SUSTAINABLE RURAL TOURISM IN IRAQI KURDISTAN REGION: VIEW FROM SHAQLAWA SMALL TOWN

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Abstract
Tourism is usually viewed as being multidimensional, possessing physical, social, cultural, economic and political characteristics. “Definitions of tourism share a range of common elements. tourism is the temporary movement of people to destinations out of their normal home and workplace, the activities undertaken during the stay, and the facilities created to cater for their needs This paper discusses issues of sustainability and rural tourism within the context of Kurdistan Region. Using a qualitative research approach, it investigates the experiences of one particular small town which is already popular with visitors and has featured in official tourism development plans. The focus is on the reactions of residents and their perceptions of tourism impacts and formal policies. Findings indicate that small towns are concerned about the use of local natural and cultural resources for tourism purpose, recognizing negative consequences which seem to them to outweigh positive effects. Participation has been very limited in government rural Tourism initiatives which are felt to yield few benefits for small town inhabitants. Current policies thus appear ineffective and reforms are necessary if the potential for sustainable rural tourism, embracing community engagement, is to be realized. Shaqlawa is administratively part of the Erbil Province and geographically located some 30 kilometers northeast of the city of Erbil, it is temperature in summer reaches 30-35°C and -10°C below in winter. It is rich in trees and gardens a fact that has contributed to the huge number of people visiting Shaqlawa from Erbil and it surrounding on the weekends and holidays.

Keywords: Rural Tourism, Development, Kurdistan Region, Shaqlawa small town.
Introduction and objective

Sustainable tourism in a rural setting is the subject of a growing literature, reflecting interest amongst academics and industry practitioners from both public and private sectors. There is some evidence of this trend in Kurdistan Region where government is attaching increased importance to rural tourism and has launched several initiatives, but little research has been conducted there in general and within a local community context. A research into rural tourism can help the owners of the households involved in rural tourism to improve their offer, by carefully planning and choosing the right marketing and advertising campaigns, as well as to make the right decisions about investment (SHARPLEY, 1997). Rural tourism is very difficult to define. According to LANE (1994), rural tourism should be based in those areas which are rural in all aspects. LANE (1994) suggests that rural tourism should include small companies owned by local families, thereby connecting the tourist services to the local agricultural production. The term rural tourism can also be used as a geographical term as well as a term describing cultural activities of rural communities. The term is related to some other terms, e.g. eco-tourism, green tourism, agro tourism, etc. Along with this great growth, the tourism industry will also have to take on more responsibility for its wide impacts, on the economy, on the environment, on societies and on cultural sites. Sustainable tourism is developed and managed together with the principles of sustainable development. Development and rural planning problem is one of the most complex contemporary themes, because in essence involves balancing the requirement of conservation of rural economic, environmental, social and cultural of the country on the one hand and modernization tend rural life on the other (SUPUKA et al, 2008). In both rural development and planning is at the confluence of the expansion of urban areas, the aggressive development of rural industry and the requirement due to possible areas to maintain its current size. Balanced development of the countryside can be seen as a long-term improvement of living conditions of the country but according to the imperatives of economic, environmental, social and cultural self-respect due to population. (HANCIUC, 2002).

Main objectives of identifying the positive and negative impacts of tourism on a small town and its resources. Attention is also given to the role of rural tourism as an economic development tool and the effectiveness and appropriateness of current government policies.

Rural tourism

Rural tourism can be defined as the country experience’ which encompasses a wide range of attractions and activities that take place in agricultural or non-urban areas. Its essential characteristics include wide-open spaces, low levels of tourism development, and opportunities for visitors to directly experience agricultural and/or natural environments. Over the last 20 years the concept of sustainable tourism has been developed to counter the threats which unmanaged tourism can bring. Sustainable tourism sees tourism within destination areas as
a triangular relationship between host areas and their habitats and peoples, holidaymakers, and the tourism industry. In the past, the tourism industry dominated the triangle. Sustainable tourism aims to reconcile the tensions between the three partners in the triangle, and keep the equilibrium in the long term (LANE, 1994). One of the most important features of rural tourism economy is the motivation that the private sector has for investment in tourism because it is small, varied and simple. It is a rather important field in rural development which can build up opportunities and facilities especially for employment and regional income and play a crucial role in reviving and rebuilding rural regions. The role and importance of tourism in the process of rural development had been proved in many countries. At the present time tourism is considered an industry with potential stability. The economic strategy in the regional development requires a small commerce perspective for rural tourism (ZIARI, 2005). More recently, it has been observed that rural tourism can be a catalyst for socio-economic development and regeneration (SHARPLEY, 2000).

