



Perception of local inhabitants outside tourism structures in Governor Generoso, Mindanao, Philippines

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this research is to understand the perception and attitude of the local inhabitants residing outside the tourism destinations in the Municipality of Governor Generoso, Davao Oriental, Philippines. This paper examines how local inhabitants perceive the emerging tourism industry in their area.

Methodology/Design/Approach – The study utilized the qualitative research design, particularly the phenomenological research method. This method includes several stages, such as data gathering, data analysis, and thematic analysis. The data collection process involves in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The collected data underwent a thematic analysis to identify themes that emerged in the findings and discussions, providing clear evidence of the participants' perceptions.

Finding – The result of the research shows that residents' perceptions and attitudes are relative to the benefits gained in the tourism industry. Residents benefiting from tourism have affirmative perceptions, while those who find it non-beneficial have negative and neutral perceptions, respectively. Those having an affirmative perception cite that tourism provides job opportunities, government income, beautification of the place, pride and honor for the locals, and leisure and enjoyment for the visiting tourists. Those having an adverse perception and attitude assert that tourism caused inconvenience and infringement on their fishing livelihood. Additionally, job opportunities are limited. It is a threat to their security and safety, and only a privilege for the rich. This affirms that the tourism industry brings about challenges and opportunities to residents living near tourism destinations. More importantly, it greatly affects the marginalized individual.

Originality/Value – This study provides scientific and concrete information on how locals perceive the tourism industry developed in their place. This contributes to sustainable tourism development and enhances community well-being and quality of life. Acknowledging the importance of local support to tourism can lead to a sustainable industry, coupled with better-informed decision-making, enhances the cost-benefit analysis, which may be used in crafting better policies that will support and enhance the quality of life and well-being of the locals in the same manner as the tourism industry grows. This would particularly of great value to the local community and people of Governor Generoso, Mindanao, Philippines.

Keywords: Perception and Attitude, Tourism Industry, Local Residents

Introduction

Local perception and attitude towards tourism are a vital component of the development of the tourism industry. Jamaluddin et. al. (2009) emphasized that the role of locals, together with the government, is vital in influencing tourism development activities and ensuring the commercial, socio-cultural, physiological, political, and economic sustainability. As Cottrell & Vaske (2006) posit that the perception of the residents is

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the most accurate factor in evaluating tourism conditions due to their closeness to the area of destination. As such, the residents are important stakeholders, and their quality of life should be considered in tourism planning and management to gain their support. Overall support for tourism development is a critical factor in determining the success of destinations.

Using socioeconomic factors to explain residents' perceptions and attitudes has been common among tourism researchers. Tourism has been appreciated for the job opportunities and the development of facilities it brings to the locality (Jafari & Pour, 2014). However, contradicting literature suggests that socioeconomic factors play a minor role in elucidating the varied attitudes of residents toward tourism development (Perdue et al. 1990). Besides delivering positive impacts such as enhancing local economies, being a source of new employment opportunities, additional tax receipts, foreign exchange earnings, and income, tourism development has the potential for negative outcomes (Ko & Steward, 2002). Tourism's impact is not always viewed positively. In the study of Eshliki and Kaboudi (2012), it suggests that residents were very concerned about negative environmental and sociocultural effects, leading to low involvement in tourism activities. In addition, inflation and overpopulation in tourist destinations both lower the standard of living. Such is the case in Venice and Barcelona, where residents' quality of life is suffering from negative impacts of tourism, and residents are launching campaigns against tourism, causing challenges for the industry (Pham, Andereck, & Vogt, 2019). However, it is essential to promote positive perceptions among residents as this affects their support for tourism based on their perception of the benefits generated from the development (Dyer, Aberdeen & Schuler, 2007). Harrison (2001) reinforced this idea on the role of personal benefit that the local community obtained from tourism development may cause adverse and positive perceptions of tourism development.

The relationship between residents and the level of tourism development was researched thoroughly by numerous scholars. Allen et. al (1993) found that residents' perception of tourism impact will be less positive as the level of tourism in the community increases. Further, Perdue, Long & Allen (1993) also summarized that residents' initial attitudes towards tourism were enthusiastic, but as the cost outweighed the benefit of tourism development, attitudes reached a threshold after which residents' support for tourism declined. Meanwhile, Wang & Pfister (2008) conducted a research on the impact of personal benefit obtained from tourism development, and they discovered that, benefit and cost assumed to be more carefully evaluated and as benefits exceed the costs, residents will be more supportive on tourism development. When the cost exceeds the benefits, residents tend to be more negative towards tourism development.

This paper examines residents' perceptions and attitudes toward tourism structures in their area, particularly the tourism destinations in the municipality of Governor Generoso, Davao Oriental. The place has been an emerging destination in the province due to its beautiful beaches, historical sites, and Eco parks. Considering that there is still no existing study on the social effects of tourism on the residents outside the tourism structures in the said municipality, thus, this study is very vital to contribute to the existing literature of tourism and a guide in the creation of policies relative to tourism management in the place.

