

The Influence of Socio–demographic Factors on Social Cultural Impacts of Tourism: Case Studies of Masooleh and Saree'n, Iran

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ABSTRACT

This study explores social cultural impacts of tourism as perceived by local residents with case studies of Masooleh and Sar'een in Iran. Using convenience sampling, the questionnaire was distributed door to door in the two towns. From 500 useable questionnaires analyzed; residents largely experience positive socio-cultural impact of tourism. Socio-demographic profiles of gender, educational level and tourism-related job influence the perception of socio-cultural impacts of tourism in the areas. The paper also suggests some management implications of the research findings.

Key words: Residents' Perceptions, Socio-Cultural Impacts, Socio-Demographic Factors, Tourism, Iran.

Introduction

With the continuous growth of tourism industry, tourists continue to explore distant destinations in their quest to experience unique culture and heritage. Iran is one of the most attractive heritage destinations in the world. O'Gorman (2007) states that inbound tourists are attracted to visit Iran primarily due to its archaeology, cultural heritage and natural characteristics. Two of the unique heritage attractions in Iran are Masooleh and Saree'n. Visits by tourists to these destinations are seasonal and primarily domestic in orientation. With increasing visitation by both domestic and international tourists, concern on how the development is impacting local community is growing. Thus this study is timely in providing the baseline information for the region's authority in their efforts to develop a sustainable tourism development. The aim of the study is to explore the socio-cultural impacts of tourism as perceived by the local community in Masooleh and Saree'n.

This is achieved through the following objectives:

1. to identify the socio-cultural impacts of tourism; and
2. to examine the influence of socio-demographic factors on socio-cultural impacts of tourism.

An Overview on Case Study

Iran was known as Persia till 1935, and is a crossroads between the East and the West. It is the second largest country in the Middle East (1.6 million square kilometers) and is inhabited by over 70 million people (SCI, 2007). The country forms a bridge that links the Caspian Sea to the Persian Gulf. According to Alavi and Yasin (2000), the country is ranked as one of the world's top ten in terms of the number of ancient and historical sites. Thousands of historical places are yet to be discovered. Today eight historical sites are listed under the World Heritage list, while fifty-three more sites are tentatively listed (UNESCO, 2007). Despite these attractions, political orientation may have limited the country's tourism activity to the primarily domestic. Furthermore, the lack of information and advertising renders the country remaining relatively less explored by the outside world. Nonetheless Iran's growth of international tourism expenditure is 9.5% from 2005 to 2006 (UNWTO, 2008) and in 2007, the country recorded tourist arrivals of 2.2 million (UNWTO, 2008).

Masooleh is located in the northern part of Iran, 1,050 metres above the sea level, a short distance away from the Caspian Sea. The town has its recorded history of more than 1,000 years (ICHTO, 2004). Ancient history and architecture, desirable climatic conditions and natural beauty are distinctive features of this area. Masooleh has a remarkable stair-like architecture with courtyards and roofs both of which serve as pedestrian areas (ICHTO, 2001–2006). The town is in the list of the National Cultural and Natural Heritage Organization since 1976 (ICHTO, 2001–2006). The majority of tourists who visit the area are locals. Their visits are normally short and seasonal. International tourists mainly visit the area in organized tour groups. During the peak season, Masooleh may host more than 10,000 tourists per day (Zamani-Farahani and Musa, 2008). The town is inhabited by 700 residents (Iran's Ministry of Health, 2006). The number however escalates in spring and summer when the weather is more desirable and job opportunities are in abundance especially in the tourism sector.

