

The Impact of Tourism Development on The Quality of Urban Life

A Case Study of Al Ula, Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

This study investigates the impacts of tourism development on the quality of urban life (QoUL) for the residents of Al Ula, Saudi Arabia – an area of focus in the Vision 2030 framework. A quantitative research approach was adopted in a survey of 250 residents. The results show that there was an overall improvement in the QoUL as tourism has brought employment opportunities, increased earnings and development of facilities. However, these increases in QoL measures are not uniformly dispersed across the population which raises the issues of increasing cost of living, income disparity and marginalization. Tourism boosts the preserving of cultures and instils sense of belonging but the challenges of cultural heritage commercialization, overpopulation of tourists and pollution are real. The findings also highlight of disparities within the community where there are greater benefits to the younger, not so educated and active in the tourism industry, whereas women, older generation and the non-active in tourism tend to be more worried about the outcome of tourism. Also, lack of active input from the residents and the management decisions that are not transparent also impair the overall satisfaction of the residents. The study emphasizes that in order to eliminate the adverse effects of economic growth and culture as well as environment degradation in Al Ula, there is need for implementation of appropriate policies in relation to the tourism sector.

المخلص

تبحث هذه الدراسة تأثير التنمية السياحية على جودة الحياة الحضرية لسكان منطقة العلا في المملكة العربية السعودية، والتي تُعد وجهة رئيسية ضمن إطار رؤية ٢٠٣٠. وبناءً على استطلاع شمل ٢٥٠ من السكان، أظهرت النتائج أن السياحة ساهمت في تحسين جودة الحياة من خلال خلق فرص العمل، وزيادة الدخل، وتطوير البنية التحتية. ومع ذلك، فإن هذه الفوائد لم توزع بشكل عادل، مما أثار مخاوف بشأن ارتفاع تكاليف المعيشة. وعلى الرغم من أن السياحة تعزز الحفاظ على التراث الثقافي وتعزز الفخر المجتمعي، إلا أن التحديات المرتبطة بتسليع الثقافة، والاحتكاك، وتدهور البيئة لا تزال قائمة. وكشفت النتائج عن اختلافات ديموغرافية، حيث أبدى السكان الأصغر سناً، والأقل تعليماً، والمشاركون في قطاع السياحة استفادة أكبر، في حين عبر النساء، وكبار السن، وغير المشاركين في قطاع السياحة عن المزيد من المخاوف. علاوة على ذلك، فإن محدودية مشاركة المجتمع المحلي وغياب الشفافية في عمليات اتخاذ القرار يعيقان رضا السكان بشكل عام. وتؤكد الدراسة على ضرورة تبني سياسات سياحية عادلة ومستدامة وشاملة من أجل تحقيق توازن بين النمو الاقتصادي والحفاظ على الثقافة والبيئة، بما يضمن رفاهية سكان العلا على المدى الطويل.

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Introduction

Tourism is a transformative global industry that drives economic growth, cultural exchange, and regional development. In destinations rich in heritage and natural beauty, tourism often fosters economic diversification, infrastructure improvement, and cultural preservation. Al Ula, in northwestern Saudi Arabia, exemplifies this potential. Known for its archaeological treasures, including the UNESCO World Heritage Site of Hegra, and stunning desert landscapes, Al Ula plays a key role in Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030—a national strategy to reduce oil dependence by expanding non-oil sectors like tourism, culture, and entertainment (Saudi Vision 2030, 2016). While Al Ula's rapid transformation into a global tourism hub has brought international recognition, it raises concerns about sustainability and its impact on the local community's quality of urban life (QoUL).

Tourism development brings economic benefits and global recognition but can disrupt communities, strain resources, and alter cultural norms. Economically, it fosters job creation, income growth, and infrastructure investment but may also raise living costs, deepen inequalities, and over-rely on a single sector (Mason, 2015). Socially and culturally, tourism promotes pride in local traditions but risks cultural commodification, eroding authenticity over time (Sharpley, 2014). Environmentally, while it encourages conservation, it can also lead to resource depletion, pollution, and habitat destruction if mismanaged (Hall & Lew, 2009). These challenges are magnified in emerging destinations like Al Ula, where tourism is reshaping the socio-economic and urban fabric of a small community.

