

RESIDENTS' ATTITUDES AND SUPPORT FOR TOURISM
DEVELOPMENT IN BISTOON, IRAN

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I dedicated this thesis to my beloved Mother for her continued love and prayers.

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IN THE NAME OF GOD, MOST GRACIOUS, MOST COMPASSIONATE

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ABSTRACT

Community support for tourism is essential for successful tourism development. Presently, tourism managers are giving due recognition and appreciation to the local communities for their role in sustaining these destinations as tourist attractions. Although residents' support for tourism has been examined in previous studies, elements which affect residents' support for tourism have not been thoroughly identified. This research has attempted to identify elements which affect residents' support for tourism development. Based on social exchange theory and previous findings, this study proposed a series of hypotheses and developed a theoretical model of residents' support for tourism development. This study is based on a self-administered survey, hand-delivered to residents of Bistoon. Bistoon, a historical city is one of the popular tourist destinations in Iran and it is on the UNESCO list of world heritage sites. Structural equation modelling approach was used to analyse the data. The final model shows the relationships between elements of successful tourism. The findings from the data analysis revealed that ecocentric attitudes, community concern and social identity affect residents' perceptions of tourism impacts. The impacts, include economic, social, and environmental benefits and costs. In addition, the residents' perceptions of tourism benefits in relation to economic, social, and environmental benefits affect their support for tourism development. The model developed in this research provides a theoretical basis to study residents' attitudes and support for tourism development. It is recommended that tourism planners collect information about the elements based on the model as these could be used to develop appropriate strategies addressing the tourism related issues raised by the local communities.

ABSTRAK

Sokongan masyarakat kepada sektor pelancongan adalah penting untuk pembangunan pelancongan yang berjaya. Pada masa ini, pengurus pelancongan mengiktiraf dan menghargai sokongan masyarakat tempatan terhadap peranan mereka dalam mengekalkan destinasi-destinasi pelancongan sebagai tarikan pelancong. Walaupun sokongan penduduk terhadap pelancongan telah dikaji dalam kajian terdahulu namun unsur-unsur yang memberikan kesan kepada sokongan penduduk terhadap pelancongan belum dikenal pasti secara menyeluruh. Kajian ini telah cuba untuk mengenal pasti elemen-elemen yang mempengaruhi sokongan penduduk terhadap pembangunan pelancongan. Berdasarkan teori pertukaran sosial dan penemuan kajian terdahulu, kajian ini mencadangkan satu siri hipotesis dan membangunkan model teori sokongan penduduk untuk pembangunan pelancongan. Kajian ini berdasarkan kaji selidik yang ditadbir sendiri dan diedar terus kepada penduduk Bistoon. Bistoon ialah sebuah bandar sejarah yang menjadi salah satu destinasi pelancongan yang popular di Iran dan tersenarai sebagai tapak warisan dunia oleh UNESCO. Pendekatan pemodelan persamaan berstruktur telah diaplikasikan dalam penganalisan data. Model terakhir menunjukkan hubungan antara elemen-elemen kejayaan pelancongan. Hasil kajian daripada analisis data menunjukkan sikap ekosentrik, perhatian masyarakat dan identiti sosial mempengaruhi persepsi penduduk terhadap kesan pelancongan. Kesan tersebut termasuklah faedah dan kos ekonomi, sosial, dan alam sekitar. Selain itu, persepsi penduduk terhadap manfaat pelancongan iaitu manfaat ekonomi, sosial dan alam sekitar, memberikan kesan terhadap sokongan mereka kepada pembangunan pelancongan. Model yang dibangunkan dalam kajian ini menyediakan asas teori untuk mengkaji sikap dan sokongan penduduk kepada pembangunan pelancongan. Model ini mengesyorkan supaya perancang pelancongan mengumpul maklumat tentang elemen-elemen berdasarkan model ini kerana ia boleh diaplikasikan bagi membangunkan strategi yang sesuai untuk menangani isu-isu yang berkaitan dengan pelancongan yang dibangkitkan oleh masyarakat tempatan.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The city of Bistoon in Iran

Iran is the second largest country in the Middle East. The country has an ancient civilization with many different cultural and natural attractions, which makes it unique in the world. Iran is also geographically and culturally diverse. Traditional lifestyles are still observed in different parts of the country and people are very attached to their culture and national identity.

