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Responsible Tourism Practices and Quality of Life: Perspective of Langkawi Island communities

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Abstract

Responsible tourism practice (RTP) has become the most popular concept and principle for modern tourism development. RTP promotes the protection and conservation of the natural environment, local cultures and contributes towards a better quality of life (QoL). This paper endeavors to discover the Langkawi Island communities' perceptions of RTP and its impacts on their quality of life. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed to the Langkawi Islands' community using a quota sampling method. The research conjunctures were tested by using Baron and Kenny's four-step analysis with RTP as the moderating variables.

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Keywords: Responsible tourism practice; tourism development; quality of life

1. Background of the study

The importance of tourism as a significant income contributor has been recognized widely (M. H. M. Hanafiah & Harun, 2010). In order to cater to the needs of the tourists travelling from one place to another and escaping from

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their daily life by being involved in and experiencing many things, numerous destinations have been identified and developed as tourist attractions. The development of tourism areas involves various socially conscious policies such as sustainable tourism, eco-tourism, ethical tourism and other tourism development best practice (Mowforth & Munt, 2008). Previously, over the years, sustainable tourism has received widespread interest from tourism scholars (Bramwell & Lane, 1993; Hunter, 1997). The sustainable tourism development has gained attention and been adopted as a policy in tourism planning by many governments. However, currently there are numerous debates on the effectiveness of sustainable policy in managing tourism development (Bramwell & Lane, 2014).

It is important to note that the tourism industry is based on the people and places and the interaction between them. The industry is extremely sensitive to the social and physical conditions of the destination micro and macro environment (Hanafiah & Harun, 2010). In fact, the tourism industry faces numerous sustainability challenges, such as resources manipulation, economic uncertainty, and changes in tourist demand. For this reason also, the tourism policy makers must promote and make available the benefits of renewal and resilience to the residents and the area. This is why responsible tourism practice (RTP) was introduced at the first place and currently has become an established area of tourism research pertaining in enhancing the current sustainable tourism development (Spenceley, 2010). RTP shares the same goals as sustainable tourism, focusing on environmental integrity, social justice, and maximizing communities' benefits. Further, RTP is by far the most favored policy to be used for marketing a tourism destination mostly by the European and African nations (Bramwell, Lane, McCabe, Mosedale, & Scarles, 2008).

In the beginning, the tourism industry was developed with the support of the residents who were involved in this industry. The residents play a pivotal role as the primary stakeholder in tourism development. The local community support is the key element in successful tourism development as tourism planners and other authorities engaged in the tourism industry have to be concerned with the communities' views on development plans. The involvement of communities is particularly crucial to the success of tourism development and the implementation of responsible tourism and the residents' attitude may directly affect the development of the tourism industry (Ling, Jakpar, Johari, Myint, & Rani, 2011). However, the central principle of community participation in planning the tourism development has been proven difficult to achieve (Shani & Pizam, 2012).

2. Langkawi Island

Langkawi is a district of the state of Kedah, Malaysia consisting of a cluster of 99 islands. The total land mass of the islands is 47,848 hectares while the main island of Langkawi itself has a total area of 32,000 hectares. The coastal areas consist of flat, alluvial plains punctuated by limestone ridges. Two-thirds of the island are dominated by forest-covered mountains, hills, and natural vegetation. The rapid investments by the federal government and the private sector in developing Langkawi can still be seen. The Langkawi Development Authority (LADA) is the local governance agency responsible for expanding and supporting tourism development in Langkawi by encouraging and carrying out the economic restructuring of lower productivity to higher productivity sectors.

LADA is also responsible for creating attractive opportunities for foreign investors using the existing available tourism products and resources. This government body is also involved in the social, economic and physical development of Langkawi, as well as preserving the natural resources and offering a conducive environment for tourism business activities. The development of Langkawi as a tourist destination is given a much-needed boost by being a tax-free island. Furthermore, the richness of the flora and fauna has stimulated the number of tourist arrivals to the island. Based on Table 1, the numbers of visitors have blossomed from year to year in line with the number of developments in Langkawi Island. In line with that, the growing numbers of visitors posit a serious challenge for the Island's management in dealing with environmental concerns, maintenance, socioeconomic impacts and also sustaining the resources whilst fulfilling the needs of the tourists and the local communities.

