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TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND RESIDENTS' ATTITUDE: A CASE STUDY OF YAZD, IRAN

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The Yazd residents look at tourism development with a promising future to bring more income to the area that can be shared. Investors search to find new attractive business and middle and low classes in the community look to find better job opportunities. This paper assesses the attitude and perception of local residents toward this fast growing industry and also their expectation of authority regarding tourism development in Yazd city. A questionnaire was designed based on five point Likert scale and total 320 usable questionnaires were collected from local residents. Though the result shows positive attitude of local people towards tourism development but they are not totally satisfied with tourism management in the area.

Keywords: *Tourism development, Yazd (Iran), Local residents, Attitude.*

JEL Classification: *L83, M1, O1*

INTRODUCTION

In general residents' attitudes towards tourism development can be improved by increasing both tangible and intangible benefits that these populations receive from involving directly in decision-making processes. As Choi & Sirakaya (2006) indicate host community attitudes towards tourism is one of important indicators for sustainable tourism development. A number of factors can influence residences' perceptions about benefits of tourism development and, hence, the extent of their support. Both community participation and recognition of the role of traditional values consistently having recognized as a fundamental to the success of development projects (Alexander 2000).

Stakeholder involvement in the tourism development is a critical factor for success, yet there are many examples of local communities



being excluded or only minimally involve in the initial planning and management (Hough 1998; Jacobson 1991; West & Brechin 1991; Heinen 1993; Durbin & Ralambo 1994). There are different levels of people in community which need different levers for motivation and satisfaction which should be identified. Negative attitudes towards tourism development often arise from poor relationship between local resident and authority, problems with distributions of benefits to local population and lack of local involvement in the decision-making and/ or management. The key to successful implementation of tourism programs is in actively addressing relevant factors with residence who traditionally have been ignored but who today are recognized as the main stakeholders in the process.

The study aimed to identify residence

- a) attitude and perceptual towards tourism development,
- b) feeling about management of tourism in the area,
- c) involvement in tourism sector and receiving tangible and intangible benefits and at the end,
- d) suggest a strategic planning for sustainable tourism development in the area.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As travel and tourism industries are among the words fastest growing industries and are the major source of foreign exchange earning for many developing countries (Megan Epler Wood 2002), it is very important to study socioeconomic impact of these industries. Community participation, a Western paradigm in natural resource management and utilization, is currently much discussed in sustainable tourism development research (Agrawal 2000, Archabald and Naughton-Treves 2001, Brohman 1996, Inskip 1991, Prentice 1993, Simmons 1994 and Straede and Helles 2000).

It is thought that only when local communities are involved in decision-making, can their benefits be ensured and their traditional lifestyles and values respected (Gunn 1994, Lankford and Howard 1994, Linderberg and Johnson 1997, Mitchell and Reid 2001, Sheldon and Abenoja 2001, Timothy 1999 and Wells 1996). Ashley and Roe (1998) suggest that tourism can involve and affect local residents without being driven and controlled by community and therefore there can be many forms of their involvement. These may include a range of involvement from passive to active and include lease agreement, concessions, partnership and active involvement in businesses. Involvement of local

community can have many positive incomes include: a) public values and opinions are incorporated in the decision-making process (Beierle 1998, Carmin, Darnall & Mil Homens 2003) b) new ideas are generated (Carmin, Darnall & Mil Homens 2003, Fiorino 1990) c) empowerment of community (Scheyvens 1999) d) a cost effective process (Beierle 1998) e) a reduction in conflict and lawsuits (Beierle 1998, Carmin, Darnall & Mil Homens 2003, Simrell King & Feltey 1998, Steelman 2001).

Usually the local government is responsible to introduce and implement the program in the area but there is seldom perfect relationship between key stakeholders. Finding out the local resident attitude towards tourism development can be a proper way to understand the success of the program in the area that have been previously discussed by researcher such as Ross (1992), Ryan & Montgomery (1994), Mac Cool & Martin (1994), Hernandez et al (1996), Lankford (1994) and Lankford & Howard (1994). All these studies shows local people have more positive attitude towards tourism development when they have right to involve in decision-making and management of the programs. Unfortunately there is lack of research on tourism development in the selected study area which leads to a sustainable tourism development.

STUDY AREA

Officially the Islamic Republic of Iran and formerly known internationally as Persia (from 600 BC until 1935), is a country in Central Eurasia located on the northeastern shore of the Persian Gulf and Oman Sea and the southern shore of the Caspian Sea. Iran is the 18th largest country in the world in terms of area at 1,648,195 km², and has a population of over seventy million.

With a long-standing and proud civilization, Persian culture is among the richest in the world. Two and a half millennia of inspiring literature, thousands of poets and writers, magnificent and impressive architecture, live customs dating back to Zoroastrians over 3000 years ago, and other unique characteristics of the nation are rivaled by only a few countries. It is rich with the history of humanity and has a high concentration of archaeological sites (Zende Del 20001). Among the ceremonies still being held are Norouz (Iranian New Year), Charshanbeh Suri (last Wednesday of the year), Sizdah Bedar (thirteenth day of spring) and Yalda Night (the longest night of the year).

The province of Yazd is situated in center of Iran with area of 73467 km². The capital of the province is Yazd with the population of more than 505,037 people, located 1230 meter above the sea level with mean annual

temperature and precipitation of 18.9 C0 and 64mm (NGDIR 2009). The province of Yazd is dry for two basic reasons, firstly Yazd is located on the arid belt of the world, and secondly is very far from Persian Gulf, Oman Sea and the Iranian lakes, as well as the humid currents of the sea. One of the important factors which makes the weather moderate and also suitable for living, is being surrounded by high mountains, which affect the weather.