After the victory of the Islamic revolution in Iran in 1979 and the beginning of the imposing Iran-Iraq war, the tourism industry of Iran was badly damaged due to the political crisis and war. However, from the first development plan of the country after the Islamic revolution, tourism was taken into consideration once again. Iran Cultural Heritage, Handicraft and Tourism Organization is the governmental body responsible to protect, introduce, preserve and restore the country's historic-cultural legacy as well as promoting tourism development. The main objectives of tourism development in the social, cultural and economic development plan of Iran (after Iran-Iraq war) were introducing the culture and civilization of Islamic Iran, stimulating local commerce and industries and generating a favourable worldwide image of the country (Farzin, 2007).

In 2012, 4,000,000 international tourists visited Iran (ICHTO, 2013) which is low in light of the potential and comparative advantages that exist in the country.

However, there was a 25 percent increase in the number of foreign tourists from 2011 to 2012, which is a very high rate of growth (ICHTO, 2013).



Figure 1.1 The map of Iran in the Middle East

Iran is one of the world's top 10 countries in terms of tourist attractions (ICHTO, 2013) and there are many cultural heritage and natural attractions which provide a great opportunity for tourism sector. According to social, cultural and economic development plan of Iran, the government has the responsibility of doing the following tasks in order to support and keep safe Iran historical identity and to benefit from factors and elements of Iranian identity.

1. To support scientific researches in the field of knowing Iran and its history.
2. To strengthen the interrelation of native languages and cultures in the spirit of national culture and heritage to introduce different aspects of natives based on national unity, especially in the education system, media and production of artistic and cultural products at the national level.
3. To recognize the regulations and laws governing Iranian architectural design in towns and villages to introduce the artistic design of Iran.
4. The government should also spread the culture of peace, understanding, living together peacefully among nations and having dialogues among cultures and civilizations.
5. To plan for cooperation and active presence in processes, organizations and international as well as local meetings about the issue of dialogue among civilizations.
6. To pay attention to the introduction of cultural, artistic aspects of Iran in other places and to provide cultural centres to reflect the new cultural achievements of the world.
7. To make local and international cultural contracts and provide the conditions of implementing them in executive organizations
8. The government is responsible for the purpose of national attention in knowing, protecting, covering, renewing, reviving, benefiting and introducing cultural heritage and raising the capabilities of tourism, financial benefits, making jobs and cultural exchange.

The city of Bistoon is one of the main tourist attractions in Iran, which is popular as a world heritage. Bistoon is located in the west of Iran, 30 kilometres from the city of Kermanshah, the capital of Kermanshah province and 1303 m above sea level. It is along ten ancient trade routes linking the Persian high plateau to Mesopotamia (Kermanshah Province Report, 2012). The city is inhabited by about 4000 people during the fall and winter; however, the number escalates in spring and summer because of more desirable weather and more job opportunities especially in the tourism sector (Kermanshah Province Report, 2012).

The economy of residents is related to farming, tourism and some big industrial factories around the city. Residents who are employed in primary industry of agriculture make up about 23% of all employed residents. The residents who are employed in manufacturing industries (construction 7%, manufacturing 18%) account for 25% of all employed residents.

Most of the residents are working in different sectors of the service industry in which the tourism industry accounts for 20%. The religion of the residents is Islam. There are many shops and food services and large-scale hotels around the city. Figure 1.2 shows the categories of employed residents in Bistoon.

