



## Residents' Perceptions Toward Tourism as a Community Development Tool: A Case of Sultanate of Oman

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### Abstract

Tourism has been considered a vital means of community development in several economies of the world, especially among developing and underdeveloped nations. It contributes to a lot of socio-cultural, economic and environmental positive and negative impacts. Some of the prime benefits to the host population are employment opportunities, economic growth, infrastructural development and cross-cultural understanding, etc. On the other hand, crime rate increase, inflation, lower wages, long working hours, culture shock and environmental degradation are some adverse effects of tourism. Method: For the study purpose, both secondary, as well as primary data, have been collected. 'Exploratory Factor Analysis' (EFA) and 'Confirmatory Factor Analysis' (CFA) have been used to analyze the research data. Result: The findings confirm that both economic and socio-cultural impact of tourism on community development is positive and significant, whereas the environmental impact of tourism on community development is negative and insignificant.

### Article Type

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## INTRODUCTION

Tourism has become an essential element of economic development in many countries (Harrill, 2004), especially in developing nations. Nowadays tourism is no longer limited to just rest & relaxation, leisure & pleasure, but it has become a necessity of life for many. Tourism offers a variety of economic, socio-cultural and environmental advantages to locals and outsiders. Tourism encourages economies to promote it for the sake of generating foreign ex-change, employment, infrastructure development such as road, rail, air, water, electricity, health facilities, safety and security, etc. (Agri, Acha, Lucy, & Lucy, 2016). Currently, several economically depressed communities are seeing tourism as an alternative to boost their economies (Virginia & Hall, 2012). Over and above, tourism strengthens changes in family relationships, lifestyles, way of working and several unforeseen issues (Ambroz, 2008; Puczkó & Rátz, 2000).

The significant positive impacts that tourism offers to the residents are job opportunities, better income, infrastructural development, educational improvement, business-related opportunities, country's economic growth, cultural exchange, improved living standards, conservation & preservation of cultural and heritage resources (Alhammad, 2012; Bagri & Kala, 2016; Ekanayake, 2012). On the contrary, tourism also affects residents negatively, such as some unwanted activities like crime, gambling, cultural distortion, overexploitation of cultural & historic resources, inflation, environmental degradation such as water, air and noise pollution etc. (Agri et al., 2016; Chandel, Varshney, & Kumar, 2016; Cohen, 1978). Tourism also causes parking problems, traffic congestion, road blockage, illegal construction of hotels, restaurants and other buildings, habitat problem for flora and fauna, etc. (Erkuş-Öztürk & Terhorst, 2018; Eshliki & Kaboudi, 2012; Hao, Long, & Kleckley, 2010).

Globalization has made tourism one of the most significant industries worldwide (Al-Rabaani, 2013). The Sultanate of Oman possesses great tourism potentials that may benefit the country economically in the long run. According to Al-Riyami (2014), improved road transportation has boosted domestic tourism in Oman in recent years. It has made travel more effective and efficient within the country, especially during the weekends. Oman is widely known for its rich heritage, architecture, historical, cultural, natural landscapes and marine tourism attractions. Local tourism has grown significantly within different regions of Oman such as Dhofar region, known for its natural, climatic and heritage attractions; Ad Dakhiliyah region covers many destinations like Bahla- the magical town; Nizwa- the historic capital of the country; Al Jabel Al Akhdar- the camel's hideout; Jabel Shams- the entry point for Sun in Oman; Al Hoota Caves- a habitat for hope; Musandam governorate- the land of beaches having several activities such as dolphin watching, dhow cruising, fishing, diving and underwater activities. Masirah and Sohar are other spectacular destinations with several attractions. Sharqia region is relatively affluent in terms of touristic resources. Sur is the biggest city in this region, which offers a wide array of tourist activities such as desert safari trips and camping in Bidiyah, scenic nature tourism in Wadi Bani Khalid, turtle watching in Ras Al Hadd and so on.