In the case of Al Ula, the region's rapid rise as a global tourism hub presents unique opportunities and challenges. On the one hand, Vision 2030 has led to significant investments in infrastructure and cultural initiatives, such as the Al Ula Vision and the Royal Commission for Al Ula (RCU), which aim to position the region as a model for sustainable tourism and cultural preservation (RCU, 2021). On the other hand, the scale and speed of tourism development may risk overwhelming the local community and its urban infrastructure if not balanced with principles of sustainability. For the residents of Al Ula, these changes are deeply personal, as they influence not only their economic prospects but also their social cohesion, cultural identity, and overall QoUL.

Balancing tourism development with urban sustainability is essential for Al Ula's future. Urban sustainability extends beyond environmental conservation, encompassing the social and economic well-being of residents and their ability to adapt without compromising their QoUL. A comprehensive approach integrating economic growth, community engagement, environmental stewardship, and cultural preservation is crucial. This balance is especially important in Al Ula, where the community shapes and experiences the impacts of tourism. Understanding residents' perceptions offers insights into achieving sustainability and identifying areas for improvement.

As tourism reshapes Al Ula's urban landscape and community life, understanding residents' perspectives is crucial to fostering sustainable development that enhances their QoUL. Specifically, the study seeks to address the following questions:

1. How do Al Ula's residents view the tourism development in relation to their overall QoUL?
2. How do local residents perceive the economic, social, cultural, and environmental impacts of tourism development?
3. What factors influence these perceptions, and how do they vary across different demographic groups?

Based on the existing literature and the identified gaps, this study proposes some of hypotheses. These hypotheses were formulated to address the research questions and to explore residents' perceptions of tourism's economic, cultural, social, and environmental impacts on their QoUL. These hypotheses as a follow:

- H1: Residents involved in tourism perceive greater economic benefits than those not involved.
- H2: Perceived economic benefits positively influence residents' QoUL.
- H3: Tourism is perceived to contribute to cultural preservation but raises concerns about cultural commodification.
- H4: Social disruptions negatively affect residents' QoUL.
- H5: Residents express concerns about tourism's environmental impacts, such as resource depletion and pollution.
- H6: Environmental degradation perceptions negatively influence residents' QoUL.
- H7: Perceptions of tourism impacts vary by demographic factors (e.g., gender, age, and education).
- H8: Tourism development positively influences overall resident satisfaction.

These hypotheses aim to address research gaps and explore tourism's multidimensional impacts on QoUL, offering practical recommendations for sustainable tourism in Al Ula.

Literature Review

1. Tourism and (QoUL

The relationship between tourism development and residents' QoUL is a key focus in tourism research. While tourism provides economic, social, cultural, and environmental benefits, it also poses challenges like environmental degradation, cultural commodification, and social tensions (Sharpley, 2014; Hall & Lew, 2009). Understanding these impacts is crucial, especially in rapidly developing regions. Resident satisfaction, a key QoUL measure, depends on factors like economic opportunities, cultural pride, and environmental preservation (Kim et al., 2013; Yu et al., 2011). However, dissatisfaction can stem from issues such as overcrowding, rising living costs, and environmental harm (Alrashidi, 2022).

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 positions tourism as a key driver of economic diversification, with rapid developments in destinations like Al Ula. Understanding residents' perceptions is crucial to aligning tourism growth with community well-being. Studies by Iswan et al. (2021), Khizindar (2013), and Almeida-García et al. (2016) highlight tourism's multidimensional impacts—economic, social, cultural, and environmental. Khizindar (2013) particularly emphasizes the need to balance tourism's benefits with its costs in culturally sensitive and environmentally vulnerable areas.

2. Residents' Perceptions of Tourism Development and QoUL

Residents' perceptions are at the centre of tourism research, as their support for tourism development depends on their assessment of its benefits and drawbacks. Studies have consistently shown that perceptions of tourism's economic, social, cultural, and environmental impacts shape residents' attitudes toward tourism (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2012).

2.1 Economic Impacts

Economic benefits are among the most visible impacts of tourism, including job creation, increased income, and improved infrastructure, contributing to community development (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011). However, these benefits are often unevenly distributed, with those directly involved in tourism perceiving greater gains (Bazazo et al., 2017). In Saudi Arabia, Khizindar (2013) found tourism improves employment, income, and public services but noted inequitable distribution leads to dissatisfaction. Similarly, Naseem (2021) highlighted concerns about rising living costs and unequal benefits despite contributions to infrastructure and job creation. In Al Ula, Alosaimi (2022) observed significant increases in housing costs due to tourism development. While tourism stimulates SMEs and entrepreneurship, economic leakages—where profits leave the local economy—remain a challenge, particularly in developing regions (Telfer & Sharpley, 2015). This is a concern for Saudi Arabia, where Vision 2030 emphasizes empowering local businesses and reducing reliance on foreign companies. The next section explores tourism's social and cultural impacts.

