

The Perceived Impacts of Sport Tourism: A Host Community's Perspective around Iten town, Kenya

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Abstract

Sport tourism is one of the fastest growing market segments in the global tourism industry. Kenya is no different, as it is reputed world over for its exemplary performances in diverse competitions including long distance athletics and rugby. More significantly, the North Rift region in Kenya is famous for producing world champions including long distance runners. Accordingly, the North Rift region has over the years experienced an increase in the number of athletes and development of athletics training camps not only to nurture young talent but also tap revenue from sport tourists who comprise of world-class athletes from all over the world residing in training camps in the region for weeks or months ahead of major events. However, economic, social and environmental impacts of sport tourism upon destinations in Kenya have received little attention, with prior research on tourism impacts in Kenya focusing almost exclusively on wildlife, cultural and beach tourism. The purpose of this study was to examine residents' perceived impacts of sport tourism around Iten town. In particular, the study looked at how the development of sport tourism has affected the local environment and the livelihood of local people. The study population consisted of local people living in Iten town and the surrounding area. Cluster sampling was applied to select the sampling units where most local people reside. Simple random sampling technique was then used to recruit respondents from each sampling unit. Data collection involved a combination of questionnaires, interviews and observations. Questionnaires and interviews were administered in training camps and residential areas. In addition, interviews were conducted with local community leaders. In total 150 respondents participated in the study. The findings supported the social exchange theory and showed that the economic benefits appear to have the greatest influence on whether local residents support further sport tourism developments.

Keywords: Tourism; Sport; Impacts; Social exchange theory; Community; Sustainable Development.

1. Introduction

Tourism is a hospitality industry, and whenever tourists visit any attraction they expect gracious and prompt service (Hritz and Ross, 2010). In this regard, if tourism is to merit its pseudonym of being a hospitality industry, it must look beyond its own doors and employees and consider the social, cultural and economic impacts it is having on the host community (Murphy, 1985). Thus it is important that studies in tourism explore the social impacts of tourism on host communities (Gibson, 2006).

According to Hritz and Ross (2010) sport tourism is one of the fastest growing market segments in the tourism industry and is receiving increased attention for its social, environmental and economic impacts on destinations. Besides prior research in tourism impacts has tended to focus exclusively on tourism as a whole and does not differentiate among the different types of tourism that may be present in destination.

Brunt and Courtney (1999) assert that social and cultural impacts of tourism should be considered throughout the planning process and in an environmental impact assessment procedure, so that benefits are optimized and problems minimized. An important general planning policy to reinforce positive and mitigate negative impacts is the involvement of communities so that residents understand tourism. This can be achieved through community participation in decision making and fair sharing of benefits from the industry (Brunt and Courtney, 1999). Further, the perceptions and attitudes of residents towards the impacts of tourism are likely to be an important planning and policy consideration for the successful development, marketing and operation of existing and future programs and projects. Therefore, the study reported in this paper also has implications in terms of planning for tourism development and managing resources in rural locations.

A study by Brunt and Courtney (1999) disclosed that the socio-cultural impacts of tourist-host interaction could be applied to host residents and was influenced by their particular role or relationship to the tourism industry. Not everyone in a host community perceives the impacts of tourism in the same way.

Individuals who reside, work and have business interests in the tourism industry in a particular community can offer valuable opinions and professional knowledge of the different types of tourists who visit their destination. The purpose of this study was therefore to examine residents' perceptions of social and economic impacts of sport tourism in Iten region, Keiyo County.

In recent decades, an abundance of empirical investigations have focused on residents' and tourists' attitudes and perceptions of the impact of tourism and have proposed strategies to provide better services. However, empirical research on the social impact of sport tourism on local host communities is limited (Barker, 2004; Fredline, 2006; Ritchie and Adair, 2004). The growing importance placed on studying impacts from a destination perspective

also increases the likelihood for residents' support for tourism development and enables policy makers to enhance the quality of life for the community (Hritz and Ross, 2010).

As the North Rift region continues to gain dominance in international sporting arena for producing world record holders in steeple chase and long distance races, and with increased development of athletics training camps, it is essential to gain an understanding of the residents' view regarding development. Not including residents' opinion can have economic and social consequences according Hritz and Ross (2010). These include delayed construction of tourism development due to community protests, loss of support for tourism development officials, an unwillingness to work in the industry and lack of enthusiasm for promotion of tourism by word of mouth (Pearce, 1998). Therefore, residents' attitudes towards sport tourism development in Iten region are paramount. This follows the paradigm that without community support, it "is difficult to develop a sustainable tourism industry in the community" (Andereck and Vogt, 2000: 27). The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) posited that to have a sustainable tourism destination, the social, environmental and economic impacts must be monitored and brought to an acceptable level for residents, visitors and business interests (UNWTO, 2004).