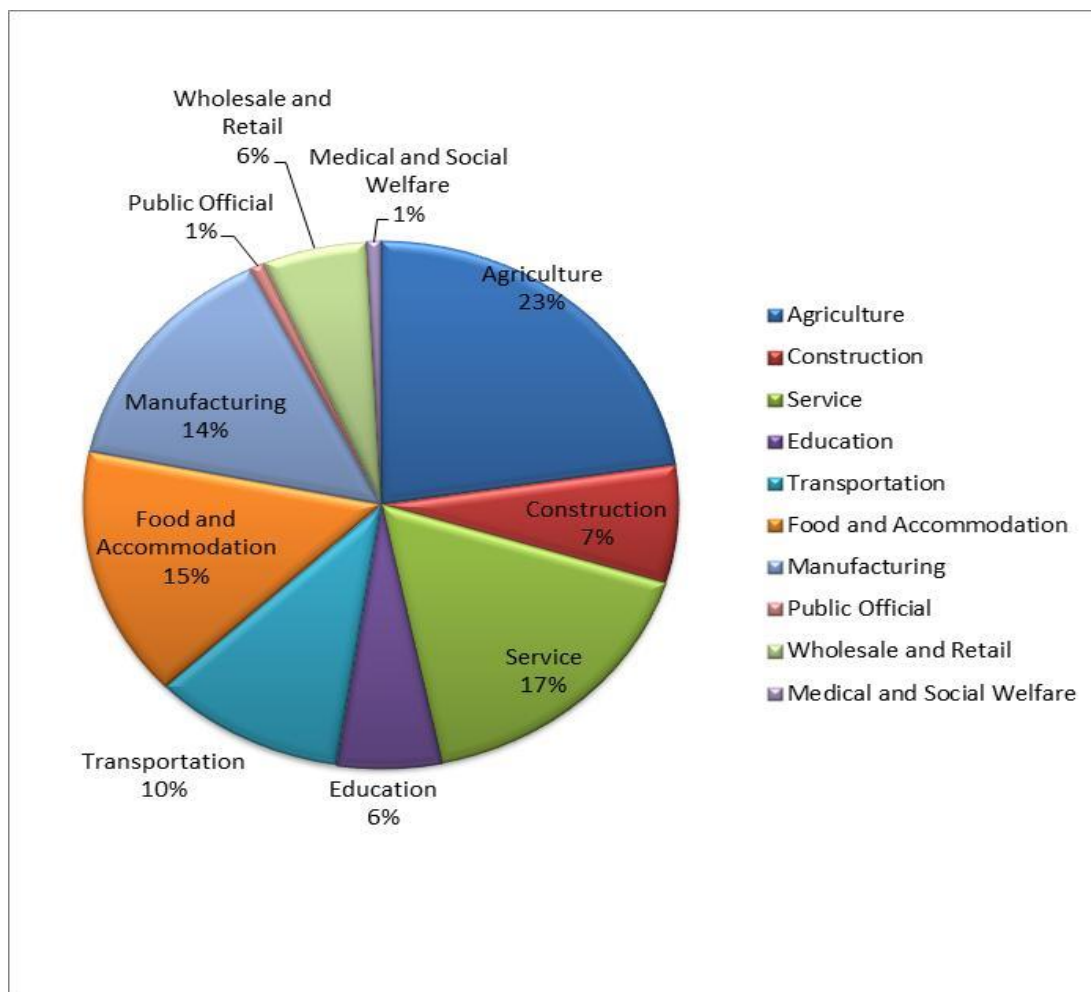


Figure 1.2 Categories of employed residents in Bistoon (Adapted from Kermanshah province government report, 2012)

Bistoon is a protected area and it was registered in the UNESCO list of world heritage sites in a decision made by UNESCO world heritage committee and announced in July 2006 (UNESCO, 2006). Current global tourism trends and the unique nature and heritage attractions which the city possesses are important motives for the government to help the economy of the region by developing tourism sector.

In addition to the attractive sights, rivers and springs, which are considered tourist attractions, Bistoon is full of archaeological objects and monuments from different periods of Iranian history. The origin of the name Bistoon can be derived from the Greek rendering Bagistanon, cited by Ctesias, as Bagastana, meaning place

or stand of the Gods (Zolfaghari et al., 2005). The name clearly shows that the place had been holy from time immemorial. The monument of Darius was well known to the ancients, with its sheer height cliff sacred to Zeus, to the supreme god Ahura Mazda (Zolfaghari et al., 2005).