2.2 Social and Cultural Impacts

Tourism's social and cultural impacts are complex. It can promote cultural preservation and community pride but also lead to social disruptions and cultural commodification (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011; Sharpley, 2014). In Saudi Arabia, Khizindar (2013) found tourism revitalizes cultural heritage and strengthens community pride, but concerns remain about eroding traditional values due to external influences. Similarly, Alhasanat and Hyasat (2011) observed in Petra, Jordan, that while residents valued archaeological preservation, they feared cultural commercialization. Bazazo et al. (2017) noted a similar duality in Aqaba, where tourism preserved culture but raised concerns about its effects on traditions and social relationships.

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 emphasizes cultural tourism through projects like Diriyah Gate and Al Ula's heritage sites, showcasing the nation's history and culture. While

praised for preserving landmarks, these initiatives have raised concerns about cultural authenticity and commodification (Saudi Vision 2030, 2016). Tourism can foster community collaboration but may also create divisions if revenues are unevenly distributed (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011). In developing regions, it often exacerbates social inequalities due to unequal access to resources and opportunities (Telfer & Sharpley, 2015).

2.3 Environmental Impacts and Sustainability

Environmental impacts are a contentious aspect of tourism development. While tourism can promote conservation through eco-tourism and sustainable practices, it often leads to resource depletion, pollution, and habitat destruction (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011). In Saudi Arabia, Khizindar (2013) observed mixed impacts, where eco-tourism initiatives encouraged conservation, but rapid urbanization in tourist areas caused environmental degradation. Similarly, Bazazo et al. (2017) noted concerns in Aqaba about tourism's strain on resources, particularly waste management and water usage.

Iswan et al. (2021) reported growing awareness among Saudi residents about tourism's ecological challenges, especially in fragile ecosystems like deserts and coastal areas. Concerns included waste pollution, increased water consumption, and landscape destruction. These findings align with Almeida-García et al. (2016), who stressed the need for sustainable tourism practices to mitigate such challenges and sustain community support. Vision 2030 emphasizes eco-tourism and habitat restoration, with projects like the Red Sea Project aiming to minimize environmental footprints through renewable energy and strict conservation practices (Saudi Vision 2030, 2016; The Red Sea Development Company, 2021). However, long-term success depends on balancing tourism growth with environmental preservation, particularly in resource-stressed regions.

3. Tourism Development and Urban Sustainability in Saudi Arabia

Tourism development in Saudi Arabia is a cornerstone of Vision 2030, which seeks to diversify the national economy and establish the country as a global tourism destination (Saudi Vision 2030, 2016). Destinations like Al Ula exemplify this strategy, as significant investments have been made to transform the region into a global tourism hub. The RCU has prioritized cultural preservation and environmental conservation in its development plans, aligning with global best practices for sustainable tourism.

Khizindar (2013) argued that sustainable tourism development in Saudi Arabia requires a careful balance between economic growth and the preservation of cultural and environmental resources. The study emphasized that a lack of long-term planning could undermine the benefits of tourism, particularly in areas with fragile ecosystems or limited infrastructure. This aligns with Almeida-García et al. (2016), who argue that sustainable tourism must address long-term social and environmental impacts, especially in emerging destinations. Similarly, Kim et al. (2013) stress the importance of balancing tourism development with community well-being to ensure residents' continued support and satisfaction.

4. Impacts on Overall Residents' Quality of Urban Life (QoUL)

Tourism aims to improve the QoL of host communities, with studies assessing tourism-related QoL (TCQOL) through resident satisfaction and perceived impacts (Yu et al., 2011). Its effects on residents' QoUL are multidimensional, spanning economic, social, cultural, and environmental aspects. Kim et al. (2013) emphasized that residents are more likely to support tourism when its benefits outweigh its costs. In Saudi Arabia, Khizindar (2013) found tourism boosted job opportunities and public services but also caused challenges like overcrowding, cultural commodification, and environmental strain. Similar trade-offs were observed in Petra (Alhasanat & Hyasat, 2011) and Aqaba (Bazazo et al., 2017). In Saudi Arabia, Ekiz et al. (2017) identified comparable impacts in Saudi Arabia, where residents appreciated tourism's economic and cultural benefits, such as improved infrastructure, job creation, and cultural pride. However, concerns about environmental degradation, traffic congestion, and social inequality persisted. These findings highlight the need for community-centered tourism planning to enhance residents' overall QoUL.