In the near future, it is expected that tourism will reach new heights with the establishment of additional domestic airports, rail networks, improved ferry services and the development of highways, expressways in the different parts of the Sultanate. Expansion of tourism can help boost Oman's economic diversification with its natural attractions and resources. The presence of adventure, nature, leisure & pleasure, business, marine, culture and heritage resources enhances the touristic image of the Sultanate. Most attractions are easily accessible to all, local and international visitors.

Despite having potential tourism resources, there is a lack of awareness among the local people. The government intends to develop Oman as a luxury touristic destination in the Arab world instead of mass tourism (Innovative Tourism Advisors, 2016). For tourism to expand on all levels, participation among locals are crucial. Therefore, understanding locals' perception of tourism towards its contribution to community development is paramount.

### **Literature Review**

Over the past several years many research studies have been carried out in different parts of the world such as Africa, Europe, Australia, America, the middle east and Asia, etc., to understand and study the residents' perceptions toward tourism as a community development tool (Andriotis, 2000; Chili, 2015; Du, Lew, & Ng, 2016; Eshliki & Kaboudi, 2012; Gnanapala, 2016; Mustapha N, Azman I, 2013; Shariff & Abidin, 2013; Sharpley, 2002; Tichaawa, 2015; Virginia & Hall, 2012; Wang & Pfister, 2008). However, very few studies have been done in the same context regarding Oman (Chandel et al., 2016).

Above mentioned studies conclude that residents' perceptions are based on three significant dimensions; environmental, economic and socio-cultural. A detailed review of such studies suggests that tourism creates positive as well as negative impacts on each dimension (Bender et al., 2008). Sometimes residents' perceptions are contradictory that is generally based on culture and religion (Bagri & Kala, 2016). These impacts have a significant influence on resi-dents' perception towards tourism growth and development (Bahae, Pisani, & Shavakh, 2014; Chandralal, 2010; Cohen, 1978; Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004).

### **Community Development**

Several researchers have accepted that good and healthy relationship between hosts and guests (tourists) may prolong tourism development at a destination (Ambroz, 2008; Ap & Crompton, 1998). Hao et al. (2010) assessed various factors predicting attitudes of resident and second home property owners concerning the development of tourism and its impacts on a second home-intensive coastal region. Szell (2012) executed a survey close to Retezat Na-tional Park, Romania, to know the local people's and visitors' attitudes and perceptions toward protected areas and their 'Willingness To Pay' (WTP) for environmental protection. The outcomes of the study suggest that visitors have a greater awareness of the significance of the protected area, and they highly appreciate the presence of the park. Also, the visitors are ready to pay higher entry ticket fees to help conservation and preservation efforts compared to the locals. Many research studies predict that residents' attitudes toward tourism develop-ment depend on the level of dependency of residents on the tourism industry, and the development of tourism at the destination (Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004; Virginia & Hall, 2012). Butler (1980) has developed a model called 'Tourist Area Life Cycle' (TALC). As per the model, a destination passes through different stages (exploration, involvement, development, consolidation and stagnation). Each stage offers some benefits to the residents and outsiders. This model supports Doxy's (1976) view that at the beginning residents' attitudes are quite positive towards tourism development, but in the later stages, they become negative (Alhammad, 2012).

Generally, tourism impacts vary among different communities or different groups of people (Godfrey & Clarke, 2000). Although the significance of tourism in context with community development is quite visible to academicians and people directly or indirectly associated with this industry, very few research studies, have been done on residents'

perception on tourism as a community development tool within Omani perspectives so far. Hence, knowledge and understanding of residents' mindsets of tourism regarding community development are limited.

### **Environmental Impacts of Tourism on Community Development**

The environment is a vital element of tourism, considering most of its resource tools are directly or indirectly linked with the environment (Bagri & Kala, 2016). In recent decades, major global trends blend towards ecological problems such as global warming, deforestation, overexploitation of scarce natural resources, air, water and noise pollution and so on (Açıksöz, Cetinkaya, Uzun, Erduran Nemutlu, & Ilke, 2016). It is believed that tourism is one of the major industries responsible for all such mentioned problems (Cohen, 1978; Erkuş-Öztürk & Terhorst, 2018). On the other hand, tourism development demonstrates the conservation and preservation of wildlife and other natural elements (Dayneko & Dayneko, 2018). Most of the residents support tourism development and promotion because it encourages the construction of parks, wildlife reserves, national parks and centuries (Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, 2001). It also creates awareness about environmental conservation and preservation among residents and tourists (Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004; Harrill, 2004). Based on the above review, it can be hypothesized that,

H1: The environmental impact of tourism on community development in Oman is positive and significant.