Archaeological evidence indicates that this region became a human shelter 40,000 years ago. Its primary monument is the Bistoon Inscription, made in 521 BC by Darius the Great when he conquered the Persian throne. The inscription is written in 3 languages: Elamite, Babylonian and Old Persian (UNESCO, 2006). It represents the victory of Darius the Great over Gaumata and nine rebellious kings and covers an area of about 20 meters by 10 meters. There is no doubt that this is the most important document of the ancient Near East (Zolfaghari et al., 2005). There are Achaemenid (550–330 BC) inscriptions and reliefs carved in Bistoon cliff, which attract the attention of tourists and passengers to the delicate artistry which was used in carving these historical relics.



Figure 1.3 Territory of Persian Empire

There are 18 historical monuments other than the inscription of Darius the Great in the Bistoon complex, for example: the hunters cave (Prehistoric remains), the statue of Heracles 148 B.C., Pole-Khosro (Sassanid remains), the Mongol building, the Safavid caravansary and bridge, Parthian town, Khosrow palace, royal road and median fortress.

These attractions in Bistoon are visited by many national and international tourists every year. Tourists visit Bistoon to enjoy the natural beauty of the area and visit unique heritage. The typical visit is short and seasonal. Many national tourists usually visit the area during the Nowruz (Iranian New Year) period, spring, summer, and other public holidays. It is also visited by international tourists in all seasons. Their visits are mainly organized by tour operators. At the peak tourist season, Bistoon may host more than 25,000 tourists per day.

1.2 Background of the Study

Previous studies in the field of tourism have demonstrated that support of tourism by residents is essential for successful sustainable development of tourism (Andereck & Vogt, 2000; Jurowski & Gursoy, 2004). Residents' perceptions of tourism could be investigated from different aspects. Tourism is associated with economic, environmental, and socio-cultural benefits, which can contribute to the revitalization of communities and enhancement of residents' quality of life (McGehee and Andereck, 2004). It may bring local community economic benefits such as increased total income and employment opportunities (Mason and Cheyne, 2000). Tourism also can be used as a tool for rural communities seeking to improve the quality of life for their residents (Kim, 2002).

Furthermore, tourism can have positive social impacts on local economies. It can support cultural revitalization, leading to increased cultural pride, and can facilitate educational, scientific, and aesthetic advantages of cross-cultural contacts.

Tourism can also contribute to the quality of life of residents by improving local infrastructure, public services, and local recreational facilities (Yoon, 2002).

However, just like any other industry, tourism may bring changes to communities, which will negatively affect residents' lives. Any tourism impact that causes annoyance or irritation within the host community may lead to problems with the long-term sustainability of the industry. If tourism is not carefully planned to meet specific desired goals, tourism development can result in environmental degradation such as loss of vegetation and habitat, overcrowding, pollution of natural areas, overbuilding, sewage problems, and housing problems (McGehee and Andereck, 2004; Gursoy et al., 2002; Yoon, 2002).

For tourism to be accepted and supported by communities, taking the views of the host community into account is important (Gursoy et al., 2002). There are several reasons why community inclusion in tourism planning is important. If residents are not satisfied with the level or type of tourism development or tourist behaviour, tourists may encounter negative interactions with residents. Therefore, high tourist satisfaction has been linked to positive host perceptions about tourism (Andriotis & Vaughan, 2003).

If residents are not included in the decision making in tourism development, commercial tourism ventures may be hampered or terminated by excessive negative resident sentiment toward tourism (Williams and Lawson, 2001). Thus, having residents play an active role in the process, facilitation, and development of positive attitudes toward tourism is very important for the sustainability of tourism. For these reasons, research on residents' attitudes toward tourism has become an area of interest for numerous tourism scholars.

Before a community begins to develop tourism resources, it is crucial to understand residents' opinions about future development. Support of tourism by residents is necessary for successful sustainable development of tourism (McGehee

and Andereck, 2004; Gursoy et al., 2002; Yoon, 2002). Residents' perceptions of tourism are shaped by numerous factors. Some may perceive tourism development as economically beneficial with its potential to create jobs, generate income, and enhance infrastructure.

