



# Perception of Community in Tourism Impacts and their Participation in Tourism Planning: 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.

**Keywords:** community participations; tourism impacts, ramsar

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## **1.0 Introduction**

Tourism is a powerful force of change in the economy in both the developed and in the least developed countries (Gumus et al., 2007). 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 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 Mathieson, 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:

1. Analyzing tourism's economic, social and cultural effects, and the importance of community participation in tourism development programs.
2. 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.
3. 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.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 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). One of the main reasons for this issue in developing countries, with regard to their political, economic and social structures, is that required infrastructures for participating in decision making are not provided simultaneously (Dola and Mijan, 2006). Aref and Redzuan (2006) emphasized there are operational, structural and cultural barriers to community participation in the tourism development in local communities in Iran. They found that these barriers do not equally exist in every community but, the lack of community participation has been identified as important barriers to effective tourism development.

## **2.2 Community Attitudes to Tourism**

Community attitudes are crucial for successful and sustainable tourism development because an understanding of community s' attitudes and perceptions and how these perceptions are formed regarding tourism development would be valuable knowledge for decision makers. Community is the most important party, since it is they who will be most affected either positively or negatively by tourism planning and development. Therefore by identifying the attitudes of local populations, programs can be set up to minimize friction between tourists and residents (Zhang et al, 2006). Zhang and Lai Lei (2009) have stressed the issue that the differences between development community environmental attitudes and behavioral intention of tourism development suggest that promoting community environmental attitudes may have influences in community involvement with tourism development, which may be a fundamental necessity for sustainable tourism development. The factors which

influence residents' perceptions and attitudes, as well as the nature and the extent of the impact are likely to be different in each community. Social structure of a local community has a major bearing on its ability to absorb positively the different norms and values brought by tourists (Mansfeld 1992). Nzama (2008) has stated that there is a strong positive relationship between the extent of the community in tourism development and their perceptions towards an increase in tourism development. Harrill (2004) highlights Residents with the most economic gain are the most supportive of the tourism industry. Because tourism development usually involves a tradeoff between economic benefits and environmental or cultural costs, residents cope by downplaying the negative impacts based and emphasizing the economic gains to maintain satisfaction with their community (Dyer et al., 2007; Cavus and Tannrisevdi, 2003; Faulkner and Tideswell, 1997).

### **3.0 Methodology**

#### **3.1 Study Site and Sample**

Coastal area of Ramsar is the research site for this study. Ramsar is located at the distance of 291 km from Tehran, the capital of Iran. This city is among the most important coastal tourism destinations in Iran. According to the performed surveys, the major reason of traveling to Ramsar is the use of sea water (Shahr va Bonyan Consultant Engineers, 2007). According to the stats of Iranian Cultural Heritage Organization, 39735 tourists traveled to Ramsar in 2007, which 7 % were foreign tourists, and it is predicted this amount will increase to 8% in 2014 (Shahr va Bonyan Consultant Engineers, 2007).



Map1: Location of Ramsar  
(Source: Shahr va Bonyan Consultant Engineers)

Data were collected via a stratified random sample with the help of self-administered questionnaires that were delivered to all houses in street chosen according to randomly

selected street map coordinates. The survey was conducted by both authors who requested participation from the resident who answered the door. If the respondent was over 18 years of age and agreed to participate, the purpose of the visit was explained and the questionnaire was given out to be collected the following day. From the 186 questionnaires which were distributed, 181 responses were received which indicated a response rate of around 97%.

### **3.2 The Survey Instrument and Data Analysis**

The survey instrument used in this study was a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into three sections. The first section contained questions relating to the demographic characteristics of the respondent but no names were collected, thus retaining the privacy of the respondents. The second part was related to cultural, social, economic and environmental items of tourism. Only 19 impact indicators that were strongly related to the serious issues of Ramsar beach were selected. A four-point scale (1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = agree; 4 = strongly agree) was used for respondents to rate these 19 items. These items were determined based on researcher studies of related references, Observing coastal environment of Ramsar and interviews with local people. The third part of the survey is related to people inclination to participate in tourism development programs which was tested with two general questions. Data analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS Version 16.0).

## **4.0 Results and Discussions**

### **4.1 The Sample Profile**

The majority of the residents were male (61.3%), whereas female accounted for 38.7% of the respondents. Seventy-seven percent of the respondents were not dependent on tourism. Highly educated respondents (more than 12 years of education) accounted for 21.5% of the sample, whereas those who were medium educated (12 years of education) and less educated (less than 12 years of education) accounted for 56.4% and 22.1%, respectively. One hundred and twelve respondents were in the low-income groups (less than 550 dollars per month) accounting for 61.9% of the sample and other were in high-income groups (more than 550 dollars per month). The majority of the residents (47.0%) belonged to the 18-35 age groups. Other groups are 36-56 (24.3%) and more than 56 (28.7%).

