

# Attitudes of Urban Residents Toward Tourism: Evidence from Bishkek

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## Abstract

On a global scale, tourism is an actively developing industry, which is of great importance for the development of the economy of many regions of the world. Satisfaction of the local population with the development of tourism is closely related to the opportunities for active participation in the decision-making process on tourism development. The level of satisfaction with tourism can show the feelings and attitude of the residents toward tourism, and in particular, to tourists. Satisfied local people are more hospitable and willing to provide tourists with the necessary products and services.

This paper aims to study the attitude of urban residents towards tourism and its development on the basis of a survey conducted among residents of Bishkek by random sampling. Bishkek is the capital of the country and the largest number of registered economic entities in the tourism sector is focused in Bishkek.

Respondents (N=190) attitude toward tourism varied according to their age, education, gender, marital status. The study showed that urban residents have a mostly benevolent and supportive attitude to tourism. Among the negative consequences expected from tourism development is related with the risk of rising prices in accommodation facilities. The results can be useful for policy makers, business representatives, local government and researchers.

## 1 Introduction

On a global scale, tourism is an actively developing industry, which is of great importance for the development of the economy of many regions of the world. Nowadays, the tourism industry is one of the most dynamic one. The rate of its growth is faster than most other branches of the world economy.

Tourism is one of the main driving forces of economic development in modern era, offering new opportunities for employment, increase in living standard and improvement of quality of life in the cities (Dimitrovski et al., 2015). As evidence, the report of UN World Tourism Organization shows that the number of international tourist arrivals in 2017 reached record levels of 1.3 billion. *This strong momentum is expected to continue in 2018 at a rate of 4%-5%*. International tourism receipts 1,220 billion USD. The tourism industry is one of the leaders in creating jobs, where every 11th employed in the world is working in this sector. *The economic impact of global travel and tourism is to 10.4% of GDP. In the world, the one of 10 jobs are supported by travel and tourism sector.*

The importance of tourism nowadays is determined by the multiple roles that it plays within any country (economic, social and cultural) and its ability to create a positive impact (employment, wealth, dynamism, income enhancement, infrastructure, international friendship and moving people and assets) (Muresan et al., 2016).

As known, the development of tourism is like a stick with two ends. Tourism not only generates the income, but also requires investment and expenditure. Assessing these benefits and costs, local residents develop their attitude towards tourism (Wang et al, 2006). It should be noted that among the important aspects of the quality of tourist services, such as the image of the country, security, reliability of information about services, differentiation of services, etc. the attitude of the local population to tourism and to tourists is extremely significant. Satisfaction of the local population with the development of tourism is closely related to the opportunities for active participation in the decision-making process on tourism development. Also, the level of satisfaction with tourism of the local population can lead to conclusions about the feelings and attitude of the inhabitants to tourism, and in particular, to tourists. Satisfied local residents are more hospitable and more willing to provide tourists with necessary products and services (Slovak Aid Report, 2008).

A decade ago as Harrill (2004) stated most of this research on attitudes toward tourism has been conducted in North America and Europe. However, geography of studies conducted in this field has expanded and in different parts of the world studies were done: in the case of Turkey (by Cavus and Tarrisevdi, 2003), USA (by Wang et al. 2006), Uganda (by Lepp, 2007), Vietnam, (by Long, 2011), Romania (by Muresan, 2016), Croatia (by Zadel et al., 2014), Iran (by Bahae, 2014), Serbia (by Dimitrovski et al., 2015), Cape Verde- Africa (by Cañizares et al., 2017).

Moreover, residents' attitude towards tourism is subject to change. Lepp (2004) argued that in 1991 in Uganda residents reacted to tourism with anxiety, suspicion and fear. In fact, they believed tourists would steal their land. Time passed and situation has changed drastically and residents in Uganda slowly came to believe that tourism provides benefits in the form of community development, income, improved agricultural markets, and a chance at good fortune.

The tourism sector is considered to be a priority and dynamic branch of the economy of the Kyrgyzstan, as evidenced by the development plan for the sector in the medium-term development strategy until 2023. Tourist arrivals of Kyrgyzstan 2.9 million person, tourism receipts of Kyrgyzstan 415,6 million USD grew by 1,3% in 2016 (www.stat.kg). The gross added value created in the tourism sector in 2016, according to preliminary estimates, was about 21.5 billion soms, or 4.7 percent of GDP. For country with limited strategic natural resources it is important to develop service sector like tourism.

