

Original Research Article

Cultural Impacts of Tourism Development in Iran from the Perspective of Experts

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Abstract | The tourism industry is based on the connections of people with different cultures in the context of tourism destinations, and these connections of tourists with different cultures can have many positive and negative impacts. Accordingly, the aim of the present study is to identify the most important impacts of tourism development on the culture of tourism destinations at the local and national community level. The research method is descriptive-analytical and data collection was performed using the field method (questionnaire). The study population included 50 interdisciplinary experts in the field of culture and tourism. Data analysis was performed using SPSS and Excel software. The findings indicate that tourism development has several positive and negative cultural impacts on the destination community at the local and national levels. The positive impacts of tourism in the local community are the revival of local traditions and ceremonies, protection of historical and ancient sites, and familiarity with the customs of different cultures. However, if tourism development takes place without appropriate planning, it can be destructive and leads to the consumerist behavior and commodification of culture at the local community level. Also, the impacts of tourism development at the national level also include strengthening national pride and cultural understanding of the other nations.

Keywords | *Tourism, Cultural impacts, Local Communities, National Level.*

Introduction | The demand for tourism is growing rapidly and millions of tourists travel worldwide with different goals and motivations each year. The tourism development with the introduction of a new system of relationships in all activities causes changes in various levels of life in economic, political, environmental, social, and cultural dimensions (Lanfant, 1980). The cultural sector is one of the important aspects of tourism, and the development of any type of tourism will have many positive and negative impacts on the destination community and the tourists (Barre, 1996). With the arrival of tourists to a destination and the formation

of cultural interactions between guests and the local community, not only the behavior and culture of tourists affect the local community, but also tourists are affected by the culture of the local community (Azadkhani, Hosseinzadeh & Salimi Bavandpour, 2018). In fact, the hospitality, behavior pattern, and environment of the destination community, which are parts of the intangible tourism elements, have a significant impact on tourists, and in return, based on what they experienced during the trip, will have new demands and expectations after returning home (Kazemi, 2014). In most developing societies, most of the key stakeholders in tourism, especially governments, as the founders of tourism development policies focus on the economic aspect of

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tourism, and in destination planning seek to increase the number of incoming tourists regardless of cultural considerations. Therefore, they are neglected of the positive and negative cultural impacts of tourism on the culture of the host community. If it continues, in the process of tourism development, based on the destination life cycle, different challenges arise in the stages of growth and maturity. Accordingly, the relationship of the host community with the guest tends towards hostility and causes the decline and stagnation of the destination. Iran is in the beginning stage of becoming a tourist destination, and it is obvious that public and private decision-makers have based their goal on attracting the maximum number of tourists, especially foreign tourists. This approach led to less attention to tourism's cultural dimensions and its impacts on the culture of the host society. Therefore, this is one of the main challenges of the country's tourism industry. Accordingly, it is necessary to conduct interdisciplinary studies to predict the positive and negative impacts of tourism and to formulate appropriate policies in order to protect cultural originality and prevent the commodification of local community cultures. Accordingly, the aim of this study is to identify the cultural impacts and consequences of tourism on the destination community. More specifically, the research aims to investigate the positive and negative impacts of tourism development on the culture of tourism destinations at the local and national community levels.

The impacts of tourism on the culture of the destination community

There is a reciprocal relationship between tourism and culture. As culture is a source for tourism development, tourism also plays an important role in cultural development (Richards, 2000). Cultural impacts refer to changes that occur in the art, habits, customs, and architecture of the destination community considering direct contact between local people and tourists (Vallas & Becherel, 2012). Sustainable tourism development can have a significant impact on strengthening local culture and helping to revive ancient customs and traditions. Also, tourism will revive and strengthen the cultural and artistic heritage of local communities by reviving and reconstructing customs and traditions, ethnic arts (music, dance, and drama), lifestyle, indigenous economic activities, and architectural styles, which are being forgotten (Sahabi & Moradi, 2011). In fact, tourism will increase people's awareness of local traditions, as well as revive the indigenous arts and crafts of the destination community by introducing and promoting the culture of the destination (Chuck Y & Fayos Sola, 2011). In this regard, Sharpley and Telfer (2015) pointed