**Kurdistan and it is tourism**  
The Kurdistan Region or Southern Kurdistan (GEOFFREY, 1999), is largely mountainous, with the highest point being a 3,611 m (11,847 ft) point known locally as Cheekah Dar (black tent). The mountains are part of the larger Zagros mountain range which is present in Iran as well. There are many rivers flowing and running through mountains of the region making it distinguished by its fertile lands, plentiful water, and picturesque nature. The Great Zab and the Little Zab flow from the east to the west in the region. The Tigris River enters Iraq from the Kurdistan Region after flowing from Turkey. The mountainous nature of Iraqi Kurdistan, the difference of temperatures in its various parts, and its wealth of waters, make Kurdistan a land of agriculture and tourism. In addition to various minerals, oil in particular, which for a long time was being extracted via pipeline only in Kurdistan Region through Iraq. The largest lake in the region is Lake Dukan. In addition, there are several smaller lakes such as the Duhok Lake. In the western and southern parts of the Kurdistan Region, the area is not as mountainous as the east. It is rolling hills and sometimes plains that make up the area. The area however is greener than the rest of Iraq. The term "Northern Iraq" is a bit of a geographical ambiguity in usage. "North" typically refers to the Kurdistan Region. "Centre" and "South" or "Centre-South" when individually referring to the other areas of Iraq or the rest of the country that is not the Kurdistan Region. Most media sources continually refer to "North" and "Northern Iraq" as anywhere north of Baghdad (DAHLMAN, 2002). The Kurdistan Region is an ideal destination for those seeking unspoiled mountain scenery and ancient archaeological sites off the beaten track. Hillside resorts and lakes During the Kurdistan Region’s long hot summers, visitors and locals can enjoy the cooler weather of Kurdistan’s hillside resorts Gali Ali Bag spring near Rawandoz city in the summer time.
The study area of Shaqlawa

Shaqlawa, a town of approximately 25,000 people, lies 51 km to the northeast of Erbil, at the bottom of Safeen Mountain. Shaqlawa is situated between Safeen Mountain and Sork Mountain, and sits 966 m above sea level. The town is inhabited mostly by Kurds (Muslims) and Assyrians Chaldean Catholics. In the past (before 60-70 years) there was Armenians and Jewish also. There are some sacred places where both Muslims and Christians visit. For instance the Sheikh Wassorahman Grave is a sacred place for Muslims, which is also called St. Raban Boya by the Christians and every year Christians from around the Region visit the place two weeks after Easter. Shaqlawa district is part of the Erbil Governorate of Iraq in the Kurdistan region. It is located in the central part of Erbil state, and is sub-divided into five sub-districts, namely; Salahaddin, Harir, Hiran, Balisn and Basirmah. Shaqlawa share borders with Swran districts to the north, Suleimaniah governorate and Koey district to the east, and Dohuk governorate to the west. Shaqlawa district has a total land area of 1787 km² Covering about 12 % of the former Erbil governorate total land area which is about 14471 km². Farming activities take up about 52 % of the total district land, while other uses are grazing 32 % and forests 16 % (SWZAN, 1999). Shaqlawa climate differs according to the seasons in the winter rains and heavy snow, and people Shaqlawa old stoves built of mud Used for cooking and heating stoves are used and, more recently, oil, gas and electricity, and rainy spring show Shaqlawa the full beauty and the overwhelming green of the mountains and valleys and hills and plains surrounding them as a fragrance that smells aromatic revive the man during this season of the year. The summer weather would moderate its position and the foot of a mountain overlooking the advantage given Sven the difference between the climate in this chapter and the rest of other regions also briefed Balbsaten made Nasimha Alela and fresh, so frequented by visitors from all zones, and in the summer ripe fruit. In the autumn Shaqlawa red-yellow dress at the leaves change color Ftersm so for a total of painting masterpieces of villages and cities and our homeland. It is temperature in summer reaches 30-35°C and -10°C below in winter see table (1) Shaqlawa the nomination had not been agreed by historians as both of them made a conclusion of its own, but is known that even the twelfth century did not name Shaqlawa. The town of Shaqlawa is known for its nature and mountains, where it lies at the foot of Mount Safin. Shaqlawa is located in the province of Erbil, Safin-foot tall mountain in an open and fertile valley, bordered to the east and north mountain range Sork a red soil from the west and south, a forest-clad .The sapphire reported in his book Al Hamwi countries under the name of a glossary (SHqlabad) while in the rituals of the church books stored on behalf of the Church (Shaqlabaz), under the name (Shaqabad) in the history book Mirani Suran Hussein wrote to my sorrow Mukrayani, under the name (Hakulai Wawa) in the history book Kurds and Kurdistan writer Mohammad Amin Zaki. Local ecology and agronomy features include forests of fruit trees, including peaches, walnuts, grapes, figs and
pomegranate, and sweet water. It has a big market selling many types of non-seasonal foods, live in the mountains of various wild animals.

