

The Impact of Festival Nowruz Eventson Residents' Perceptions: Evidence from Shiraz, Iran

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Abstract

Nowruz or the Persian New Year is one of the world's oldest cultural festivals. It has been celebrated in Iran and other parts of the Middle East, the Caucasus and central Asia for at least 5,000 years with Iranians marking the event universal, which is reflected in economic, ecological and sociocultural effects on destinations. The objective of this study was to investigate residents' perceptions of festival Nowruz functions at a destination. Particularly, the investigation analysed residents' perceptions of the social, economic and the environmental effects of festival Nowruz events at the destination. Survey questionnaires were carried out as methods of obtaining data. The surveysolicited residents' perceptions of the social, economic, and environmental impacts of special event tourism. The study was exploratory and followed a descriptive design.Each professionals and educators will advantage through the outcomes of this research as it offers perception towards a destination's residents' ideas of social and cultural events tourism.

Keywords: *Tourism, Resident's Community, Festival Event, Nowruz, Shiraz, Iran*

1. Introduction

Destination residents are key stakeholders in the tourism system, exposed to the positive and negative impacts of the presence of tourists and the industry at work (Murphy & Price, 2005). They also contribute to the quality of the visitor experience, and attitudes adopted and hospitality offered may enhance or tourist satisfaction (Zabkar, Brencic & Dmitrovic, 2010). The pursuit of understanding about what citizens think of the tourists, they encounter and ensuing relations, alongside opinions about increased arrivals, is thus an important task for both practitioners and academics. Such knowledge assumes an additional significance in situations where there is potential for conflict between locals and visitors due to cultural differences that encompass religion (Farahani & Henderson, 2014). The purpose of this research was to explore residents' perceptions of festival Nowruz events at a destination. Specifically, the research examined resident's perceptions of the social, economic and environmental impacts on the destination.

1.1 Attitudes toward Tourists

Attitudes, interests, and opinions of local people toward tourists are deemed important because of their contribution to a hospitable environment. Tourists will not return to destinations where they do not feel welcome and any unsatisfactory experiences communicated by word-of-mouth could create a negative image of the destination (Munasinghe, 2001). Any destination marketing efforts will be less successful without the goodwill of the resident population, which is essential for sustainable tourism development (Dwyer & Kim, 2003). Tosun (2006) stated that community members play a role in strategic tourism planning, helping to ensure the effective operation of existing and future programs and projects (Haley, Snaith, & Miller, 2005). Therefore, local communities can be conceived of as tourism assets that facilitate development through the proffering of support, or at least absence of direct opposition, and the extension of friendliness and courtesy to visitors (Dwyer & Kim, 2003). Locals must also be prepared to tolerate the inconvenience caused by tourism such as the sharing of space and facilities, traffic congestion, peak season overcrowding, and queuing for goods and services. Taxation raised locally may be spent on public services used or rendered necessary by tourists in a way which can generate controversy unless taxpayers are convinced that the investment is worthwhile (Farahani, & Henderson, 2014).

1.2 Type of Event Tourism

An event can be described as a public assembly for the purpose of celebration, entertainment, education, marketing or reunion (Goldblatt, 2010). According to Getz (2008) Event Management and Event Tourism stated that events are temporary occurrences, either planned or unplanned, and they usually have a finite length which is normally fixed or publicized for planned events. And they can be classified or categorized in different ways on the basis of their size, form and content. Examples of the various types are: special events, hallmark events, mega events, festivals, fairs and exhibition, expositions and shows, meetings and other business and educational events, sports events, art events. Fig. 1 provides a typology of the main categories of planned events based primarily on their form that is, obvious differences in their purpose and program.