Sar'een was founded during the periods of Medies (825BC) and Achaemenias (533-330 BC) (Sadeg Moganlo, 2004). The town is located in the northwest of Iran's Plateau and is inhabited by 4,446 people (Iran's Ministry of Health, 2006). Its proximity to the Sabalan Mountains provides many attractive activities such as enjoying hot springs, skiing, mountain and rock climbing and hiking. The main draws of the town are its fresh and moderate climate and the twelve mineral hot springs. The area is famous for food products and herbal medicines. Like Masooleh, tourism in Sar'een is also affected by seasonality and primarily visited by domestic tourists. Foreign tourists who visit the area are mainly from the Middle East. Sar'een attracts about two million tourists annually (Saree'n Municipality, 2005-2007).

Literature on Socio-Cultural Impacts of Tourism

1. Socio-cultural Impact of Tourism

In recent years, tourism impact has been gaining increasing attention in tourism literature (Ap and Crompton, 1998). The impact affects economy, environment and socio-culture. Tourism like any industry has benefits and costs and each community tends to view and prioritize them differently (Cook *et al.*, 1999). If the economic impact of tourism is measurable, the social and cultural impacts are more hidden, invisible, indirect, intangible, and often difficult to measure and quantify. They usually occur slowly over time in an unspectacular fashion (Swarbrooke 1999). Mathieson and Wall (1982) note that there is no clear distinction between social and cultural phenomena. Thus many theorists classify socio-cultural impact of tourism in a broad context.

Social and cultural impacts constitute the greatest number of observed impacts resulting from tourism as perceived by residents (Crompton and Ap, 1994). Different perceptions of tourism impacts from different residents can provide insight into the nature and degree of tourism impacts to a tourist destination. Therefore it is not surprising that research on residents' attitudes towards tourism development continues to be a topic of considerable interest (Teye *et al.*, 2002; Weaver and Lawton, 2001).

Host communities' attitudes and perceptions toward tourism development and tourists fluctuate continuously between the negative and the positive (Pizam, 1978; Hernandez *et al.*, 1996; Hashimoto 2002). Hernandez *et al.* (1996) argue not only that different resident may have different attitudes, but each individual resident may have ambivalent attitudes toward tourism. Since one of the main goals of developing tourism industry in a community is to maximize positive impacts and minimize potential negative impacts thus, it is essential to examine, monitor and manage those impacts accordingly.

Several models have been developed since the early 1960s that describe the evolution of tourism through a life-cycle process. Among the more well-known are the models advocated by Doxey (1975) and Butler (1980). Doxey (1976) states that residents' attitudes towards tourists progress from the initial euphoric stage to antagonism. Butler (1980) proposes that a destination develops via stages of exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, and stagnation, followed by either decline or rejuvenation. Both Doxey (1975) and Butler (1980) recognize the increasing intensity of socio-cultural impacts as the stages of development progress.

Social and cultural impacts of tourism are described as the effects on host communities of direct and indirect relations with tourists, and of interaction with the tourism industry (UNEP, 2005). Pizam and Milman (1984) state that socio-cultural impacts of tourism are the ways in which tourism is contributing to changes in value systems, individual behavior, family relationships, collective lifestyles, moral conduct, creative expressions, traditional ceremonies and community organization. Krippendorf (1987) points out that the socio-cultural effects of tourism development are so significant that they should be studied before anything else. The impacts, according to Hashimoto (2002) are the most difficult to measure and quantify.

Hashimoto (2002) states that tourism development can contribute positively as well as negatively to the well-being of the host population. Among socio-cultural benefits of tourism are cultural development and exchange, social change and choice, improved image of host community, improved public health, social and amenity improvements, education and conservation. On the other hand the socio-cultural costs include host cultural destruction and debasement, social instability, crimes, consumerism, changes in the law and social order, commercialized host-visitor relationships and changes in traditional values (Liu and Var, 1986; Milman and Pizam, 1988).

Mbaiwa (2004) who examined the socio-cultural impacts of tourism development in the Okavango Delta, Botswana found that among positive socio-cultural impacts are the improvement of various local services, infrastructure development, and the participation of local communities in community-based tourism and natural resource management. Through this, employment is generated and traditional culture is preserved and rejuvenated. Among negative impacts observed are enclave tourism, racism, relocation of traditional communities, break-up of the traditional family structure and relationships, increase in crime, prostitution and demonstration effect (Mbaiwa, 2004).

