

Resident's Perceptions of the Role of Tourism in Social Changes of Rural Areas (Case Study: Ziarat Village of Gorgan County)

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Received: 22 June 2014

Accepted: 1 August 2015

Extended Abstract

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is considered as a social event by many researchers, because the tourism activity occurs between two different groups of people of which one is the local and the other one is the visitor. Tourism as a social event, makes a relationship between communities that have different social characteristics and creates the mutual relationship between the different cultures, traditions and behaviors. As a result, it may cause changes in social structures, modes of behavior and life style. Hence it can be said that tourism as a social and cultural activity, is a potential of change, but. Since the direction of this change is not clear, it would cause difficulties for tourism management. Unbalanced and uncoordinated social changes with society can cause chaos and confusion and heavy blows for the society. Therefore, it is necessary to review them. The aim of this research is the assessment of the host communities' perceptions of tourism's role on social changes of Ziarat village. In the present article, we have tried to answer the following fundamental questions: What is tourism's role in social changes of Ziarat village from the perspective of the villagers? What are the affective variables on perceptions and attitudes of the villagers about tourism's role in social change in Ziarat village?

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Issues on social change in the humanities have a continuous history. There are numerous definitions regarding the concept of social change. According to Vagu (1994), social change is a process of qualitative and quantitative replacement of social phenomena which can be planned (intentional) and unplanned (unintended). According to Giddens (1998), social change is change in the basic institutions of society during a given period. Sociologists often consider effects of social changes in macro and micro levels. In macro level, the effects of changes in society and dimensions

such as family, school, economy, and political system is studied. And the effects of changes on phenomena such as individual behaviors and awareness, ideas, beliefs, desires, and impulses are considered in micro level. Therefore, several factors are involved in social change. These factors influence each other and are interdependent. Although social change is a feature of all societies, the original source includes natural environment, demographic changes, technology, governance, competition, war, planning, and social movements. However, there are several reasons that ensure social changes. In this context, mankind and his natural curiosity, his eternal desire for new experiences and his wishes to know the unknowns can be mentioned. Changes in a society are different according to the nature of changes (i.e., endogenous and exogenous). Changes caused by internal factors generally are not associated with value conflict and structural instability. But changes caused by external factors make trouble for at least parts of the society. According to the aforementioned classification, tourism is one of the exogenous factors of social change in communities. Presence of tourists in rural areas and their contacts with villagers cause the promotion of different cultures and change of the lifestyle in the village.

3. METHODOLOGY

This is a questionnaire-based survey research. The questionnaire used in this study consists of two parts. The first part includes demographic characteristics of the population and the second part is related to the social changes in the region under study. Through reviewing the literature, four indicators were chosen to measure social changes (i.e., social status of women, tendency to migrate, social interaction of residents, and increasing social pathologies). The population of this study consisted of 557 households in the Ziarat village of which 250 have been selected as sample by use of Morgan table. The questionnaires were distributed

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between samples through Judgmental sampling. In order to test hypotheses, binomial test with SPSS software was used. To examine the role of demographic variables that influence the perception of host communities on the role of tourism in the local community, the Mann-Whitney, Kruskal-Wallis, and ANOVA test were used.

4. DISCUSSION

According to the findings of this study, which are based on the perspective of the residents, tourism is contributed to the changing of social status of women, social interactions of residents, and increasing social pathologies. Thus, the means of these variables are greater than the expected mean (%50). In relation to the indicator of tendency to migrate, the research hypothesis was rejected. Tourism not only does not increase the desire of the residents to emigrate, but also reduces the willingness of residents to migrate. Moreover, based on the findings, sex and age of the residents influence their perception of the role of tourism in social changes. The results also present that, men more than women, and young people more than elder ones can feel the social changes caused by tourism.

5. CONCLUSION

According to the findings, tourism has increased employment opportunities, independency, and participation in family issues for women in the village. Tourism is a favorable ground for the promotion of rural women's entrepreneurship. They can find employment with minimal cost and risk. Tourism development has provided many areas for the women to participate in the economy and creat small businesses in the Ziarat village. With the development of the tourism, the importance of visiting relatives, the importance of cooperating in village council, and family involvement in public session has been decreased. In the dimension of immigration tendency, it seems that tourism development makes the rural infrastructure improved , good communication with the surrounding area happens, and also creates job opportunities. All these changes facilitate the possibility of life in the village. Tourism and delinquency with some abnormalities in the host community has a positive correlation. Tourism has increased the level of crime in the region.

Key words: Tourism, social changes, rural areas, Ziarat village, rural tourism.

How to cite this article:

Mahmoudzadeh, S. M. & Bazrafshan, Sh. (2016). Resident's perceptions of the role of tourism in social changes of rural areas (Case study: Ziarat village of Gorgan County). *Journal of Research & Rural Planning*, 4(4), 1-15.

URL <http://jrrp.um.ac.ir/index.php/RRP/article/view/36587>

ISSN: 2322-2514

eISSN: 2383-2495