

## **The Host Community Perception towards the Impact of Tourism in Lebanon**

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**Abstract:** *Tourism is one of the world leading industries now a day. Rural tourism is one of the most important types of tourism, this article try to analyze the Lebanese locals' perception towards tourism in order to help stakeholders to formulate their strategies.*

**Keywords:** *Lebanon, Perception, Rural tourism, Tourism impact.*

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### **I. Introduction**

The objective behind this paper is to examine Lebanese local citizens' perception of tourism impact. Travel and tourism are proved to embody a leading and essential economic sector globally. By reference to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), the global travel and tourism sector recorded a 3.9% growth rate in 2018, with a rough 8.8 trillion dollar contribution to the world economy and an estimated 319 million jobs active within the sector [1]. This ensures the high significance of the travel and tourism sector for the economies of countries worldwide; this sector contributes directly and indirectly to GDP. The direct contribution of travel and tourism is represented by total expenditures on services like accommodation, transportation, entertainment, etc... The indirect contribution on the other hand is represented by marketing and promotional investments and expenditures of governments for tourism purposes.

Available facilities and infrastructure in a country have an effect on tourism. For instance, in Lebanon, tourism is more nourished and active in urban areas compared to rural areas. However, over the last two decades, numerous investors and pioneers focused on developing Lebanese rural areas to urbanize them and promote them as attractive sites for tourists.

One important step in the context of tourism is tourism planning. This step is important for the development of tourism, which in turn has a major contribution to the economic sector of a country. It is worth to mention that developing an effective strategic tourism plan requires a good knowledge of the capabilities and strengths of a country, and one of those capabilities is the host country's perception towards tourism Impact. Successful and satisfactory local tourism development in a country highly depends on studying its local citizens' perception of tourism impacts, including the economic impact, socio-cultural impact and the environmental impact.

Preparing tourism development plans is one way to ensure long-term progress of a country's life conditions. These strategic plans are part of the destination management efforts which permit converting a regular touristic area into a more productive one. An effective tourism strategic plan is the one that is inclusive of the local, regional and national aspects of the promoted touristic destination. The planning process of tourism development and local tourism destination management is reflected by modeling a well-functioning tourist complex over a certain time period, in addition to understanding the factors, parameters and stages of strategic planning [2].

### **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Tourism can be described as a social, cultural and economic phenomenon that involves the temporary movement of individuals called "tourists" to foreign countries or locations other than their original habitat for personal or professional purposes [3].

There exists different types of tourists and different forms of tourism, and their classification depends on the destination of the tourist, his/her purpose, the geographic location visited in addition to other factors. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), 2011, there are several specifically defined

types of tourists. One type of tourists is the “business visitor”, who is an individual visiting a country strictly for conducting work, business activities and other professional purposes.

There are also different forms of tourism such as cultural tourism, sustainable tourism and rural tourism.

“Cultural tourism” is defined as the form of tourism that enables people who belong to different cultures to share their different traditions, customs, arts, historic backgrounds, mentalities, ideas, physical environments, human activities, experiences, ways of living and other cultural and archaeological elements with each other [4].

Other forms of tourism, such as “sustainable tourism”, are highly focused on creating sustainable tourism activities that are environmentally friendly and take into consideration the socio-cultural aspect of a visited destination [5]. The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), 2014, defines sustainable tourism as the form of tourism that fulfills the needed outcomes of tourism as per the hosting country and the tourist as well, while preserving and nourishing possibilities over the long-run [6]. Resource management efforts ensure that it is still conceivable to achieve the intended social, economic and aesthetic aspects of tourism while maintaining sustainability approaches such as preserving biological diversity, supporting vital ecology processes, building life support systems and addressing cultural integrity.