Kim and Patrick (2005) identified five dimensions of positive impact. These are tourism resource development and urban revitalization, image enhancement, economic benefits, intercultural appreciation and tourism infrastructure development. Negative economic perspective, disorder and conflict and traffic problem and congestion are three dimensions of negative impacts (Kim and Patrick, 2005).

Brunt and Courtney (1999) state that tourism has led to a greater investment in education, improvements in health care, social services and leisure facilities. However they also claim that tourism has contributed to the increased perception of crime. Sheldon and Var (1987) analyzed local residents' perceptions of the potential negative impacts of tourism as a function that is directly dependent on the ratio between the number of tourists and the number of residents. The higher the ratio of tourists per resident the higher the perceptions of the environmental problems that tourism causes to the community, such as the congestion of cities, tourist centres and nature reserves, noise, waste generation and pollution, the destruction of the local flora and fauna, and urban pressure

2. Influence of socio demographic characteristics on socio cultural impact of tourism

The resident's attitudes and perception of socio-cultural impact of tourism have been examined by many researchers (Wang *et al.* 2006; Kuvan and Akan, 2005; Teye *et al.* 2002; Korca 1996; Brunt and Courtney 1999; Hernandez *et al.* 1996; Seid 1994; Mok *et al.* 1991; Lankford and Howard 1994; and McCool and Martin 1994).

According to Wang *et al.* (2006) perceived personal benefit was found to be closely and positively related to residents' attitudes. The major source of the family income is the single most important variable related to the perception of tourism impacts. Residents who have their major source of income from a tourism related job are more welcoming of the positive changes, and less disapproving of the negative effects, compared to their counterparts who do not have a pecuniary interest in tourism. The influence between tourism related job and the positive perception of socio-cultural impact is also evidenced in many other studies (McGehee and Andereck, 2004; Brunt and Courtney, 1999 Lankford and Howard 1994; Jurowski *et al.* 1997; Murphy, 1983; Milman & Pizam, 1988 and Brougham & Butler, 1981).

Conversely, residents who do not share the economic benefits of tourism, as in the case of the respondents in the lower income categories, and those who do not have tourism related jobs, are more critical of the negative effects of tourism (Kuvan and Akan, 2005). They add that the educational level, family income, as well as the birthplace, and if the respondent has always lived in or moved into the area after the development of tourism are factors that have been found to have significant effects on attitudes.

Teye *et al.* (2002) emphasized the existent relationship between tourists and residents, the importance of the industry for the local community, the industry's economic dependence, the area's level of tourism development, the individual's place of birth, the length of time residents have been living in the community and the distance between the place where they live and the tourist centre, all of which influence the perception of socio-cultural impact of tourism. Korca (1996) in his study in Turkey found that socio-demographic variables of gender, length of residency, educational level, tourism related job, income dependency on tourism, frequency of tourism facility usage and distance from tourism zone have significant influence on the perceived socio-cultural impact of tourism.

According to Brunt and Courtney (1999), younger residents seem to perceive more positive behaviour changes among residents compared with older residents. The significance of age in influencing the residents' attitudes towards tourism development is also found as a factor in the studies by Lankford and Howard (1994) in the Columbia River Gorge study and by Bastias-Perez and Var's (1996) in the study in Darwin, Australia.

The study of Hernandez *et al.* (1996) found that respondents with less than high school education express less favorable attitudes towards the proposed resort than those with higher education. This may be explained by the lower employability among the less educated respondents which translates to lower personal benefit. In Pennsylvania, Seid (1994) also observes the influence of educational level and length of residency on the perceived socio-cultural impact. However, there are no significant effects of gender, age, marital status or income. Teye *et al.* (2002) find that with

increase in educational level, there is improvement in their social interaction with tourists and the socio-cultural impacts are viewed more positively.

