

Local Community Attitudes Toward Social and Economic Impacts of Tourism: A Case Study of Bisotun, Iran

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Abstract: The historical city of Bisotun in western Iran is popular for its ancient heritage and cultural tourism. Bisotun is a protected area and registered in the list of world heritage Sites in 2006. This study examines the perceptions of the residents toward social and economic impacts of tourism development in the area. A questionnaire was designed for this research and various related literature were used to develop the items for questions. Besides the questionnaire, author had semi-structured interviews with residents. According to the survey, a high percentage of the answers, emphasizes the positive impacts of tourism toward local people. Besides, social aspects of tourism impacts are found to be more favorable. The Findings in Semi structured interviews with residents supported the survey results.

Key words: Residents • Tourism stakeholders • Tourism development • Social impacts • Economic impacts • Participation

INTRODUCTION

Tourism cannot be planned in isolation; the achievement of the residents' objectives should be mentioned in tourism development. Considering the importance of residents, who have a key role in tourism development; many researchers carried out studies in developed countries about local community toward tourism impacts. Among them are Lankford and Howard [1], Hernandez *et al.* [2], Schroeder [3], Ryan and Montgomery [4], Nicholas [5], Williams and Lawson [6]. Based on these studies, there is no doubt that tourism development has major effect on the economies of destination areas. Economic impacts induced by tourism development encompass the monetary costs and benefits which result from tourism development and use of tourist facilities and services.

In addition to impacting economic arenas of local life, tourism development can also affect social aspects of a community. Tourism is essentially a social phenomenon and, although it is influenced by the society in which it exists like other industries, tourism is unusual in that it involves a large scale, temporary transfer of individuals between different societies. This can create both a

temporary and a longer term social change. As a developing country, where tourism is a growing and young industry, few works has been devoted to examining residents' attitudes in Iran. Bisotun, counts as one of the tourism destinations in the region, which is popular for cultural heritage. Based on the concept of stakeholders, the main objectives of this study are to identify the perceptions of residents toward social and economic impacts of tourism and giving suggestion for the future tourism management of the area.

Study Area: Iran is the eighteenth largest country in the world in terms of area. It is located in southwestern Asia and covers the land area of more than 1,648,000km². It has a population of over seventy million [7]. Throughout history, Iran has been of geostrategic importance because of its central location in Eurasia. It occupies an important position in the world economy due to its large reserves of petroleum and natural gas. The country possesses one of the world's oldest continuous major civilizations, with historical and urban settlements date back to more than 5000 BCE. It is rich with the history of humanity and has a high concentration of archaeological sites [8]. There are ten historical sites listed under the World Heritage list,

while 60 more sites are tentatively listed [9]. Heritage attractions give the country a good potential for tourism development. The government intends to develop the tourism sector as a key factor mentioned in the national economic and social development plan.

The city of Bisotun is located in Western Iran, 30 kilometers from the city of Kermanshah, the capital of Kermanshah province and 1303 meter above the sea level. It is along ten ancient trade routes linking the Persian high plateau to Mesopotamia [10]. 2500 people inhabit the city during fall and winter [11]; however, the number escalates in spring and summer because of desirable weather and more job opportunities especially in the tourism sector.

Besides the attracting sights, rivers and springs, Bisotun is full of archaeological objects and monuments from different periods of Iranian history. The origin of the name Bisotun can be recovered from the Greek rendering Bagistanon, cited by Ctesias, as Bagastana, meaning place or stand of Gods. The name clearly shows that the place had been holy from time immemorial and Darius' monument in there, was well known to the ancients, with its sheer height cliff sacred to Zeus, to the supreme god Ahura Mazda [12]. The site covers an area of 116 hectares. Archeological evidence indicates that this region became a human shelter 40,000 years ago. Its primary monument is the Bisotun Inscription, made in 521 BC by Darius the Great when he conquered the Persian throne. The inscription is written in three languages: Elamite, Babylonian and Old Persian [13]. It represents the victory of Darius the Great over Gaumata and the nine rebellious kings. It covers an area of about 20 meters by 10 meters. There is no doubt that this is the most important document of the ancient Near East [14]. There are Achaemenid (550-330 BC) inscriptions and reliefs carved in Bisotun cliff, which attract the attention of tourists and passengers to the art and delicacy, which was used in carving these historical relics.

