafari, Smith and Brent (2001) advocated , tourism development bore



both positive and negative impacts on host destination. According to Látková and Vogt (2011), although tourism has increasingly been regarded as a vehicle of development in developing countries and has taken a dominant role in most countries, however it may threaten the indigenous culture and incur enormous costs on the host community. During the last decades, growing attention has been drawn to the impacts of tourism perceived by local residents of host communities. For instance, Andereck and Vogt (2000) claimed that understanding the local residents' perception of tourism impacts could be taken into account as an effective factor to engage them actively in the planning stage of sustainable tourism development in order to achieve sustainable tourism development. Moreover, according to Vargas-Sanchez, Porras-Bueno and Plaza-Mejia (2009), understanding residents' attitude toward tourism development leads to minimize the negative impacts in addition to maximizing the support for tourism initiatives. Furthermore, Nunkoo and Ramkissoon (2011) claimed that local population's perception of tourism impacts are required to be considered during preliminary process of tourism policy making and planning in the host community. Thus, sustainable tourism planning inevitably requires host community participation and support at all stages of development and one way to engage them at the beginning stages of the planning process is to understand their attitudes toward tourism development and their perceptions of tourism impacts.

Accordingly, Sebele (2010) reinforced previous opinions and stated that community-based tourism development coincides with ongoing sustainable community development. However, despite growing interest in the subject, only a few studies have been carried out from a developing world perspective.

Due to its proximity to Mashhad, as the religious capital and the second metropolis of Iran, Torqabeh receives millions of tourists annually (ICHTO, 2005), however, no research has been conducted within Torqabeh' context so far. Therefore, in an attempt to fill this gap, the current study was undertaken with the purpose of exploring how host residents shape their attitudes toward tourism development and impacts in Torqabeh.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue of residents' attitude and perception toward impacts of tourism development has received increasing attention in recent decades from tourism academics and scholars (Albalade & bel, 2010).

During last two decades, increasing number of studies and research utilized in the study of residents' attitude and a number of researchers identified a vast range of positive and negative impacts of tourism that may affect residents' attitude toward tourism development (Harill,2004 ; Lepp,2007; Spanou, 2007 ; Zamani-Farahani & Musa,2008; Nicholas et al,2009; Sebele , 2010 ; Rastegar, 2010; Vargas-Sanchez et al, 2011 ; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon,2011; Nunkoo & Gursoy , 2012; Lee , 2012). Furthermore several theoretical frameworks such as Doxey's Irridex's Model, Social Exchange Theory, Butler's Life Cycle and Ap and Crompton's Framework have been developed in order to help study tourism impacts perceived by host community.

Irridex's Model of Doxey (1975) one of the first models of residents attitude toward tourism, suggested that host population' attitude change over time, becoming more negative as tourism development and tourism flux increase and move forward through four stages: enthusiasm , apathy, annoyance and antagonism.

Butler (1980) developed the "tourism area life cycle" model which is a universal life cycle tourism model that explains the evolution of tourist area through the stages of exploration, involvement, development, consolidation/stabilization, decline or rejuvenation

Based on Ap and Crompton's framework (1993), residents' reaction to tourism development could be placed on a continuum comprised of four strategies: embracement, tolerance, adjustment and withdrawal.

According to the Social exchange theory (SET) suggested by Ap (1992), individuals will evaluate an exchange based on the cost and benefits that have incurred as a result of that exchange. This implies that residents weigh the costs and benefits of the exchange before forming their attitude and opinion toward tourism development. SET remains one of the most widely used frameworks by researchers attempting to study community attitudes. For instance, Varges-Sanchez et al (2011) concluded that residents, who obtain personal benefits of tourism, show a more favorable attitude toward the development of tourism. Similarly, in their model of community support based on the social exchange theory, Nunkoo and Ramkissoon (2011) suggested that perceived benefits, perceived costs, and community satisfaction influence residents' support of tourism development. Accordingly, Lee (2012) claimed that the benefits perceived by host residents are consistent with their support for sustainable tourism development. However, most studies have been conducted in the context of the developed world; very little research on this topic has been carried out in the developing world. In addition, The present study was the first attempt focused on host community reactions

to tourism development in Torqabeh. Therefore, the findings of current study can be a valuable and effective information source for decision makers and policy makers in attracting local people to tourism development.