## **2 Factors Influencing Attitudes Toward Tourism**

Focusing on how tourism is perceived by residents, literature has identified demographics, community attachment, economic dependence, and physical distance from tourism as factors influencing attitudes. The literature review reveals many factors that have effect on residents' – be it urban or rural – attitude on tourism and tourists.

As literature review shows resident attitudes are a function of some definite factors – socioeconomic and demographic factors. It can include income, educational status, age, occupational status, gender, length of residence and economic dependency or benefit expectation of residents.

### **2.1 Income**

The income level of residents can influence the attitude toward tourism. In terms of income, Bender et al., (2008) emphasized that residents with higher incomes were significantly less likely than those with lower incomes to believe crime would increase in the community due to tourism. Harrill and Potts (2003) suggested that the positive relationship between income and resident attitudes towards tourism is thought to capture some aspects of economic dependency where those with higher incomes are more likely to find ways to capitalize on tourism development. Devine et al., (2009) argued that the residents with higher incomes and more land should be in a better position to benefit financially from tourism. Additionally, residents active in the work force are also more likely to benefit financially than those who do not work due to increased opportunity for employment and more competitive labor markets.

### **2.2 Education**

The income educational level of residents might have effect on their attitude toward tourism. Wang et al. (2006) stated that the higher level of formal education the respondents have, the less likely they attribute the improvement of life quality to tourism development. Bender et al., (2008) resulted that respondents who had attended college were more supportive in forming partnerships with surrounding communities than those who had less education.

### **2.3 Occupation**

In terms of work status of residents, there are different findings. Residents who are not engaged with tourism, had little knowledge of tourism, and had neither positive nor negative attitudes about it (Lepp, 2007). In addition, Devine and Bell (2009) resulted that work status has a significant positive effect on attitudes at the county community scale. Interestingly both workers and retirees were found to hold significantly less negative attitudes towards tourism.

### **2.4 Gender**

Gender of residents has been found to be a significant factor in a variety of other study areas and they are quite contradictory. For example, Muresan et al (2016) argued that females differ significantly in their support for tourism development. Males were more supportive of tourism development than females (Long, 2011). Harrill and Potts (2003) found gender to be a significant predictor of tourism's perceived economic benefits, with more women than men negatively disposed toward tourism development. In contrary, the results by Wang et al., (2006) indicated that there are no significant differences in attitudes toward tourism between males and females.

Interestingly the findings by Bahae et al. (2014) which include the view of tourism's impact upon religion recorded the most significant differences. Men viewed tourism's impact upon the country's religion (i.e., Islam) in a more positive light and in a less negative view than women.

### **2.5 Length of Residence**

Interestingly the longer residents have lived in the destination the more negative attitudes toward tourism occur with time (Cavus and Tanrisevdi, 2002). In addition, non-local residents showed more positive attitude on the significance of tourism (Dimitrovski et al. 2015). Harrill and Potts (2003) suggested that resident attitudes are a partial function of both economic dependence and spatial location, where people living in tourist centers but who do not depend economically on local visitors are the most likely to hold negative attitudes.

### **2.6 Age**

For ages of residents, the research results are quite different and contradictory. For instance, in Kusadasi (Turkey) older residents had negative attitudes toward tourism (Cavus and Tanrisevdi, 2002). In contrary, in West Virginia the older residents were more positive in their attitudes toward tourism development (Bender et al., 2008). The younger the respondent, the more likely he or she was to support tourism development (Long, 2011). Bahae et al.

(2014) found out that the youth and the educated class of society are more sensitive toward the environment perhaps because of their exposure through education or online media about the green movement and environmental issues. Dimitrovski et al. (2015) argued older respondents are equally supportive of tourism development as younger respondents, even showing that older generations are more tolerant towards foreign tourists and are less worried of tourism's harmful effects on environment.