Table 1: Shaqlawa average weather (2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Temperature °F</th>
<th>Average Rainfall (mm)</th>
<th>Average snow days</th>
<th>Average Fog days</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Absolute</td>
<td>Daily</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>max</td>
<td>min</td>
<td>max</td>
<td>min</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>42.1</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>62.6</td>
<td>20.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>46.8</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>71.6</td>
<td>21.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>56.3</td>
<td>43.7</td>
<td>87.8</td>
<td>28.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>65.1</td>
<td>50.9</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>26.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>77.2</td>
<td>61.7</td>
<td>95.9</td>
<td>44.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>87.3</td>
<td>68.4</td>
<td>100.4</td>
<td>32.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>94.6</td>
<td>76.5</td>
<td>105.8</td>
<td>64.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>89.8</td>
<td>75.4</td>
<td>107.6</td>
<td>68.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>82.4</td>
<td>67.8</td>
<td>97.9</td>
<td>44.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>69.8</td>
<td>59.4</td>
<td>89.6</td>
<td>41.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>57.2</td>
<td>46.0</td>
<td>75.2</td>
<td>30.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>46.4</td>
<td>37.4</td>
<td>66.2</td>
<td>19.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Methodology

Primary and secondary data were needed to satisfy the study objectives and thus assembled. Secondary data were collected from published sources within Kurdistan, including official reports and plans. Semi-structured face to face interviews with household heads was chosen as the most appropriate method of gathering primary information. Such a technique encourages open discussion of a topic, yet allows comparisons to be made of responses. A sample of 50 households was selected by systematic random sampling of a household list provided by the Village Council. In conformity with this technique, the population was listed in random order with an interval size of 10. Interviews in the local dialect, lasting from 45 minutes, were completed over one month in the middle of 2012. Of the 50 households contacted, 55 interviews were carried out and the response rate was therefore 86%; 95 participants were male and 5 were female. Those refusing proffered a variety of reasons such as lack of interest, absence from home and insufficient time. The interviews were based on 11 questions about rural tourism related principally to the economic, social-cultural and environmental impacts of tourism in the village. Opinions were also solicited about the role of women in tourism, government support in developing tourism in the village and understanding of and perceived barriers to sustainable tourism development. Respondents were prompted to elaborate on their views after answering the initial question. Data were then analyzed thematically in alignment with the key themes. Qualitative thematic analysis is widely used in social science research, not least tourism, and appropriate for the current exercise which is concerned with the personal reflections and thoughts of respondents. Limitations are, however, acknowledged and include the possibility that respondents did not speak freely about certain matters deemed
sensitive. The sample was also dominated by males and women were not always permitted to respond, even though they sometimes headed the household.

Results and discussion
Positive and negative effects of tourist
Tourism various activities in rural areas can bring with positive and negative effects on cultural or natural environments. The tourism effects can be divided into two main parts of positive and negative. The positive effects of tourism are production of income, occupation and new economic resource for local people, assist to reduce on social unbalanced powers, providing job opportunities for maintaining regional population, support and improvement of local industry, reviving local culture and self-confidence, preserving natural and cultural resources. The negative effects are Local price inflation especially residential buildings, migration of work power, destruction of the local work structure, reduction of life patterns, different types of pollutions and residues made by tourists, destroying available farmlands by constructing new buildings, change of local culture for conforming to touristic’s culture, destruction of the zone environment, Water scarcity led to the deterioration of Agriculture. Tourist’s harms includes: Expenses of bringing instruments and facilities e.g. transportation systems, lack attention to customs and local habits resulting in basically weakening the living method of local people, destruction of natural environment because of construction of the buildings of hotels in natural coverage zones, polluting the natural environment and probably outbreak of epidemic diseases.