Method

This study applied the qualitative research method, specifically the phenomenological research design, to describe and understand the perception and attitude of local inhabitants in the area. An in-depth interview and Focus Group Discussion were employed in the gathering of data.

Participants were interviewed randomly, including males and females with ages ranging from twenty (20) years old to the late 60s. The interviews were conducted with the residents living outside the four famous tourism structures in Governor Generoso, namely Cape of San Agustin (Parola), El Don Beach Resort, Coco Pearl, and Jakka Beach Resort. To follow the ethical standards in research, entry protocols were adhered to through request letters to the office of the Mayor, barangay Captains, and informed consent was signed by the resident participants.

Research questionnaires with open-ended questions were used as guides in the interviews and Focus Group Discussions to capture more meaningful data from the participants. The purpose of the FGD is to

provide participants with the opportunity to share their personal experience of the phenomenon under investigation with the researcher.

Thematic analysis was employed in creating meaning and themes with the gathered data and responses from the participants.

Findings and Discussion

Results

This paper aimed to know the perception and attitude of residents towards tourism in their locality. As residents of the place living outside the tourism structures, their perception and attitude are crucial in the development of the tourism industry and the place. Perception and attitudes can break or make an industry. The results of the data gathered are clustered into affirmative, negative, and neutral answers for clarity. The reasons for the said perceptions and attitudes will be elaborated in the next paragraphs.

Affirmative perceptions were gained in the conduct of the study. The primary reason for an affirmative perception of locals towards tourism is that it afforded them with job opportunities. They were able to get employment, either full-time, part-time, or on an on-call basis. Their job ranges from being a gardener, waiter/server, room attendant, all-around helper, and even a construction worker during the construction of the various resorts. One of the residents said that the resorts *"give additional income to our family since we can work in the resort."*

The second reason for the locals is that it brought about the beautification of the place. They expound that long before the establishment of various resorts, their place was not that beautiful in terms of structure, seascapes, and landscape. However, with the presence of the various tourism structures, their place has improved, developed, and been beautified. This gave them a sense of pride, honor, and upliftment due to the beautification that happened in their place. As one resident said, *"As for me, I can say that my place has changed a lot. It has so much development."*

Third, locals perceived this tourism industry as government income, either the provincial, municipal, or the Barangay government. Locals believed that the tourism industry is mainly for the income of the local government units through tax collection from the tourists in the form of ticket sales, and from the resorts and other establishments through tax collection. In return, these taxes collected were also used in the improvement and development of their place, particularly in the road construction, one of the residents exclaimed.

Fourth, locals perceived the tourism industry as a leisure and enjoyment for the tourist. They've mentioned that the beauty of their place, particularly the beach, brings joy and happiness to arriving tourists. This gives them the sense of pride and fulfillment that their place is frequently visited by tourists due to its beauty.

Adverse perception towards tourism was also uncovered during the conduct of the study. One of the primary reasons for an adverse perception of the locals towards these resorts is that they caused disturbance and infringement on their fishing livelihood. This has been shown in the lack of docking and parking space for their motorized boat, or locally called "Bangka." Others also clamor for an established path to the beach. Their usual path was being enclosed or fenced by resort owners. As such, they do not have a route or road to pass by going to and from the beach.

The second adverse perception of the locals towards the tourism industry is that job opportunities were limited. In this aspect, the qualifications set by the resort owners in hiring were acceptable to them, as they admit their lack of qualifications due to a lack of formal education. Only a few among the locals were hired, and among those hired, the positions given are those in the blue-collar sector and not with the administration.

The third adverse perception of the locals of the tourism industry is that it is threatening and dangerous. They fear for their security and safety. Due to the influx of unfamiliar people, they feared kidnapping and other crimes, particularly against their children.

fourth, locals perceived this tourism industry as a social privilege for the rich. This tourism industry, for them, is only for the socially and economically wealthy and not for those who consider themselves underprivileged and poor. The high prices in resorts are deterring locals from enjoying the resorts in their

locality. Further, it also results in increasing prices of commodities, particularly fish. As they said that “we are also like tourists because the price of fish is similar to the price they give to the tourist.”

However, not everyone has an affirmative or negative perception, others have a neutral perception of tourism. The reason is that they are not directly affected by the tourism industry. Some depend on farming for a livelihood. They are not interested in working in the resort or going to the sea since they have their farm to cultivate.