### **Economic Impacts of Tourism on Community Development**

Tourism is a multi-product and multi-service industry (Erkuş-Öztürk & Terhorst, 2018). It can benefit economies at national, regional and local levels. Tourism accelerates the development of several primary and associated industries (Eraqi, 2007). This provides the platform to grow and prosper for many small and medium scale businesses (Christ, Hillel, Matus, & Sweeting, 2003). Economic advantages are critical factors for a destination from the tourist industry point of view, as it offers employment opportunities, foreign exchange growth, income improvement and revenue generation at local, national and regional level (Kalaiya & Kumar, 2015; Rastegar, 2010; Zaei & Zaei, 2013). Cooper & Ellram (1993) believe that tourism enhances rural and urban areas as it makes tourists possible to visit various developed and unexplored regions. Consequently, it brings new business enterprises and creates a positive image in the area (Teye, Sirakaya, & Sönmez, 2002). Therefore, it can be concluded that,

H2: The economic impact of tourism on community development in Oman is positive and significant.

### **Socio-cultural Impacts of Tourism on Community Development**

Various kinds of literature conclude that tourism creates significant socio-cultural benefits like lifestyle improvement, cultural exchange and understanding, amenities and infrastructure development, language skills, community confidence and identity (Wilkinson, 2008). It also enhances community image, conservation of cultural heritage and resources (Cheng & Jarvis, 2010; Ramseook-Munhurrin & Naidoo, 2011). Socio-cultural impacts play a significant role in community development (Aref & Redzuan, 2010). Mason (2003) states that it is quite challenging to evaluate the socio-cultural impacts of tourism for a destination because they are more qualitative compared to quantitative economic impacts. Liu (2003) argues that the interaction between residents and tourists is critical. It brings new ideas, confidence, values, life-style improvement, which enhances the socio-cultural growth (Daher, 2007). Therefore, the current study postulates that,

H3: The socio-cultural impact of tourism on community development in Oman is positive and significant.

## Methodology

A survey was conducted to measure the residents' perceptions toward community development in Sultanate of Oman through tourism. A questionnaire was designed to collect primary data. The questionnaire was consisting of two sections: demographic and research model. The demographic section comprises seven questions, whereas the research model includes 26 items. Each item was measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 'Strongly Disagree (1)' to 'Strongly Agree (5)'. Items measure Environmental, Economic and Social-cultural impacts in the context of Community Development. These items were chosen after considering selected research studies and adapted with minor changes reflecting target respondents. A pre-test was conducted to assess the viability of questions which form the basis of the final questionnaire.

Data were collected through a web-based instrument. A list of approximately 300 email addresses of colleagues, friends, and relatives living in Oman was prepared. A weblink was mailed to all of them with a request to circulate the weblink to others. After removing incomplete responses and outliers, a total of 149 responses were used for further analysis.

## Result and Discussion

Collected data were recorded in MS Excel and then analyzed by SPSS and AMOS. Table 1 depicts the demographic details of the respondents. A nearly equal gender (Male: Female:: 58%:42%) and nationality (Omani: Non-Omani:: 47%:53%) spectrum among participation in the survey was succeeded. With regards to Occupation, most participants were Non-Govt. Employees (64%). Major respondents were of the age group 31-40 years (61%) and Islam by religion (52%). Most of the respondents were well educated and lived in Oman between 16-20 years (50%).