Social and civilized effects
Survey respondents cited favorable socio-cultural impacts of tourism in the village, although stances tended to be more positive when the locals felt that they were profiting financially from tourists. The rapid growth of an art and crafts market brought about by tourist demand was welcomed as was the awakening amongst residents to the importance of preserving rural heritage which had been in danger of vanishing a decade ago. Villagers enjoyed meeting new people and practicing their language skills and appreciated some of the village amenities which owed their origin to tourists. Women had once been confined to agricultural labour and the making of handicrafts, but tourism development afforded other opportunities; this could enhance their status in society and lead to a degree of emancipation. Male household heads were asked if they did or would allow females from their family to be employed in tourism 90% said they would refuse and 10% maintained it would depend on the job. Men opposed to the idea adhered to the traditional belief that a woman's place was at home, looking after the house and family. Nevertheless, the extent of female involvement and its acceptance supports the results of DEVEDZIC, (2002) that rural tourism can modify gender roles and relationships within
communities, giving women greater independence and a stronger sense of identity. Younger generation in the town has changed their lifestyles. They are interested to consume non-local foods and drinks, wear non-traditional fashions, and they desire to indulge in the same form of entertainment as tourists. We are a strictly traditional and religious society so that tourism had adverse impact upon the social structure. In Shaqlawa, a majority (75%) of respondents were of the view that the commercialization of tangible and intangible culture and cultural heritage was widespread. Ceremonies, events, activities, art and handicrafts had been adapted to satisfy visitor expectations. Some respondents (30%) deplored handicraft fakery and one pointed out. Nowadays the quality of local handicrafts has been decreased due to high demand for such products. Locals who are involved in this business reduced the quality and increased the price to suit the needs of customers, for this purpose must establish local factories for the production of local products such as the kinds of sweet and pomegranate juice (pomegranate vinegar) which is famous for this area in order to provide the best for tourists. Inhabitants of the town also produced good quality of homemade shoes and traditional Kurdish dresses.

**Economic effects**

Nearly all respondents believed that tourism generated income and employment, constituted a market for local products and helped to diversify the economy. It was calculated that more than 80% of town residents depended on tourism for their livelihoods. Tourists come here every day. We see almost more than 500 tourists coming every day, and most of them stay in this hotel and other accommodations in the town, and few of them are same-day visitors, tats why the price of accommodations in the town Most of the time Too expensive. The inhabitant of the town confirmed that tourisms are concentrated in the summer season more than other seasons. With regard to outward migration, respondents conceded that a shrinking agricultural sector and fewer jobs in the village had prompted many younger residents to move to towns. Amongst motivations were the search for employment and especially within government, education, enhanced marriage prospects and a better standard of living, more than half of those with family members who had migrated said that these relatives would come back if suitable jobs were available in a thriving tourism industry backed by the authorities. It did not seem to interviewees that tourism had a significant effect on slowing this pattern of migration, although it was recalled that some individuals had returned from urban centers in order to set up a tourism business. The benefits of rural tourism lie in the preservation of the environment and of the cultural heritage, as well as in the economic benefit for the local population, which would, in turn, motivate the population to continue living in rural areas. The main benefits of rural tourism are: economic effects, prevention of migration from villages into cities- especially in passive regions (like mountain regions), transfer of ideas from urban into rural regions, diversification of the rural economy (connecting it to other sectors like naive art, local craftsmanship, etc.) improvements in local infrastructure (making the
rural sector more sustainable). However not all the authors are convinced that
the benefits outweigh the costs. REEDER and BROWN, (2005) discuss that in
many cases concerns emerge not only about the quality of the jobs created but
also how tourism development affects rural well. Although tourism causes
income production and plays an effective role for creating job opportunities, but
these yields should balance economic losses. Because rural tourism: Increases
the expenses of public services e.g. waste disposal, medicinal services and
providing police costs. Interferes developing costs e.g. creating tourism
attraction, facilities and generally, basic reformations. Mostly causes to raise the
price of land, goods and services, particularly ownership of the country houses
in rural areas. It means that local people are too connected to this industry and
consequently supervision of local societies on tourism area will be decreased.
(For instance, long period of unpleasant climate condition or competition of
other areas will decrease the number of visitors, according to the long period of
tourism economic-practical policies).

