



**Community perception & support for Wildlife
Tourism, empirical evidence from Udawalawe
National park**

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ABSTRACT

Wildlife-viewing has become a popular nature based tourism sector worldwide providing opportunities for tourist to enjoy wildlife in natural habitats such as protected areas. The main purpose of this study is to examine local residents' attitudes and participation in tourism and to explore factors which affect residents' support and participation in tourism in Udawalawe National Park, Sri Lanka. This study tests the Structural Equation Model between community perceptions and opinions about the impacts of tourism, community participation and further to determine their willingness to support for wildlife tourism. The study is descriptive in nature and is based on a quantitative methodology to investigate the relationships between different constructs. The study site is called the Udawalawe National Park. Therefore, the population of this study represents the natives who are living in the Udawalawe area. For the sample size of this study was 160 citizens in Udawalawe area. Convenience and quota sampling methods were adapted methods from identified and independent sample frames to collect quantitative data from the respondents the questionnaire included with the community involvement and interest in tourism and community perception on tourism development impacts. It was made up of close-ended questions and five-point Likert scale type questions. The data was analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with the SPSS. The result reveals that there is a significant relationship between community participation and community perceived impacts. Hence, there is a significant relationship between community participation and support for wildlife tourism and there is no significant relationship between the perceived impact and wildlife tourism support and it also indicates a negative relationship. The results of factor analyses of tourism impacts identified two factors: Socio and Economic factors. But in the final result there is no statistically significant relationship and it also indicates a negative relationship. It can be concluded that community participation can be increased by the education level of residents to understand their right and need for greater participation in the decision-making process. Also, outbound parties have greater responsibility to make their contribution, to increase the involving the socio and economic factors in wildlife tourism.

Keywords: Wildlife tourism, Community participation, Community perceived impact, Tourism Support,