The hospitality of the local community is vital to the tourism industry. As such, the destination should develop according to the needs of the host community (Androit, 2005). Murphy (1985) supports this assertion by arguing that tourism is a resource industry, dependent on public goodwill. This goodwill is an essential piece of a visitor's experience "for if the host community is antagonistic to visitors no amount of attractions will compensate for the rudeness or hostility" (Murphy, 1985:13).

1.1 Social exchange theory

According to Hritz and Ross (2010), social exchange theory is a social, psychological and sociological perspective that describes social change as a process of negotiated exchanges between individuals or groups. This theory, dating back to the early 1920s is one of the most influential conceptual paradigms in organizational behavior (Cropamzano and Mitchell, 2005). It suggests that people engage in interaction or reciprocate with other people because they expect to receive benefits or incentives from the other party or that it generates obligations between the parties (Hritz and Ross, 2010). Thus human relationships are formed by the use of subjective cost-benefit analysis creating mutual obligation, reciprocating or repayment over time (Hritz and Ross, 2010).

In assessing tourism related impacts to a destination, the social exchange theory has been used predominantly in past studies (Androit, 2005; Hritz and Ross, 2010). It is based on the assumption that tourism development will be supported when the benefits, such as economic benefits outweigh the costs of sharing environmental and social resources with tourists (Hritz and Ross, 2010).

The social exchange theory allows for the investigation of both positive and negative attitudes of residents to tourism in a destination (Ap, 1992). The social exchange theory when used in tourism, postulate that hosts and visitors exchange resources that are valued by both parties. More than likely, residents and the business community aware of the positive and negative implications of tourism will either support or decline to support tourism development based on their perceptions of the benefits and costs (Androit and Vangham, 2003). It assumes that hosts enter an exchange with the purpose of "gaining" or "winning" in the end (McGhee and Andereck, 2004).

2. Sports tourism

According to Standeven and De Krop (1999) sport tourism is one of the largest and fastest growing segments of the travel and tourism industry that is receiving increased attention for its social, environmental and economic development and opportunities. It is widely understood that major sporting events contribute significantly to the economic development and tourists' traffic in a region, and are a vital component of the marketing mix for tourist destination (Hritz and Ross, 2010).

There have been numerous studies devoted to identifying and defining sport tourism. However, in this paper, sport tourism is defined as all forms of active and passive involvement in sporting activity, participated in casually or in an organized way for non-commercial or business reasons that necessitate travel way from home and work locality (Standeven and De Knop, 1999: 12).

Sport tourism is viewed as a vehicle for economic development (Gibson, 1998). Past research has examined the perceived economic impacts of specific sport tourism events by members of the community. Walo, Bull and Breen (1996) reported that residents did perceive an economic gain from sporting events. Soutar and McLeod (1993) examined residents' perceptions of the America's Cup defense in Australia and found that residents' perceptions before the event were remarkably different from the actual social and economic impacts experienced. The actual economic impacts for the community were not as high as expected and the social costs of the event, such as traffic and congestion, were not perceived to be as much as a problem before the event (Sontour and McLeod, 1993).

Although comprehensive in their analysis, studies have not looked beyond residents' views on tourism impacts, and have not included perspectives from other community groups such as tourism business interests (Hritz and

Ross, 2010).

3. Study area

Over the years the North Rift region in Kenya has experienced an increase in the number of athletics and athletic training camps due to its world fame of producing internationally celebrated athletics including steeple chase and long distance. In fact, athletes, spectators and researchers travel from different parts of the world to train, cheer and even undertake research (Gitao *et al.*, 2008). Due to many puzzling questions as to why the region produces the best long distance athletes in the world, researchers have been visiting the region to try unravel the mystery (Gitao, Sitati, Wishitemi and Njoroge Ibid). This unique regional image can be exploited as a tourist destination to benefit the North Rift region and the country. Athletics can play a key role in adding a new impetus to the diversification of Kenya's tourism industry. In this regard, the North Rift region is emerging as an important sport related tourism destination. Unlike other sport destinations in the cities which attract huge crowds of spectators, the North Rift region is a high altitude training ground famous for producing long distance runners among other races. The training ground mainly benefits private agencies and individuals who have established training camps used by athletes from all over the world.