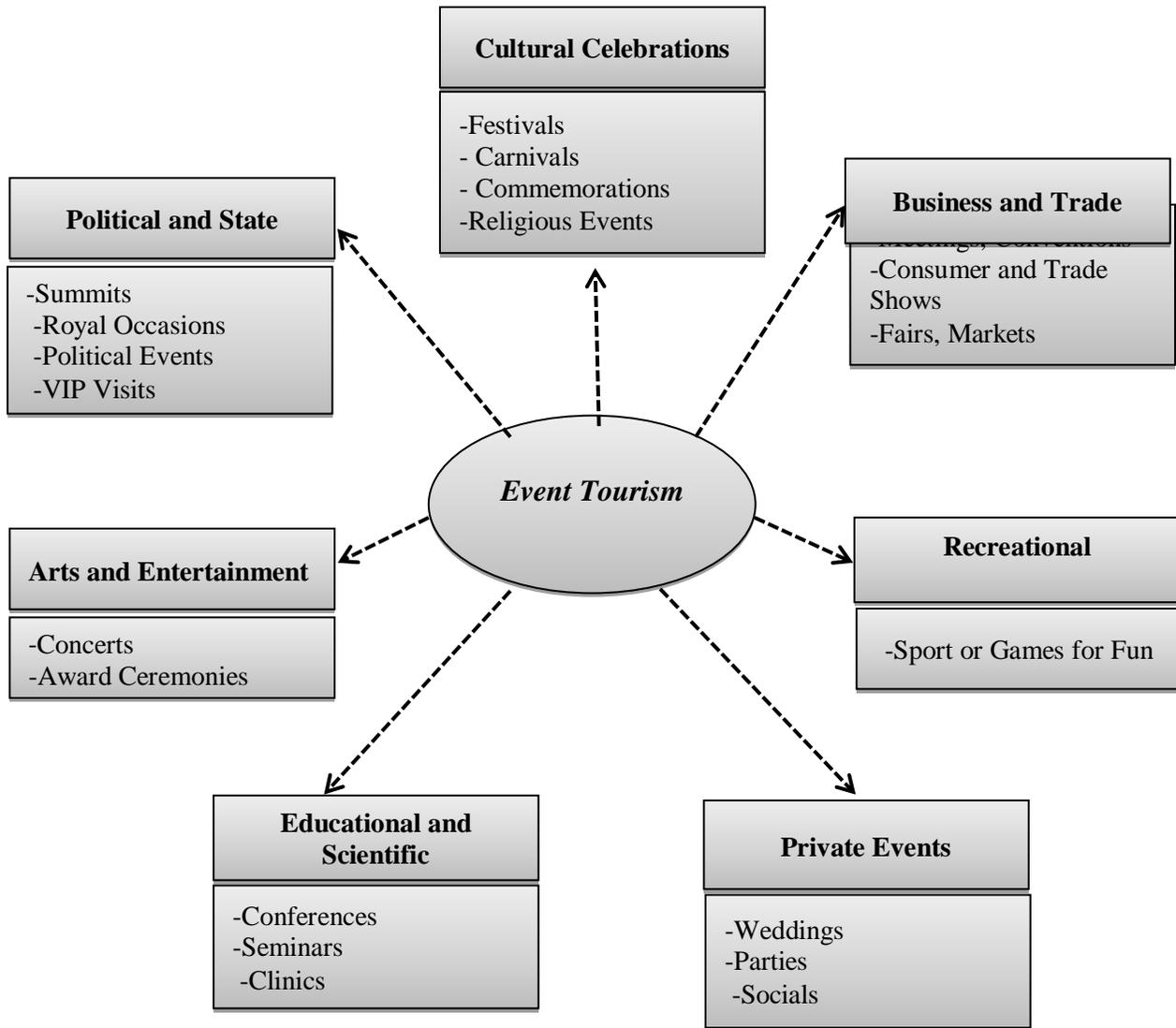


Fig 1: Typology of planned events; Source: Getz(2005)

1.3 Iran as Area of Study

Iran is located at an intersection point between Asian, Middle Eastern and European culture. Iran has an abundant wealth of natural and cultural assets, most of which are largely unexploited from a tourism perspective. According to UNESCO, Iran is ranked as one of the top 10 countries in the world in terms of potential tourism attractions (Wikipedia, 2010). There are tens of thousands of historical monuments in Iran, with more than 12,000 of them registered officially (Mashai, 2005). Shiraz is situated in the southwestern region of Iran, about 200 km from the Persian Gulf, at an elevation of 1800 meters above sea level. Shiraz has applied to be selected as a city of literature by UNESCO, and it has been selected as a city museum of the Asia-Pacific region by the International Council of Museums (Cultural Heritage News Agency, 2007). Persepolis and Pasargadae, the oldest historical attractions in the Shiraz region (and more than 2500 years old), are both listed as World Heritage Sites (UNESCO, 2010).