The birthplace can also influence attitudes towards tourism development (Brunt and Curtney, 1999; Brougham and Butler, 1981; Davis *et al.*, 1988; Um and Crompton, 1987). Davis *et al.* (1988) discover that residents who are natives tend to view tourism more positively than the newcomers to the community. Lankford and Howard (1994) report a significant relationship between community attachment and its perceptions of tourism. McCool and Martin (1994) note that a greater sense of belonging to a country is correlated with higher rating of both positive and negative impacts of tourism.

Mok *et al.* (1991) however, in their study concerning resident's attitudes towards tourism in Hong Kong, found out that there are no significant relationships between demographic variables (age, job related tourism, family tourism related job, length of residence, education level, income and gender) and socio-cultural impacts.

From the above literature review it could be hypothesized that the socio-demographic factors influence the perception of socio-cultural impact of tourism.

Methodology

Data was collected using a questionnaire as the research instrument. The study was a part of a bigger study which examines the influence of antecedents on the socio-cultural impact as perceived by the residents in Masooleh and Saree'n. This paper examines the influence of socio-demographic factors on the perceived socio-cultural impact of tourism by local community. There are 24 items of socio-cultural impact of tourism included in the questionnaire. The items are exploratory in nature and derived from the previous research such as Hashimoto (2002), Mbaiwa (2004) Kim and Patrick (2005) Brunt and Courtney (1999) Sheldon and Var, (1987), Liu and Var (1986) and Milman and Pizam (1988). The items are anchored by the 5-point Likert Scale (1=strongly disagree, to 5=strongly agree) as suggested by Maddox (1985). In the section of socio-demographic profile among items examined are gender, age, education level, tourism job related, place of birth, income and religion. The questionnaire was translated into the Persian language. A Pilot test was carried out in Saree'n with thirty respondents. The inputs from the pilot test were used to re-word items in the questionnaire in order to better assist respondents in understanding and responding to the questionnaire.

The sample for study included residents who were 18 years of age or older and live within the township areas of Sar'een and Masooleh. The questionnaire was hand delivered from home to home by the researcher and with the help of a local research assistant. In most cases the questionnaires were self-administered. However, the researcher and the research assistant also helped the respondents in filling out the questionnaire especially when the respondent's literacy was limited. In Masooleh, due to its small population, all houses were selected as the sample for the study. In Sar'een which has the population of over 4,000, the houses nearest to the mineral hot spring hydrotherapy complex were selected. Data collection was carried out during the months of November and December 2006.

A total of 500 useable questionnaires were collected and analyzed using SPSS version 16.

Results

The profile of the respondents shows that the majority are male (64.6 %) (refer Table 1). Respondents who are 37 years old or less constitute 69.2%, while 17.6% are between 38-47 years old. The majority of the respondents are married (56.8%) while single is represented by 40.8%. With regard to educational background 29.3% of the

respondents have diploma, while 21.2% achieve college and university education. Respondents are mainly born within the research areas (67.8%). In terms of employment 52.8% of the respondents stated that they have jobs related to tourism. When it comes to the question of monthly income, respondents preferred to not provide the answer. All the respondents are Shia Muslim (SCI, 2007)

Table1. Demographic Profile of the respondents

Demographic variable	Frequency	(%)
Sex		
Male	323	64.6
Female	177	35.4
Total	500	100.0
Age		
18-27	219	43.8
28-37	127	25.4
38-47	88	17.6
48-57	38	7.6
58-67	8	1.6
68 and above	20	4.0
Total	500	100.0
Marital status		
Married	284	56.8
Widowed or Divorced	12	2.4
Single	204	40.8
Total	500	100.0
Education		
No formal education	19	3.8
Primary School	46	9.1
Secondary School	83	16.4
High School	71	14.1
Diploma	148	29.3
Matriculation	26	5.1
Junior College Diploma	44	8.7
Bachelor Degree	56	11.1
Master Degree & above	7	1.4
Total	500	100.0
Place of Birth		
At area of research	339	67.8
The city/village nearby	98	19.6
Same province	25	5.0
Other Province	38	7.6
Total	500	100.0
Job related to Tourism		
Yes	264	52.8
No	236	47.2
Total	500	100.0