Environmental effects
Without exception, respondents concurred that tourism had negative impacts on
the environment. Erosion, degradation, littering, fire risks and vandalism were
highlighted. The majority (80 %) of interviewees claimed that uncontrolled
construction had occurred with undesirable consequences. There had been a
rush to open teahouses, small supermarkets, guesthouses, and handicraft shops
which the village had not the capacity to accommodate. In addition to physical
damage, land and property prices had escalated. There were complaints that
trees and stones had been illicitly used for building, depleting natural resources.
However, it was noted that general development was to blame for much
environmental destruction which was then exacerbated by tourism. According
to one respondent. Traditionally, Shaqlawa was famous for its orchards and
high quality fruits; unfortunately, the water that was being used for irrigation
was transferred for villager's consumption, and most of these orchards were
dried. Residents cut orchard trees and sold out for constructions. Visitors were
condemned for their irresponsible behavior in leaving rubbish at camp sites and
tourist attractions which created a fetid smell in the village. The litter problem
was made worse by the fact that there were no containers for garbage or formal
method of collection. Traffic congestion and noise pollution during the peak
season was another serious worry for all the interviewees. Roads were narrow
there was no car park in the town. The real and natural value of the environment
is far more than its tourist value. Therefore it must not entail depriving the next
generations of the environment through short term misuses. Tourism must be
looked upon as a constructive activity, which has a bilateral benefit to both
tourists and local's societies.

Sustainable rural tourism and barriers to development
In reply to a question about how they understood sustainable tourism and their
preferred type of tourist, respondents spoke about tourism that brought assorted
benefits to local people and assisted in preserving their culture. Destination residents should be involved in decisions, not dictated to by outsiders, and enjoy an improved life because of tourism. Jobs should be available for their children and overall resources better protected for the younger generation. Visitors who were responsible, respectful of customs and traditions and cared about nature and the environment were desired. In reality, most (90 %) respondents agreed that tourism threatened fragile natural or cultural heritage in Shaqlawa due to intensive tourist activity. Speaking about current conditions in the town, most (85 %) respondents referred to serious weaknesses in infrastructure and public services. Examples were quoted of unsatisfactory transport networks, telecommunications, and water supply, delivering water to the town and setting up the artificial waterfall, waste disposal and sewage. Shortcomings in the stock and standard of tourist accommodation, catering, attractions and transportation were also observed there were calls for more art galleries and rural museums to educate tourists about local culture and heritage. The gravest anxiety was the waste disposal in the town. Walking through the streets, one can see that cars are parking everywhere on the street due to lack of parking spaces. As Shaqlawa is situated in a mountainous area, this has made it difficult for the expansion and improvement of streets and roads. According to the inhabitants there are few parking lots in the town is that most of the lands there are freehold and people want to use them for other investment purposes. Drawing up traffic regulations and reforming buildings.

**Conclusion**

The interviews revealed that Citizens had an appreciation of the concept of sustainable rural tourism. While recognizing some advantages popularity with tourists had brought to the village and its population, these appeared to be offset by fears of harmful consequences rural tourism could be a strategy for sustainable development for rural areas, rural tourism is a good opportunity for agricultural based communities but the setting of objectives and the final tourism development plan needs caution. For better results the whole range of the stakeholders has to participate in the planning stage. Slow and stable steps needs for this kind of planning in order conflicts and mistakes to be avoided. It is also worth noting that many respondents were keen to set up tourism businesses and critical of official failure to help them do so. Dissatisfaction with government and its tourism strategy was a dominant theme of discussions and there was a divergence between the aims of rural tourism projects and the manner in which execution had been attempted, stated goals proving elusive. It may be that unrealistic objectives were set by policy makers and planners who had insufficient experience and expertise and that the expectations of villagers about tourism's contribution to economic and social revitalization were over-optimistic. Authorities appeared reluctant to communicate with local residents and take into account their needs, compounding any misunderstandings. It would seem therefore that tourism cannot be seen in Kurdistan (Shaqlawa) as a
key driver of growth for rural economies and an economic activity approved by resident populations; rather, it is a supplementary source of income which assists in development while arousing strong criticism. One of the challenges for the future is to reconcile divergent viewpoints and devise effective sustainable rural tourism projects which actively involve inhabitants. However, further research is necessary to compare and contrast the experiences of Shaqlawa town with other towns. More thorough impact analyses can be conducted and interviews sought with authorities to better evaluate the dynamics of formal decision making. The results of such work would help cast light on rural tourism in general and the distinctive destination of Kurdistan in particular.

References