### **4.2 Results of Descriptive Statistics and Factor Analysis**

The results of the mean, standard deviation and the number of responses to 19 items are provided in table1 in column descriptive statistics. The number of valid responses varied from 165 to 181. The results of mean indicate that some items have stronger effect on the community than others, while some of them were positive and some negative. For example, the effects of tourism on increasing retailing development (3.30), increasing job opportunity to

local people (3.17), increasing coast of living (3.14), increasing household income (2.89), sea-water pollution (2.89) and destroying of agricultural fields (2.87). This issue, especially for sea water pollution and destroying of agricultural fields is disturbing. To identify the common features of 19 impacts, varimax rotated factor analysis was applied and produced five factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.00, accounting for 63.99 percent of the total variance. Bartlett's test of Sphericity was 1427.334, P-value < 0.001 and Kaiser was 0.83 indicated that data are suitable for factor analysis. The factor loadings of five factors are shown in Table 1 in factor loading column. Highest values are bold. The first factor is reckoned as coastal tourism's environmental effects on community. All of the items related to this factor involve in negative effects of tourism on environment though the mean scores of responses is at a medium level. For example, destroying agricultural fields and increasing crowds (factor loading 0.77), increasing traffic jam (factor loading 0.87), as well as vegetation disappearance (factor loading 0.79) and enhancing soil erosion (factor loading 0.80).

Table1: Descriptive Statistics and Factor Analysis of Tourism's Impacts for Ramsar Beach

Items	Descriptive Statistics			Factor loading				
	5	4	3	2	1	SD	Mean	N
<i>Factor1: Environmental destruction</i>								
Tourism increases traffic jam	0.00	0.05	-0.06	0.16	0.87	1.09	2.78	171
Tourism increases crowding	0.07	0.13	-0.11	0.11	0.83	1.05	2.78	178
Tourism enhances soil erosion	-0.08	0.28	0.02	0.14	0.80	1.07	2.57	177
Vegetation disappearance, e.g. trees cut	0.02	0.15	-0.03	0.21	0.79	1.08	2.62	166
Tourism developments results in the destroying of agricultural fields	0.01	0.13	-0.14	0.22	0.77	0.94	2.87	180
<i>Factor2: Social and cultural effects</i>								
Tourism increases crime and social problems	0.00	-0.02	-0.15	0.81	0.11	0.96	2.08	172
Tourism improves the image of the city	-0.09	0.06	-0.08	0.81	0.22	1.00	2.12	172
Tourism damages aboriginal culture	0.00	0.15	-0.10	0.80	0.14	0.98	2.37	175
tourists interrupt quiet life in the city	-0.04	0.06	-0.07	0.77	0.26	1.04	2.44	167
<i>Factor3: economical effects</i>								
Tourism increases cost of living	0.06	-0.07	0.77	-0.11	-0.04	0.83	3.14	178
Tourism increases household income	-0.03	0.01	0.77	-0.11	0.00	0.93	2.89	171
Tourism helps other sector	-0.09	-0.08	0.70	-0.07	0.01	0.89	2.64	165

Tourism increases retailing development	0.23	-0.07	0.67	-0.08	-0.04	0.82	3.30	178
Tourism increases job opportunity to local people	-0.14	0.08	0.52	-0.02	-0.22	0.84	3.17	177
<i>Factor4: Water and coast pollution</i>								
Tourist increases garbage along the coast	0.02	0.87	-0.11	0.07	0.10	1.09	2.72	175
Tourism increases Waste water generation	0.04	0.86	-0.06	0.07	0.25	1.17	2.75	174
Tourist activities cause sea-water pollution	0.08	0.83	0.05	0.09	0.22	1.04	2.89	172
<i>Factor5: Life quality improvement</i>								
Tourism improves the quality of public services	0.76	0.00	-0.06	-0.10	0.07	0.86	1.85	171
Tourism improves quality of life	0.76	0.11	0.06	0.01	-0.06	0.99	2.45	176

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation converged in six iterations.

(Source: Authors, 2011)

A portion of these negative effects is related to inappropriate land use planning, and disobeying rules of construction in coastal areas. These problems are also argued in comprehensive plan of Ramsar city. The second factor relates to tourism's cultural and social effects. The items such as interrupting quiet life in city (factor loading 0.77) and damaging aboriginal culture (factor loading 0.80), increasing crimes (factor loading 0.81) as the negative items, and improving the image of the city because of tourism (factor loading 0.81) as the positive item are included in this factor. The third factor includes 5 items and is interpreted as tourism's economic effects on community. The results of analyses indicates that increasing retailing (factor loading 0.67), as well as increasing job opportunities (factor loading 0.52) have a high correlation with these factors. Coastal tourism also results in increasing life expenses (factor loading 0.77). Other items include increasing household income (factor loading 0.77) and helping other economic sections (factor loading 0.70). The forth factor is related to coast pollution. Items' factor loading in this factor has big amounts, and this issue indicated that people have realized the effects of this factor on their life clearly. Waste water generation (factor loading 0.86) and sea water pollution (factor loading 0.83) as well as increasing garbage along the coast (factor loading 0.87). The fifth factor with two items include improving life quality because of tourism performance (factor loading 0.76), and improving public service quality (factor loading 0.76) is related to improving life quality.