Discussion

This study discloses the fact that the perceptions and attitudes of locals towards the tourism structures are relative to the benefits they gained as individuals. These benefits range from economic, social, personal, spatial, and environmental. This is consistent with what Yeoman (2006) posits that ecotourism has been interwoven in the different aspects of human life, particularly the economic aspect. The quality of life that it can provide is very crucial in their perception and attitude. This is congruent to what Wang & Pfister (2008) posits in their research on the impact of personal benefit obtained from tourism development, and they discovered that, benefit and cost assumed to be more carefully evaluated and as benefits exceed the costs, residents will be more supportive on tourism development. When the cost exceeds the benefits, residents tend to be more negative towards tourism development. As shown in the results, residents who gained benefits were supportive, while those who did not had negative perceptions and attitudes, even calling these resorts a distraction and an infringement on their lives. Further, in considering the economic gains, their perception is affirmative when they can work and gain a salary for a full-time and part-time job opportunity. Economics has been the particular aspect that the inhabitants wished could be addressed by these tourism structures. Working in a tourism destination is an additional economic option aside from fishing and farming. Further, income generated from tourism is not only the case for the inhabitants, but more so, as they posit, with the local government units (Provincial, Municipal, and Barangay). In the latest data gathered by the provincial tourism office of the province of Davao Oriental, the Cape of San Agustin of Governor Generoso gained the highest income in ticket sales of tourists arriving in the place in all government-run eco-parks and museums, amounting to 1.5 Million Pesos (Deloso, 2023). However, the result showed that job opportunities were limited due to educational qualifications and the skills required by the tourism structures. A mismatch of the need and qualification is the obvious reason for this occurrence. On the other hand, the result also showed a similarity with the study of Jurowski, Uysal & William (1997) when they found out that when the residents did not enjoy any direct economic benefit from tourism, the residents would be neutral. Some of the locals' perception is neither affirmative nor adverse on the tourism structures since their livelihood is neither in the sea nor in the resorts.

The social exchange theory expounded by Harrill (2004) explains the influence of material and psychological exchanges on the residents' attitude. As such, the material aspect is not the only factor in perception and attitude. Psychologically, the beautification, development, and improvement of their place by way of infrastructure, seascapes, roads, and other establishments created a sense of pride and honor for the local inhabitants, which paved for an affirmative perception and attitude. This manifests that intangible elements are also a factor in perception and attitude towards tourism.

Rabanny et al. (2013) emphasized the importance of the development of good tourism facilities, which include accommodation, restaurants, water supplies, and other recreational facilities that can boost the tourism destination. Regrettably, this also contradicts the spatial aspect of the residents' lives, since these facilities caused interference and disturbance to their fishing livelihood. These caused the displacement of their homes and motorized boats. This conflict creates a negative perception among locals. Hester (1993) calls this an infraction of the locals' “sacred structure.” The difficulty in finding an established path in going to the beach and space for parking their motorized boats for fishing greatly influenced their perception and attitude. Their livelihood has been greatly affected by this phenomenon. This was aptly described by Ko and Steward (2002) that, besides delivering positive impacts such as enhancing local economies, being a source of new employment opportunities, additional tax receipts, foreign exchange earnings, and income, tourism development has the potential for negative outcomes.

Conclusion

Overall, the study confirms perception and attitude of locals vary from affirmative, negative, and neutral. It also exposed that overall benefits, which include economic, social, psychological, and environmental, are great factors in one's perception and attitude. When individuals gain benefits, they are affirmative. But if their livelihood and space are affected, it becomes adverse. And, if they do not gain benefit or are not affected, they tend to be neutral. This may be similar to other situations in other destinations, yet what it presents is a unique condition of an emerging tourist destination where the conditions of locals are not yet being studied and understood. As such, it is indeed very necessary to consider the locals' perception and attitude in the development of tourism in the various destinations. Tourism development can be more impactful if it elevates the quality of life of those who are marginalized in our society.

As such, local government units and the private tourism industry must consider the plight of local inhabitants in the planning and implementation of tourism policies. It is recommended that tourism policies incorporate job opportunities for locals and, development of skills to meet the labor needs of the tourist destination. Capacity building or training will be of great help. Further, home displacement should be addressed. Relocation sites for locals affected by the tourism industry should be provided. And, environmental policies should be strengthened to maintain or improve the beauty of the place. Waste management should be strictly implemented not only in the tourist destinations but also for visiting tourists.

This study on the perception of local inhabitants outside tourism structures in Governor Generoso is limited in terms of scope and method. In terms of scope, its geographical location is limited only in Governor Generoso, as such, future studies can also be done in other rural places with similar conditions to confirm the similarity or dissimilarity of findings. On the other hand, in terms of method, this study employs the phenomenological method in gathering data, for future endeavors, a quantitative method may also be employed to gather numerical data in understanding perceptions of locals in tourism destinations. And, other future studies may also be done relative to local perceptions as this study is primarily on the perceptions of locals outside tourism structures in Governor Generoso.

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Declaration

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Availability of data and materials

The data supporting the findings of this study are available upon request.

Competing interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding this work.

Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies

During the preparation of this work the author used Grammarly in order to correct spelling mistakes and help me make better sentences. After using this tool/service, the author reviewed and edited the content as needed and takes full responsibility for the content of the published article.

Author contributions

LNC Conceptualization, Writing –original draft, Writing –review and editing.

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