Table 2 presents the descriptive analysis of residents' perception of socio-cultural impact of tourism. A total of 24 items are measured by the 5-point Likert scale. Based on the mean score of each item, respondents have the highest agreement that tourism stimulates the maintenance of historical sites (Mean = 4.22), provides the positive image of the community (Mean = 4.21), creates better job opportunities (Mean = 4.09) and provides a better recreational opportunities for local residents (Mean= 4.07). Respondents also have positive perception that tourism provides positive effects to life satisfaction (Mean = 3.98), quality of life (Mean = 3.97), maintenance of public facilities (Mean = 3.91), local infrastructure development (Mean = 3.91), public health services (Mean = 3.89), education (Mean = 3.88), cultural exchange (Mean = 3.86), cultural activities (Mean = 3.79), preservation of cultural identity (Mean = 3.78) and women's socio-economic situation (Mean = 3.67). Respondents are between neutral and agreement with the statement that tourism does not affect the religious practices of local people (Mean = 3.51). Respondents' perceptions are rather neutral on the statements of the effects of tourism development on vandalism (Mean = 3.33), crime (Mean = 3.32), drug addiction and trafficking (Mean = 3.30), maintenance of traditional way of life (Mean = 3.30), alcohol consumption (Mean = 3.03), prostitution (Mean = 3.11), disruption of peace and tranquility (Mean = 3.21), pick-pocketing and robbery (Mean = 3.22) and littering (Mean= 2.76 mean).

Table 2. Descriptive Analysis of Tourism Socio-Cultural Impacts

Socio-Cultural Impact Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation
Historical sites maintenance.	4.22	.88
Image of area.	4.21	.85
Employment opportunities.	4.09	1.02
Recreational opportunity.	4.07	1.01
Satisfied with living in this area.	3.98	1.00
Quality of life.	3.97	.99
Public facilities maintenance.	3.91	.92
Infrastructure development.	3.91	.94
Public health services.	3.89	1.05
Educational effect.	3.88	.97
Cultural exchange.	3.86	.98
Cultural activities.	3.79	1.01
Cultural identity.	3.78	.98
Women's socio-economic situation.	3.67	2.59
Affect on religious practices.	3.51	1.17
Vandalism.	3.33	1.12
Crimes.	3.32	1.23
Drug addiction and trafficking.	3.30	1.18
Traditional way of life.	3.30	1.17
Pick-pocketing and robbery.	3.22	1.22
Peace and tranquility.	3.21	1.20
Prostitution.	3.11	1.30
Alcohol consumption.	3.03	1.26
Littering.	2.76	1.32

1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree

Factor Analysis is performed on the socio-cultural impact items. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy test is 0.872 and the Bartlett's test of sphericity is significant ($p < 0.000$) indicating that data are acceptable for factor analysis. Using 0.5 as a significant factor loading (Hair *et al.* 2006), five factors are extracted. Four items did not load on any factor (quality of life, traditional way of life, maintenance of historical sites and Littering) and a factor is loaded with only one item (women's socio-economic status). All these items are dropped from the subsequent factor analysis.