Alternatively, others may view tourism development in a negative light because of its potential negative impact on the environment and local culture. Understanding how residents formulate their perceptions of tourism impacts and their attitudes toward tourism can help mitigate negative attitudes towards tourism, which often influence destination attractiveness and hence, the number of visitor arrivals (Gursoy and Rutherford, 2004). High tourist satisfaction has been linked to positive host perceptions and attitudes (Andriotis and Vaughan, 2003).

Therefore, to achieve community support for tourism, tourism authorities should view tourism as a community industry and involve residents in local tourism planning (McGehee and Andereck, 2004; Gursoy et al., 2002). Through the tourism planning process, the community can collectively assess its own potential and that of the surrounding area of tourism. Community participation in tourism planning is a key to successful tourism development with the overall goal of improving the community.

1.3 Problem Statement and Research Gap

As explained before, the city of Bistoon is one of the important tourist destinations in Iran. Considering the historical and cultural importance of heritage inside Bistoon, it is very popular among Iranians as a symbol of Iranian identity. According to social, cultural and economic development plan of Iran, the government has the responsibility to support and preserve Iran's historical identity and to benefit from factors and elements of Iranian identity. The government is also responsible for the purpose of national attention in knowing, protecting, benefiting

and introducing cultural heritage and raising the capabilities of tourism, financial benefits, making jobs and cultural exchange.

As mentioned, Bistoon was registered in the UNESCO List of World Heritage Sites (UNESCO, 2006). The current global tourism trends and the unique nature and heritage attraction, which the city possesses, were motives of the government in recent years to help the poor economy of the region by developing tourism sector (ICHTO, 2013). However, evidence shows that after six years as a world heritage site and the high hopes that local people had for the benefits of economic tourism, the community is still suffering from high rates of unemployment and low levels of income. The unemployment rate is more than 20 percent and the poverty rate exceeded 30 percent. According to the Kermanshah province government, the unemployment situation in the area is very serious and it is the second highest unemployment rate recorded in Iran (Kermanshah Province Report, 2012).

Table 1.1 Poverty Rate and Unemployment Rate in Bistoon (Kermanshah Province Report, 2012)

Poverty Rate	31%
Unemployment Rate	20.7

Table 1.2 Comparison of Unemployment Rates in Bistoon and Iran (Kermanshah Province Report, 2012)

Unemployment Rate Percentage		
Year	Bistoon	Iran
2006	14.7	11.3
2007	12.1	10.5
2008	13.8	10.4
2009	14.5	11.9
2010	15.7	14.5
2011	16.2	12.3
2012	20.7	12.2

The exchange rate of Iranian Rial has dramatically been adjusted many times from 2011 till now due to political issues. Converting income to US dollars may not precisely reflect the economic power of the residents; however, depending on exchange rates, median household income equates to approximately 5000 U.S. dollars. Considering the low level of income and a high rate of unemployment in Bistoon, it could be understood that residents have not fully achieved the economic benefits of tourism development.

Furthermore, in order to attract large-scale development, the government has solicited proposals from developers. One development proposal introduced at the end of 2009 focused on the establishment of a five-star hotel with a 30-year build operation transfer investment. Residents protested the proposal, arguing that they were not involved in or even informed of the proposal. Their concern for tourism development continues to exist today due in part to suspicion that the government is not acting in their best interest and fear that the new tourism development policy will attract outside investors who are not committed to local long-term interest (ICHTO, 2013).

Iran Cultural Heritage, Handicraft and Tourism Organization (ICHTO) as the governmental body responsible for Iranian tourism industry, has an office in Kermanshah province where Bistoon is located. ICHTO has the duty to protect, preserve and restore Bistoon historic-cultural legacy as well as tourism management and promoting tourism development in the area. ICHTO intends to develop tourism industry in Boston as an effective economic contributor as described in the economic and social-cultural development plan. Tourism is believed to offer an opportunity, not only through its contribution to the economy, but also as a vehicle for cultural exchange among nations, reinforcing the sense of national identity and providing a good image of the country.

