



Socio-demographic effects on Anzali wetland tourism development



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Residents' attitudes of Anzali wetland toward tourism development are examined.
- The Partial least squares (PLS) is used to test both the model and the hypothesis.
- A positive link between the tourism impacts and residents' attitudes was found.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the attitudes of residents of Iran's Anzali wetland toward tourism development. The investigators examine how these attitudes are mitigated by three different socio-demographic variables; family size, length of residency, and distance from tourist zone. This study assumes that the development process is affected by residents and that their attitudes are predictive of the success or failure of a tourism development. Partial Least Squares (PLS) analysis is used to test both the research model and the hypotheses. The results reveal a positive and direct relationship between the perceived impact of development and residents' attitudes toward tourism development in the Anzali wetland.

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1. Introduction

Tourism is regarded as a gateway for the economic development of local communities, especially in the context of developing economies (Ko & Stewart, 2002). Consequently, tourism development is often used by communities to improve the quality of life of local residents (Jurovski & Gursoy, 2004). Such improvements in the quality of life of residents were thought to be particularly pronounced in developing countries where the infrastructure established in support of tourism development would invariably contribute toward the economic development of the local community (Cooke, 1982). Such infrastructure, supporting both tourism and local economic development includes accommodation, transportation, hospitality, and leisure services; these services growing to meet the demands of a thriving tourism industry (Marzuki, 2011).

According to Honey, Vargas, and Durham (2010), the tourism industry and its management differs across countries. Although the importance of tourism development and its impact on local communities is well recognised (Russo & Borg, 2002), little attention has been given to understanding the significance of tourism to local residents and communities in the rural and wetland areas of developing countries. Developing countries, such as Iran, may be predisposed toward certain adverse socio-cultural, economic, and environmental side effects associated with the development of tourism.

Iran constitutes an ideal setting for this case study due to its rich natural resources which lend themselves to the development of a vibrant tourism industry. Bordered to the north by the Caspian Sea and to the south by both the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, Iran possesses a scenic 2800 km coastline. Accessible throughout the year, the Caspian Sea is a highly sought after tourism destination (Panow, 2007) due to its natural beauty. The snow capped Alborz and drier Zagros mountain ranges present Iran with a range of additional tourism opportunities (Pak & Farajzadeh, 2007). Iran's temperate climate, with its four very distinct seasons (Zamani-

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Farahani, 2010), present an additional asset to the country's tourism destination competitiveness. Iran's rich historical and cultural heritage is also a significant feature of the country. With various cultures stretching across Iran's length and breadth, Iran presents the tourist with an array of destination options (Panow, 2007).

However, while Iran's tourism capacity develops, some attention must be afforded to maintaining the country's natural assets; such as wetlands, lagoons, deserts, lakes and other natural resources. International experiences have demonstrated that wetland conservation programmes benefit from well thought-out participatory planning and management approaches which take into consideration the economic, social, and environmental concerns of stakeholders (Allendorf, Smith, & Anderson, 2007; DSE, 2007; Whitten, Bennett, Moss, Handley, & Phillips, 2002). However, according to Rezaei (2003), such participatory approaches are virtually non-existent in Iran and have certainly never been implemented in Iran's wetland areas.

As key stakeholders in any tourism development, the needs and expectations of local residents must be taken into consideration throughout a development's strategic planning and implementation process (Allendorf et al., 2007). Understanding the attitudes of local residents toward the development is fundamental to identifying these needs and expectations. Consequently, by observing the processes and outcomes of the Anzali wetland's resource allocation management and conservation project, insight can be gained into the relationship between local residents and the tourism development.

The Anzali wetland is situated in the northern Iranian province of Gilan. Protected by the Ramsar Convention due to its international significance, the Anzali wetland appeals to both local and international tourists alike (Dadras & Kardovani, 2010). One of the largest freshwater coastal lagoons in the world, the Anzali wetland is separated from the high salinity Caspian Sea by the harbour city of Bandar-e Anzali (Kardovani, 1998). Therefore, the Anzali wetland is precariously located and understanding the attitudes of local residents toward tourism development is essential if a successful tourism industry is to be established in this area, while simultaneously maintaining the local ecology.