**Table 1.** Demographic Analysis of Respondents

Items	Frequency	Percent
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	87	58.4
Female	62	41.6
<i>Nationality</i>		
Omani	70	47.0
Non-Omani	79	53.0
<i>Occupation</i>		
Self-Employed	4	2.7
Govt. Employee	21	14.1
Non-Govt. Employee	95	63.8
Student	29	19.5
<i>Age</i>		
Below 20 Years	5	3.4
20-30 Years	25	16.8
31-40 Years	91	61.1
41-50 Years	23	15.4
Above 50 Years	5	3.4
<i>Religion</i>		
Christianity	24	16.1
Islam	77	51.7
Hinduism	39	26.2
Other	9	6.0

**Table 1.** Demographic Analysis of Respondents

<i>Education</i>		
No Formal Education	8	5.4
School	11	7.4
Graduate	58	38.9
Post Graduate	39	26.2
Doctorate	18	12.1
Other	15	10.1
<i>Years Living in Oman</i>		
Below 5 Years	3	2.0
6-10 Years	24	16.1
11- 15 Years	15	10.1
16-20 Years	74	49.7
Above 20 Years	33	22.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>100</b>

Exploratory Factor Analysis was performed to construct the components based on items. A total of four elements were extracted viz. 'Environmental Impact', 'Economic Impact', 'Social Impact' and 'Community Development'. KMO and Bartlett's Test (Table 2) measurements are well under the acceptance regions. Factor loading (Table 3) of each item was above 0.6 (with one exception), which is well accepted. The values of Cronbach's  $\alpha$  (Table 4) are above the cutoff point (0.8), which shows a good internal consistency of the items. Four extracted components accounted for 69.595% of the total variance (Table 4) explained in the research.

**Table 2.** KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.893
Approx. Chi-Square		2979.079
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Df	325
	Sig.	.000

**Table 3.** Scores of the Components

Items in each Component	Mean	Std. Deviation	Factor Loading
<i>Environmental Impact</i>			
Development of tourist facilities destroy the natural environment	3.91	0.738	0.642
The area's visual and aesthetic look improves due to tourism development	4.00	0.647	0.852
Loss of natural landscape and agricultural lands due to tourism development (N)	3.98	0.712	0.879
Destruction of flora and fauna (including the collection of plants, animals, rocks, coral, or artefacts) because of tourism development (N)	3.89	0.683	0.799
Tourism encourages heritage restoration	3.85	0.623	0.745
Air pollution, traffic congestion, solid waste and noise pollution are general outcomes of tourism (N)	3.91	0.671	0.541
<i>Economic Impact</i>			
Tourism creates a variety of jobs for the residents in the community	4.11	0.571	0.767
The prices of many goods and services in the community get increased because of tourism	4.04	0.568	0.769
The cost of living in the community increases because of tourism (N)	4.09	0.592	0.806
Tourism development encourages more investment and spending	4.06	0.560	0.831
Inflation is a common outcome of tourism development (N)	4.09	0.636	0.795
Tourism contributes to employment generation	4.13	0.600	0.742
Local people earn a lot of economic benefit due to tourism	4.11	0.638	0.742