Residents in Bistoon elect the city council every four years. The mayor is elected then by the city council. The principal task of the city council is to ensure the smooth running of the city and to ensure the social, economic, and environmental

well-being of the community. As the members of the governing body of the council, they represent the interests of the residents in Bistoon, providing leadership and guidance to the community and facilitating communication between local community and the council. The council is responsible for directing and controlling the city's business affairs, performance of the city's services and facilities, overseeing the allocation of the city's finances and resources, determining the policies for the city and planning for the future needs of the city.

With regard to current tourism issues in Bistoon, decisions on heritage tourism development and tourism planning in the area are usually made by ICHTO, and the city council has no considerable influence on tourism related decisions in the area. In addition, based on government regulations, the establishment of any infrastructure, building, road and operations for water or telephone channels in Bistoon must be approved by ICHTO. The organization has the power to refuse approving urban plans suggested by the city council if there is any probable threat to the heritage site. Consequently, this has given an upper hand to ICHTO rather than Bistoon City Council in not only tourism related decisions but also about city development plans.

On the other hand, there is evidence of conflict when ICHTO intends to establish a new project in the area. Most of the time, the city council and residents are not informed about projects such as development of new tourist sites or a new archaeological excavation in the area. Therefore, many residents perceived that their involvement and views are not taken into consideration by the ICHTO authorities in the decision making process of developing and managing tourism (ICHTO, 2013).

Given the fact that there is limited empirical research on residents' attitudes toward tourism in the area, local communities' attitudes and support for tourism in Bistoon must be examined so that the information from this study will help tourism planners and policy-makers to improve the problems and provide efficient policies for tourism development and enable residents to use tourism benefits especially from the economic perspective.

In this way, the problem of the study is to examine residents' attitudes toward tourism and their support for tourism development in the city of Bistoon in Iran. The research also tested the influence of residents' perceptions of the impact of tourism on support for tourism development. As will be explained in the next chapter, some aspects of residents' perceptions have been investigated in previous frameworks by researchers. By categorizing the tourism impacts into perceived benefits and costs, more aspects of tourism development impacts such as economic, social and environmental benefits and costs were investigated in this study.

With regard to the study of residents' attitudes toward tourism, social exchange theory has been a dominant theoretical framework. The main premise of social exchange theory is that individuals evaluate an exchange based on the costs and benefits associated with that exchange. Hence, people will engage in an exchange if the exchange is likely to produce valued rewards, and the perceived costs do not exceed perceived rewards (Skidmore, 1975). This study will use social exchange theory as the theoretical base to investigate residents' attitudes and support for tourism in the area.

1.4 Research Questions

This study will provide information useful in understanding local community perceptions about tourism impacts and their support for tourism development. The conceptual basis of this study is on social exchange theory. Based on social exchange theory, residents' perceptions of tourism impacts affect their support for tourism development. The following research questions will be addressed in this study:

RQ1. What are the residents' perceptions toward tourism impacts and what is their overall evaluation of tourism impacts?

RQ2. To what extent do residents support tourism development in the area?

RQ3. What are the elements that affect residents' perceptions of tourism impacts and how do these elements affect residents' perceptions of tourism impacts?

RQ4. What are the elements that affect residents' support for tourism development and how these elements affect support for tourism development?

1.5 Research Objectives

Based on the background and questions of the study, following are the research objectives:

RO1. To examine residents' perceptions toward tourism impacts and their overall evaluation of tourism impacts

RO2. To explore residents' support for tourism development in the area

RO3. To investigate the elements that might affect residents' perceptions of tourism impacts

RO4. To determine elements which affect residents' support for tourism development

RO5. To develop a model for residents' attitudes and support for tourism development

1.6 Significance and Contribution of the Study

This study contributes to a theoretical advancement in the field of tourism by proposing a framework to measure local community attitudes and support for tourism development. In this study, beside positive perception of tourism impacts like economic benefits, social benefits, environmental benefits, negative aspects of tourism impacts including economic costs, social costs, and environmental costs are examined in the framework. Moreover, the effects of ecocentric attitudes, community concern and social identity on residents' attitudes toward tourism development are investigated.

In addition, this study is adding to the limited research examining the role of attitudes and support of tourism development particularly in Iran. The results of this research therefore can provide a point of view regarding tourism issues and would be an appropriate source of information for the related tourism policy makers and planners in order to provide a more sustainable tourism development approach.