A third form of tourism is “rural tourism”, which is a type of sustainable tourism. This form of tourism does not only imply tourism that is carried out in a country’s rural areas, for its definition goes beyond this simplicity across different countries [7]. By reference to Irshad (2010), rural tourism is the “country experience” which involves attractive activities hosted in the rural, non-urban or agricultural regions of a country. This form of tourism is characterized by weak tourism development, wide-open landscapes and spaces, and permission for tourists to come in direct contact with the natural and farming environments [8]. Rural tourism may extend to include ecotourism, educational travel, artistic and historic tourism, holiday tourism as well as activities related to ethnic groups or ethnic tourism. These mentioned extensions of rural tourism have obvious dissimilarities, even though they share commonalities, and because of their differences, they are referred to as “niche markets in rural tourism”.

### **III. Tourism Impact**

Nowadays, tourism is a main contributor to the economy of countries around the world. However, the impacts of tourism are not always positive. Tourism development induces both positive and negative effects on a host country. One of the good sides of tourism is that it enriches cross-cultural communication between different societies and sets a platform that enables a sophisticated way of understanding the lifestyles exchanged between countries.

Besides boosting culture and economy, tourism positively affects the physical, social and environmental aspects of a country. This idea is supported by Grunce [9]. And according to Smith (1995), tourism helps reduce poverty, nourish employment and jobs opportunities, and enhance development in rural areas. Nevertheless, tourism provides main financial benefits through generating foreign currency revenue and elevating tax revenue. Tourism also helps generally improve the public infrastructure of a host country[10].

Other authors agree and emphasize on the above mentioned benefits of tourism. According to Dogan & Denney (2004), tourism empowers the economic, social, cultural and environmental aspects of a country. Economically, tourism boosts employment, foreign investment, business opportunities and governmental tax income. Socially, tourism provides incentives for renovation of the host area through improving the general structure and appearance of neighborhoods, creating better public parks and recreational areas for locals, healing historic residential and non-residential places and houses, and enhancing the quality of roads and public places. Moreover, tourism complements nourishing cultural and subcultural sport activities. However, there exists a negative side to the impact of tourism, which is represented by a higher monetary charge for services, higher crime costs, more traffic congestion and higher pollutant levels. [11]

Based on Beeton (2006) tourism development also seems to have huge impact on local communities, given that the activities associated with the development of tourism are closely related to the activities of these local communities. In turn, the perceptions and attitudes of local communities towards tourism development is important in determining the fate of sustainability of tourism[12]. By reference to Zhang et al. (2006), the community is the most significant party in the tourism industry because this party is most affected by tourism, and it’s the party that holds the most valuable knowledge and information for decision makers to take action[13].

Robbins et al. (2005) define *perception* as the process by which a person assigns meaning to an environment by organizing and interpreting sensory impressions such as sight, sound and scents. The local community that

encounters tourism, thus, develops a specific perception about tourists, their behaviors and the associated impacts. And what influences community perception of tourism are three main factors:

1. Factors in the perceiver
2. Factors in the target
3. Factors in the situation.

Factors in the perceiver are reflected by personal characteristics of community members. These characteristics include their attitudes, personality, interests, motivation, degree on contact with tourists, previous experience and expectations.

Factors in the target include characteristics of the destination and products/services being provided to the tourists. These characteristics strongly affect the perception of a tourist and include the tourist's background, similarity, proximity, etc...

Factors in the situation are reflected by the context in which tourists consume destination products and services. These factors affect the perceptions of both the tourists and local community members. [14]

#### **IV. METHODOLOGY**

A self-designed survey in the form of a questionnaire is the mean of our primary data collection. Questions of the survey are designed specifically to test our hypotheses; the questions will be straightforward and multiple-choice. These multiple choice questions each displayed five options for the respondents choose. Therefore, the survey follows the *Likert method* using a five-point scale [15].

Based on the literature review and the actual situation of rural tourism in Lebanon the analytical framework and the methodology of this study were elaborated. To explore and investigate the perception of locals toward tourism impacts, a quantitative approach was adopted. Research data was collected by using a survey conducted in Lebanese villages represented rural areas. The selection of villages was guided by the fact that the study is about rural areas and it was chosen randomly.