It is hoped that the communities of the wetland area will benefit from the prospect of tourism development. Consequently, promoting the wetland is essential in order to attract domestic and international visitors. In addition to revitalizing the economy of the region, tourism provides a context for conservation efforts to maintain the region's natural resources (Dadras & Kardovani, 2010). The wetland area receives about 40,000 tourists annually, contributing around 3 billion Rials (approx. \$112,355 USD) per year to the local economy. Around 184,000 domestic tourists visit Guilan province each year to visit the wetland area, while around 3100 international tourists do likewise. These tourists come to visit the major tourist attractions at Bandar Anzali, Rasht, Masuleh and Fuman (JICA, 2005).

In this study, we quantify local residents' attitudes according to several demographic variables; including family size, distance from tourist zone and length of residency. Furthermore, we investigate the impact of tourism development in terms of its cultural, economic and environmental effects. In the proceeding section, we outline the context for this research and describe the conceptual model with regard to the existing literature in terms of the impact of tourism and relational indicators such as family size, length of residency, and distance from tourist zones. We will subsequently formulate our conceptual framework describing the relationship between these variables. We will then elucidate upon our research methods and discuss our determination of goodness of fit, construct validity, convergent validity, discriminant validity, and the reliability of the constructs. In the results section, we will

analyse our findings and test our hypotheses. We then conclude with a discussion of the implications of our findings and suggestions for future research (see Fig. 1).

2. Research context and research model

This study represents part of a much larger research effort to investigate the relationship between the impact of tourism and the attitudes of residents in Iran's Anzali wetland.

2.1. Socio-demographic characteristics and residents' attitudes

Eagly and Chaiken (1993) describe an attitude as 'a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degrees of favour or disfavour ... [where] ... evaluating refers to all classes of evaluative responding, whether overt or covert, cognitive, affective or behavioural' (p.1). Many tourism researchers believe that these attitudes and perceptions can have a profound influence on the success of tourism development programmes (Ap, 1992; Lawson, Williams, Young, & Cossens, 1998). Therefore, successful destination development demands that planners understand residents' attitudes toward tourism development and evaluate the impact of such developments post implementation.

Attitudes are comprised of three basic elements; namely beliefs (cognitive elements), feelings (affective elements), and behaviours (action-tendency elements) (Shortt, 1994). Yen and Kerstetter (2009) correlated the difference between these diverse components of attitudes with the existing tourism industry and future tourism. It was their observations which motivated this study, to examine the impact of tourism by measuring local residents' attitudes toward tourism development. Residents' attitudes toward tourism are based on the perceived impact of development on population structures, the cultural expression of host communities, social structures and patterns of consumption, employment and occupational structures, crime, prostitution and gambling (Ap & Crompton, 1998; Haralambopoulos & Pizam, 1996). These perceived effects can be further classified into intrinsic and extrinsic effects, based on Social Exchange Theory (SET) (Ap, 1992), that influence residents' attitudes (Haralambopoulos & Pizam, 1996; Pizam, 1978; Snaith & Haley, 1994; Weaver & Lawton, 2001). The extrinsic dimension refers to location characteristics, which include nature, tourism development stage, as well as the reflective factors that include tourism activity levels and tourist types. The intrinsic dimension refers to characteristics of the host community members. Tourism affects each member of the host community differently as a function of their unique characteristics.

Personal characteristics, as well as the perceived positive and negative impact of tourism, can influence residents' attitudes toward tourism development (Allen, Hafer, Long, & Perdue, 1993). Brida, Osti, and Barquet (2010) argued that analyses of socio-demographic variables have long been a mainstay of tourism-related research. This earlier research indicates the significance of these demographic variables in influencing residents' attitudes toward tourism, as well as the socio-cultural, economic, and environmental impact of tourism (Andereck, Valentine, Knopf, & Vogt, 2005; Cui & Ryan, 2011; Nyaupane & Thapa, 2006; Teye, Sirakaya, & Sönmez, 2002; Tosun, 2002). However, few studies have explored the relationship between family size and attitudes toward the effects of tourism (Brida, Osti, & Faccioli, 2011; Kuvan & Akan, 2005; Teye et al., 2002; Tosun, 2002; Wang & Pfister, 2008).

Wang and Pfister (2008) observed that residents' attitudes are statistically interrelated with the number of family members. In other words, family size influences attitudes toward tourism development. Additionally, family members' attitudes are a

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