### **2.7 Economic Dependency and Benefit Expectation**

According to Harrill (2004), tourism researchers have viewed the relationship between resident attitudes and economic dependency across a range of perspectives, from a single individual to an entire community, with the most prevalent and obvious hypothesis being that the more a person or community depends on tourism dollars, the more positive his or her attitude is toward tourism development. Wang et al. (2006) found out that the more personal benefits respondents expected from tourism, the more likely they are to favor tourism development and the more likely they are to attribute the improvement in quality of life to tourism development. Bender et al., (2008) found out that concerning economic impacts, respondents believed that tourism development would provide more jobs for local people, and generally, tourism is perceived by residents as having strong economic benefits, which outweigh any other possible negative impacts, encouraging residents to perceive tourist activity in a positive way and resulting in strong involvement and support. Also, they stated that huge part of the respondents believed that the benefits of tourism outweigh the negative consequences of tourism development and felt that tourists are valuable. Residents who believed that tourism has positive socio-cultural impacts tended to support tourism development. Finally, and interestingly, respondents who believed that tourism has negative environmental impacts also supported tourism development (Long, 2011). As the survey statements of Assante et al., (2010) determined, from one hand, many residents feel tourists help increase their quality of life through public services that are mutually beneficial, and from other hand, respondents also feel that tourism competes for natural resources (i.e., drinking water) and adds a disproportionate burden to public services (i.e., wastewater disposal). Also, the benefit expectation of residents can be related with quality of life. Cañizares et al., (2014) high scores were also found for degree of agreement with the statement that tourism increases investments and the development of infrastructures, in addition to the quality of the hospitality and retail sectors, and the sensation that residents feel proud about belonging to the island owing to the amount of tourists who visit it. Meanwhile another point of view is interesting as well. The residents expressed their concerns over the fact that the prices of real estate and many goods and services in their community have increased because of tourism and that the income from tourism is not distributed equally among residents in their community (Long, 2011).

## **3 Research Methodology**

This study aims to identify the relationships between urban residents' socio-economic and demographic attributes and their attitudes toward tourism. To examine residents' attitudes toward tourism in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, researchers adopted questionnaire form. Bishkek is the capital of the country, the largest number of registered economic entities in the tourism sector in Kyrgyzstan is concentrated in Bishkek, the Issyk-Kul and Chui oblasts (National Statistic Committee of Kyrgyz Republic Report).

200 questionnaires were distributed to a random sample of adults. The response rate was 95% (190 questionnaires). The questionnaire consisted of 38 items, divided into 4 parts as follows: Part 1: This part included socio-demographic and occupational characteristics of respondents (age, gender, marital status, occupation, education and work experience in tourism sector). Parts 2-4: These parts altogether included 28 statements, five-point Likert-type response format based on the following scale: (1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = slightly agree; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree). These items measured the residents' perceptions of tourism impacts, negative impacts of tourism, and residents' opinion on measures for tourism development. This study used the survey questionnaire method for data collection.

Having collected the data, the next step was to analyze them utilizing the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences. Descriptive statistics summarizes the respondents' socio-demographic characteristics as well as the items adapted to measure their perceptions of tourism, evaluation of tourism negative impacts, and measures for tourism development. In terms of statistical analyses, descriptive statistics, independent samples t test and variance analysis (ANOVA) were used.

## **4 Research Findings**

According to the results of this survey, 58% of respondents are respondents aged 21 to 40 years. 60% of respondents have a higher education. 57% of the respondents are female. 51% of respondents are single. 37% of respondents are students, 23% are occupied in public sector. To the question "Do you have any work experience in tourism", only 20% answered "yes". Average work duration in tourism sector shows less than a year. And only 19% of respondents got some knowledge in the tourism field or in related fields.