**Table 3.** Scores of the Components

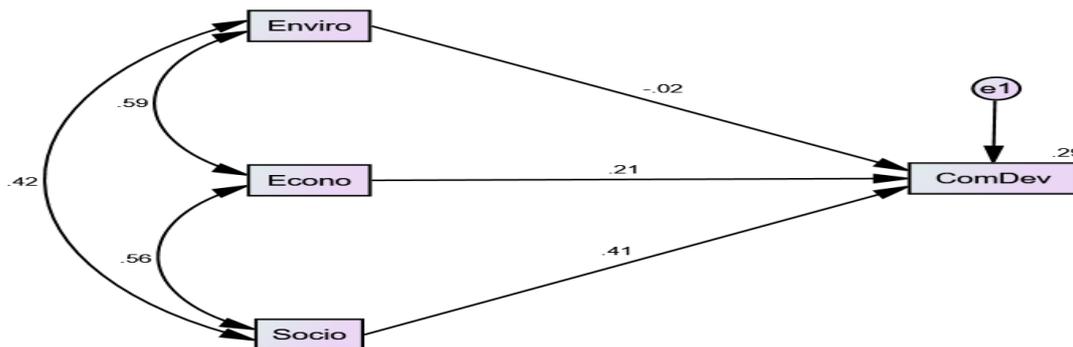
<i>Socio-cultural Impact</i>			
Tourism results in cultural exchange between tourists and residents	3.56	0.911	0.814
Tourism development may cause conflict between visitors and local people (N)	3.64	0.814	0.817
Tourism promotes social problems such as crime, drug use, etc. in the community (N)	3.80	0.780	0.799
Tourism has an unwanted effect on residents' lifestyle (N)	3.42	0.938	0.807
Traditional culture gets harmed because of tourism (N)	3.70	0.803	0.806
Tourism causes a lower quality of life for residents (N)	3.78	0.770	0.819
<i>Community Development</i>			
Tourism helps to keep public facilities at a better level	2.74	0.863	0.737
Tourism causes crowd on public areas/places (N)	2.92	0.912	0.857
Tourism helps in the provision of infrastructure and basic amenities	2.74	0.938	0.715
Tourism helps in the up-gradation of the standard of living	3.25	0.915	0.717
The residents are denied access to the natural resource (N)	3.03	0.937	0.849
Meeting tourists is a valuable experience	3.08	0.948	0.837
Tourism supports the development of recreational facilities	2.89	0.886	0.682

Confirmatory Factor Analysis reports several fit indices (CMIN/DF = 1.485, CFI = .952, SRMR = .070, RMSEA = .057, PClose = .151) for the overall model (Table 4). These indices show a goodness of fit of the proposed model.

**Table 4.** Reliability and Fit Measures

Component	No. of Items	Cronbach's $\alpha$	Variance Explained (%)
Environmental Impact	6	0.888	14.954
Economic Impact	7	0.926	18.863
Socio-cultural Impact	6	0.931	17.752
Community Development	7	0.908	18.025
<b>Overall Model</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>0.933</b>	<b>69.595</b>
CMIN/DF = 1.485, CFI = .952, SRMR = .070, RMSEA = .057, PClose = .151			

Figure 1 signifies the structural equation model of the proposed hypothesis. It includes estimates of path coefficient, which indicates the strengths of the relationship between dependent and independent variables.



**Figure 1.** Path Analysis

The standardized regression weights represent, Environmental Impact ( $\beta = -.022$ ,  $p = .801$ ), Economic Impact ( $\beta = .206$ ,  $p = .030$ ) and Social Impact ( $\beta = .411$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Based on these weights, hypothesis results are shown in Table 5.

H1: The environmental impact of tourism on community development in Oman is positive and significant. (Not supported)

H2: The economic impact of tourism on community development in Oman is positive and significant. (Supported)

H3: The socio-cultural impact of tourism on community development in Oman is positive and significant. (Supported)

**Table 5.** Standardized Regression Weights

Predictors	Estimate ( $\beta$ )	p-value	Hypothesis
Dependent Variable: Community Development			
Environmental Impact	-.022	.801	Not supported
Economic Impact	.206	.030	Supported
Socio-cultural Impact	.411	.000	Supported

## Discussion

Based on 149 respondents from Oman, it is found that approximately an equal number of both males and females participated in the research. Also, participation among Omani and Non-Omani were almost identical. Most respondents were Non-government employees, between 31-40 years of age, Graduate, Islam by religion, and living in Oman between 16-20 years.

According to the residents of Oman, there is no significant environmental impact of tourism on community development. Generally, it is hypothesized that environmental factors play both positive and negative roles for community development. The present study reveals that the community can be developed without destroying or improving the natural environment for leisure visits or relaxation. However, residents believe that the economic impact of tourism has a significant effect on the development of the community. Therefore, for community development, economic factors play a significant role. Furthermore, the socio-cultural impact of tourism is also significant and beneficial for community development. Residents in Oman accept that for the development of the community, socio-cultural factors need to be improved.

Hence, it can be concluded that the economic and socio-cultural impacts of tourism are the two most essential factors for community development in Oman. This study is based on a limited number of respondents, so generalization of results for the whole of Oman should be avoided. Future studies may be conducted with more sample size with a representation of respondents from all Governorates of Oman.

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