

Perception Differences of Socio- cultural Impacts of Tourism: A Study with Reference to Demographic Factors in Hikkaduwa Region

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Introduction

Tourism is often referred to as the world's largest industry and regarded as a mean of achieving development in destination areas (Sharpley, 2002). The perception is a process by which people translate sensory impressions into a coherent and unified view of the world around them. Though necessarily based on incomplete and unverified information, perception is equated with reality for most practical purposes and guides human behavior in general.

Ap (1992) and Lankford (1994) indicate that the perceptions and attitudes of residents toward the impacts of tourism tend to be a key planning and policy consideration for the successful development and operation of existing and future projects. According to Pizam and Milman (1984) "tourism is contributing to the changes in value systems, individual behavior, family relationships collective lifestyles, moral conduct, creative expressions, traditional ceremonies and community organization". Further, in a study using segmentation analysis examining residents' attitudes toward tourism in Scotland from a socio-demographic perspective, Brougham and Butler (1981) found that there are significant differences in residents' attitudes related to local and personal characteristics, with tourist contact, length of residence, age and language. Moreover, in a study measuring residents' attachment levels in a host community in New Braunfels, Texas, Um and Crompton (1987) found that the more attached a resident was to his or her community in terms of birthplace, heritage, and length of residence, the less favorably he or she perceived tourism impacts. Similarly, the results of the study of Kusadasi et al. (2002) witness a significant relationship between age and length of residence and attitude toward tourism development. In terms of length of residence, Girard and Gartner (1993) discovered that both long-term and short-term second homeowners appreciated the availability of goods and services from increased tourism, but long-term residents tended not want to see an increase in tourism development in their study in Wisconsin.

Tourism industry has a great impact on socio-cultural aspects of a country (Bandara, 2001). With reference to the past research findings it was clear that, there are different ideas in relation to the perception on social and cultural impacts of tourism and this may be due to contextual differences and methodological differences. Hence, this study was focusing on residents' perception on social and cultural impacts of tourism in Hikkaduwa, which is a rapidly growing tourism zone of the country. Therefore, main objective was to examine the perceptual differences of residents' on socio-cultural impacts of tourism in Hikkaduwa tourism zone in terms of demographic factors of residents.

Methodology

A random sample of 100 residents from Hikkaduwa region was selected for the study and the principle resident of the household was given with the questionnaire. The structured questionnaire used to collect data was comprised with two main sections and section -1 was focusing on the demographic information of the resident and the section-2 was comprised with 5 point Likert Scale questions to measure the perception on socio-cultural impacts of tourism. The data were analyzed by using non-parametric tests of Mann-Witney U test when there are two categories in the independent variable and Kruskalwallis test when there are more than two categories in the independent variable.

Results and Discussions

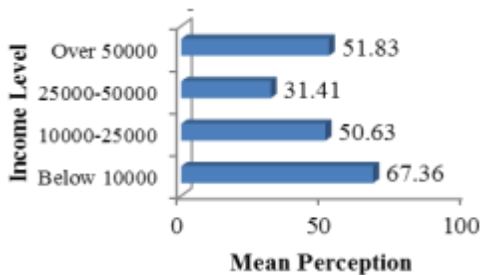
In accordance with the Table 1, none of the demographic variables are accounting for a statistically significant difference in residents' perception on positive impacts except in the case of income level in which data support for a statistically significant ($P < 0.05$) difference.

Table 1. Impacts of residents' demographic factors on socio- cultural impacts of tourism.

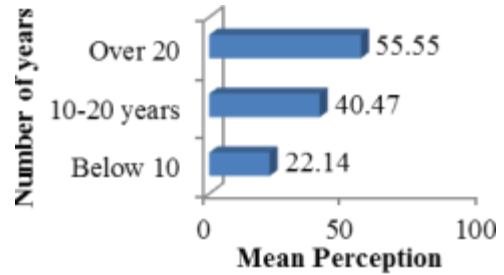
	Gender	Age	Educational level	Employment status	Place of employment	Marital status	Income level	Length of the residents' stay
Positive impacts	.562	.050	.241	.694	.741	.784	.000	.158
Negative impacts	.557	.612	.126	.078	.276	.066	.192	.004
General impacts	.118	.969	.751	.038	.052	.327	.834	.002

Source: Summarized SPSS output based on the data of the field survey, 2013

The aforesaid difference in perception in terms of income level can be portrayed as follows (Figure1).



Source - Field Survey 2012



Source - Field Survey 2012

Figure 1. Residents' perception on positive Tourism impacts in terms of income level

Figure 2. Residents' perception on negative tourism impacts in terms of length of stay in the area.

On the other hand, it can be observed that there is a statistically significant difference on residents' perception on negative impacts in terms of length of stay (Figure2) and further it shows that perception is higher when the number of years of stay increases. In the case of general impacts, employment status and length of stay of the resident have statistically significant influences in creating differences in the perception of the residents. Considering the variables which have a significant influence, it is quite interesting to see that when the number of years of stay in the area increases the perception on negative impacts is also higher while there is no such a significant influence in the case of positive impacts of tourism. These results support the findings of Girard and Gartner's (1993) and McCool and Martin (1994) who found that long-term residents had less positive perception of tourism than short-term residents.

Conclusions

The objective of this study was to identify the differences of perception on tourism impacts in terms of demographic factors by taking a random sample from Hikkaduwa region. The overall perception was positive and this maybe due to relatively low number of elder participants (55 years old and over). Since the elder residents have experienced the difference before/after Hikkaduwa was open to the public, they might have different perceptions and attitudes toward tourism. However, because elder residents tend to have a generally low literacy rate, it is not easy to get them into the study using a survey methodology. Further, it was found that perception on positive tourism impacts differ in terms of income level while the perception on negative impacts vary in terms of length of stay in the area. Further, perception on general impacts was differing in terms of employment status and length of stay.

References

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