



## Community Perceptions toward Economic and Environmental Impacts of Tourism on Local Communities

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### Abstract

This paper investigates the community perceptions toward economic and environmental impacts of tourism in Shiraz, Iran. Special focus is on the differences in perceptions between the Old and New Districts of Shiraz. The study demonstrates that there are broadly similar views among the community leaders and community residents from both districts of Shiraz. In fact, a high percentage of the answers obtained highlighted positive aspects environmental and economic impacts of tourism toward local communities. According to the survey, the strongest and favourable perceptions toward tourism impacts are found to be linked with environmental aspects and while economic matters are found to be the least favourable in terms of the perceived impacts on tourism. T-test analysis of the study indicates that there is no significant difference between community leaders' perceptions in both districts of Shiraz City. Results drew from discussion with the target group show that the community residents have positive perceptions toward economic and environmental impacts of tourism with only minor differences with each other.

**Keywords:** Community perception, Economic impacts, Environmental impacts, Local communities

### 1. Introduction

A number of studies in recent years have examined host residents' perceptions of the impact of tourism towards their community. Many local communities recognize that tourism can stimulate change in social, cultural, environmental and economic dimensions, where tourism activities have had a close connection with the local communities (Beeton, 2006; Richards & Hall, 2000). Understanding and assessing tourism impacts in local communities is important in order to maintain sustainability and long-term success of the tourism industry (Diedrich & Garcí'a-Buades, 2008). A major reason for rising interest in the area has been the evidences that tourism leads not only to be positive, but also has the potential for negative, outcomes at the local level (Lankford & Howard, 1994). It is generally felt that community perceptions toward tourism impacts are likely to be an important planning and policy consideration for successful

tourism development (Ap, 1992). Numerous studies on community residents' perceptions of tourism impacts have been conducted (Andreck et al., 2005; Ap, 1990, 1992; Ap & Crompton, 1993; Brown & Giles, 1994; Choi & Sirakaya, 2005; Johnson et al., 1994; Liu et al., 1987; Liu & Var1986; Pizam, 1978; Ritchie, 1993; Robson & Robson, 1996; Ryan & Montgomery, 1994; Seid, 1994; Sheldon & Abenoja, 2001; Sheldon & Var, 1984; Sirakaya et al., 2001; Teye et al., 2002; Upchurch & Teivane, 2000). All these studies are performed by Western researchers. Thus, the relevance of the findings in the Iranian context may not be fitting. To date, very little research has examined residents' perceived impacts of tourism toward the local communities in Iran (Zamani-Farahani & Musa, 2008). In point of case, local communities in Shiraz, Iran have never been studied of such. Thus, there is limited understanding of residents' perceptions of tourism impacts toward local communities and also very few research has been done here on the process of tourism in Iran. Hence the purpose of this study is to examine community perceptions toward economic and environmental impacts of tourism

## 2. Study area

The study was conducted on local communities in city of Shiraz, Iran. Shiraz is located in Fars province; a central area for Persian civilization. Shiraz has a moderate climate and has been a regional trade centre for more than a thousand years. Shiraz is known as the city of poets, wine and flowers. It is also considered by many Iranians to be the city of gardens, because of the many gardens and fruit trees that can be seen in the city. The crafts of Shiraz consist of inlaid mosaic work of triangular design; silver-ware; pile carpet-weaving and weaving of Kilim, called Gilim and Jajim in the villages and among the tribes (Wikipedia, 2009). Shiraz has a population of more than 1,000,000 people; it is situated in south-western region of Iran, in the inlands of about 200 km from the Persian Gulf, at an elevation of 1,800 meters above sea level (Cultural Heritage News Agency, 2004). As one of the oldest Iranian cities (approximately 2,500 years old), Shiraz is listed as a world heritage site and accommodates many of Iran's most outstanding tourist attractions. Shiraz's archaeology, cultural heritage, traditions, and natural characteristics are among the main factors which attract inbound tourists to Shiraz. According to department of tourism in Shiraz, the majority of the tourists who came to Shiraz were mainly from the neighboring countries. Additionally, the majority of tourist visas granted in 2008 were obtained by Asian Muslims, who presumably intended to visit important pilgrimage places in Shiraz. Shiraz has a lot of opportunities in building various forms of tourism activities. However, it is believed that Shiraz does not exploit to the maximum its potentials of tourist attractions in developing its tourism sector. Meanwhile, Shiraz Tourism Department has been formulating a policy on tourism development under the community development programs. In this policy, tourism is one of the priorities of community development programs. Shiraz's economy also relies on tourism industry. According to available statistics, a total of 843,700 visitors were recorded in 2007 in Shiraz whom 70,400 were foreigners (Shiraz Tourism Department, 2008). Table 1 shows statistics of tourists that were noted in Shiraz city. These statistics show those who stay in hotels, guest houses and inns in Shiraz. Also noted were tourists who stayed in at their relatives'.