5. Gaps in Research and Study Rationale

While a large body of research has examined tourism's impact on residents' QoUL, critical gaps remain, especially in developing destinations. In Saudi Arabia, most studies (e.g., Khizindar, 2013; Iswan et al., 2021) focus on national or urban contexts, neglecting rural and rapidly developing regions like Al Ula. This limit understanding of tourism's effects in culturally sensitive and environmentally fragile areas. Another gap concerns how large-scale initiatives under Vision 2030 balance modernization with cultural preservation. Few studies address the challenges faced by culturally conservative societies like Saudi Arabia, where tourism may disrupt traditional values. Furthermore, while some research highlights sustainability (e.g., Almeida-García et al., 2016), there is limited focus on residents' perceptions of environmental conservation, economic equity, and cultural preservation. Addressing these gaps, this study aims to provide insights into tourism's multidimensional impacts in Al Ula, supporting sustainable, community-centered tourism planning.

6. Summary of Literature Review

The literature reveals that tourism development impacts residents' QoUL in complex ways. While it provides economic benefits like job creation and infrastructure improvement, these are often unevenly distributed, causing dissatisfaction among some residents. Socially and culturally, tourism fosters community pride and cultural preservation but raises concerns about commodification and social disruption. Environmentally, it risks resource depletion, pollution, and habitat destruction, especially in fragile regions like Al Ula. However, research gaps persist, particularly in rural and rapidly developing areas. This study addresses these gaps by exploring tourism's economic, social, cultural, and environmental impacts on residents' QoUL in Al Ula.

Methodology

1. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design with a cross-sectional survey to examine Al Ula residents' perceptions of tourism's impact on their QoUL. This approach effectively identifies trends and evaluates the economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions of tourism (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The survey, based on validated scales from prior studies, was adapted to Al Ula's unique socio-cultural context.

2. Study Area and Population

This study focused on Al Ula, a key site in Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, known for its cultural heritage, archaeological sites, and natural landscapes. As the region transforms into a global tourism hub, the Royal Commission for Al Ula (RCU) emphasizes sustainable tourism, making it an ideal case for studying tourism's impact on residents' QoUL. The target population includes Al Ula residents aged 18+, capturing diverse perspectives from those directly and indirectly affected by tourism to ensure a comprehensive understanding of its impacts.

3. Sampling Method

A simple random sampling method was used to ensure a representative sample and minimize bias (Bryman, 2016). From a target of 250 participants, 202 valid responses were collected, achieving an 80.8% response rate, sufficient for robust analysis (Israel, 1992). Challenges like respondent unavailability and time constraints were addressed by distributing surveys both in person and online. Despite the smaller sample size, the response rate aligns with similar studies on tourism impacts (e.g., Khizindar, 2013; Yu et al., 2011).

The simple random sampling method was employed by generating a list of all eligible residents from the local registry provided by the municipal authorities of Al Ula. Using a random number generator, participants were selected to ensure equal probability of selection. Efforts were made to capture diversity across key demographic factors, including:

- Gender: To explore potential differences in perceptions between male and female residents.
- Age: To account for generational differences in attitudes toward tourism development.
- Education Level: To assess how educational attainment influences perceptions of tourism impacts.
- Involvement in Tourism: To compare perceptions between residents directly involved in tourism-related activities and those who are not.

This stratified approach ensures that the sample reflects the heterogeneity of Al Ula's population and aligns with the study's hypotheses, particularly H7 (perceptions of tourism impacts vary by demographic factors).

4. Data Collection

Data were collected through a structured survey questionnaire, which was designed to assess residents' perceptions of tourism development and its impacts on their QoUL. The survey was distributed online to maximize participation in the study.

4.1 Survey Instrument

The structured survey questionnaire comprised five sections, with most items measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The sections were as follows:

- Demographic Information: Age, gender, marital status, educational level, income, and involvement in tourism-related activities.
- Economic Impacts: Perceptions of job creation, income generation, cost of living, and infrastructure improvements.
- Social and Cultural Impacts: Community pride, cultural preservation, commodification concerns, and social tensions.
- Environmental Impacts: Resource usage, waste management, pollution, and conservation efforts.
- QoUL and Community Involvement: Overall quality of life, alignment with community aspirations, and involvement in tourism planning.

