

Research Paper

Comparative analysis of local residents' perceptions of the impacts of tourism on rural areas: A case study of the villages in the basin of the Kolan river in Malayer County

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ABSTRACT

Until now, a large number of studies on tourism in rural regions have concentrated on the recognition of its positive and negative impacts on economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions. However, considering the different views held by local people of the impact of tourism, few studies have been carried out to compare the perceptions of stakeholders, especially from the perspective of rural residents. This research aims to do a comparative analysis of the perceptions of local residents about the impacts of tourism on the villages of Kolan river basin in *Malayer* County. The research method is a mixed procedure. In the qualitative phase, during six sessions, group brainstorming was done by 60 persons participating as local volunteers. They tried to identify the positive and negative impacts of tourism. The findings in this phase were used to design a questionnaire as a measurement tool in the quantitative phase. As many as 350 questionnaires were given to 10% of the population over 15 years of age. The data were analyzed by descriptive statistics, exploratory factor analysis, cluster analysis, discriminant analysis, chi-square, and ANOVA. According to the exploratory factor analysis, the positive impacts were classified into economic, environmental, and social factors. Similarly, the negative impacts were classified into three factors in terms of environmental, social and security, and cultural impacts. The results of the cluster analysis showed three different perspectives. In most cases, there were significant differences between the perceptions of the local residents in terms of positive and negative impacts of tourism. The findings are consistent with the principles of social exchange theory.

Key words:

Rural tourism, Tourism impacts, Social exchange theory, Basin of Kolan river, *Malayer* County

Extended Abstract**1. Introduction**

In recent decades, development of rural tourism has become one of the most popular activities for diversification and reconstruction of the rural economy. Nonetheless, many experiences in the world show that poor planning and managing of rural

tourism has posed certain challenges and even caused unsustainability. The present study explores an appropriate model of tourism management in the rural areas of the Kolan river, *Malayer* County. Generally, tourism management is a systematic approach for minimizing the negative impacts and maximizing the positive impacts of tourism development through studies and comprehensive planning. The research issues concentrate on spontaneous and unmanaged development of rural tourism in the study area. On this basis, the necessity of taking advantage of

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an appropriate model for management of rural tourism impacts is discussed. The main purpose of the intended model was to enhance the capabilities of the rural tourism sector to continuously reduce the adverse or negative impacts and, consistently, to increase the appropriate or positive impacts of rural tourism activities in the area. Accordingly, the study questions focused on various aspects of rural tourism impacts as well as appropriate strategies and tactics for managing them.

2. Methodology

The study was conducted by qualitative and quantitative techniques. In the qualitative stage, six group-brainstorming sessions were held to identify the positive and negative impacts of rural tourism on the area. Based on the results of these sessions, a questionnaire was designed for a sample of 350 local residents who expressed their perception of the rural tourism impacts. First, a statistically descriptive analysis was done on the collected data to explore the overall sample profile. In the second stage, the principal component analysis (PCA) with a varimax rotation was used for hierarchy clustering. Also, the number of the clusters was identified by an agglomeration schedule. Then, K-means cluster analysis was performed to classify the samples according to their perception of the effects of tourism on the areas in the basin of the Kolan river in Malayer County. This actually helped to best discriminate the groups. In the third stage, the cluster characteristics were delineated by various univariate and multivariate statistical procedures. Specifically, the demographic and socio-economic differences among the clusters and the other corresponding dimensions were assessed by such analyses as ANOVA and chi-square. ANOVA was used to identify whether there were any differences among the clusters, as measured by a comparison of means (for metric variables). A discriminant analysis was also done to provide information on which of the travel motivational items would drive the differences and to assess the accuracy level of the segment membership classification. Finally, chi-square analysis was used to explore the differences among the clusters in terms of categorical variables, such as demographics and perception of positive and negative impacts of rural tourism.

3. Results

Six group brainstorming sessions participated by 65 persons resulted in 11 positive impacts and eight negative impacts. The positive impacts of tourism on the areas in the basin of the Kolan river were stated as follows: 1) providing new employment opportunities in the tourism sector, 2) improvement of rural property values, 3)

financial investments by the public and private sectors in various functions and activities of rural tourism, 4) prosperity of selling local products, 5) increased government investment in rural development, 6) improvement of rural facilities and transport infrastructures, 7) bringing the area out of geographical isolation, 8) physical restructuring of rural settlements, 9) formation of a new local identity as a recreational and tourist area, 10) creation of a new and positive image of the area in the public opinion and the media, and 11) increased sense of place in the region. The negative impacts of tourism on the area of the Kolan river were stated as follows: 1) destruction of the land and vegetation, 2) increase of environmental pollution, 3) irregular increase in the illegal hunting of wild animals and birds, 4) congestion of traffic, 5) increased crimes and social problems in the area, 6) increased sense of personal and social insecurity, 7) threatened safety and health of tourists because of the poor existing standards, and 8) cultural conflicts between tourists and locals. Implementation of PCA resulted in three factor solutions for explaining both positive and negative impacts of rural tourism. So, the positive categories were recognized as economic, environmental (physical), and social impacts, while the negative categories were summarized as environmental, social and security, and cultural impacts. According to the results of the cluster analysis, the local people's perception of the positive and negative impacts of tourism was divided into three viewpoints. In most cases, a significant difference was observed between the perception of the local residents of the positive and negative impacts of tourism on the area. A Chi-square test was used to measure the relationship between the descriptive variables of the respondents and their perception of positive and negative impacts of tourism. The results showed that there was a significant relationship between the age, occupation, education level, and place of residence of the people and their perception of the impact of tourism in various aspects

4. Discussion

Perception of tourists, attitude toward tourism development, and the relation of tourists and hosts were identified as key factors. This finding is in line with many other studies of rural tourism in the literature. The result of the comparative analysis of the local people's perception of the positive and negative impacts of tourism on the area of the Kolan river is consistent with the principles of social exchange theory. The theory has provided a conceptual basis to examine the inter-relationships among perceptions of costs and benefits, positive and negative impacts, support for tourism in the tourism industry, and critical issues for governments, policy makers and industry.

5. Conclusion

This study has provided valuable insights into tourism for local managers and authorities to refine their strategies for managing rural tourism impacts on the rural area of the Kolan river.

Generally, based on the results and implications of the research, certain propositions can be presented as follows. Rural people do not have the same perceptions of rural tourism impacts, and such perceptions depend on their profit and loss from the benefits of tourism development. So, it is necessary that rural development planners manage the tourism impacts by considering the views and expectations of various rural groups and stakeholders.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declared no conflicts of interest

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