Map of Iran and the location of Shiraz

1.4 The Meaning of Nowruz

Nowruz, literally translated from the Farsi (Persian) language as New Day, marks the Persian New Year. According to the Persian calendar which is based on the earth revolving around the sun, Nowruz represents the first day of spring and nature's rebirth after winter. It coincides with the date of the astronomical vernal equinox, which usually falls on 20 or 21 March. Exact origins are uncertain and mythological, but it has close links with the Zoroastrianism religion which was founded by the Prophet Zoroaster (or Zarathustra) in ancient Iran. Zoroaster rejected the many gods of the era and taught that there was only one God to be worshipped (BBC, 2009). The New Year acquired prominence during the time of the Achaemenes 250 (648-330 BC) when rulers of the different kingdoms making up the Persian Empire brought gifts to the Emperor (Boyce, 2009). Despite early religious associations, Nowruz is now more of a cultural festival and its history makes it one of the oldest in the world, commemorated for at least 5000 years and possibly longer. Rituals have evolved and been modified over time with differences emerging depending on geographical location. The event under variants of the name (NovRuz, NowRouz, NooRuz, NavRuz, NauRoz, and NevRuz) is celebrated in parts of the Middle East, Central and South Asia and the Caucasus regions which were once part of the Persian Empire or exposed to its influence. In addition to Iran, which is the focus of this study, specific countries include Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, India, Kyrgyz Republic, Pakistan, Turkey and Uzbekistan. People of Persian and Iranian descent from around the world, including the West, are also celebrants as being Kurds in Georgia, Iraq, Syria and Turkey. A group of these nations successfully nominated Nowruz for inscription in the UNESCO List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (UNESCO, 2009a) and the United Nations acknowledged 21 March as the International Day of Nowruz in 2010, indicative of its importance. The UNESCO listing hails the festival's 'affirmation of life in harmony with nature, the awareness of the inseparable link between constructive labour and natural cycles of renewal and the solicitous and respectful attitude towards natural sources of life' (UNESCO, 2011). Such recognition is fitting given Nowruz's importance, especially in Iran. Nowruz thus transcends nationality and promotes the 'values of peace and solidarity between generations and within families as well as reconciliation and neighbourliness, thus contributing to cultural diversity and friendship among peoples and various communities' (UNESCO, 2009a).

2. Nowruz and Tourism

Nowruz is a public holiday in the 13 countries listed in Table 1. While the focus for most holiday makers is the home and local community where the happenings described above take place, the long vacation in

Iran is also welcomed as an opportunity for relaxation and leisure travel. This may adversely affect engagement in traditional activities, but the author has observed an upsurge in participation in recent years. 252 With the exception of Turkey, none of the above-mentioned countries is an established international tourist centre and most of them are relatively unknown while several might be deemed unsafe due to political instability.

Table 1:Countries Where Nowruz is a Public Holiday

| No. | Location | Public Holiday |
|-----|-----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 | Afghanistan | 20-23 March |
| 2 | Albania | 20-23 March |
| 3 | Azerbaijan | 20-26 March |
| 4 | Georgia | 21 March |
| 5 | Iran | 20-2 April (13 days in total for schools and universities) |
| 6 | Iraq (only Kurdistan) | 21 March |
| 7 | Kazakhstan | 21 March |
| 8 | Kosovo | 21 March |
| 9 | Kyrgyzstan | 21 March |
| 10 | Tajikistan | 20-23March |
| 11 | Turkmenistan | 20-23March |
| 12 | Turkey | 21 March |
| 13 | Uzbekistan | 21 March |

2.1 Economic Impacts

Evaluations of the influences created by events and its measurement Researchers have long investigated unique events as tourism points of interest (Lee & Taylor, 2012). According to Getz (2008), event impacts have three dimensions: economic; social, cultural and political; and environmental. According to McGehee, and Andereck (2004), scientific studies on the economic effect have not been broadly approved by researchers, politicians, and the public due to the fact the numbers have been identified unscientifically and frequently overestimate outcomes. Nonetheless, researches of economic impact provide a good tool to estimate the influence of specific events on the economy. Gelan (2009) remarks that studies of economic impact are valuable in marketing decisions and that developers and local politicians might justify public resources by citing the economic advantages events may have for the entire community. Harrill and Potts (2003), "argue that studies of economic impact concentrate on how a project can affect the surrounding community by creating career, income, and assisting place spatial organization. But Madden (2001) mentioned that no single methodology can be utilized to investigate all elements of economic impact. Table 2 presents various studies on the economic impact of events, distinguishing between specific events methodology and viewpoint of the studies. According to the information in Table 2 a few findings can be attracted:

Table 2: Overview of types of events, perspectives and methodologies

| Year | Author | Perspectives | Methodology |
|------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1997 | MacPherson | Visitors and/or tourists | Direct and indirect impact (multipliers) |
| 1999 | Flognfeldt | Visitors and/or tourists | Direct, indirect and induced effects Input-output tables. Multipliers |
| 2001 | Chhabra | Visitors and/or tourists | Direct, indirect and induced effects Multipliers |
| 2003 | King | Visitors and/or tourists, between others | Direct impact and multipliers |
| 2004 | Haug et al. | Visitors and/or tourists | Expenditures determination and Multiplier |
| 2004 | Herrero | Visitors and/or tourists | Direct, indirect, and induced effects Input-output tables. Multipliers |
| 2005 | Lee and Taylor | Visitors and/or tourists | It only takes into consideration Expenditures done by audience. Input-output model |
| 2005 | Wood | Local community residents Visitors and/or tourists, between others Organizers | Qualitative economic impact |
| 2006 | Perles | Visitors and/or tourists Organizers (local operators), between others | Qualitative and quantitative |
| 2006 | Wilson | Visitors | Some direct impacts |
| 2007 | Cela et al. | Visitors | Direct, indirect and induced effects. Multipliers |
| 2007 | Ramírez et al. | Visitors and/or tourists, between others | Cost-benefits analysis and input/output Tables |
| 2009 | Centro de Estudios Económicos Tomillo | Economic data estimation | Dynamic and static impact |
| 2011 | Wood | Local community residents | Qualitative and quantitative |

2.2 Cultural Impacts

Occasion and event tourism even though could impact socio-culturally on a host community by way of building up the local values or cultures, and it also has the potentiality of introducing social and cultural expenses to the host community. In spite of the fact that a host-guest conversation is enhanced through joint participation in celebrations and events, it can also be strained by events and tourism in general (King, 2003) every event managed in a community usually has direct social and cultural impacts on the participants, and in some instances, the wider host communities too. These impacts can be simple experiences in form of shared enjoyment such as sports events or concerts. Events have the capability to increase community pride, introduce new and challenging ideas and also assist to revitalize the traditions of the host community (Lee & Taylor, 2005). Main events can sometimes create unintended consequences which can hijack the agenda and determine the way the public perceives the event if not

managed properly. Such consequences can be in form of substance abuse, bad behaviour by crowds and the increase in criminal activities (Omorieg,2012). Events can also effect on the social life and constructions of communities in various ways. A case in point of which can be car traffic which may impede the access to resident's homes, loss of amenities, cost inflation of goods and services, which can increase housing markets therefore affecting on the low income groups (Allen et al., 2010).

2.3Environment Impacts

The environmental impact of event tourism on a host community or destination actually starts right from the planning stage to the assessment stage of any event (Van & Wagen, 2010). In order for any destination or host community to be able to provide services to visitors, they first have to develop the necessary infrastructures to support these services. This is because infrastructure is the underlying factor or basic framework (Omorieg, 2012). For major events like the FIFA world cup, infrastructures like stadia, roads, welcome centre, rental facilities and hotels has to be put in place and in developing these infrastructures, they will impact on the environment negatively on the initial stage but positively in the long run. But in order to minimize these impacts, there should be good designs and planning, for instance, the use of underground lines for utilities can retain the more natural look of vistas. After these infrastructures have been put in place, another detrimental impact that can occur to the environment is the substantial increase in the number of people using them. They could be simple impacts, like increase in traffic, crowded parks but might be severe enough to cause harm to a fragile environment(Cook et al., 2010).

3. Methodology

This research has been exploratory and applied descriptive statistics to measure residents' behaviour towards tourism improvement. Earlier research have used descriptive statistics to assess resident attitudes towards tourism advancement (Iraqi, 2007; GU and Ryan, 2008; Pappas, 2008). The methodology implemented the multiphase approach offered by Mason and Cheyne (2000). This method comprised a review of literature, set of questions development, and pre-test surveys. Pursuing an extensive review of the tourism impact literature (Ap& Crompton, 1993; Perdue et al., 2001; Sheldon &Var, 2005) a set of questions was developed to acquire data about residents' perceptions of special events tourism's social impact, economic impact, and environmental impact. The survey also gathered demographic information. A 5-point Likert scale was used to measure residents' perceptions of festival Nowruz event effects.

3.1Empirical Result

Profile of Respondents

Table 3 exhibits information about the demographic features of the respondents. Females outnumbered male respondents in the present research by 37 percent 63 to percent. The majority of respondents (percent) were more than the age of 34, with the greatest age group being the 36-45 age groups (16 percent). In phrases of employment status, 54 percent of the respondents pointed out that they were presently appointed, although only 24 percent were pensioners. Forty-six percent of respondents produced direct or indirect advantages from tourism.