## 3. Literature review

Tourism is often referred to as the world's largest industry and regarded as a means of achieving community development (Sharpley, 2002). According to the World Tourism Organization (2009), tourism is one of the world's fastest growing industry and one of the global engines of development. One of the most popular topics of tourism is tourism impact studies toward the community. The understanding of community's perceptions on tourism impacts is important (Ap, 1992). A main reason for the rising interest has been the increasing evidence that tourism can both have positive and negative impacts on local communities involved (Lankford & Howard, 1994). Different perceptions from different residents can provide insight into the nature and degree of tourism impacts towards the respective tourist destination. The community perceptions on tourism impacts are likely to be an important planning for successful community development (Ko & Stewart, 2002).

Tourism was encouraged first because of its economic impacts. Tourism is an engine for generating a range of new private and public income opportunities. The most immediate and direct benefit of tourism development is the creation of jobs and the opportunity for people to increase their income and standard of living in local communities. Hence local communities turn to tourism as a means of raising income, increase employment and living standards (Akis et al., 1996). These impacts are observable as tourists interact with the local environment, economy, and community. Hence, it is apt to consider the impacts of tourism under the headings of economic and environmental impacts. The impacts of tourism can either be positive and beneficial, or negative and detrimental to the local community. The economic impacts of tourism are the most widely researched impacts of tourism on community (Mason, 2003). Economic impacts are easier to research in a local community because it is small and generally easier to assess. Tourism can have positive economic effects on local economies, and a visible impact on national GDP growth. It can be also an essential component for both community development and poverty reduction (Ashe, 2005). The economic impacts of tourism are therefore, generally perceived positively by the residents (Tatoglu et al., 2000).

The environment is being increasingly recognized as a key element in tourism (Liu et al., 1987). Many community attractions and tourism offerings have a reliance on the natural and man-made resources (Starr, 2002). The environmental impacts of tourism on community can take the form of both the quality of the physical environment and access to these resources in which positive environmental impacts of tourism on a community (Liu et al., 1987; Mason, 2003). Tourism provides a reason to preserve the natural scenery and man-made historic sites, traditional towns and neighbourhoods, villages, lighthouses, harbours and fishing piers (Cohen, 1978). Conversely, negative environmental impacts which are frequently highlighted include littering, overcrowding, traffic congestion as well as pollution of, water and soil along with the deterioration of natural resources as a result of the constructions of tourism services, such as erections of hotels (Liu et al., 1987; Mason, 2003).

#### 4. Research methodology

The local communities selected for this study is based on the researchers' familiarity with Shiraz. This study examined community perceptions toward economic and environmental impacts of tourism in Shiraz during the summer of 2008. For the purposes of the study, Shiraz is divided to two major areas: the Old Shiraz (Historical area) and the New Shiraz (Modern area). Eighty six communities are located in Old Shiraz, whereas 92 communities are located in New Shiraz. The most interesting buildings in Shiraz are located in the old district of the town. In the Old Shiraz, one can find many historical artifacts including monuments, gates, and old buildings, whereas new and modern edifices including shopping complexes and hotels are located in New Shiraz (Aref et al., 2009).