To ensure reliability and validity, the survey items were adapted from established studies (e.g., Kim et al., 2013; Yu et al., 2011). Minor modifications were made to contextualize the questions for Al Ula's unique socio-cultural and environmental setting.

4.2 Pilot Testing

The survey instrument was pilot-tested with 20 residents of Al Ula to identify potential issues with clarity, cultural appropriateness, and overall design (Malmqvist et al., 2019). Key feedback and corresponding adjustments included:

1. **Clarity:** Some participants found questions about "cultural commodification" unclear. These items were rephrased to simplify terminology while maintaining conceptual accuracy.
 - Example: "Tourism has led to the commodification of local traditions and culture" was rephrased as "Tourism has commercialized local traditions for tourists."
2. **Cultural Sensitivity:** Questions related to community involvement were revised to include examples of decision-making processes (e.g., public forums or consultations).
3. **Survey Length:** Respondents suggested reducing the number of items in the environmental section. Three redundant questions were removed to streamline the survey.

The final survey demonstrated high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.80 across all dimensions, indicating strong reliability (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

5. Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using SPSS software. Both descriptive and inferential statistical methods were employed to address the study's research questions and test the hypotheses.

1. Descriptive Statistics:

Means, standard deviations, and frequencies were used to summarize participants' demographic characteristics and their responses across the economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions.

2. Inferential Statistics:

- T-tests: Used to compare perceptions of economic benefits between residents directly involved in tourism and those not involved (H1).
 - ANOVA: Used to examine variations in perceptions across demographic groups, such as gender, age, and education level (H7), as ANOVA is effective for comparing means across multiple groups (Field, 2013).
 - Correlation Analysis: Explored relationships between perceived impacts (economic, social, cultural, environmental) and QoUL (H2, H4, H6).
 - Regression Analysis: Assessed the extent to which tourism development influences overall QoUL and resident satisfaction (H8).
3. **Significance Threshold:** A p-value of < 0.05 was considered statistically significant for all hypothesis tests. Assumptions of statistical tests, such as normality and homogeneity of variance, were checked and met before conducting analyses.

By combining these statistical techniques, the study provides a comprehensive analysis of how tourism development impacts residents' QoUL in Al Ula.

6. Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical guidelines to ensure the rights and well-being of participants. Key ethical considerations included:

- Informed Consent: Participants were provided with detailed information about the study's purpose, procedures, and their rights to withdraw at any time. Written consent was obtained prior to participation.
- Anonymity and Confidentiality: Participant identities were anonymized, and all data were securely stored to protect confidentiality (Bryman, 2016).
- Voluntary Participation: Participation was entirely voluntary, with no incentives provided to avoid coercion.

7. Limitations

While the study provides valuable insights into residents' perceptions of tourism development in Al Ula, several limitations must be acknowledged:

- Cross-Sectional Design: The study captures residents' perceptions at a single point in time, limiting the ability to assess how these perceptions evolve as tourism development progresses. Future research should consider longitudinal designs to track changes over time.

- **Self-Reported Data:** The survey relied on self-reported data, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Participants may have provided responses they believed were socially acceptable rather than reflecting their true opinions.
- **Sample Size:** Although 202 responses were achieved, this is slightly below the planned sample size of 250. While the sample is sufficient for statistical analysis, it may marginally reduce the generalizability of the findings (Israel, 1992).
- **Generalizability:** The findings are specific to Al Ula and may not be generalizable to other regions of Saudi Arabia or similar emerging tourism destinations.

Despite these limitations, the study offers a comprehensive analysis of tourism's impacts on residents' QoUL and provides practical recommendations for achieving sustainable tourism development in Al Ula.

Results and Discussion

This section presents Al Ula residents' perceptions of tourism's impact on their QoUL, linking findings to the theoretical and empirical frameworks from the Literature Review. It offers insights into the relationship between tourism and QoUL while addressing implications for sustainable tourism, community well-being, and policy design in sensitive destinations.