There are 18 historical monuments other than the inscription of Darius the great in the Bisotun complex, some of them are: the hunters cave (Prehistoric remains), the statue of Heracles from 148 B.C., Pole-Khosro (Sassanid remains), The Mongol building, The Safavid remains (caravansary and bridge), Parthian town, Khosrow palace, royal road and median fortress [15, 16]. Bisotun is protected under the list of the National Cultural and Natural Heritage Organization of Iran and besides that, it was registered in UNESCO List of World Heritage Sites in a decision made by UNESCO World Heritage Committee and announced 13th of July 2006 [17]. Considering the unique heritage attraction, which the city possesses,

government is planning to help the economy of the region by developing tourism sector. The first organization concerning tourism in Iran was set up in 1935 and was called 'attracting tourists and advertisement'. However, from the time till now, the responsible organization for tourism in Iran has confronted many changes from its name and its structure to its objectives and policies [18]. After the victory of Islamic revolution of Iran in 1978 and the starting of imposed Iran-Iraq war, tourism industry of Iran was badly damaged due to the political crises and war. However, from the first development plan of the country after the Islamic revolution, tourism was taken into consideration once again [19].

Iran Cultural Heritage, Handicraft and Tourism organization is the current governmental responsible body to protect, introduce, preserve and restore the country's historic-cultural legacy as well as promote tourism development. The main objectives of tourism development in the four-five year (2004-2009) socio cultural and economic development plan of Iran (after Iran-Iraq war) were introducing the culture and civilianization of Islamic Iran, simulating local commerce and industries and generating a favorable worldwide image of the country [20].

Many national and international tourists visit Bisotun every year. The reason for tourists to visit the area is to enjoy the unique heritage and natural beauty of the areas. The typical visit is short and seasonal. Many national Tourists usually visit these areas during the NowRuz (Iranian New Year) period, spring, summer and other public holidays. International tourists also visit it in all seasons and tour operators mainly organize their visits. At the peak tourist season, they may host more than 25,000 tourists per day.

Literature Review: Heritage is regarded as one of the more significant and fastest growing components of tourism in many developed economies [21, 22]. It is becoming increasingly popular in the world and deemed important for tourism development. Defined as a form of special interest tourism, it caters to the desire of tourists to learn about the history and lifestyle of a destination [23, 24]. As a fast growing kind of tourism Heritage tourism development can have several impacts on local communities living in the vicinity of heritage attractions.

Impacts of tourism development are viewed as being more than the results of a specific tourist event or facility. They result from processes of change and these impacts change through time with changing demands of the

tourist population and with structural changes in the destination areas. Impacts emerge in the form of altered human attitudes and behavior that stem from the interaction between the agents of change and the subsystems, which they interrupt. That is, impacts result from a complex process of interactions among tourists, host communities and destination environments.

A number of studies have investigated residents' reactions toward tourism impacts. According to these studies tourism development can create more jobs and provide opportunities for employment and it also improves the economic structure of the area. In this sense, tourism offers considerable potential for economic growth in the destination area in the early phase of the development. Thus, tourism development becomes a way of upgrading a community' economy in many areas. However it was recognized that there may be some negative aspects of tourism economic impacts like increased inflation, imbalances in income distribution and employment opportunities, increased cost of living in tourism destinations [25, 26].

Although there are studies on both positive and negative impacts, much more is known about the positive economic impacts of tourism development. Because of continued emphasis on the positive nature of related studies, the overall economic impacts generally tend to be accepted favorably and with optimism. Future examination of the economic impacts of tourism should adopt a more balanced approach which assesses both the benefits and the costs of tourism development perceived by the host community [26, 27].

