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Resident Perception of the Effect of Tourism: A Case Study of the Crystal Basin Recreation Area, California

This study examines the social impacts of tourism in the Crystal Basin Recreation Area of El Dorado County, California. Social impact was determined by factors that influenced the local resident lifestyle. Several lifestyle items (perception based) were identified through literature review. The results indicate that resident perceptions were influenced by age and their personal pursuit of activities in the study area.

Keywords: resident perceptions, social impacts, tourism, lifestyle

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Introduction

Milman and Pizam (1988) stated that the local resident perception of tourism development impacts was influenced directly by the changes in their lifestyle. According to Edginton et al. (2002), lifestyle is referred to “the integration and balance of the physical, mental, emotional, intellectual, social, and spiritual aspects of a person.” McCool and Martin (1994) indicated that resident characteristics such as socio-economic characteristics, resident length of stay, distance from residence to the destination and attitude toward tourism development were factors that affected their perceptions. This study examines how a sample of residents of El Dorado County perceived the effect of tourism upon their lifestyle. In addition, it provides an understanding of tourism values that need to be taken into account to provide better recreation services in the study area. A series of reservoirs are located in Crystal Basin, El Dorado County, California. The reservoirs not only generate electricity, but also provide a variety of land and water-based recreation opportunities for all visitors to enjoy.

Methodology

Approximately, 153 residents within the study area (Placerville and Pollock Pines) were randomly intercepted and requested to fill a survey during the spring of 2003. The survey contained a standardized ten-item tourism impacts perception scale to measure the responses on a five-point Likert-type scale. These were as follows: recreation activities provided in the Crystal Basin recreation area (CB) conflict with resident lifestyle (conflict); happy to live in the CB (happy); availability of recreational opportunities in the CB (availability); CB increases quality of life (quality); CB helps maintain good health (health); CB reduces crime rate (crime); CB increases quality of police protection (protection); CB increases monetary benefits

(money); CB increases self-esteem (self-esteem), and CB enhances sense of hospitality (hospitality). Further, information on socioeconomic characteristics (gender, age, income, and length of residence) and recreation behavior (distance, pursuit, and time) of the residents was obtained. The effects of the resident socio demographics and recreation behavior upon resident perceptions of tourism were analyzed using OLS bivariate regression models.

Findings

The average age of the respondents was found to be 43 years old. Fifty-eight percent of the respondents were females and seventy-five percent of the respondents had lived in the study area for over five years. Approximately, thirty-two percent had an annual income of less than \$40,000, forty-two percent were between \$40,000 and \$80,000 and twenty-six percent had an annual household income of more than \$80,000. Seventy-seven percent of the respondents had pursued recreation activities in the study area. The average distance traveled to the attraction was found to be 31 miles and the average time (per year) was 11 times.

Descriptions were calculated on all the lifestyle related items. As Table 1 shows, average rating was found to be 4.5 with regard to the “happy” variable. The “quality” variable had an average rating of 4.3. With regard to the “availability”, and the “health” variables, the average rating was 4.2. The average rating of the “conflicts” variable was 3.9. The average rating of the “hospitality” variable was 3.4. The average rating of the “money” variable and the “self-esteem” variable was 2.9. “Crime,” and “protection” received the lowest average rating (2.8).

Table 1 Resident Perception towards Lifestyle on a Liker Scale (1 to 5)

Variable	Average	Median	Standard Deviation
Happy to live in CB area	4.5	5	0.7
Availability of recreational opportunities at CB	4.2	4	0.9
CB increases quality of life	4.3	4	0.8
CB recreation area helps maintain good health	4.2	4	0.9
Conflict with resident lifestyle	3.9	4	1.2
CB enhances sense of hospitality	3.4	4	1.0
CB increases monetary benefits	2.9	3	1.0
CB increases self esteem	2.9	3	1.0
CB reduces crime in the study area	2.8	3	0.8
CB increases quality of police protection	2.8	3	0.8

Socioeconomic characteristics of the resident were regressed on the lifestyle items. “Age” had a significantly negative effect ($p \leq .05$) upon “the development of self-esteem” (see Table 2). When variables related to recreation behavior were regressed, only the “pursuit” variable was found to be important. As Table 3 reveals, those who pursued recreation activities in the study area reported higher scores for the following perceptions: “happiness to live in the Crystal Basin area,” “availability of recreational opportunities in the Crystal Basin area,” “increased quality of police protection,” “opportunities to improve health as a result of Crystal Basin recreation,” and “the average resident attitude toward lifestyle.”

Table 2 Bivariate Regression with Age as Explanatory Variable

Response Variable	Intercept	Parameter	T statistic	F value	R squared
Self-esteem	3.404	-.012*	-1.998	3.991	.027

* Significant at $p \leq 0.05$ level.

Table 3 Bivariate Regression with Pursuit as Explanatory Variable

Response Variable	Intercept	Parameter	T statistic	F value	R squared
Happy	5.146	-.499*	-4.210	17.725	.107
Availability	5.048	-.686*	-4.406	19.411	.116
Quality	4.783	-.421*	-2.923	8.545	.055
Health	4.721	-.451*	-2.796	7.819	.051
Avresident	3.881	-.234*	-.2467	6.086	.039

* Significant at $p \leq 0.05$ level.

Conclusions

Results of this study reveal that residents are happy to stay near the Crystal Basin recreation area. The residents felt that there was an increase in quality of outdoor recreation opportunities due to tourism. Further, they thought that better recreation opportunities were available and good health could be maintained through recreation activities. However, they also felt that there was no reduction in crime rates and that police protection was not improved. The study indicated that younger residents had a more positive perception toward the development of self-esteem. Those who pursued recreation activities in the area were more positive about the tourism impacts. However, this study is subject to several limitations. Changes in family structure were not incorporated in the lifestyle scale. Due to budgetary and time frame issues, a pretest was not conducted.

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