Table 3: profile of respondents

| Demographic variables | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Age | | |
| Less than 25 | 18 | 8.7 |
| 26-35 | 42 | 21 |
| 36-45 | 34 | 16.5 |
| 46-55 | 41 | 20 |
| 56-65 | 39 | 19 |
| More than 65 | 32 | 15.6 |
| Total | 205 | 100 |
| Gender | | |
| Male | 129 | 63 |
| female | 76 | 37 |
| Total | 205 | 100 |
| Employment status | | |
| Employed | 110 | 53.6 |
| Retired | 50 | 24.3 |
| Unemployed | 34 | 16.5 |
| Homemaker | 11 | 5.3 |
| Total | 205 | 100 |
| Derive direct economic benefit from tourism | | |
| Yes | 95 | 46.3 |
| No | 110 | 53.6 |
| Total | 205 | 100 |

3.2 Significance of Study on Economic Impacts

The outcomes as mentioned in Table 4 demonstrate that there is powerful contract about the economic positive aspects of tourism to the economy of the city. In this regards, 73 percent of residents recognized the fact that tourism attracts more investment and spending in the city's economy and 70 percent of them agreed with economic contributions of tourism that far outweigh the negative social impacts of Tourism. Sixty-six percent of residents furthermore identified the established jobs as the majority of essential benefits of tourism for residents and employment 58 percent of them were agreed that Tourism has generated much employment. In terms of economic trade-offs, 54 percent of participants suggested without tourism income, the city would not be in a position to meet its financial responsibilities. Curiously, 34 percent mentioned that tourism has lead in a boost in the price of consumer goods. Therefore, Only 29 percent of residents, however, feel that their taxes are well invested on tourism information. This is not unexpected as there are not many visible information kiosks in the city. Thus, residents do not have any visible evidence of the paying of their taxes on tourism. There also shows up to be some doubt of the government towards tourism planning as a low percentage.

Table 4: economy impact of festival Nowruz events

| Rank | Questions On Survey Instrument | Mean b | Percentage |
|------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|------------|
| 1 | I am satisfied with the way my taxes are spent by the city on tourist information, etc. | 3.35 | 29.5 |
| 2 | Because of tourism, the price of many goods has increased | 2.79 | 33.6 |
| 3 | Without tourism revenue, the city would not be able to meet its financial obligations | 2.54 | 53.8 |
| 4 | Tourism development has generated much employment in this city | 2.44 | 57.8 |
| 5 | One of the most important benefits of tourism to city is that it has created jobs for Beach residents | 2.18 | 65.8 |
| 6 | Tourism attracts more investment and spending in the city's economy than any other industry | 2.13 | 73.2 |
| 7 | The economic contributions of tourism far outweigh the negative social impacts of Tourism | 2.03 | 70.1 |

Notes: a Questions are ranked by mean values; b scale ranges from 1 ¼ strongly agree to 5 ¼ strongly Disagree; c percentage agreeing are those answering 1, 2 on the 5-point scale

3.3 Social Impact

General, citizens showed up to be in strong commitment that tourism provides optimistic social advantages that they can easily enjoy (Table 5). Particularly, these consist of items such as motivates a variety of cultural activities by the local Society (66%), and variety of enjoyment accessible to residents (62%). Offered this positive perspective, it is thus no wonder that a vast majority (65%) pointed out that they might be in prefer of improved tourism improvement. The overall positive attitude towards the social influences is not unexpected and could be described by social exchange theory which assumes that possible helpful results will generate positive attitudes towards tourism (Jurowski&Gursoy, 2004). Provided the reality that the community is mainly dependent on tourism, the theory is consequently supported. Furthermore, (28%) mentioned that an increase in tourism could lead to social conflict in between tourists and residents. Even more (21%) connected tourism with overall crime in the city, while, only 25 percent considered that tourists do not value the local way of life. General, the data do not expose any main issues towards the perceived negative social effects of tourism in this city.