Data was collected in two consecutive months. A total of 430 respondents were interviewed face-to-face. The choice of the respondents was made randomly in different locations of the villages and at different periods of the day. The questionnaire was formulated based on a review of the different rural tourism consumer behavior theories and studies, and a preliminary analysis of the current rural tourism situation in Lebanon. The questionnaire included a total of 38 main questions of which 33 questions (divided into 3 categories) concerning locals' perception toward tourism impact and 5 questions concerning information about the respondents themselves. Data obtained were analyzed by using the SPSS (version 20.0), in particular Chi Square tests (two-way contingency table) were conducted as well as correlation test. The Chi Square is a statistical test commonly used to compare observed data with data expected to be obtained according to a specific hypothesis. The Chi square test is therefore used to test a relation between two independent variables that enable the researchers to validate or reject the expected outcomes [16].

#### **Findings:**

##### **The socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents**

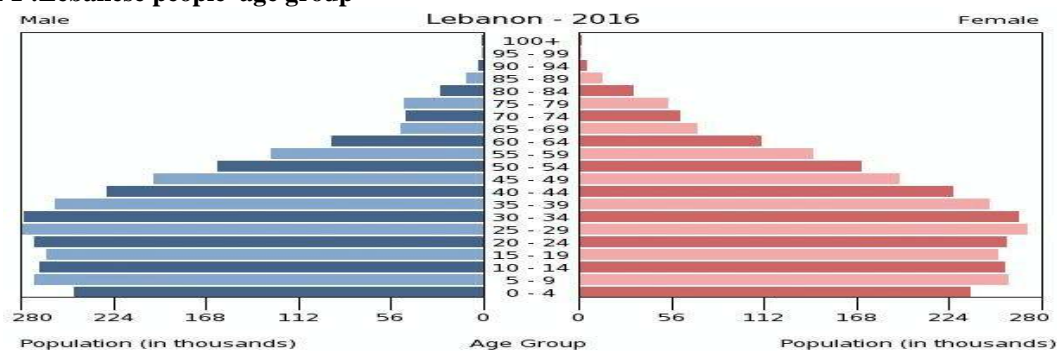
The socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents are represented in table 1.

The age group (26-35) is over respondents (44.2%) while the other percentages are distributed among the other age group categories. Females and males are somehow equally represented in the sample (47.7 % male, 52.3 % female). To check if the sample is representative in term of residents' age we have to compare Lebanese population pyramid 2016(graph 1). The figure shows that 3 age groups 25-29 & 30-34 represent the highest percentage of the total Lebanese population comparing to other age categories. This shows that the sample is representative and represents the reality on the field. Therefore the results are credible and the respondents' opinions and perspectives are useful for tourism stake holders. The sample also covered a broad spectrum high educational level for 89.5% of the respondents (university or higher) .Also a majority of the respondents' (60.5 %) were residents for more than 15 years in the community. The main source of income for the respondent was from working locally (60.5%).

**Table 1: Respondents' Profile**

Variable	Category	Percentage
Sex	Male	47.7
	Female	52.3
Age	18-25	32.6
	26-35	44.2
	36-45	15.1
	46-55	5.8
	55+	2.3
Education level	Middle school	4.7
	High school	5.8
	University or higher	89.5
Years of residence in the community	<5 years	17.4
	5-10 years	15.1
	10-15 years	7
	>15 years	60.5
Main source of income	Planting	2.3
	Working locally	60.5
	Working in other places(villages)	15.1
	Own business	10.5
	Other	11.6

**Graph 1 :Lebanese people age group**



## V. Economic impact

There are several outcomes of rural tourism. First, tourism offers new job opportunities, which is in favor of employment rates. In addition, it provides important income and more economic resources for a country through a lot of ways like imposition of taxes. Moreover, tourism induces foreign capital injections into the host village's economy. Growth and prosperity of certain industries, like handcrafts and cottage, is also boosted via tourism activities.