In addition to impacting economic arenas of local life, tourism development can also affect social aspects of a community. Rapid community development affects the quality and fabric of community life by revising interaction possibilities, changing value systems, social relationships and organization and by transforming elements of community and landscape that contribute to personal and collective identity [25, 26]. Research on the social impacts of tourism regarding the host population is concerned with the changes in the way of life of residents of destination areas caused by tourism development and interaction with the tourists. It can be defined as the ways in which tourism contributes to changes in social conditions. They are the ways in which tourism is contributing to changes in value systems, individual behavior, family relationship, collective life style, safety level, moral conduct, traditional ceremony and community organizations.

Researchers have found positive social impacts due to modernization and changes in ethnic attitudes by means of social exchange, increased supply of services due to infrastructural development in the destination, improved community service and facilities and consequently, improved quality of life for local residents. however, while tourism may have improved the social structure of the host community and broadened social understanding, it will inevitably bring about problems. Rapid and intensive tourism development results in different and usually less favorable impacts than organic and small scale development [26, 27].

According to the studies, tourism development may contribute to social conditions that lead to some problems in the host society. one of the most significant and least desirable byproducts of tourism development is its effects on the moral standards of the host population like changes in the ways of life or traditional culture. Such negative perceptions can diminish residents' support for tourism development and can impact upon the experience of the visitors through their interactions with them [28, 29].

The results of these studies have suggested that community support for tourism development is essential for the successful operation and sustainability of tourism [30, 31]. This is because tourism relies heavily upon the goodwill of the local community and residents and understanding local communities' reactions toward tourism development is essential in achieving the goal of favorable host community support for tourism development [32].

A stakeholder has been defined as a person who has the right and capacity to participate in the process. Therefore, anybody who is impacted upon by the action of others has a right to be involved. In this way, a stakeholder in the tourism industry is deemed to be any person who is impacted on by development positively or negatively [33]. It has been shown that although tourism provides opportunities for many destinations, it may also represent different kinds of threats for residents. In order to minimize these threats, there is a need for dialogue, cooperation and collaboration among the stakeholders involved [34].

The concept of stakeholders is becoming increasingly important in heritage management and planning, especially the community as owner and custodian of heritage [35-37]. The local communities are known as the main stakeholders in heritage tourism. Local community residents in the vicinity of the heritages are

increasingly being afforded the opportunity to make decisions over their own resources and livelihood infrastructure [38]. However, the condition of resident participation in tourism management is not similar in different countries. Compared with many developed countries, local residents in many third world countries do not have such opportunities to share in decision making about their hometown tourism management [39]. Many analysts call for greater local participation in the Third World tourism sector to permit a more equitable distribution of its costs and benefits [40, 41].

Research Methodology: In this research the perceptions of Bisotun local communities toward social and economic impacts of tourism, is presented. A questionnaire was designed for this research and various related literature were used to develop the items for questions [42-46]. The questionnaire was based on a Likert scale from 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree'. It was piloted tested to ensure that the contents are validated by several tourism specialists of Iran. Using Cronbach's alpha, the validity of statement about tourism impact was tested. The Cronbach alpha values for economic impacts, social impacts and overall dimension were 0.79, 0.76 and 0.72, each was above the satisfactory level (above. 70) [47]. Descriptive statistic and T-test were employed as statistical techniques in this study and for discussing the distribution of answers obtained in the study; Means and standard deviations were used as the descriptive statistics.

The questionnaires were distributed among the local people, living or working in Bisotun. A total of 200 usable and completed questionnaires were collected and analyzed. Besides the questionnaire, author had semi-structured interviews with residents. Interviews were

recorded digitally and transcribed while informal conversations and observations were written daily in field notes. A total of 62 persons accepted to have interview with the author. The qualitative data of the interviews were interpreted and analyzed by the author impression and reported finally. The study was carried out over a three-week period in December 2009.

