THE IMPACTS OF TOURISM AND LOCAL RESIDENTS’ SUPPORT ON TOURISM DEVELOPMENT: A CASE STUDY OF THE RURAL COMMUNITY OF JEONGSEON, GANGWON PROVINCE, SOUTH KOREA

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Abstract: This research seeks to examine the impact of tourism and local residents’ support for tourism development in a rural tourism destination in the Gangwon province, South Korea named Jeongseon. It looks at the economic, socio-cultural and environmental impact tourism and the benefits and costs to the local residents. This study used the social exchange theory as a theoretical framework. A total of 376 valid responses were collected To achieve the research's goals, ten research hypotheses were proposed. The findings show that the economic impacts of tourism were most favorably perceived by the local people who also saw benefits in socio-cultural terms. This perception translated into local residents’ support for tourism development even though they saw it as having a negative impact on the environment.

Key words: tourism development, perception, impacts, support, Jeongseon.

1. Introduction

The travel and tourism industry today is one of the world’s largest and most diverse business sectors. It is also an important and thriving industry in South Korea. According to the Korean National Tourism Organization (KTO), in 2010, 8.78 million foreign tourists visited Korea. This figure shows a 12.5% rise as compared with 2009; a remarkable growth rate given that on aggregate, in 2010, the world suffered a 4% fall in tourism. The central as well as local governments are now paying attention to tourism in terms of national and regional development. One area they are focusing is the development of rural tourism destinations.

The aim of rural tourism is to develop the local economy and improve the standard of living of the local communities. Tourism development, however, can bring both benefits and costs to the local community in terms of economic, social, or environmental effects. In fact, one of the major reasons for the increasing interest among scholars in rural tourism has been the realization that while tourism can lead to positive outcomes at the local level, it also has the potential to generate negative ones (Lankford & Howard, 1994). Tourist destinations have had a substantial impact on both local people and tourists. Tourism itself can have both a positive and negative impact on local residents. It should therefore be carefully monitored in order to minimize its negative impact (Sheldon & Abenoja, 2001). Keeping a balanced perception of the costs and benefits of tourism for local residents is considered to be a major factor in visitor satisfaction. Fisher (2005) argued that community perception is an effective element in community development. So, understanding how local residents’ perceive the impacts of tourism development is essential for the future planning and managing of the host community tourism development (Yoon et al., 2001). If residents have a positive attitude toward the impact of tourism, they are more likely to support the tourism development of the tourism destination (Lee et al., 2010). Local residents’ support is especially critical to ensure the long-term success of tourism development in regional destinations (Ko & Stewart, 2002). A destination will retain its popularity in the long term only if the local residents are friendly, hospitable and welcome visitors (Hall et al., 1997). Keeping track of the impacts of tourism on a community and of