STUDY AREA

Mashhad is the second largest city in Iran which is located at the northeast of country, at the center of the Razavi Khorasan Province close to the borders of Afghanistan and Turkmenistan. With population of 2,427,316 (SCI, 2011), Mashhad attracts more than 20 million tourists and pilgrims every year, many of whom come to pay homage to the Imam Reza shrine (the eighth Shiite Imam) (ICHTO, 2005). Torqabeh as a very popular tourism resort is located 13 kilometers northwest of Mashhad. Mild climate, unique sceneries and landscapers, and traditional handicrafts are distinctive features of this area. At the 2011 census (SCI, 2011) its population was 13,158, in 3,668 families. Furthermore, its proximity to Mashhad provides an opportunity that the tourists and local residents of Mashhad visit it. For the last two decades, tourism has been the largest industry in Torqabeh and it was developed as a major tourism destination first in 2004 and hence, the government and private sectors have launched several projects for the development of infrastructure and public facilities in the area. Although its economy has historically been influenced by farming and gardening, tourism has emerged as an important dimension of the local economy in recent decade. (Aryanezhad, 2010)

METHODOLOGY

The study population included local residents of Torqabeh and households were chosen as study's sample through the Cochran sampling

method ($n = \frac{Nz^2pq}{Nd^2 + z^2pq}$) in which confidence level of 95%, accuracy of 0.06 and variance of 0.5 were considered. In addition, in this study, cluster sampling method was chosen due to fewer travel expenses, administration costs and cheaper than other methods and was employed for dividing the total population into groups based on the list provided by the city council and a random sample of these clusters are selected. The data collection was performed from October 2012 to December 2012 by researchers. The questionnaire designed was in Farsi (Persian), Iran's

official language, as all respondents only speak Farsi. It comprised three sections to investigate residents' attitude toward tourism impacts and development in Torqabeh. 26 statements were derived by researchers from various relevant works of literature to fit within the Torqabeh's context appropriately. The first section is designed to ask the respondents to state their level of agreement or disagreement with economical, socio-cultural and environmental impacts relating to tourism development on a Five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 strongly agree to 5 strongly disagree. Five-point Likert scale has been chosen particularly as respondents can express themselves better. The purpose of second section is to explore the community participation in process of making decisions about tourism in the area, the community attachment, in addition to studying whether the respondents are going to support tourism development in the future as well and finally the last section gathered demographic characteristics of respondents in Torqabeh. In addition, Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant (2150/699 and sig< 0/000), indicating that the data was acceptable for factor analysis. The factor analysis was used to assess the validity of questionnaire. Moreover, The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.829 and it implied that sampling was appropriate. To measure internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha coefficient of reliability for tourism impacts variables was 0.855, which is appropriate. Data analysis was conducted using the statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS Version 20) and Descriptive statistics, Factor Analysis, Pearson correlation analysis, Tb Kendall correlation and T-test were conducted to analyze data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, 250 households were chosen as a sample of study. The majority of respondents were male (62 %) and married (72.5%). An absolute majority of the respondents (79.2%) were born in Torqabeh. The mean age of respondents in this study was 36.5 years and 50% of respondents have completed a high school education. In terms of income, insufficient data was received. 50% of households did not mention their income due to privacy, etc. Consequently researchers were unable to analyze this section of data. Moreover, an absolute majority of the respondents (83.2%) prefer living in Torqabeh rather than elsewhere. In other words, they have sense of belonging to their hometown. Only 30% of the respondents were involved in tourism related businesses or

activities, whereas the majority of residents were involved in farming or gardening sectors. Furthermore, Only 12% of respondents reported that they were involved with process of making decisions and management of tourism in Torqabeh.

To measure the economical, socio-cultural and environmental impacts of tourism in the study area, 26 items were derived from various tourism related literature. Of those, fourteen items are related to socio-cultural impacts of tourism (mean: 39.62% - range: 13-65), eight items are related to economical impacts of tourism (mean :24/41 , range:8-40) and four items are related to environmental impacts(mean:8/70 , range : 4-20). t-Test was conducted in order to examine the influence of tourism-related jobs on local residents' perception of tourism development .The value for those who were involved in tourism-related job was 78/15, whereas the value for those residents who were not associated with tourism-related job was 70/38. The results of the research showed up those respondents with tourism related job had significantly perceived tourism development in Torqabeh more positively than those who were not involved in the tourism industry. ($t=3.844$, $sig=0/000$).Tb Kendall correlation was carried out to examine the relationship between local community involvement in making decisions about tourism development in area and attitude towards tourism. The findings of data analysis reported a significant and positive relation between community involvement in making decision about tourism and impacts of tourism in area. The Pearson correlation coefficient for relationship between local community involvement in making descion decision and socio-cultural impacts was 0/128, for economic impacts was 0/191 and for environmental impact was 0/123. (P Value $\leq 0/05$).