1. Perceptions of Tourism Impacts

1.1 Economic Impacts

Economic impacts of tourism were examined across groups with direct/indirect involvement in tourism and those with no involvement. A t-test revealed that residents involved in tourism reported significantly higher perceived economic benefits ($M = 4.2$, $SD = 0.6$) compared to those not involved ($M = 3.1$, $SD = 0.8$), $t(200) = 8.12$, $p < 0.001$. For the relationship between perceived economic benefits and QoUL, a correlation analysis revealed a strong positive ($r = 0.67$, $p < 0.001$) (see table 1). The study's findings underscore the economic significance of tourism development in Al Ula. Residents overwhelmingly acknowledged the positive economic benefits, particularly in terms of job creation, income generation, and infrastructure development (table 2).

Job Creation and Income Levels: The majority of respondents (78%) agreed that tourism created new jobs in hospitality, transportation, and cultural services, supporting H1 and aligning with Khizindar's (2013) findings on tourism's economic benefits in Saudi Arabia. However, unequal benefit distribution, with those directly involved perceiving greater gains, highlights disparities noted by Bazazo et al. (2017), suggesting tourism can boost local economies but may also widen inequalities without inclusive policies.

Infrastructure Development: Over 85% of participants reported improvements in public infrastructure as a result of tourism investments. This finding mirrors observations by Almeida-García et al. (2016), who emphasized the role of tourism in enhancing public services and infrastructure. However, the challenge of ensuring that these improvements benefit the broader community, particularly marginalized groups, remains critical.

The positive link between economic benefits and QoUL (H2) highlights the role of economic opportunities in resident satisfaction. However, concerns about rising living costs and dependency on tourism were evident. A significant 62% of participants reported that tourism development increased living costs, aligning with Alosaimi (2022). Over-

reliance on tourism, as noted by Telfer & Sharpley (2015), underscores the need for diversified economic strategies and equitable benefit distribution.

Table 1: Relationship between perceived economic benefits and QoUL

Variable 1	Variable 2	Correlation Coefficient (r)	p-Value
Perceived Economic Benefits	QoUL	0.67	< 0.001

• (r = 0.67, p < 0.001). (Strong positive relationship)

Fig 1: Economic Impact of Tourism

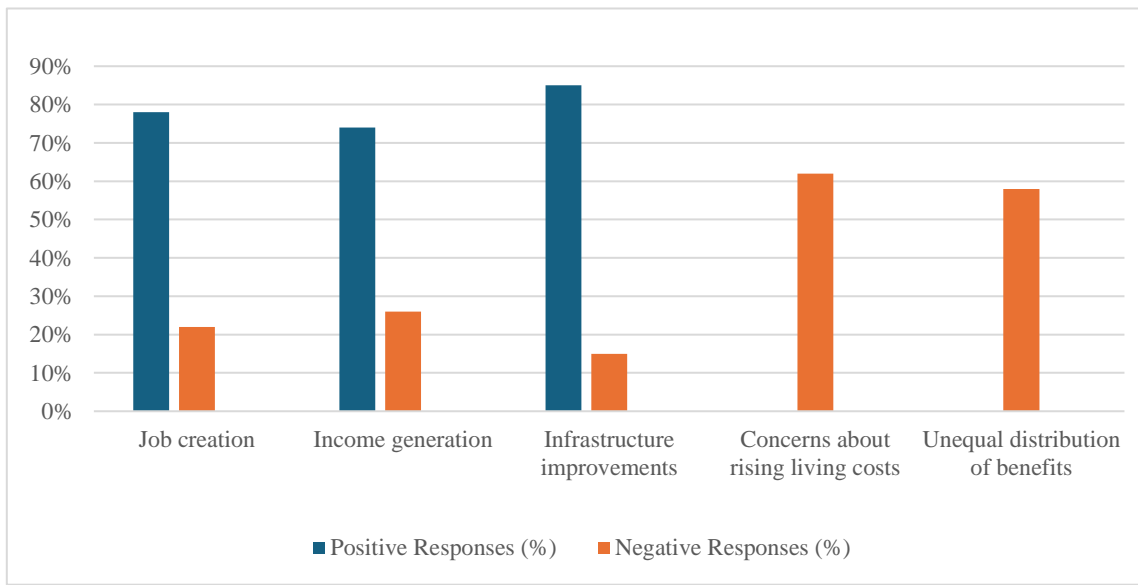


Table 2: Economic Impact Factors, Positive and Negative Responses

Economic Factors	Positive Responses (%)	Negative Responses (%)	Key Insights
Job creation	78%	22%	Majority of residents agree that tourism has created new employment opportunities, particularly in hospitality.
Income generation	74%	26%	Residents directly involved in tourism reported higher income levels than those not involved.
Infrastructure improvements	85%	15%	Widespread acknowledgment of improved roads, utilities, and public services due to tourism investments.
Concerns about rising living costs	N/A	62%	Significant proportion of residents expressed concerns about increased costs of living in tourism-dense areas.
Unequal distribution of benefits	N/A	58%	Over half of respondents felt that economic benefits were not equitably distributed within the community.