This study is based on both quantitative and qualitative methodologies to investigate the community perceptions toward tourism impacts. The research study use survey questionnaires, focus groups discussion (FGD). Surveys are particularly useful to study economic and environmental impacts of tourism. Qualitative research methods nowadays are widely used in tourism research e.g. Esterby-Smith et al. (2002), Miles & Huberman (1994), and Walle (1997) in tourism research, anthropologists and sociologists have used qualitative research (Decrop, 1999; Riley & Love, 2000). When it comes to economy, geography, psychology or marketing, researchers tend to use quantitative approaches (Decrop, 1999). Furthermore, according to Riley (1996) The majority of tourism research has relied on structured surveys. The qualitative methods are used explicitly in the exploratory stage to initiate and provide information for further quantitative investigation or to subordinate and enhance the empirical findings. Walle (1997, p. 528) explained that as tourism is becoming a multidisciplinary field, tourism researchers should explore the variety of tools and techniques available to them. Consequently, the use of quantitative and qualitative research methods in tourism is both useful and appropriate. Triangulation of research methods is commonly used in tourism research. For example, Corey (1996) used FGD techniques and questionnaires. To achieve the objectives of this study the concurrent triangulation strategy was adopted. According to Creswell (2003) this approach uses quantitative and qualitative methods separately to balance the weaknesses of one with the strengths of the other. Moreover, the results of the two methods are integrated during the interpretation stage, which allows ratifying and cross validating the findings of the study. Furthermore, the process of gathering the data is quicker than any other strategy mentioned above. Findings that are based on several different sources of information following this type of corroboratory mode are likely to be much more reliable (Yin, 1994).

The questionnaire was structured around a Likert scale. The items for community perceptions toward tourism impacts were taken from these studies (Belisle & Hoy, 1980; Haralambopoulos & Pizam, 1996; Lankford & Howard, 1994; Liu & Var, 1986; Milman & Pizam, 1988; Perdue, Long, & Allen, 1987; Pizam, 1978). The respondents answered to each statement based on five scales. The value of each response for these items on the questionnaire is as follows: 1 = strongly disagree 2 = disagree 3 = not sure 4 = agree 5 = strongly agree. Ko & Stewart (2002) and Maddox (1985), recommended the use of a Likert type scale in tourism research due to its high validity. Then, the questionnaire was piloted tested to have its content validated by several reviewers of Persian background. Statements for tourism impacts were tested for their validity using Cronbach's alpha. The participants in the pilot test had relatively diverse demographic characteristics, especially with regards to community. To test the proposed objective, this study employed statistical techniques such as descriptive statistic and t-test. The t-test was employed to test to determine whether there were significant differences among group mean totals and item mean scores. Means and standard deviations are the descriptive statistics used in discussing the distribution of responses gathered during the quantitative component of this study. To assess the normality of the distribution of the data, the skewness and kurtosis of each variable were also examined. According to George & Mallery (2002) if the coefficient of the skewness and kurtosis falls between -0.5 and +0.5 inclusive, then the distribution appears to be relatively symmetric which in this study skewness was .254 and Kurtosis -.211.

The data for this study was collected from two independent sampling frames. These two samples were drawn from populations that include local residents, and community leaders. Community leaders in Shiraz were chosen as the sample population for this survey because they represent "the voice of the people of concern (Eng & Parker, 1994). Community leaders are able to speak for the community because they have special knowledge of the community being studied because of their roles in that community (Eyler et al., 1999; Thompson, Lichtenstein, Corbett, Nettekoven, & Feng, 2000; Von Kroff et al., 1992; Warheit, Bull, & Bell, 1978). For this study community leader was defined as one

who can influence policy, opinion, or community action because of their role, title, or position in the community. Community leaders were identified in each community accepting funding by the Shiraz municipality.