out that in the southern Indian city of Mahabalipuram, the traditional art of green stone carving, which was being forgotten, has been revived with the development of tourism and increasing tourist demand for souvenirs. Tourism preserves the cultural heritage of a region, and the tourist helps to exploit the potential of historical and cultural buildings of a destination with economic goals for the social welfare of the local community of the destination (Kazemi, 2014; Saghaei Khoshe Bast, 2012). Also, the intercultural exchange, social, and cultural interaction of different ethnic groups are spontaneously effective in increasing information, awareness, understanding, and knowledge of lifestyles, and cultural and social characteristics of other ethnic groups. Obviously, the positive effects of dialogue, social, and cultural interaction can be effective in increasing public awareness, thereby somehow bringing them out of isolation, one-dimensionality, and bigotry (Rezvani, 2013). Tourism also provided an opportunity to blend ethnic boundaries in neighboring areas and to strengthen intercultural understanding and social unity by honoring different ethnic groups. In other words, tourism is a strong force to strengthen the identity of ethnic groups by providing appropriate opportunities to display cultures, languages, revive traditions, and increase cultural pride. Considering its benefits, tourism will give people the self-confidence and commitment needed to preserve traditions and maintain their identities and distinctions (Salehipour, 2015). In addition, tourism preserves historical monuments, because tourism brings significant amounts of money to countries, regions, and communities that can be used to preserve heritage and culture. In fact, historical and ancient heritage and natural sites in many developing countries rely heavily on tourism revenues due to a lack of public and private funding (Timothy & Nyaupane, 2014). Moreover, there may be a chance for further protection of historic and heritage buildings by reusing them in tourism. This ensures that a restored historic building has a dynamic function, and enhances the historic attraction of buildings, which are often restored using better standards and accuracy than modern buildings (Salehipour, 2015). For example, the ancient city of Bhaktapur in Nepal (a World Heritage Site) receives an entrance fee of 10 dollars from tourists. This is used to maintain the site and its surroundings and provide amenities and services to local residents (Timothy & Nyaupane, 2014). Another point is that tourism promotes friendship and understanding between people of different communities (Inskeep, 1991), and causes familiarity with different cultures and public awareness of different nations. In this way, both the host country will have the opportunity to

introduce its culture and values to the people of other nations (Alvani & Pirozbakht, 2006), and the local people will have the opportunity to meet the tourists with the socio-cultural characteristics of the tourist's country (Ranjbarian & Zahedi, 2011).

Despite the mentioned positive impacts of tourism development, studies show that if tourism development is not properly managed and planned, it will have negative impacts on the culture of the destination. The study shows that some of the world's major tourist destinations have changed their cultural originality with the development of mass tourism activities, and the subsequent increase in tourist flow from different cultures. Another negative impact of tourism development, which has to some extent attracted researchers' attention is the role of tourism in the occurrence of crime. Many residents of the tourist areas believe that there is a relationship between tourism and the occurrence of crime; and with the development of tourism, crime also increases in tourism destinations (Sheikhi, 2014). They also believe that increasing tourism activities lead to issues such as sexual attraction, organized crime, gambling recognition, and drug trafficking (Ghadami & Gholamian Baei, 2014). Religious sites and holy shrines are also commercialized in many tourist destinations. Many of these places have become tourist attractions and are part of the tourism product. As a result, there will be a conflict between local communities, visitors, and religious tourists due to the disruption of religious affairs in temples and places of worship by tourists (Sharpley & Telfer, 2015). The globalization of tourism is associated with the concept of commodification. The tourism production system sells places in order to attract tourists. Tourists tend to buy the high quality and prestigious goods that reflect new lifestyles, things that free them from the shackles of everyday life and provide them with comfort and convenience in a reasonable and honorable manner. In this situation, the place thus becomes a commodity, and emphasis is always put on its frequent use regardless of its social and environmental consequences (Ghadami & Gholamian Baei, 2014). Another socio-cultural impact of tourism is its demonstration effect, which points to the obvious differences between the tourist and the host community. In other words, watching tourists will merely cause behavioral changes in the local community, especially among young people. Local residents see the affordability of the tourists and become frustrated by the inability to achieve the lifestyle exhibited by visitors (Mason, 2011). Another impact of tourism is acculturation, this phenomenon occurs if the relationship between host and visitors becomes longer and deeper. When two cultures come in contact with each other at