The final contribution of the study is to the destination management office of Bistoon. The information obtained from this research could help the authorities and tourism managers to improve the condition in the area. Bistoon, as one of most popular Iranian tourism destinations could have appropriate tourism development with more balanced distribution of tourism benefits to local people.

1.7 Operational Definitions

Attitude: A learned disposition to respond in a consistently favourable or unfavourable manner with respect to a given object (Fridgen, 1991). Attitude has three parts: (1) what the person knows or believes about the object, (2) how the person feels about the object or how it is valued, and (3) the likelihood that the individual will take action based on the attitude (Alreck, 2004). For current research,

attitude is focused on tourism. In most of the researches about residents' attitudes toward tourism which have been based on social exchange theory, the words "attitudes" and "perceptions" have been used interchangeably (Gursoy and Rutherford, 2004; Gursoy et al., 2002; McGehee and Andreck, 2004). In the same way, in this study perception of tourism impacts are also considered as attitudes. Also, several studies of residents' attitudes toward tourism have discussed the construct of support for tourism as Alreck's explanation of attitude, the likelihood that an individual will take action. Thus, in this study, constructs such as support for tourism development, ecocentric attitudes, community concern, social identity and perception of tourism impacts are consistent with the aforementioned definitions. Also, all the constructs are considered to contribute to the concept of attitude.

Ecocentric attitude: Strong belief in the preservation and protection of the environment (Jurowski et al., 1997).

Community concern: Residents' concerns about community problems and living situation in their area of living (Gursoy et al., 2002).

Social identity: Peoples' knowledge about belonging to certain social or national groups together with particular values and culture, significance to them (Tajfel, 1972).

Tourism development impacts: The changes and differences, which are brought by the influence or process of tourism development in a community (Gursoy et al., 2002).

Perceptions: The meaning attributed to an object or subject, is perception (Ap, 1992). In this research, perception is focused on six aspects of tourism development impacts: economic benefits, economic costs, social benefits, social costs, environmental benefits and environmental costs. As explained previously, perceptions of tourism impacts with other constructs of this research are totally considered to contribute to the concept of attitude in this study.

Economic benefits: The degree of benefits that residents perceive they receive economically from tourism development in their area of living (Gursoy et al., 2002).

Economic costs: The degree of costs that residents perceive they were incurred economically from tourism development in their area of living (Gursoy et al., 2002).

Social benefits: The degree of benefits that residents perceive they receive socially from tourism development in their area of living (Gursoy et al., 2002).

Social costs: The degree of costs that residents perceive they were incurred socially from tourism development in their area of living (Gursoy et al., 2002).

Environmental benefits: The degree of benefits that residents perceive they receive environmentally from tourism development in their area of living (Gursoy et al., 2002).

Environmental costs: The degree of costs that residents perceive they were incurred environmentally from tourism development in their area of living (Gursoy et al., 2002).

1.8 Scope of the study

This study can be classified as a cross-sectional study, since it measures residents' attitudes within a specific period of time. In addition, this research is limited to the study of residents in the cultural heritage city of Bistoon in Iran.

1.9 Organization of the Thesis

This dissertation consists of five chapters; introduction, literature review, research methodology, data analysis, discussion and conclusions. The first chapter briefly states the introduction to the study and the background of the research. It also outlines the objectives, statement of research problem, research questions and significance of the study.

Second chapter provides an in-depth overview of the study's theoretical concepts and describes previous models in relation to residents' attitudes toward tourism development. It also conceptualizes a framework that will be proposed for testing. The hypotheses of the study are presented at the end of this chapter. Third chapter describes the methods that were utilized in pursuing this research. It discusses the research methodology, how the survey instrument was developed, sampling and data collection procedure, and data analysis method.

The fourth chapter reports the results obtained from the empirical study. It is comprised of different parts including demographic profiling, descriptive analysis, reliability and validity testing, and the structural modelling approach. The results of hypothesis testing were presented in the final section of the chapter. The final chapter includes a summary of the research conclusions, the theoretical and practical implications, discussion of the study's limitations and suggestions for future studies.

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