Table 1. Langkawi island tourist arrivals (2012-2013)

Month	Ferry				Airport				Total	
	Domestic		International		Domestic		International		2012	2013
	2012	2013	2012	2013	2012	2013	2012	2013		
January	180,730	150,115	8690	11,080	66,570	63,461	5,860	7,175	493,681	312,951
February	141,213	191,997	8834	11,609	58,784	58,427	5,122	7,292	483,278	342,065
March	169,966	189,117	12528	14,007	53,498	62,069	3,984	6,458	511,627	341,661
April	139,283	130,483	15289	17,308	52,187	62,559	3,795	5,193	426,097	286,814
May	167,103	191,533	8904	12,466	51,353	62,284	3,889	5,057	502,589	335,486
June	199,741	201,982	7149	7,105	61,565	77,320	6,475	6,979	568,316	368,575
July	127,859	109,222	5923	12,116	51,574	57,259	5,327	5,186	374,466	246,607
August	155,261	192,351	7328	12,333	57,165	81,533	5,291	6,030	517,292	362,031
September	137,410	143,465	8739	8,300	52,478	74,180	4,483	5,033	434,088	296,678
October	147,043	147,904	8748	10,468	56,358	81,074	5,110	5,237	461,942	314,899
November	238,373	216,220	7402	7,461	63,512	87,967	5,551	7,317	633,803	395,430
December	310,308	311,319	10145	12,791	78,086	110,680	8,927	10,266	852,522	542,214
Total	2,114,290	2,175,708	109679	137044	703,130	878,813	63,814	77,223	6,259,701	4,145,411

Source: Langkawi Development Authority website

3. Literature review

Residents' perceptions of tourism development impacts have been studied extensively and produced similar result; the tourism industry affect the economy, social and cultural of the local community (Deery, Jago, & Fredline, 2012; M. H. Hanafiah & Hemdi, 2014; M. H. Hanafiah, Jamaluddin, & Zulkifly, 2013; Lee, 2013). However, the findings of those studies have produced contradictory results. Several studies reported that residents tend to perceived tourism development negatively (Gabriel Brida, Osti, & Faccioli, 2011; Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2012). Meanwhile, a few researchers have suggested that residents view tourism as providing various economic, social and cultural benefits to the community (Deery et al., 2012; Shani & Pizam, 2012). Furthermore, the tourism industry was viewed as a vehicle to create new employment and infrastructure development.

As suggested by M. Hanafiah, Abas, Jamaluddin, and Zulkifly (2013), the tourism industry should provide new opportunities and instigates social change in the community. Residents perceived tourism as having a positive impact on local services by improving the standard of roads and other public facilities (Xue, Kerstetter, & Buzinde, 2015). García, Vázquez, and Macías (2015) in their studies pointed out that the majority of residents view tourism as a tool for economic development strategy. The residents are likely to consider tourism as a tool that reduces unemployment by creating new employment opportunities, bringing in new businesses and creating new investment opportunities. It also generates additional business for local and small businesses and revenue for local communities and governments.

Almost all studies that have examined the relationship between perceived economic benefits and attitudes towards tourism reported a positive relationship (Látková & Vogt, 2012). However, researchers who examined the link between the perceptions of social impact and support for tourism development reported a negative relationship between negative social impacts and residents' perceptions of tourism development (M. Hanafiah et al., 2013). Further, M. H. Hanafiah and Hemdi (2014) also suggested that tourism benefit can be obtained from four different aspects that are environmental and economic as well as social and cultural. The above implication has led to the conclusion that the economic, environmental and socio-cultural aspects dynamically affect the residents' life experiences and their quality of life satisfaction (Moscardo, 2009). However, it is important to note that sustainable tourism development can only affect the quality of life through the positive support from the residents (Lee, 2013). After all, based on the review of major tourism white papers, it is obvious to say that the residents' quality of life was enhanced through sustainable tourism development and responsible tourism practices (Carasuk, 2011).

Moving forward, in order to minimize the negative effect of tourism development, few researchers suggested RTP as an alternative to tourism development (Brunt & Courtney, 1999; Hafiz, Jamaluddin, Zulkifly, & Othman, 2014). The responsible concept was seen to be a useful guideline to support and protect tourism destination from being overwhelmed by mass tourism. Therefore, the RTP assessment was narrowed down to the locals' insights into the practices. Martínez, Pérez, and Rodríguez del Bosque (2013) suggested that RTP may come from social responsibility and an ethical dimension focussing on the local perspectives. Further, Hafiz et al. (2014) in their research identified two responsible tourism dimensions that are responsible destination planning and responsible environmental practice. This is in line with Carasuk (2011) and Darson, Wahab, Kassim, and Hanafiah (2013) studies suggesting that the community's propositions on responsible tourism were based on environmental practice and tourism development planning. Nevertheless, there are limited studies investigating the interaction between tourism development impact, responsible tourism and quality of life dimensions.

4. Research framework

This study aims to test the direct and indirect impact of residents' perceptions of tourism development on the quality of life, with the focus on the moderating effect of responsible tourism practices (RTP). Accordingly, based on Figure 1, this study intends to examine whether RTP moderates the relationship between residents' perceptions of tourism development and quality of life. In order to achieve the objectives of the study, a thorough review of the existing relevant literature was performed, and subsequently, a theoretical framework was developed. This study considers various determinants of residents' perceptions of tourism development based on the reviews of the key tourism impact studies. The research framework adoption covers an important objective in this research, which includes all relevant determinants that shape and influence the residents' perceptions of tourism development. The study also acknowledges that tourism development leads to better quality of life as moderated by the RTP.