The data collection process in this research involved a variety of methods which included collecting data in the field through questionnaires, FGD, and using secondary data and information. The primary data collection is based on survey questionnaires. The major method used in this research to collect data is the use of questionnaires. A questionnaire interview is a data instrument that each respondent fills out as part of participating in a research study (Johnson & Christensen, 2004; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003). The questionnaire is structured around a type of scale like the Likert scale. The Likert scale is most common because it is easy for the researcher to construct and administer and it is suitable for the respondent to understand. Likert scale also commonly used in marketing research (Grover & Vriens, 2006). Part of the data and information needed to gather through reviewing the documents and reports published by governmental organizations related to tourism in Iran. It must be emphasized. However, that most of these documents and reports are prepared by the government and tried to justify the new tourism activities, although they provided valuable information about the tourism development. For achieve the objectives also ten FGD were held at local mosque, and local school. FGD participants were selected from local community in the old and new areas of Shiraz. Five FGD were scheduled in the new district and also five FGD in old district. By examining these variables, I hoped to answer some additional questions for support qualitative data.

## 5. Results

As noted earlier, the unit of analyses is divided by two Districts; Old and New. The Old district includes 84 communities, which are located on the central part of Shiraz whereas the New district consists of 91 communities, which are modern and smaller in population. Overall response rate was 48% from the Old community and 52% from the New part of Shiraz. Out of 175 leaders who responded, 5.14% were female and 94.86% were male participants, with an average age of 53.12 years. Of all the respondents, 26.36% said their highest level of education earned was a diploma and 42.86% had a bachelor's degree. More than 60% of the respondents had engaged in tourism activities. Median income range of the respondents was 500\$. However, there were 12% who earned less than 350\$, and 8% who make more than 750\$ per month. Participants' gender composition, age, education level and income did not differ significantly. Moreover, two question were used to collect information regarding respondents' attitude towards the most important types of tourism activities. For most important types of tourism activities they illustrated Handicrafts with (34.9%), Nature 10.3%, and Culture (e.g. visiting archaeological sites, festivals) 41.7%, Business 10.9% and Medical Services 2.3 %.

Community perceptions toward economic and environmental impacts of tourism were measured using a 10-item, five point Likert type scale. Descriptive statistics revealed that respondents from both parts of Shiraz rated higher on positive statements and lower on negative statements, indicating consistency in the direction of their perceptions.

Table 2 shows community leaders' perceptions toward the perceived economic and environmental impacts of tourism. Based on the mean measures of impact items, the impact items associated with economic impacts have the lowest scores. Some of the economic impacts, which are most favored by residents, are as follows: "benefits to local people and small business" (4.59), "creates employment opportunities" (4.53), and "increase standard of living" (3.62). Following the economic impact of tourism, the findings environment impacts show traffic congestion, noise and air pollution, as well as natural environment detriment is the negative aspects of environmental impacts of tourism which do not appear to be unexpected. Some of the environmental impacts, which are most favored by leaders, are as follows: 'Provides more parks and other recreational areas' (4.36) and 'Provides convenient transport' (4.06).

As shown in Table 2, all these suggest that the respondents have rather positive perception toward economic and environmental impacts of tourism in their community. Meanwhile differences among respondents were also observed. Most of the 10 attitudinal items had the max range from the minimum (1 point) to maximum (5 points), indicating a variation of individual respondents' perceptions toward tourism impacts. The size of the standard deviations of the 10 statements also indicated a moderate spread around the theoretical mean. We have attempted to prove whether the differences between the Old and New districts of Shiraz are significant. We use t-test statistical analysis to establish whether there is a difference. The result of the test shows that there are no significant differences of economic and environmental impacts of tourism between the Old and New districts. According to the table of equality of variance, tourism impacts are not accepted because the significant difference level at (-.012) does not show any significant differences between the Old and New districts of Shiraz ( $t = -2.531$ ,  $p = .012$ ).