any time, there will be an exchange of goods and ideas, which will create levels of convergence between the two cultures over time; that is, they become more similar. The process of this exchange will not be balanced and fair, because the dominant culture will prevail over the subservient culture and will have a greater impact on any new socio-cultural pattern (Williams, 2014). Even in ethnic societies with traditional cultures where women do not contribute to the social activities, the development of tourism will make them familiar with other cultures and in long term leads to gender equality (Sheikhi, 2015b). Researchers in the field of tourism on the culture of destination have conducted extensive research worldwide. In this regard, Taghdisi, Taghvaei & Piri (2012) in a study of the socio-cultural impacts of tourism in the county of Dalahou showed that tourism has caused an increase in sociocultural abnormalities and changes in customs of the local community. Adabi Mamaqani, Khani, Sojasi Qidari & Farrokhi (2014) evaluated the impacts of cultural-oriented tourism development on socio-cultural changes in rural destinations. The results showed that the development of tourism had profound impacts on socio-cultural changes in the study area and had the greatest impact on changes in local customs and dressing style of rural youth. Amini, Bakhti & Babajamali (2015) in a study on the evaluation of the host community's attitude to tourism development in the Damab village in Isfahan Province found that tourism has led to social-culture abnormalities such as commodification and commercialization of the cultural aspects of the village and the spread of social-culture abnormalities in the village. Sheikhi (2015a) in a study of impacts of tourism in multi-ethnic communities in Sistan and Baluchestan province showed that sustainable tourism development can reduce tensions between ethnic groups and strengthen centralism. Vazin, Barghi & Tabatabaee (2018) in a study of the impacts of desert tourism development on rural communities in Jarqavieh Olya and Bon Rud Districts of Isfahan county concluded that tourism had positive socio-cultural impacts including increasing the sense of belonging of villagers, paying attention to local customs, improving the level of cultural awareness of villagers, and also negative impacts including increasing social abnormalities and creating socio-cultural dualism. Vazin, Mokhtari Hashi & Setayesh Manesh (2019) in a study investigated the impact of tourism development on strengthening national power in Iran and results indicated that the tourism development improved national cohesion and unity, and cultural exchanges. They also found that introducing the true face of the nation to the international community will affect the development of the country at

the national and international level and will ultimately increase the country’s geopolitical prestige at the regional and international levels.

Research Method

The purpose of this study was to investigate the cultural impacts and consequences of tourism on destinations at the local and national levels. This study is an applied research considering its purpose and analytical-descriptive in terms of its nature. The statistical population includes interdisciplinary tourism experts that were purposefully selected based on published scientific works in this field with an emphasis on the cultural aspect. The method of data collection was a survey using a questionnaire technique that was collected in the summer of 1398. Questionnaires were then distributed in person or by email, and finally, 50 questionnaires were approved. Indicators were measured using a five-point Likert scale from very low (1) to very high (5). Based on the literature review, indicators related to the positive and negative cultural impacts of tourism development were selected at both local and national levels. The indicators were then evaluated by several relevant professors. Data analysis was performed using descriptive statistics method (mean) in SPSS software and Excel program was used to draw charts. Cronbach’s alpha method was used to measure the reliability of the questionnaire, which was calculated to be 0.87, which indicates that the questionnaire has a high reliability. In other words, the internal components of the scales have an acceptable correlation with each other. Since these indicators were measured using a five-point Likert scale, the average value was considered 3, and if the calculated average is 3 or more, it means tourism development has an impact on that indicator.

