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Community Perception of Tourism Impacts and Their Participation in Tourism Planning: A Case Study of Ramsar, Iran

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore and analyze the relationship between effects of tourism on the quality of local community members' life and the extent of their participation in tourism quality improvement programs. Beach of Ramsar in Iran is chosen as a case study. The result of analysis revealed that tourism influences the quality of local community members' life. Also there is a significant relationship between factors affecting quality of community members' life and their level of participation.

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Keywords: Community participations; tourism impacts; factor analysis; coastal tourism; Ramsar

1. Introduction

Tourism is a powerful force of change in the economy in both the developed and in the least developed countries (Gumus, 2007 p157). While the roles of tourism in the economic development of cities and in bringing several benefits to the locals are well recognized, tourism development has also affected the Community in many ways. Communities are likely to suffer from traffic congestion, increasing crime

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rates, waste water generation and increasing cost of living (Nunkoo and Ramkissoon, 2009). A sustainable tourism industry is predicated on a number of factors; in particular, consideration should be given to the impact that tourism has on the host community (Cahndralal, 2010). Though the local population's attitudes toward tourism are important given the argument that a happy community is more likely to support tourism development and welcome tourists (Snaith and Haley, 1999). During the last decades, increasing academic attention has been given to the perceptions of impacts of tourism, and a considerable number of studies have emerged focusing particularly on the perceptions and attitudes towards sociocultural impacts (Wall and Mathieso, 2006). Due to the fact that different communities have different cultures and traditions, tourism development leaves different effects on them. This issue, especially in developing countries, is more important.

While most of studies have been conducted from a developed country tourism context, few have been carried out from a developing world perspective. The main purpose of this paper is analyzing the effects of tourism on local community, and evaluating these effects on the degree of community participation in Tourism Planning in Ramsar beach, Iran. More specifically, objectives of the paper are:

- Analyzing tourism's economic, social and cultural effects, and the importance of community participation in tourism development programs.
- Determining the degree to which the community is affected by tourism development items and their satisfaction, and finding the effective qualification factors in tourism development according to these items.
- Analyzing the factors which are effective on the degree of society participation in tourism development programs, and determining the degree of their correlation in a case study.

With regard to results, some suggestions are provided for extending the participation of community in tourism development programs in order to heighten the quality of these programs and facilitate the procedure of their implementation.

2. Community participation in tourism planning

In developing countries, local community participation in the decision making process of tourism development has often been lacking and in the decision-making process is always limited or sometimes marginalized (Dola and Mijan, 2006). The acceptance and emphasis on local participation and community approach to tourism development implies that host members are often excluded from not only planning, but decision-making and management of projects. Their exclusion is a common practice in developing countries with top-down development culture (Teye et al., 2002).

Cater (1994) highlights the need for local community involvement in planning and managing tourism, particularly in the context of developing countries. Drake (1991) has stated that participation is increasingly being regarded as fundamental to the effectiveness of the planning and management of tourism. Infact, community participation in tourism development does not only relate to the decision-making process and the benefits of tourism development, but also regarded integral to sustainable tourism (D'Amore, 1992; Green, 1995; Leslie, 1993; Murphy, 1988). However, there are significant obstacles to participate community in tourism planning in developing countries such as Iran. Some of these obstacles are related to the instruction of decision making in governing system. Since the central government administration structures, ministries and agencies worked on sectoral basis, it became a norm for development planning and management to work on the basis, that is to say, sectorally and from top to bottom. Hence, there are two of the main problems of the development planning system: Sectorally fragmented system, and no considerable presence of community participation in the planning and management process (Mohammadi, 2010).

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