Statements	N	Mean	SD
The development of tourism accelerates the urbanization of rural areas.	189	3,7619	0,97382
Tourism is one of the important income-producing sectors in Kyrgyzstan.	190	3,8789	1,02924
Due to tourism, local community has a chance to learn a foreign language.	190	3,8947	1,08353
Tourism contributes to the improvement of the country's infrastructure.	190	4,0789	0,91956
The local population plays an important role in the development of tourism.	190	4,1526	0,97745
Tourism is the best way to get acquainted with other cultures.	190	4,1632	0,86661
Tourism is the source of income for households.	190	4,1632	0,91415
Due to tourism, the sale of souvenirs can grow up.	190	4,2000	0,90968
Kyrgyzstan is a country of tourism.	190	4,3000	0,8031
The development of tourism creates jobs in the country.	189	4,3175	0,8282
It is necessary to develop tourism in Kyrgyzstan.	190	4,4895	0,76109
Valid N (listwise)	188		

**Table 1.** Respondents' Perception on Tourism and Tourism Development General Statements

Table 1 shows respondents' perception on tourism and tourism development. In general residents expressed positive attitudes towards tourism. Respondents (N=190) strongly agree with statements like "It is necessary to develop tourism in Kyrgyzstan" (M=4.48), "Kyrgyzstan is a country of tourism" (M=4.30), "Tourism is the source of income for households" (M=4.16), and "Tourism is the best way to get acquainted with other cultures" (M=4.16). The results indicate that overall residents are generally favorable to tourism and demonstrated substantial concern about the positive effects of tourism development on improving their future household standard of living.

Negative impacts of tourism	N	Mean	SD
In tourism-concentrated locations, historical monuments and other fine arts can be destroyed.	189	2,5556	1,12672
Tourism can suppress the distinctive culture of the local community.	190	2,7947	1,04145
Due to tourism the level of inflation can grow up.	190	2,9053	1,02429
Tourism can be a reason of air pollution.	190	3,0105	1,17734
Because of the tourists, accommodation companies (hotels, resorts, etc.) are becoming more expensive	190	3,5632	1,14721
Valid N (listwise)	189		

**Table 2.** Respondents' Perception on Negative Impacts of Tourism

It is documented in the literature that tourism development has both positive and negative impacts on host communities (Dimitrovski et al. 2015). Despite overall respondents' general favorable attitude to tourism residents have negative attitude towards tourism. Table 2 shows negative impact and consequences of tourism in the perspective of urban residents in Bishkek. The respondents have more negative attitude on tourism related with the increase of accommodation costs caused by tourist arrivals. Environmental consciousness of respondents pushes them think that tourism can have negative impact on air-pollution. They have less negative attitude on destruction of historical and art projects.

Tourism development measurements	N	Mean	SD
Foreign languages knowledge of local residents	189	3,5926	1,09552
Reduce accommodation costs (hotels, resorts, etc.)	190	3,5947	1,14964
Visa application facilities	190	3,7263	1,17687
Stop cheating tourists by overpricing	190	3,8211	1,16818
Increase the number of premium class hotels	190	3,8579	1,00043
Education of local residents in the field of tourism	190	3,9895	0,97584
Allocation of funds from the state budget to tourism promotion	190	4,0579	0,98229
Increase of friendly and responsive behavior of local residents	190	4,2737	0,89018
Stop deceiving tourists	189	4,2910	0,9537
Country history and culture knowledge of the local residents	190	4,3105	0,91628
More polite treat of customs officers, police and other state officers	190	4,3421	0,99937
Increase the promotion of country abroad	190	4,3737	0,8621
Improvement of service level	190	4,4211	0,87986
Improving the quality of highways.	190	4,6211	0,75843
Valid N (listwise)	188		

**Table 3** Respondents Opinion on Measurement on Tourism Developments

In order to promote and improve the tourism in the country respondents were asked to scale the ways to develop tourism sector. Respondents (N=190) strongly agree with statements like "Allocation of funds from the state budget to tourism promotion" (M=4.05), "Increase the promotion of country abroad" (M=4.37), "Improvement of service level" (M=4.42).

In order to attract more tourists, respondents thought it is necessary to have more polite treat of customs officers, police and other state officers (M=4.34), to stop deceiving tourists (M=4.29), to increase history and culture knowledge of the local residents (M=4.31), increase of friendly and responsive behavior of local residents to tourists (M=4.27) and "Improving the quality of highways" (M=4.62).

Results of ANOVA test showed the relationship between the demographic characteristics of respondents and their attitude toward tourism. The results determined statistically significant differences in attitudes of respondents on the impact of tourism development in terms of age, education level, gender and marital status of residents.