Table 5: Social impacts of festival Nowruz events

| Rank | Questions On Survey Instrument | Mean b | Percentage c |
|------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|--------------|
| 1 | Tourists do not respect our lifestyle here in the city | 3.49 | 24.7 |
| 2 | Because of tourism, the crime rate in beach has increased | 3.34 | 21.5 |
| 3 | Tourist increases may lead to social conflicts between tourists and residents | 3.28 | 27.8 |
| 4 | I would be in favor of increased tourism development in the city | 2.56 | 64.8 |
| 5 | Tourism is one major reason for the variety of entertainments available to residents in the city | 2.36 | 62 |
| 6 | Tourism encourages a variety of cultural activities by the local Population (e.g. arts, music, etc.) | 2.35 | 65.8 |

Notes: a Questions are ranked by mean values; b scale ranges from 1 ¼ strongly agree to 5 ¼ strongly Disagree; c percentage agreeing are those answering 1, 2 on the 5-point scale

3.4 Environmental Impacts

Despite the fact that residents are in the contract about the positive economic contribution of tourism to the city, it seems as nevertheless residents have combined emotions about the environmental advantages of tourism. Slightly more than half of all respondents (58 percent, Table 6) decided that tourism offers there are more services and leisure actions accessible for local residents Due to the fact of tourism activities. Furthermore, only 20 percent concluded that utilizing taxes to enhance general public services is a waste of tax dollars. This obtaining reveals that residents are satisfied with how their tax dollars are invested in tourism-related facilities and 28 percent credited the upkeep of facilities and local public facilities for tourism. The results also pointed out that as a community, city residents are hesitant to blame tourists for overcrowding of beaches, parks, and other outside spaces utilized by local residents (33 percent agreed). They also suggested that government policy could decrease effects on the environmentally friendly (58 percent).

Table 6: Residents' perceptions of the environmental impacts of festival Nowruz events

| Rank | Questions On Survey Instrument | Mean b | Percentage |
|------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------|------------|
| 1 | Improving public tourist facilities is a waste of our taxes | 3.58 | 20.1 |
| 2 | Because of tourism, our local infrastructure such as our roads and other public facilities are kept at a high standard | 3.36 | 27.7 |
| 3 | overcrowded city , parks and other outdoor places for the local population | 3.20 | 33.1 |
| 4 | Policy by the government can control the impact on the ecological Environment | 2.57 | 57.9 |
| 5 | There are more facilities and recreational activities available for local residents Because of tourism. | 2.46 | 59.2 |

Notes: a Questions are ranked by mean values; b scale ranges from 1 ¼ strongly agree to 5 strongly Disagree; c percentage agreeing are those answering 1, 2 on the 5-point scale

4. Conclusions

Nowruz Events appear to be an efficient tool in placing locations in the market and in providing tourism, culture and heritage set by governmental tourism. Nowruz has much to deliver to visitors to Iran and the other countries wherever it is celebrated, by offering ideas into history and contemporary culture. It is a special event and a representation of cultural heritage that brings together intangible and tangible aspects, complicated stereotypical views of the area and its people. As an appearance of identification, belief and culture, Nowruz has the prospective to be a cultural heritage appeal or leisure activity which could boost cross-cultural recognition and understanding. It has the benefit of becoming a cultural heritage event without requiring any special financing, preparing or planning. This study has lost some light on the perceptions and behaviour of residents towards Nowruz events tourism. The outcomes of the research expose that local residents of the city typically have positive behaviour towards tourism events. In spite of the perception of some negative impacts of tourism, residents perceived the overall impacts as useful. Residents in the research area connected tourism with investment in the city, employment, variety of activities. Residents also mentioned that they feel Nowruz event can bring economic benefits, promote cultural swap, and raise employment opportunities.

Those accountable for tourism, organizing should be discover methods to offset and reduce perceived negative impacts. Provided the attractiveness of tourism as a system for producing economic growth and

advancement, there can be little doubt that the attitudes of sponsor residential areas should be monitored on a regular basis and integrated into tourism policies. Points of views about tourists kept by residents are thus not uniform and are determined by multiple aspects and forces. The condition of relationships between tourists and residents should be taken into account by those with duties in the management of tourism, particularly in countries that rely greatly on the tourist industry. Efforts must be made to develop positive emotions and relations, ameliorating the animosities which can tarnish place images and reputations. Outright hostility can deter travellers and investors and a minimum level of approval is needed if the tourists are to come back.

5.Limitations and Future Research

This research has offered a 1st phase in comprehending how residents of a host community perceived the impacts of Nowruz event. Nevertheless the sample was adequate for statistical analysis; a larger sample size might produce more generalizable outcomes. Subsequently, caution should be applied in creating generalizations based on this research. Furthermore, this study was carried out throughout Nowruz event, which was two weeks subsequent one of the main event, Nowruz. Consequently, this could have biased responses, since this event would be the most current of respondents' thoughts. Upcoming research could concentrate on longitudinal studies during and after Nowruz events, while the effects of each event are refreshing in the minds of participants.

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