Rural tourism may also include the involvement of different individuals and social groups into a single rural tourism project or activity, for instance, some individuals may participate in ecotourism through guiding tourists, while others may sell handcrafts and artistic material to tourists. This diverse involvement of individuals in a tourism process brings generous economic benefit for all the involved social levels.

Nevertheless, rural tourism increases income options and resources for villagers which in turn decreases their dependence on agriculture as their only previous source of income. This improves the economic security of villagers and, hence, the preservation of the natural qualities of the rural area as a whole. It is worth to mention that due to the seasonal and temporary nature of rural tourism, there might be incremental pricing strategies to preserve this type of tourism and survive during low tourism seasons.

Study statistical results:

**Table2: Tourism Economic Impact**

Statement	Agreed %	Disagreed %	Neutral %
Tourism activities increase personal income of locals	79.1	3.5	17.4
Tourism increases work opportunities for locals	80.2	3.5	16.3
Tourism contributes to local economic development	79.1	3.5	17.4
Tourism enhances the urbanization process in host communities	65.1	5.8	29.1
Tourism encourages local agriculture development	60.5	8.1	31.4
Tourism gives impetus to local industry development	62.5	10.5	27
Tourism attracts new investments	83.7	4.7	11.6
Tourism encourage small businesses	63.9	15.2	20.9
Tourism Leads to increased prices and higher living costs in local area	59.3	14	26.7

## **VI. Environmental impact**

Rural tourism nourishes village progress and enhances the quality of its landscapes because it necessitates investments in construction, renovation and reconditioning of the different natural and non-natural landscapes and areas of the village. However, negative consequences may arise due to these investments, such as soil pollution of landscapes due to excessive waste generation, soil erosion and deterioration of soil quality.

Study statistical results:

**Table 3: Tourism Environmental Impact**

Statement	Agreed %	Disagreed %	Neutral %
Tourism improves the local natural environment through encouraging environmental protection	69.8	11.6	18.6
Tourism encourages people to conserve natural resources	61.6	16.3	22.1
Tourism enhances local environmental protection awareness	62.8	12.8	24.4
Tourism raises the awareness of the government and local authorities towards the importance of environmental practices	66.2	9.4	24.4
Tourism traffic increases pollution	36.1	27.9	36
Improper operational practices in tourism sector increase pollution level	54.7	22.1	32.2
Tourism increases the risk of spreading diseases	31.4	36	32.6
A large number of tourists exerts pressure on water and electricity consumption	57	16.3	26.7
Tourism intensifies over-exploitation of local resources	45.4	11.6	43
A large number of tourists intensifies nature protection difficulties	41.9	20.9	37.2

## **VII. Socio-cultural impact**

Rural tourism encourages hosting villagers to preserve their nature and ecology because they realize that visiting tourists come to their areas specifically to view the beauty of the green and intact nature, in addition to the local culture and hand-made crafts. This will make them more conservative of what tourists actually appreciate.

Rural tourism development also heightens the fulfillment of hosting villagers who tend to feel proud towards their property and local culture. This type of tourism highlights the national heritage of the village, introducing its historic and artistic tourist attractions to other nations and other cultures.

Back to the survey analysis we get the following results:

**Table 4: Tourism Socio-cultural Impact**

Statement	Agreed %	Disagreed %	Neutral %
Tourism encourages preservation of local historical sites	74.4	8.2	17.4
Tourism Promotes conservation & development of local traditional crafts & arts	69.8	7	23.3
Tourism deepens the residents' understanding of their local culture and traditions	58.2	8.1	33.7
Tourism encourages local residents' awareness of their own identity and living style	68.6	8.1	22.3
Tourism helps improve hospitality services of both local hosts and foreign guests	72.1	9.3	18.6
Tourism changes conservative thinking of local residents	50	17.4	32.6
Tourism improves the ethical behavior of local residents in their daily life	57	12.8	30.2
Tourism enhances the image and popularity of the host community	65.1	8.2	26.7
Tourism promotes cultural exchange between locals and tourists	72.1	9.3	18.6
Tourism causes deterioration of traditional moral values of the local society	30.2	39.5	30.2
Tourism nourishes a materialistic mentality within local residents (as they would be strictly focused on making profits from tourists)	40.7	19.8	39.5
Tourism results in locals honesty decrease	29	38.4	32.6
Tourism increases criminal ratios in host areas	23.3	46.5	30.2
Commercialized performances in tourism leads to modifications in local folk customs	36.1	30.2	33.7

To test the relation between some variables (one variable from each category), chi square test was conducted and the results were as below:

**Table 5: Relation Between Variables**

Test Variables	Test value	DF	$\alpha$	Critical value
Tourism increases work opportunities for locals with Age	47.701	16	0.05	26.296
Tourism attracts new investments with Educational level	92.801	16	0.05	26.296
Tourism attracts new investments with Years of residence in the community	84.365	9	0.05	16.916
Tourism improves the local natural environment through encouraging environmental protection Age	44.904	16	0.05	26.296
Tourism improves the local natural environment through encouraging environmental protection * Years of residence in the community	37.955	9	0.05	16.919
Tourism enhances local environmental protection awareness * Age	44.904	12	0.05	21.026
Tourism enhances the image and popularity of the host community * Gender	20.695	4	0.05	9.448
Tourism enhances the image and popularity of the host community * Age	100.342	16	0.05	26.296
Tourism enhances the image and popularity of the host community * Educational level	25.938	8	0.05	15.507
DF is the degree of freedom which is used with critical value to determine the rejection or acceptance of alternative hypothesis. If the test value is higher than the critical value then the alternative hypothesis is accepted (which assume that there is relation between the variables being tested)				

## VIII. Results

Regarding the 1<sup>st</sup> hypothesis, we conclude that there is relation between the variable “Tourism increase work opportunities for locals” & the variables (age, educational level, & years of residence in the community). For the 2<sup>nd</sup> hypothesis, we conclude that there is relation between the variable “Tourism improves the local natural environment through encouraging environmental protection” & the variables (age, educational level, & years of residence in the community).

And regarding the 3<sup>rd</sup> hypothesis, we conclude that there’s a relation between the variable “Tourism enhances the image and popularity of the host community” & the variables (gender, age, Educational level)

## IX. Conclusion

Local people are involved in tourism development although they did not actively take part in the tourism development decision- making process, and wish to have a voice when decisions are made (through active participation). As key stakeholders in any tourism development, they want to be actively involved in this process to ensure that their pressing needs, priorities and interests are considered. The level of local participation and involvement by the local people in tourism development is very minimal as it was mostly through assistance offered to community initiated self-help groups and conservation clubs in learning institutions

This study focused on identifying the community perception on the tourism development impacts in relation to economic, socio- cultural and environment and the study was carried out in Lebanon one of the tourist countries on the Mediterranean sea . The results shows that the community has positive perception about the ongoing tourism development and they have more hopes about tourism development in the area and think that it will help to create more employment opportunities , attracting new investment , imputes the local industry and contributes to local economic development. Also, they have a doubt and fear about some aspects related to socio-cultural and environment like the spread of disease, locals honesty decrease, exerts pressure on water and electricity consumption and the discharge of solid and liquid waste to the environment.

The community perception for tourism development and its impact is essential for having a balanced tourism development that lead to economic benefits while harmonizing other factors.

This study examined the locals’ perception about tourism impact on economic, socio-culture, and environmental dimensions, and the results are shown in tables 2, 3, 4.

A specific designed plan should be developed to deliver the benefits of tourism development to the local community without being linked only to large scale tourism businesses.

For that, it’s essential to carry out educational and training programs that focus on the local community in order to merge them in tourism industry.

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