1.2 Social and Cultural Impacts

Tourism's social and cultural impacts in Al Ula show both benefits and challenges for community well-being. Pride in Cultural Identity ($r = +0.80$, $p < 0.01$) and Cultural Preservation ($r = +0.72$, $p < 0.01$) strongly enhance QoUL, while Exposure to External Influences ($r = -0.60$, $p < 0.01$) and Cultural Commodification ($r = -0.45$, $p < 0.05$) negatively affect it. Social Cohesion ($r = +0.30$, $p = 0.08$) shows a weak, insignificant relationship. These findings stress the need to foster cultural pride and preservation while mitigating external threats and commodification to sustain resident well-being (Table 3).

Table 3: Social and Cultural vs. QoUL

Variable	Correlation with QoUL (r)	Significance (p-value)
Cultural Preservation	+0.72	$p < 0.01$ (Significant)
Cultural Commodification	-0.45	$p < 0.05$ (Significant)
Social Cohesion	+0.30	$p = 0.08$ (Not Significant)
Pride in Cultural Identity	+0.80	$p < 0.01$ (Significant)
Exposure to External Influences	-0.60	$p < 0.01$ (Significant)

Cultural Preservation and Pride: Around 72% of residents agreed that tourism supports cultural preservation, supporting H3 and aligning with Khizindar (2013) and Alhasanat & Hyasat (2011) on tourism fostering cultural pride. For Al Ula, tourism plays a key role in preserving heritage and traditions. However, 48% raised concerns about cultural commodification, where traditions are altered for tourism, echoing Sharpley's (2014) warning about the erosion of cultural authenticity.

Social Disruptions: Nearly 60% of participants reported increased social tensions, such as overcrowding, rising costs, and unequal access to tourism benefits, supporting H4 and aligning with Andereck & Nyaupane (2011) on tourism exacerbating social inequalities. For Al Ula, this underscores the need to balance community pride with careful management to prevent social divides. The findings highlight the importance of social and cultural sustainability alongside economic and environmental factors, urging policymakers to adopt inclusive, community-focused tourism models (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2012).