4. Research methodology

This research used a case study of Iten town and its environs to analyze the perceived impacts of sport tourism. The study population consisted of local people living within Iten town and the surrounding area. Cluster sampling was applied to select the sampling units where most local people reside. Simple random sampling techniques were applied to recruit respondents from each sampling unit. Data collection was by a combination of questionnaire, interviews and observation. Questionnaires and interviews were administered in training camps and residential areas. In addition, interviews were conducted with local community leaders. In total 150 respondents participated in the study. The collected data was organized, tabulated and analysed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS).

The study used survey research design. Further, using purposive sampling, areas within Iten region which are highly frequented by sport tourists were selected for the study. Afterwards, using simple random sampling, local community members, business community members and managers of the training camps were recruited to the study. This study utilized both secondary and primary sources of data whereby secondary data was gathered from published materials such as journals and books while primary data was obtained from questionnaires and interview schedules. In addition, with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS), both descriptive statistics and inferential tests were performed.

5. Results

The data were first analyzed to present a description of the participants in the study and provide a description, computed as averages, for each statement in the questionnaire. The remainder of the analysis of the data tested links between social and economic impacts on one hand, and support for development of sport tourism by residents.

5.1 Sports tourism's contribution to socio-economic development

The findings showed a generally uneven division between male and female respondents. Male respondents accounted for 67.9% of the sample and female respondents accounted for 32.1% of the sample. A majority of the participants were aged 21-40 years, comprising approximately half of the total respondents. A large percentage 65.9% of the respondents had lived in Iten for 30 years or less. Moreover, 30.5% of respondents had resided in the area for less than 10 years. The respondents were educated with 26% reporting that they had acquired college education followed by 23.3% who had secondary education.

When asked about their support for sport tourism, most of the respondents (92%) expressed their willingness. Besides, Chi-square test revealed that respondents' willingness to support sport tourism was dependent on the perceived contribution of sport tourism to access health facilities ($\chi^2 = 12.16$; $df=4$; $p= 0.016$) and access to income ($\chi^2=12.345$; $df = 4$; $p = 0.015$).

5.2 Predictors of sports tourism development

The findings revealed that social benefits, economic benefits and perceived negative impacts of sport tourism in general attributed significantly to predicting support for sport tourism development in Iten at $p < 0.01$ level. The perceived environmental benefits were not a significant predictor. In addition the beta values for the perceived social benefits were positive. Therefore as the perceived social and economic benefits increase, so does support for further tourism development.

6. Discussion and conclusion

The findings supported the social exchange theory and showed that the economic benefits appear to have the greatest influence on whether local residents support further sport tourism development. This may be attributed to the people's perception that tourism will provide alternative sources of income, increased business activities

and generally improved livelihoods. Besides, residents seemed willing to overlook any negative social impacts to receive the financial gain from the sport tourist dollars.

Appreciating that social impacts have considerable importance equivalent to economic benefits, tourism planners can monitor issues relating to quality of life among residents, which may lead to 'resident friendly' initiatives (Hritz and Ross, 2010). These authors state that residents who use tourist attractions on regular basis perceive them more as community recreational facilities.

The strategic shift towards sport tourism could generate more employment opportunities. The North Rift region is home to some of the world's finest runners. If well marketed, the region could open up to the outside world (Gitao *et al.*, 2008). Moreover, sustainability issues must be addressed whenever sport tourism is developed. There is a need to strike a balance between the social, environmental and economic dimension of sport tourism.

This study allows for a more concise picture of what specific type of impacts influence support for sport tourism. The results revealed that economic impacts remain a main driver behind support for development.

This study assessed the perceived impacts of sport tourism by examining residents attitudes towards sport tourism in their destination. Overall sport tourism was supported by the participants.

The findings of the study have both theoretical and applied implications in the tourism industry. Overall, the theoretical implications for the social exchange theory were supported in the findings for this study. On the other hand, the residents' responses naturally sorted themselves out into positive and negative factors. These perceptions positively or negatively affected their subsequent support for tourism development. For example, the positive social and economic benefits led to increased support for additional development. These variables also contributed as significant predictors for support. Thus there is need for the tourism planners to tailor their decisions to the community's needs (Hritz and Ross, 2010). This will enhance community's support, which is an essential ingredient for the success of sport tourism in the destination.

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