Evaluation of Community Perception towards Tourism Industry: The Case of Hawassa City, Ethiopia

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to identify and analyze the factors affecting the perception of Hawassa community towards the tourism industry using Factor Analysis, Multiple linear regression and Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA). Cross-sectional survey was conducted on a sample of 591 from a target population of 24021 of Hawassa City. The Factor analysis estimation result identified five potential factors that affect the community’s perception towards the tourism industry. These potential factors are economic, socio-cultural, environmental, community service and community attitude factors, which explained 77.5 percent of the total variation of the community’s perception towards the tourism industry. Multiple linear regression analysis indicated that length of residency, number of tourist contacts, number of recreational activities, job creation and tourism policy participation are found significant in explaining the variation in the underlined perceptions of the community towards tourism. Among the demographic characteristics, sub city, sex, educational level, working profession and monthly income of the respondents are found were statistically significant different for the mean scores of the perceptions towards tourism.

Keywords: Factor Analysis, MANOVA, Multiple Regression, Perception towards Tourism Industry and Hawassa City

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism refers to the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes (WTO, 2002). Tourism has contributed to the domestic economies in many parts of the world. For a tourism-based economy to sustain itself in local communities the residents must be will-
ing partners in the process and it is important to understand and assess the residents’ perception regarding the impact of the tourism industry (John 1992, Ritchie et al. 2006). Sustainable tourism development can only be achieved if stakeholders are involved in the process (Byrd 2007) and it entails that the community is the focal point of the tourism and planning process (Choi et al. 2005). Investigating the host community’s perceptions of tourism is important because it influences their behavior towards tourism (Andriotis et al. 2003). Therefore, a clear understanding of the perceptions and interests of the host community is a necessary precursor to the planning and management of sustainable tourism.

Understanding that tourism development may result in many and complex impacts suggests that local elected officials, the tourism industry, and community need to work cooperatively and careful to plan for its growth and development. Planning can help create an industry that enhances a community with minimal costs and disruptions in other aspects of community life. Having broad community involvement and embracing different perspectives during planning helps identify and resolve concerns that would otherwise create problems later.

Hawassa city is one of the tourism destination areas in Ethiopia which is enriched with natural and cultural attractions; this study tries to examine communities’ perception towards the tourism industry in the city.

2. THE PROBLEM

The Southern Nations, Nationalities and People’s Regional State (SNNPRS) has different tourist destination areas which are enriched with different natures (wildlife protected areas, rivers and lakes, waterfalls, hot and cold natural springs, mountains, natural forests, caves and forts), cultural, traditional, ethical, and historical (monasteries and churches, mosques) tourist attractions. Also the region is the place where about 56 nationalities, that have their own languages and cultures, live. Hawassa city, being the seat for these nations and nationalities and capital of SNNPRS, has communities with these diversified cultures and traditions that attract tourists from different part of the country and the world. Hence, the communities with their socio-cultural, environment as well as economic activities are exposed to different positive and negative impacts on the expansion of the tourism industry in the city. According to this, the aim of the study is to identify the community perception towards the impact of tourism industry in the city.

Therefore, the major objective of this study is to statistically assess the perception of local communities towards the socio-cultural, economic and environmental impact of tourism in Hawassa City. Specifically, we try to identify:

• Factors that have a significant effect on the communities’ perception towards tourism;
• The degree and direction of influence of these significant determinants of the communities’ perception;
• Whether there are significant differences in the perception towards the impact of tourism of respondents with various demographic characteristics.

The result of this study has quantitative information about the communities’ perception towards the tourism industry in Hawassa city. Therefore, the city administrators, policy makers, tourism officials, communities, researchers and other concerned bodies can use the information in decision making regarding tourism so as to have a sustained tourism industry in the city.
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