Beautiful green valleys, wonderful country sides, marvelous springs, pleasant peaks and hill sides, caves, protected wild life fields (the protected wild areas "Kalmand" and "Bahadoran" with an area of 250 hectares and the protected area of "Kooch Bafq& areez" with an area of 100 hectares are very interesting for their location on the edge of the central desert of Iran which caused an unique varieties of desert plants and animals like: Asiatic cheetah, wild goat and so on) and more importantly the wonderful desert views of the province are very attractive for foreign and domestic tourists. Cultural attractions of the province are remarkable. The rich legacy of the people's culture shows nice and old traditions of the Zoroastrians as well as the now Muslims which consist together a marvelous tourism attraction. The native Zoroastrians of the province hold their traditional ceremonies in different occasions every year, and observing them doing so, is attractive for tourists from different cultures. The native Zoroastrians of the province still speaks their old language and practice all their traditional ceremonies in that language.

The old part of city is made out of clay and adobe; it seems that it has risen out of sand. Yazd's architecture is unique. During its long history, Yazd and its residents have adapted themselves to the desert surrounding. Majority of international tourists, who enter Iran, visit Yazd as a historical city. According to Yazd provincial Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Department, during March 2008-2009, 28,521 foreign tourists and 202,615 Iranian tourists toured historical monuments and natural sites in Yazd province. Moreover most of the international visitors were from European countries including Germany, France, Spain and Italy as well as Asian states of China, Japan and Korea in addition to several African countries. The province has more than 2,800 beds in 40 hotels (Yazd province had only 25 hotels in 2005, which increased to 40 in 2008) (Iran Daily 2009).

METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire was designed to measure the attitude of local people about tourism activity in the area and socio-cultural impacts of these activities in Yazd. In the first step one rapid approach to the main

tourist's areas of Yazd was done to get familiar with the area and the situation of tourists activities over there. All the items of the interest were measured using a multiple-item measurement scale. All measures used a five-point likert-type response format; with strongly agree to strongly disagree. A list of measurement item was developed using from the review of the literature related to this study. All the questions were translated from English to Persian to ensure the respond can understand them correctly and each questionnaire was filled by an interview up to 30 minutes. From 350 questionnaires, 320 usable questionnaires were completed for analyzing. Apart from this questionnaire informal interviews were done by author with local people and tourism authority of Yazd city. The study was done during May and June 2008.

RESULT

The majority of respondent are male with 61 percent and 39 percent female answered the questions. The level of education shows 27 percent under diploma, 43 percent diploma, 23 percent bachelor, 6 percent master and 1 percent have doctorate degree. The age group of the respondents shows 33 percent between 15-25, 50 percent between 25-40 and 17 percent have 45 years old and above.

In term of income only 15% have income of less than 250\$ per month 49%, 250\$ to 500\$ and 36% having more than 500\$ per month. Regarding employment 26% indicate that they have jobs related tourism activity, however it shows the direct employment in tourism sector and by considering the indirect engagement the number will increase. There are different engagements in tourism sector among respondent like: working in the kitchen of the hotels and restaurants, working as guide and owning souvenir shops. Majority of respondent (76%) mostly young people (85%) vote in favor of tourism activity and development in the area. The main reason for their support of tourism development is creation of job opportunity (37%) and more income (25%) and 71% indicate that tourism is one of the most important factors for development in the area. However most of old people (above 45) believe it has negative impact on local culture. The main complain about tourism activity by respondent is negligence of local people as a main stakeholder by authority that kept them away of decision making in the tourism policy and programs. The shopkeepers believe that their association must have more authority to decide about the future programs related tourism activity. The main

concern for employee in tourism sector is off-season and some look at it as a temporary job.

CONCLUSION

The study shows the expectation of young people in the community of tourism is high and they believe that this sector should bring a significant change to their lives. The old people look at it with more doubt, especially when it comes to cultural changes that may tourism bring to the area. Failure to identify the interest of even a single primary stakeholder group may result in failure of the entire process (Clarkson 1995). Tourism has been known to trigger a cascade of social, ecological, cultural and economic changes not easily managed by local residents (Belsky 1999). As tourists enjoy in local area and use local sources for completing their enjoyment and travel, they are also in charge of local people and their culture and heritage. Awareness of tourists affects their behavior towards local community and indigenous people. The growth of the industry in urban destinations presents various challenges such as protection of environment, conservation of heritage, preservation of social fabric and cultural values, and maintenance of a desired quality of life for residents (Timur & Getz, 2008)

Yazd city has many attractions for different kinds of tourism especially heritage tourism. Addition to this most of the local people have positive attitude about future of tourism in their area and look at it with a promising future. It can be a gold opportunity that must be used by authority to develop the sustainable activity in the area. But involvement of local people in decision-making is less and it caused dissatisfaction in the area. However overview of peer-reviewed articles, Agrawal and Redford (2006) found that newly generated local jobs and incomes were the most common “indicators of success” but it alone cannot ensure the sustainable tourism. Problem of off season and fluctuating in income in the area can come from lack of awareness about nature of tourism among those who are involved in this sector. In this condition during low season cash flow ends and financial incentives disappear and the members of community who are involved in the tourism activities will receive less income during the low season. This problem can be like an epidemic which destroys all same genes in one area. When people shift entirely from other income sources, they become vulnerable to boom-bust cycle and seasonal fluctuations of the tourism markets (Elper Wood 2002). So

fluctuation in tourist numbers is a disadvantage for those household not receiving income from other productive activities.

According to Scheyvens (1999) there are four kinds of empowerment which can help local communities to reduce the negative impacts of tourism in their area such as: economical, psychological, social and political empowerments. Local community need to be empowered to decide what forms of tourism facilities and programmes they want to be developed in their area, and how the tourism costs and benefits are to be shared among different stakeholders.

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