- The older the age of the respondents, the more they agree with the statement that tourism contributes to the improvement of the country's infrastructure and that the local residents play an important role in the development of tourism. Respondents under 20 years old than respondents between 31-40 years old group believe that because of the growth in demand for accommodation companies (hotels, resorts, etc.) leads to higher prices. Respondents from 31 years and above, as well as respondents with higher education, attach a relatively greater importance to improving the level of service than a younger segment.
- Respondents with higher and post graduate education, as well as respondents who have knowledge in the field of tourism and related fields, are more supportive in the statement that tourism is one of the important income-producing sectors in Kyrgyzstan than respondents with specialized secondary education. It should be noted that respondents who have high and post-graduate education generally agree more with the statements "Tourism development creates new jobs in the country", "Tourism contributes to the improvement of the country's infrastructure". Respondents with higher education are less agreeable with the statement that tourism suppresses the distinctive culture of the local community than respondents with secondary and secondary specialized education. Respondents with higher and post-graduate education are more supportive in the statement "It is necessary to improve the country's promotion abroad" than respondents who have a secondary education. The difference of views is observed in relation to the statement that it is necessary to allocate funds from the state budget to attract tourists between respondents with higher and post-graduate education. Respondents who have post-graduate education are less likely to agree with this statement.
- Female respondents are more supportive in statements like "Tourism development creates new jobs in the country", "Tourism contributes to the improvement of the country's infrastructure". Female respondents more agree with the statements "It is necessary to develop tourism in Kyrgyzstan" and "Tourism is the source of income for households".
- Respondents who have some knowledge and education in the field of tourism in higher education institutions are more supportive in statement "Due to tourism, local community has a chance to learn a foreign language" than respondents.
- Married respondents are more in likely to agree with the statement that in order to attract tourists it should be increase more friendly and responsive behavior of local residents toward tourists. In addition, married respondents are more in agreeable with the statement that it is necessary to stop cheating tourists by overpricing and to be more ethical towards tourist than single residents. At the same time, single respondents are more in supportive with the statement that it is important for local residents to be aware of the history and culture of their country, as well as improve the quality of roads and highways than married respondents.
- Respondents who have any work experience in tourism are more in supportive in statement that the more polite treatment of customs officers, police and other state officers to tourists is necessary for attracting tourists. Respondents who have any knowledge and education in tourism are less likely to agree that the visa application facilities are important for attracting tourists to the country.

## 5 Conclusion and Discussion

The impact of tourism can be traced not only through changes in environment and infrastructure in general, but also due to changes in the daily lives of local residents. These changes can be either positive or negative. Therefore, it is important to include local residents in the tourism development process. Especially for the reason that local residents are part of an integrated tourism product, the quality of the product depends on the level of their satisfaction. In addition, the attitude of local residents to tourism and tourists, to a certain extent has effect on the impression of a tourist traveling from definite country or city to another one. Therefore, it is necessary to take into account the attitude of local residents to tourism, as a factor that influences the development of the tourism industry and the image of the country as a whole.

The results indicate that overall residents are generally favorable to tourism and demonstrated supportive concern about the positive effects of tourism development on improving their future household and infrastructure in different part of the world. It is same with the results of other scholars (Harrill and Potts, 2003; Bender et al., 2008; Long, 2011; Cañizares et al., 2014). This study showed that residents of the city of Bishkek have a mostly benevolent attitude to tourism as well. Bishkek is the capital of Kyrgyzstan that it is touristically important and concentrated place in the country. It is emphasized in the literature that tourism development has both positive and

negative impacts on host communities. Among the negative consequences, residents revealed to a large extent only the risk of rising prices in accommodation companies. Among the most important factors for attracting tourists are factors such as polite treatment of customs officers, police and other state officers, more ethical behavior to foreign tourists, history and culture knowledge of the local residents, friendly and responsive behavior of local residents to tourists and improving the quality of highways in Kyrgyzstan.

The socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of respondents (in terms of age, education level, gender and marital status of residents) significantly have effect on their attitude toward tourism in Bishkek.

It is hoped that interest in this research area will stimulate efforts to explore resident attitudes in other locales, for instance, in the case of rural areas. The results can be useful for policy makers, business representatives, local government and researchers.

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