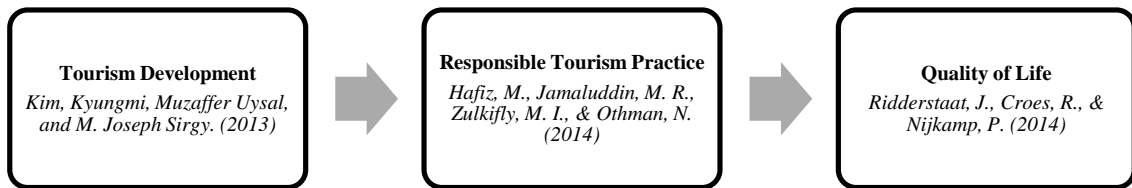


Fig. 1. Proposed research framework

The review of residents' perceptions of tourism development studies discloses three critical aspects which are the economic, social and cultural dimensions (Abdollahzadeh & Sharifzadeh, 2014; Allen, Long, Perdue, & Kieselbach, 1988; Yoon, Gursoy, & Chen, 2001). Most of the items identified by Kim, Uysal, and Sirgy (2013) in their previous model have been retained. Further, items for RTP (responsible destination planning and responsible environmental practice) were adopted from Hafiz et al. (2014) and Ridderstaat, Croes, and Nijkamp (2014) for the quality of life dimension.

5. Method

A self-administered questionnaire in Malay language was used to collect data at Langkawi Island. The data was collected for two months to reduce bias. The questionnaire was self-administered, handed out and collected upon completion. The data were gathered using quota sampling method based on the population size. Respondents were approached at Kuah, Padang Matsirat, Ayer Hangat, Bohor, Ulu Melaka and the Kedawang area. The perceptions of tourism development dimension were measured by 23 items based on five-point Likert scales. These items mirrored the works by (Abdollahzadeh & Sharifzadeh, 2014; Allen et al., 1988; Yoon et al., 2001). Meanwhile, responsible tourism practice consisted of two dimensions (responsible destination planning and responsible environmental

practice) with a total of nine items (Hafiz et al., 2014). Finally, the quality of life (QoL) dimension, the ultimate dependent variable, was measured by six indicators adapted from Ridderstaat et al. (2014).

The questionnaire was developed, and then pre-tested using SPSS software. A Cronbach reliability analysis was performed to stabilize the questionnaire structure further. The Cronbach's alpha results for the perceptions of tourism development dimension ranged from 0.923 to 0.841. The responsible tourism practice dimension had an excellent reliability coefficient of 0.913 while the quality of life dimension had reliability coefficients of 0.820. The properties of the research constructs in the proposed framework were tested using AMOS package for structural equation analysis and procedures (Byrne, 2013).

6. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

A total of 1500 questionnaires were distributed with 481 of them found usable and these were coded for further analysis. The 30 % response rate was achieved and in line with recent tourism study literature (Babbie, 2015). From the data extraction, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was employed to provide a assenting test of the measurement scale before proceeding into structural modeling. Table 2 lists the factor analysis result. Based on the suitability of the study which concerning the relevance and issue, the quantitative data approach is the most appropriate method to be applied. In line with the above concept, information requires was obtained through a self-administered questionnaire towards the residents. Furthermore, a cross-sectional approach also was used in this study and variables were measured at the same period.

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to examine the hypothesized relations in the research framework. The results of the initial estimation of the CFA of the tourism development impact construct were satisfactory since the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) value is .073. RMSEA explains the error of approximation in the population where values should be less than .05 for a good fit. Accordingly, other fit indices also indicated a significant fit in the model modification. Overall, the tourism development impact construct retained three dimensions with twelve observed indicators, RTP construct with two dimension and eight items and QoL with four items, with satisfactory results of fit indices, as shown in the table above.

Table 2. Confirmatory factor analysis result

Construct dimension	Standardized Regression (Loading)	Critical Ratio (t-values)	Composite Reliability
<u>Economic impacts</u>			0.889
Benefits outweigh costs (P2)	.848	10.143	
Employment opportunities (P1)	.963	10.641	
Local businesses (P5)	.698	14.372	
Standard of living (P4)	.681	14.222	
Resident Welfare (P3)	.713	13.547	
<u>Environmental impacts</u>			0.888
Produces waste products (P9)	.906	7.873	
Ecological and environment issues (P11)	.915	7.271	
Littering problem (P113)	.693	13.853	
Environmental pollution (P12)	.728	13.664	
<u>Social impacts</u>			0.808
Recreational activities (P18)	.825	7.127	
Pride in the local culture (P17)	.850	6.032	
Cultural activities (P20)	.603	13.718	
<u>Responsible Destination Planning</u>			0.859
Specific development strategies (R1)	0.69	13.629	

