

Evaluating Rural Community Attitudes towards Tourism Development, according to Structural Equation Model

(Case study: Mountain areas of Roodbar Ghasran, Shemiran)

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

This study examines the attitudes of residents toward tourism in rural mountain communities in Roodbareghasran district (Shemiranat, Tehran). The objective of this research is modeling host community support for tourism development and the potential of participation based on the factors found to influence reactions towards it. Understanding local communities' attitudes toward tourism development is vital for the success and sustainability of any type of tourism development. A large number of studies have examined resident attitudes as well as and the factors that are likely to influence them. Most of those studies suggest that the locals tend to have positive attitudes because they see tourism as an economic development tool and personal benefit can affect attitude toward tourism. There have been suggested in many investigations that the resident's attitudes toward tourism may be directly related to the degree or stage of development within the host community. While residents may oppose one type of development, they may be more willing to support another type. Thus a continuing assessment of locals' attitudes for different types of

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development may be necessary to assure sustainability and to manage more critical aspects that appear as a tourism destination continues to develop.

Methodology

The research utilized social exchange theory as a foundation to formulate the questions of the research and the tests of structural equation model. Using the literature of tourism supports model Propose several paths that. The model consisted of five latent structures and nine hypothesized paths. By employing a questionnaire survey and focusing on a proposed development was conducted in a rural region with 270 questionnaires by rural residents. This research examines the path relationships between perceptions of benefits from tourism development, the positive and negative impacts of tourism, and the community satisfaction support of tourism development. Data were analyzed by a structural equation modeling methodology utilizing a two-step approach. Reliability analysis was used to evaluate the stability and consistency for measured items of each latent construct.

Results

Data for this study were collected from residents of 10 villages of case study. The results support six hypotheses but three of them rejected at $p < 0.05$ levels. Findings indicated one of the most important theoretical contributions of this study: its findings confirm the usefulness of exchange theory principles in explaining resident's attitudes toward tourism. Hypothesized path relationships between personal benefits from tourism development and constructs of perceived negative tourism impacts and overall community satisfaction were rejected. Also hypothesized path relationship between community satisfaction and support tourism development were rejected. The implications suggest that, in this case, personal benefits from tourism are relevant to understanding perceptions of positive impacts. This study found that 'residents' community satisfaction' was closely related to 'perceived positive tourism impacts'. Both perceived positive and negative impacts were direct causing the attitudes towards tourism development and important relationships between resident's perceptions of tourism impacts and community satisfaction. Community satisfaction may be a useful concept for evaluation of residents' perception of tourism impacts and attitudes tourism development. In conclusion, community satisfaction was influenced by perception of tourism impacts, and may be useful in planning for tourism development. Overall findings

suggested positive relationships between tourism development and perceptions of positive impacts and negative relationships between negative impacts perceptions and support for development. Residents who see tourism as a means for creating positive economic impacts were found to support. This finding is consistent with willing for studies that positive economic impact is one of the main reasons of willing for development in local communities. The findings revealed that the host community support is affected by the level of perceived costs and benefits of the tourism development. While most of the residents were found to be concerned about economic benefits, others were more concerned about specific social, cultural and / or environmental costs. As indicated by the findings, the majority of local residents feel the economy needs improvement. If they believe certain aspects of the development may have negative impacts or certain types of development may not be appropriate, they are likely to support that development. Also the history of tourism or degree of development within a host community may be relevant to understanding residents' perceptions of tourism. Findings of this study suggested that understanding local residents' attitudes towards any form of tourism development requires an examination of a set of very complex as well as interrelated factors. Further research needs to address community satisfaction, level of tourism development, and attitude towards tourism development. Discuss integrating community satisfaction with tourism development.

Keywords: Rural tourism, rural community, perceptions and attitude of residents, structural equation model, Roodbar Ghasran.