Table 3: The Factor Loading Results on Socio-Cultural Impacts

Factor/Items	Factor Loading
Social Problems(SP) ($\alpha=0.824$)	
Drug addiction	.758
Prostitution	.720
Alcohol consumption	.715
Vandalism	.714
pick-pocketing and robbery	.619
Crimes.	.591
Religious practices.	.591
Image, Facilities and Infrastructure Improvement (IFII) ($\alpha=0.725$)	
Community's image	.670
Recreational opportunity.	.646
Infrastructure development.	.643
Public health services.	.643
Maintenance of public facilities.	.598
Cultural Activity and Life Quality (CALQ) ($\alpha=0.738$)	
cultural activities	.703
job opportunities	.698
educational	.648
Satisfied with living in this area.	.562
Cultural exchange.	.505
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.= .873	
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity= .000	
Cronbach's Alpha of total scale =.835	

Note: Only factor loading > 0.5 are shown

The internal consistency of each factor is examined with Cronbach's Alfa Coefficient. The value of 0.6 is chosen as adequate internal consistency (Hair *et al.* 2006). Factors with Cronbach Alfa value of less than 0.6 are dropped for testing. Thus a factor with two items (cultural identity and the peace and tranquility) which has Chronbach Alfa value of less than 0.6 is dropped for further testing. The deletion of these items has reduced the measurement items for socio-cultural impacts from 24 to 17. The end result revealed three main factors of socio-cultural impacts and they are labeled as Social Problems (SP), Image, Facilities and Infrastructure Improvement (IFII) and Cultural Activity and Life Quality (CALQ). Their Cronbach Alfa values are 0.824 (SP), 0.725 (IFII) and 0.738 (CALQ) indicating acceptable contribution of the items for the factors.

An independent -sample, *t*-test is conducted to examine the influence of gender on socio-cultural impacts of tourism. The finding shows there are no significant influences between gender and the socio-cultural impact factors of SP and IFFI. However, males score higher (Mean=19.85, SD=3.54) than females (Mean=19.15, SD = 3.37; $t(2.17), p=.030$) in their perception on socio-cultural impact factor of CALQ (Cultural Activity and Life Quality).

A one-way ANOVA is conducted to explore the relationship between age and socio-cultural impact factors. The findings suggest that there are no significant difference among three socio-cultural factors scores (SP, IFII and CALQ) for the six age groups. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to explore the relationship between the birth place of residents and socio-cultural impact factors (SP, IFII and CALQ). The results show no significant relationship.

A one-way ANOVA is conducted to explore the influence of educational level on the socio-cultural impact factors. The result shows that educational level does not influence the socio-cultural impact factors of SP ($f(8,491) = 1.54, p = .142$). However, those with educational achievement of Junior College Diploma and Degree have significant influence of the socio-cultural impact factors of IFII ($f(8,491) = 3.94; p = .000$) and CALQ ($f(8,491) = 2.273; p = .022$).

An independent-sample *t*-test is carried out to examine the influence of tourism-related jobs on the socio-cultural impact factors. Tourism-related jobs have significant influences on the socio-cultural impact factors of IFII (worked in tourism-Mean=20.61, SD=3.06- and do not work with tourism-M=19.28, SD=3.44; $t(4.57); p = .000$) and CALQ (worked in tourism-Mean=20.23, SD=3.36- and do not work in tourism-M=18.90 SD=3.52; $t(4.34); p = .000$). However, tourism-related jobs do not influence the socio-cultural impact factor of SP.

Thus the hypothesis that socio-demographic profiles influence the perceived socio-cultural impact of tourism in the case study (Masooleh and Sar'een) is partially supported. The profiles of gender, educational level and tourism-related jobs have significant influence on IFII and CALQ but not SP.

Discussion

The demographic profile in this study reflects a male dominated society in which the male plays an important role in social responsibility. The majority of those who responded are male, young and married. The high dependence of residents in areas on tourism is reflected by the fact that more than half of its respondents earned their living from tourism.