Locally-oriented identities (R3)	0.90	6.089	
Community participation (R5)	0.64	13.992	
Community awareness (R6)	0.86	8.619	
<u>Responsible Environmental Practice</u>			0.840
Restoration programs (R9)	0.85	10.745	
Recycling and reusing products (R10)	0.88	9.416	
Biological Conservation (R11)	0.79	12.494	
Ecological carrying capacity (R13)	0.76	12.896	
<u>Quality of life</u>			0.879
Emotional well-being (Q1)	0.94	5.185	
Community well-being (Q3)	0.93	3.311	
Economic well-being (Q2)	0.62	14.087	
Safety wellbeing (Q4)	0.67	14.900	

<u>Goodness of fit indices</u>							
χ^2	GFI	RMSEA	RMR	χ^2/df	AGFI	CFI	IFI
133.350	0.956	0.073	0.062	2.721	0.930	0.976	0.976

χ^2 , Chi-square; GFI, goodness-of-fit index; RMR, root mean square residual; RMSEA, root-mean-square error of approximation; AGFI, adjusted goodness-of-fit; CFI, comparative fit index; IFI, incremental fit index; df, degree of freedom.

7. Mediation test

To evaluate the mediating role of responsible tourism practice (RTP), the principle of the four-step approach by Baron and Kenny (1986) was employed. This study proposed that RTP mediate the relationship between perceptions of tourism development and quality of life.

Table 3. Results for mediation test

Mediation test	Standardized Estimates, p-value, Critical ratio	Results
Step 1 IV-M Perceptions of tourism development → Responsible tourism practice	.608** (CR=4.465)	Significant
Step 2 IV-DV Perceptions of tourism development → Quality of life	.510** (CR=3.459)	Significant
Step 3 M-DV Responsible tourism practice → Quality of life	.732** (CR=6.258)	Significant
Step 4 IV-M-DV Perceptions of tourism development + Responsible tourism practice → Quality of life	BIV=.104** (CR=3.699) BM=.669** (CR=4.506)	Significant
Responsible tourism practice mediates the relationship between perceptions of tourism development and quality of life.		Full mediation

Note: **Significant at p<0.05; Significant at 95%

On the first step, the path from perceptions of tourism development to RTP is positive and significant with a standardized coefficient of 0.608 and a critical ratio of 4.465. The result of the second step explicitly shows that the path from perceptions of tourism development in the quality of life is significant, with a standardized coefficient of 0.510 and the critical ratio of 3.459. The path from RTP and quality of life is also significant (β : 0.732, CR: 6.258) resulting from the third step methodology. The final step results show that the path estimates for the bivariate

relationship between perceptions of tourism development, responsible tourism practice and quality of life. The relationship were found significant when responsible tourism practice is included as an additional predictor $BIV=.104^{**}$ ($CR=3.699$); $BM=.669^{**}$ ($CR=4.506$) (Baron & Kenny, 1986). The tests results reveal that RTP posits a direct effect on the relationship between perceptions of tourism development and quality of life.

8. Conclusion

To conclude, the residents' perceptions of tourism development include the economy, environment and social as the key contributing factors that directly influence their quality of life. The majority of the tourism studies reported that tourism development delivered positive interventions in local communities. These included economic benefits such as employment, use of local services and products, and also providing benefits to local education, health and conservation initiatives. Furthermore, the residents believe that responsible tourism practice (RTP) is the appropriate solution in combating the adverse effects of tourism development. This can be seen through the success of the European and African nations in conducting restoration programs by practicing responsible development. Therefore, if Malaysia is serious about implementing RTP policy in the tourism industry, then there is clearly a great deal of work to be done by the tourism stakeholders. The policy should include responsible destination planning and responsible environmental practice.

In answering the research question, the results from the path testing show that RTP posits a direct effect on the relationship between perceptions of tourism development and quality of life. Thus, essentially this study objective was achieved. This finding is similar to several past studies conclusion on the significant relationship between tourism development impact, quality of life and RTP (Darson et al., 2013; Frey & George, 2010; Hafiz et al., 2014; Scheyvens, 1999; Sirgy & Lee, 1996). This proposition suggested that the strength of the relationship between tourism development and quality of life would be stronger in the presence of RTP. Empirically, this study shows similarities with other previous studies and thus significantly contributes new results and strengthens the existing body of knowledge both in conceptual and empirical research. As a conclusion, this study highlighted that RTP influences residents' quality of life. Therefore, the residents, officials, and other tourism stakeholders should make a proactive effort to promote RTP in their current and future national tourism development blueprint.

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