Characteristics of the statistical population of the research

Tourism is a seemingly simple industry, but extremely delicate and complex to implement its theories and

strategies in practice, given closely related to different human spirits and cultural behaviors. Furthermore, it has a very wide interdisciplinary connection to different disciplines. Therefore, in the present study, the views of people with different specialties were examined (Table 1). As the table shows, with regard to employment, out of 50 people, 30 (60%) were faculty members of universities, 13 (26%) were researchers, and 7 (14%) were students. In terms of specialization and field of study, 19 (38%), 24 (48%), and 7 (14%) were in the field of tourism, geography, and sociology respectively.

Results

The present study measured and evaluated the views of interdisciplinary experts in the tourism industry on the two main issues of positive and negative cultural impacts of tourism on the local community and the cultural impact of tourism at the national level. The results of the experts’ views on the positive effects of tourism are as shown in Figure 1, which indicates tourism development is effective in reviving local and traditional traditions and customs of cultural tourism destinations with an average of 4.22. Another important positive impact of tourism on the local community culture from the experts’ opinion, included the protection of historic and ancient sites of the destination with an average of 4.08. In fact, when local communities observe the flow of international tourism, and realize that tourists travel to their areas just to see these heritages, they oblige themselves to protect these sites and their cultural identity. Furthermore, tourism provides a basis for familiarity with different customs and cultures with an average of 4.04 in the context of tourism destinations through guest-host communication. Also, the least impact of tourism was observed on the revival of local and indigenous architecture with local materials with an average of 3.12.

Figure 2 shows the views of tourism experts on the negative impacts of tourism on the local community. According to the results from the experts’ views, in the absence of appropriate planning, with the increase in the

Table 1. Characteristics of the research population (N= 50). Source: authors.

	Characteristic	Number	Percentage (%100)
Employment	Student	7	14
	Researcher	13	26
	Faculty member	30	60
Specialty	Tourism	19	38
	Geography	24	48
	Sociology	7	14

number of tourists and the increase of social connections, there will be several negative cultural impacts on destinations. The most important negative impacts are the demonstration effect (4.02), the spread of behavior of tourists in the destination (3.90), acculturation (3.80), and the gradual decline of the local language (3.62), the commodification of local culture and its transformation into a source of income (3.32). Also, the least negative impacts of tourism were observed on the destruction of value bases (2.96), and, the development of moral anomalies (2.78).

In addition to positive and negative cultural consequences for tourism destinations on a local scale, tourism development also has a variety of impacts at the national level. Figure 3 shows the cultural impacts of tourism at the national level based on the experts' views. According to the results from the experts' views, if the country's tourism is developed sustainability, great cultural goals can be achieved, including creating national pride (3.96), cultural understanding with other nations (3.90), increasing understanding and communication between the country's ethnic groups (3.78), increasing peace between nations (3.76), national unity (3.74), strengthening public trust (3.66), integration of ethnic boundaries in neighboring regions (3.64), increasing inter-nation relationship (3.60), national cohesion and solidarity (3.50), and increasing knowledge of other cultures (3.42).

Discussion and Conclusion

The present study analyzes the positive and negative cultural impacts of tourism at both local and national levels based on library findings and the views of experts in the field of culture and tourism. Based on the findings, the most important cultural impacts of tourism at the local and national levels can be divided into the following sections:

Preservation of cultural heritage: The findings indicated that tourism development has a positive effect on the revival of indigenous lifestyles, the revival of local customs, preservation of historical and ancient sites, indigenous arts, and local architecture. On the one hand, with the increase of tourism flows, the managers of the tourism sector are directed to use the resources and tourist attractions in order to attract tourists. Therefore, cultural heritage is protected with aim of earning economic income. On the other hand, local people, especially after understanding the tourism impacts, will be interested in protecting their attractions and cultural heritage.