This study reveals that residents possess positive overall attitudes toward tourism. Local residents in Masooleh and Sar'een regard tourism as bringing positive development in terms of the maintenance of historical sites, improved destinations' image and better job opportunities and recreational facilities. The result is supportive of previous findings by authors such as Hashimoto (2002), Mbaiwa (2004), Kim and Patrick (2005), Brunt and Courtney (1999). The level of support for tourism development in the areas may be equated as the euphoric stage by Doxey (1975) or the development stage by Butler (1980). Other social impact aspects such as crime, prostitution and drug are not seen as issues of serious concern. Factor analysis reveals three main factors of socio-cultural impacts in the study areas. These are Social Problem (SP), Image, Facilities and Infrastructure Improvement (IFII) and Cultural Activities and Life Quality (CALQ).

Age does not influence the socio-cultural impact factors in the study areas. This supports the finding of Seid (1994), but contradicts Brunt and Courtney (1999), Lankford and Howard (1994) and Bastias-Perez and Var (1996), all of whom found age has significant influence on the perception of socio-cultural impact of tourism. The place of birth has no significant influence on socio-cultural impact of tourism. The finding contradicts the previous observation by Brunt and Courtney (1999), Brougham and Butler (1981), Davis *et al.* (1988) and Um and Crompton (1987) who noted significant influence of the birth place on the perception of socio-cultural impact of tourism. However it supports Kuvan and Akan's (2005) finding.

Male respondents are more likely to rate higher perception of CALQ factor than female respondents. The finding of significant influence of gender on socio-cultural impact is similar to Korca (1996). However it contradicts the finding by Mok *et al.* (1991) and Seid (1994). The finding may be explained by the fact that males may have more opportunity

of employment, education, cultural communication and cultural activities than females in a traditional community under a theocratic government. Thus they are more disposed to provide the view that tourism development has stimulated their cultural activities and life qualities.

There are also significant influences of those with higher educational level (Junior College Diploma and Degree) on their perception of IFII and CALQ factors. The finding duplicates the studies of Korca (1996), Hernandez *et al.* (1996), Seid (1994) and Teye *et al.* (2002). However it differs from the study by Mok *et al.* (1996). This may indicate that the higher educated residents tend to have higher positive perception towards the areas improvement in terms of Image, Facilities and Infrastructure Improvement as well as Cultural Activities and Life Quality.

Similar to the previous findings (Wang *et al.*, 2006; Mok *et al.*, 1991; McGehee and Andereck, 2004; Brunt and Courtney, 1999; Lankford and Howard 1994; Jurowski *et al.*1997; Murphy, 1983; Milman and Pizam, 1988 and Brougham & Butler, 1981) this study also demonstrates the influence of tourism- related jobs on the perception of socio-cultural impact of tourism. Those who are employed in or benefiting from the tourism sector rate significantly higher on the perceived Image, Facilities and Infrastructure Improvement as well as Cultural Activities and Life Quality. The study also shows that none of the socio-demographic variables has significant influence on the socio-cultural impact factor of Social Problem.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Residents in Masooleh and Saree'n regard tourism development as contributing more positive socio-cultural impacts to the community. The perception of negative social cultural impacts is not evident.

Tourism is seen as contributing to the maintenance of historical sites, the positive image of the area, the provision of job opportunities and recreational facilities. Tourism authorities should take advantage of local support to further develop tourism industry in the area.

The study shows the significant influence of socio-demographic factors of gender, educational level and tourism-related jobs on the socio-cultural impact factors of Image, Facilities and Infrastructure Improvement (IFII) as well as Cultural Activities and Life Quality (CALQ). However the socio-demographic variables do not influence the socio-cultural impact factor of Social Problem (SP). The authorities may need to put emphasis on providing better education to the community (especially women) and ensure better provision of tourism-related jobs to the community as these could ensure the future support from the community for further tourism development.

The main weakness of this study lies in its being case studies. Thus the result may not be generalized as a representative of Iran. Nonetheless, the research is a valuable step in monitoring and managing the socio-cultural impact of tourism in the areas. Future studies in the areas of economic and environmental impacts as well as the level of local people participation in tourism development may be useful in the efforts to develop a sustainable tourism development in the areas specifically and in Iran as a whole.

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