RESULTS

Out of 200 respondents, 72% were male and 28% were female participants and the average age was 40 years (70% are less than 35 years old). 38% of them are married, while 49% still single. Regarding the educational level, 35% indicated secondary school as the highest level of education attained While 24% of the respondents had diploma and 6% had a bachelor's or higher degree. The average length of residency was 30 years and 58% have been living in the area for 25 years and more. With regard to employment, 38% of respondents state that they have jobs related to tourism. Respondents (62%) reported a monthly household income for 2009 of Iranian Rials (IRR) 2000000-4000000 (about US \$216-\$432) while 27% of respondents indicated a monthly income of under (IRR) 2000000 (about US \$216).

Concerning the community attitudes toward tourism in the area, items about social and economic impacts of tourism were studied. Results showed that positive statements of the impacts' items were rated more than negative statements. Table 1 includes the results of the study. According to the statistical mean measures, the items related to social impacts of tourism obtained the highest scores. The most favored items in term of social impacts are: "increase in the recreational facilities" (3.80) and "Meeting tourists is a valuable experience" (3.66).

Table 1: Respondents' perceptions toward related tourism impacts

Tourism Impacts	Mean	Std
Economic impacts	3.48	0.023
Tourism leads to more investment and spending	3.70	0.018
Our standard of life is increasing considerably by tourism	3.55	0.016
Prices are increasing because of tourism	3.44	0.020
Tourism Created job opportunities	3.3	0.018
Tourism Gives economic benefit to local people	3.41	0.021
Social impacts	3.53	0.021
Meeting tourists is a valuable experience	3.66	0.016
Tourism had led to increase in the recreational facilities	3.80	0.018
Tourism has an undesirable effect on our way of life	3.18	0.016
Tourism causes changes in our traditional culture	3.39	0.017
Tourism causes a lower quality of life for local residents	3.62	0.015

Table 2: Independent Samples t Test

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean		
statistics		300	3.4878	.40352	.02330		
		300	3.5329	.37273	.02152		
F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference
.118	.732	-1.423	598	.155	-.04513	.03172	-.10742 .01715

According to the mean measures, economic impacts items totally have lower scores. The most favored items are as follows: “Tourism leads to more investment and spending” (3.70) and “standard of life is increasing considerably by tourism” (3.55). The negative economic impact item is “prices are increasing because of tourism” (3.44).

No significant differences of social and economic impacts of tourism have been seen among the respondents according to the T-test analysis, table 2 includes the results. Interviews with local community revealed positive perceptions about economic aspects of tourism impacts. However, most of the respondents said they expected more economic benefits of tourism especially in employment. Many of them believe that tourism creates more jobs for foreigners than for local people so Tourism gives benefits to a small group of people in the region. However, the majority of respondents are in favor of tourism development in the area.

In regards to social impact of tourism, most of the respondents had positive perceptions and said that they are happy to meet tourists especially from other countries in the city. However, some respondents were concerned about the changes that Tourism can cause in their traditional culture especially among young generation. Through interviews, in whole, the respondents perceived that tourism has had a positive impact on their communities and they agreed that tourism could lead to the welfare and development of their economy in the region. However, most of respondents believed that they are not involved in the decisions about tourism management in the area.

CONCLUSION

Residents’ attitudes about social and economic impacts of tourism in Kermanshah were studied in this research. Results showed that respondents perceived social impacts of tourism more favorably (3.53) and economic impacts (3.48). In most of previous studies, economic impacts have been perceived as favorable by

residents [48], so the results were new and interesting. Residents believe that tourism has not created enough job opportunities for local people yet, but they agree that tourism can help the economy in the region and they have high hope and positive outlook of tourism development in Bisotun.

Social impacts of tourism were evaluated most positively by the residents. They are very eager to meet tourists and show their ancient heritage, but some residents have concerns about undesirable effects or changes which tourism may cause on their culture. Local community perceived that their involvement and views are not taken into consideration by the tourism authorities in the decision making process of developing and managing tourism. The participation of local community toward tourism management is suggested since residents are directly affected by heritage tourism development in the area. Moreover, their involvement would not only ensure that they would benefit economically but also create a commitment to the preservation and conservation of Bisotun as a world heritage site.

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