In response to this objective, the open discussion at the focus group discussion (FGD) was performed. According to FGD a number of themes emerged as to what local people saw as tourism impacts on their communities. According to FGD most of the participation in both districts of Shiraz had positive perceptions toward economic of impacts tourism. However, all of the respondents said they had no doubts about the benefits of tourism, especially economic benefits including employment and income. The respondents were said they felt that the long-term effect of tourism on the economy had been positive. Additionally, all deem tourism to be a positive enhancer towards the community's future

developments. In regards to environmental impacts of tourism, several respondents from the New district of Shiraz agreed that tourism has negatives impacts towards the community's environment, for example, tourist overflowing would lead to parking space problems near their homes. Residents of local communities in the Old district of Shiraz were accustomed to traffic and crowds because many people commute to work in the area (Old Shiraz). It is important to note that some of the findings in this study are better understood in light of research about resident perceptions toward tourism. Consistent with the findings, data in this study indicated high concern for the tourism process among the residents of the communities. Through FGD, in whole, the respondents felt that tourism has had a long term positive economic impact on their communities. As equally important, all participants of the study from both districts of Shiraz agreed that tourism development not only had a positive impact on the locals' economy, but it also creates a positive impact on the infrastructure and economic development of the community. Those issues were some of the strongest and most favorable characteristics about tourism impacts reported in this study. Lastly, FGD supported community leaders' perceptions toward positive economic and environmental impacts of tourism on the local community.

## 6. Conclusion

This study has made an attempt to identify community leaders' perceptions of the economic and environmental impacts of tourism on local communities in Shiraz. Special focus has been put on the differences of perceptions between the Old and New districts of Shiraz, but the study demonstrates that there are broadly similar views among the community leaders from both districts. However, a distinct minority highlights several cultural problems arising from tourism development. Results showed that respondents strongly agree that tourism provides many economic benefits, but are ambivalent about some economic aspects of tourism. The study has also found that the community leaders perceived environmental impacts of tourism most favorably (3.49) and economic impacts (3.44). This result is rather unexpected because most of the researches indicated economic impacts of tourism as favorable for residents (Tatoglu et al., 2000). Residents evaluated environmental impacts of tourism positively. These findings provide support for previous studies. However, increased crime rate, traffic congestion, noise and air pollution, destroy of natural environment and increase in value of real estate were found to be the negative aspects of tourism impact. The study also recognized no meaningful difference between the two discussed districts of Shiraz and community leaders' perceptions toward tourism impacts. In conclusion, we can see some similarities between residents' perception and community leaders' perception toward tourism impacts. However, there are some differences evident between people in both districts of Shiraz, but they are not significantly important. The t-test showed the mean of score between community leaders' perceptions in both districts of Shiraz has no significant difference. Furthermore, FGD results illustrated harmony a pattern of results among all respondents.

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Table 1. The Number Tourists Coming to Shiraz

Origin	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Domestic	163164	112811	154759	508696	523492	631992	794295	773300
International	57088	42598	37904	26998	43861	57634	64305	70400
Total	220252	155409	192663	535694	567353	689626	858600	843700

Source: (Shiraz Tourism Department, 2008)

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Community Perceptions toward Tourism Impacts

<i>Types of impacts</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. D</i>
<i>Environmental impacts</i>	<i>17.45</i>	<i>2.93</i>
Provides more parks and recreational areas	4.36	0.60
Provides convenient transportation	4.06	0.83
Destroy of natural environment.	2.93	1.24
Traffic congestion, noise and air pollution.	2.89	1.22
Crowded public places	3.21	1.08
<i>Economic impacts</i>	<i>17.24</i>	<i>2.34</i>
Economic benefits to local people and small business	4.59	0.49
Creates employment opportunities	4.53	0.58
Increased standard of living	3.62	1.19
Increased prices of goods and services	2.03	0.80
Increases the value of real estate	2.46	1.10