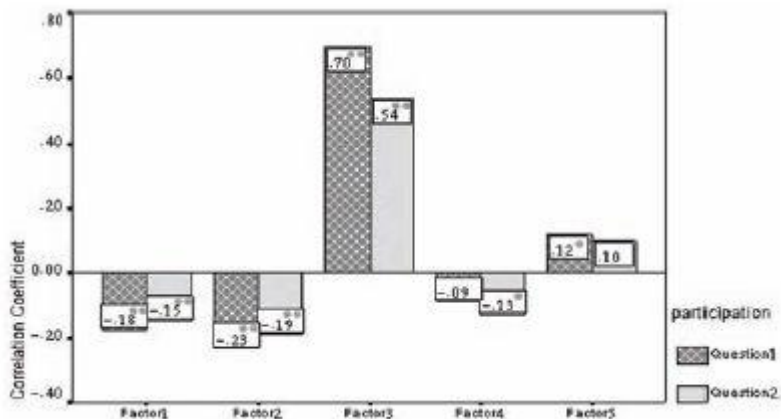
### 4.3 Results of Correlation Analysis

An important use of factor analysis is to translate the original data into the planes of the factors. By this method, a few components (factor analysis scores) will account for most of the variation, and these components can be used to replace the original variables (Insightful

Corporation, 2007, p98). This method was used to compare factor correlation degree with inclination to participate in tourism development programs variables. The predicted scores for the factors were calculated by using regression method. Two questions were asked in order to test the degree of local community participation:

1. I consider the results of tourism effects beneficial; therefore, I will participate in tourism development programs.
2. I consider the programs related to tourism development effective on improving tourism and declining its negative effects; therefore, I will participate.

These two variables were tested with a seven-point scale so it can include a wide range of responses and be comparable with the non-correlated results of factor analysis scores.



**Graph1: Correlation Coefficient of Tourism Effects and Participation in Tourism Planning**

(Source: Authors, 2011)

The mean of question 1 and question 2 are 4.27 and 4.64 indicate that majority part of community like to participate in tourism development programs. Graph (1) shows the correlation results of factor analysis scores with participation degree variables. \*\* indicates the correlation coefficient is significant at the 0.05 level and \* indicates the correlation coefficient is significant at the 0.10 level. According to this graph the highest coefficient of correlation is with that variable which is related to tourism's economic and social effects factor. The correlation coefficient for the first question with economic factor is 0.70 and for the second question is 0.54. They are significant at the 0.05 level. The degree of correlation coefficient for the factor related to social and cultural effects also shows a significant amount (-0.23 and -0.19). The obtained results indicate that this amount of inclination to participate in tourism



development programs has a significant relation (at minimum level of 0.05) with all of the tourism's effective factors on community. The correlation related to other factors with the variables related to the degree of participation is also significant. Only the relationship between the first question and water and coast pollution factor and the second question with life quality improvement are not significant.

## **5.0 Conclusion**

The results of analyzing data showed that a portion of community members have a disinclination to tourism effects. For example, their disturbance related to environment pollution, water pollution, as well as some social and cultural effects is significant. The negative effects of tourism on community cause a lower society inclination to participate in tourism development programs, though its positive affects results in increasing their support and reaching projects' goals. With regard to Ramsar city, it seems that the benefits resulted from tourism has relatively been able to provide required encouragements to participate in tourism development programs. The results related to correlation coefficients indicate that there is a significance relationship between tourism's effects of community and participation degree. In this paper, the effects of economic factor and the effects of social and cultural factor are reckoned as the most important factors effective on community participation in tourism development programs. Knowing how tourism effects on society and supporting community's cooperation have an important impact on reinforcing the strengths and improving the weakness of tourism planning. To obtain this goal, it is necessary to provide an effective communication between planners and community in order to gain support from society.

As it was mentioned in the Introduction, the effects of tourism development are different on various societies. Therefore, the obtained results from this study can't be generalized to other societies with certainty. One of the biggest problems for this study was the unavailability of researches which have been performed about the effects of tourism development in Iran. This problem is even more noticeable about coastal tourism in Iran. This results in the lack of a criterion for comparing tourism development effects for a case model. Another issue to which must be attentive is that more than 90 % of coastal tourists who choose Ramsar as their destination are excursionist tourists. Despite the fact that excursionists are observed in the tourism statistics according to the statement of World Tourism Organization, the increase in the number of foreign tourists among the coasts of Ramsar may bring different effects. This factor is effective on the participation of the society in tourism development programs. As a result, although the results of this study indicate the strong correlation between tourism development effects on community and the degree of community participation in tourism development programs, to be certain of this issue and the factors which affect it requires more studies in the future.

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