The results of Pearson correlation test demonstrated a negative significant relationship between length of residence in Torqabeh and socio-cultural and environmental impacts of tourism. The value of Pearson coefficient for relationship between length of residence and socio cultural impacts was -0/197 and for environmental impacts was -0/233. (P Value $\leq 0/05$).This finding showed that those residents living in Torqabeh for a long time perceived socio-cultural and environmental impacts of tourism negatively.

Tb Kendall correlation was employed to examine the relationship between local community's attachment to Torqabeh and perception toward tourism development. A significant relationship was found between community attachment and perceived costs. The finding showed a positive and significant relation between local residents' attachment to Torqabeh and economical impacts of tourism (value = 0/114,

Significance= 0/026). The results of analyzing data revealed that those residents with a sense of belonging to Torqabeh, perceived economical impacts positively.

Stepwise regression analysis was carried out to assess the influence of all independent variables on dependent variable (perception towards tourism). The finding demonstrated that three variables (length of residence, tourism-related occupation and community involvement in making decisions about tourism development) simultaneously influenced local residents' perception of tourism development. The multiple correlation coefficients for factor effecting perception toward tourism were 0/394, the R square is 0/155 and the adjusted R square was 0/129. Accordingly about 13 percent of residents' perception of tourism development variably was explained by three variables mentioned.

CONCLUSION

The current study examined local residents' perception of tourism impacts and development in Torqabeh, famous tourist resort in the northeast of Iran. The result of analyzing data revealed that generally, respondents had a positive attitude toward tourism impacts and development.

Firstly, the finding of study demonstrated that long-term residents of Torqabeh had a less favorable perception of tourism than newer residents. This finding confirms the claim of Harrill (2004) who found that long-term residents of Montana & Virginia held less favorable perception than newer residents toward tourism development.

Secondly, the current study's results indicated that there is a strong relationship between respondents' job and their perception on the impacts of tourism. Those residents who had a business related to tourism and had benefited from tourism, had more positive attitude than those who were not involved in or associated with the tourism industry. The result supports the social exchange theory (SET) and reinforces previous research findings in which SET have been used as theoretical framework for understanding the perception of host residents towards tourism (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011; Zamani Farahani & Musa, 2012; Nunkoo & Gursay, 2012).

Thirdly, another important conclusion is that local people, who were involved with the decision-making and management of tourism in Torqabeh, strongly had supported tourism development in the area. In other words, as the host residents' level of community involvement increases, the residents' support for sustainable tourism development also

increases. This finding is in line with the finding of some previous studies (Lepp, 2007, Lee, 2012, Sebele, 2010, Rastegar, 2010). In addition, the finding found that most of the residents in area were not involved in processes of making decision and management of tourism development. Moreover, a little synergy was found between local tourism authority and host population in sharing ideas in process of making decision about tourism development in Torqabeh. However, as the increased involvement of host residents in sustainable tourism is vital for the support of sustainable tourism development; hence, future sustainability in tourism development will inevitably require more involvement among local residents in the planning and management of tourism in Torqabeh.

Finally, the findings revealed that the residents who had greater community attachment were more favorable of sustainable tourism development. This finding is in consistent with claims by some researchers who have advocated that community attachment directly and significantly affects support for tourism development (Nicholas, Thapa & Ko, 2009; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011, Lee, 2012).

The findings of the present study can be helpful for local government officials and tourism authorities. Results suggested that these authorities and particularly local government officials should increase awareness of local residents of tourism, its potential benefits through local exhibition, workshop, advertisement via mass media, seminars, etc. Thus it is recommended that policy makers and tourism planners conduct more workshops for local residents in order for them to participate in the tourism management and planning of Torghabeh. Moreover, the managers should provide opportunities for residents in Torqabeh to become involved in the planning and management of sustainable tourism development within their communities. Moreover as tourism is still an emerging industry in developing societies such as Iran, therefore it is strongly recommended that basic principles of sustainability be considered during preliminary planning of tourism. As the current study was the first study of its type in Torqabeh, therefore results suggested the need for further research into this important issue in order to examine the reaction of local residents of Torqabeh toward impacts of tourism development in the region and to compare and contrast the experiences of Torqabeh with other tourism destinations in Iran as well.

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