Cultural interaction: The finding also showed that tourism will increase the level of public awareness and even reduce cultural prejudices by increasing cultural interaction between people. Besides, local people are indirectly interested in learning about the lifestyles of tourists from different cultures by observing their different behaviors in their residential area. The results



Fig. 1. Positive cultural impacts of tourism on the local community. Source: authors.



Fig. 2. Negative cultural impacts of tourism on the local community. Source: authors.



Fig. 3. Cultural impact of tourism at the national level. Source: authors.

are consistent with the findings of Vazin et al. (2018) that found tourism development has promoted the cultural awareness of local people.

Commodification of local culture: The findings indicated that if tourism is developed without systematic planning and without using the views of tourism stakeholders, it can reduce the attractiveness of destinations over time. Tourism destinations with the

growth of tourist flow, reach the stages of development where the negative impacts outweigh the positive ones and the customs of the local people change. These results are consistent with the findings Taghdisi et al. (2012), and Adabi et al. (2014) who found the tourism development has changed the customs and traditions of local people. In fact, local culture and customs may become merely a symbolic commodity only for tourists,

in which case, it loses its true meaning. The findings are consistent with the results of a study by Amini et al. (2015) who found the tourism development has led to the commodification of cultural aspects of the tourist destination. Therefore, it is necessary to educate local communities and raise their awareness, especially in mass tourism destinations to prevent stagnation and decline of indigenous culture.

Decline of indigenous culture: Tourism exchanges information and increases communication between tourists and the local community. So, the local culture of the destination may be affected by tourists' culture, especially when the number of tourists exceeds the local population. If it continues, the destination will no longer have the necessary image and attractiveness and will face failure and stagnation. Therefore, it is necessary to take appropriate measures to protect indigenous and local culture, such as determining the capacity of social range and controlling tourist statistics, as well as increasing the skills and knowledge of local communities by holding courses and workshops in tourism destinations.

National convergence: The tourism development will cause more communication between different ethnic groups in the country and will prevent the divergence of subcultures and ethnicities. It will also be an opportunity to integrate ethnic boundaries in neighboring areas, which in addition to reducing inter-ethnic tensions, will strengthen social unity between different ethnic groups. The findings are consistent with the findings of the study by Sheikhi (2015a), who concluded that tourism will strengthen centralism by reducing inter-ethnic tensions. Therefore, concerning tourism development policies, it is necessary to consider the expansion of domestic

tourism in order to increase relations between the ethnic groups in the country. In this regard, creating programs and facilities to increase travel such as cheap flights, can increase the travel of the young generation of the country. This will indirectly provide fruitful results to the national culture; because by increasing the travel frequency and familiarity of the subcultures with each other, life without challenge, political concern, and divergence for future generations can be created.

Development of cultural exchange and understanding: The findings also indicated that the tourism development can increase the knowledge of other cultures and strengthen the relationship between nations. It will also bring nations closer to each other and increase cultural understanding among nations. In fact, the tourism development can help cultural convergence worldwide. In other words, familiarization of different nations through tourism can contribute to common international understanding and peace. The results are consistent with the study conducted by Vazin et al. (2019) who concluded that the tourism development will lead to the development of the country and ultimately increase the geopolitical status of the country at the international level through cultural exchanges and the introduction of the real face of the country to the international community. Therefore, in order to strengthen tourism in the country, measures such as improving the relationship between national tourism organizations and related international tourism bodies such as UNESCO, UNWTO, WTTC, focusing on increasing the share of the country from international tourists, as well as reducing social, economic and cultural barriers to international tourists are proposed.

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