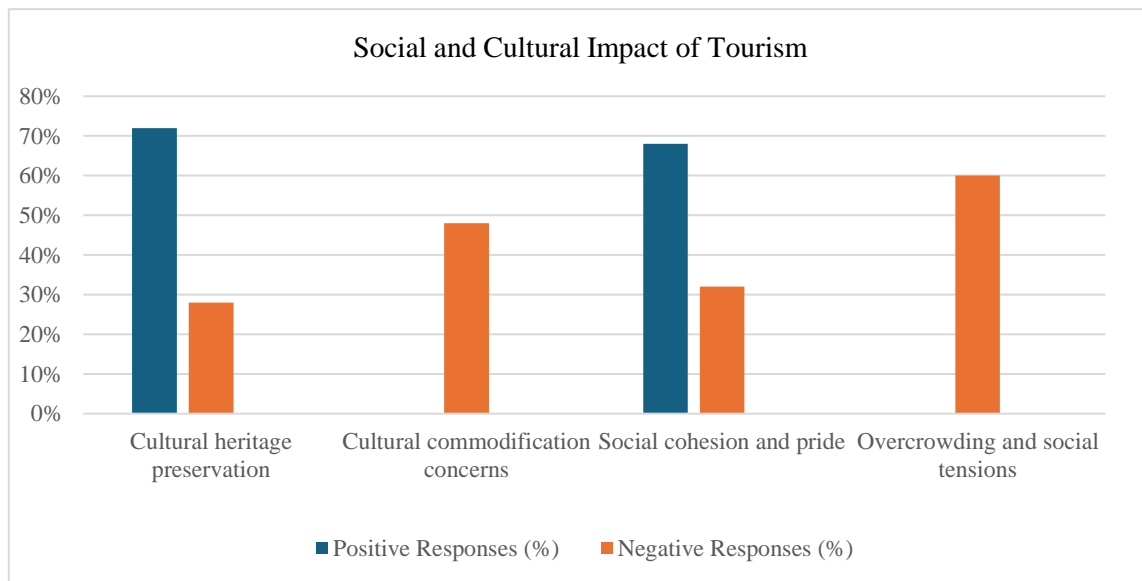


Fig 2: Social and Cultural Impact of Tourism

Table 4: Social and Cultural Impact Factors – Positive and Negative Responses

Social and Cultural Factors	Positive Responses (%)	Negative Responses (%)	Key Insights
Cultural heritage preservation	72%	28%	Tourism fosters pride and preserves cultural heritage, but risks of commodification remain.
Cultural commodification concerns	N/A	48%	Almost half of respondents worried about the commercialization of traditions for tourist consumption.
Social cohesion and pride	68%	32%	Tourism has strengthened community pride, but social disruptions are becoming evident.
Overcrowding and social tensions	N/A	60%	Overcrowding and rising living costs were significant concerns among residents.

1.3 Environmental Impacts

The study revealed significant environmental concerns among Al Ula residents, emphasizing the critical need for sustainable tourism practices. A regression analysis showed that perceived environmental degradation was a significant negative predictor of QoUL ($\beta = -0.42$, $p < 0.01$) (see table 5).

Table 5: Perceived Environmental Degradation and QoUL

Predictor Variable	β (Standardized Coefficient)	t-Value	p-Value
Perceived Environmental Degradation	-0.42	-4.29	< 0.01

Resource Depletion and Pollution: Over 65% of respondents expressed concerns about increased water consumption, waste generation, and pollution caused by tourism. These findings align with Khizindar (2013) and Bazazo et al. (2017), who identified similar environmental challenges in Saudi Arabia and Jordan, respectively. In a region like Al Ula, where natural resources are limited and ecosystems are fragile, these concerns are particularly pressing.

Habitat Destruction and Conservation: While 58% of participants acknowledged tourism's role in promoting conservation initiatives, such as the restoration of archaeological sites, concerns about habitat destruction and littering underscore the risks of poorly managed tourism. This duality reflects the findings of Andereck & Nyaupane (2011) and Hall & Lew (2009), who emphasized that tourism can simultaneously drive conservation and environmental degradation.

The negative correlation between perceptions of environmental degradation and QoUL (H6) underscores the importance of integrating environmental sustainability into tourism planning. This is consistent with Kim et al. (2013), who argued that environmental preservation is essential for maintaining resident satisfaction. For Al Ula, adopting eco-tourism models and renewable energy practices, as outlined in Vision 2030, is critical to addressing these concerns.

Variations in Perceptions Across Demographic Groups

The findings revealed significant variations in perceptions across demographic groups, supporting H7 (perceptions of tourism impacts vary by demographic factors). These variations highlight the heterogeneity of resident experiences and underscore the importance of considering demographic differences in tourism planning.

Gender: Female participants were more likely to express concerns about social and cultural disruptions, while male participants emphasized economic opportunities. This finding aligns with Bazazo et al. (2017), who observed similar gender-based differences in perceptions of tourism impacts.

Age: Younger residents (aged 18–34) were more optimistic about tourism's benefits, while older residents (aged 45 and above) were more concerned about environmental and cultural impacts. This reflects findings by Yu et al. (2011), who noted that generational differences influence attitudes toward tourism, with younger individuals often prioritizing economic and social opportunities over environmental concerns.

Education Level: Participants with higher education levels were more aware of environmental challenges and the need for sustainable tourism practices. This is consistent with Almeida-García et al. (2016), who emphasized the role of education in shaping perceptions of sustainability.

These demographic insights reinforce the need for targeted interventions that address the diverse concerns and priorities of different groups within the community.

3. Broader Implications for QoUL and Sustainability

The findings of this study highlight the complex interplay between tourism development and QoUL. While tourism has brought significant economic and cultural benefits to Al Ula, concerns about social inequalities, cultural authenticity, and environmental degradation underscore the need for balanced and sustainable approaches.

The results support H8 (tourism positively influences resident satisfaction) but highlight challenges for long-term well-being. As noted by Khizindar (2013) and Almeida-García et al. (2016), sustainable tourism requires balancing economic growth, environmental conservation, and social equity. For Al Ula, leveraging Vision 2030 offers an opportunity to create a tourism model focused on community engagement, cultural preservation, and ecological sustainability, enhancing QoUL and positioning Al Ula as a global example of sustainable tourism.

Table 6: Environmental Impact Factors– Positive and Negative Responses

Environmental Factors	Positive Responses (%)	Negative Responses (%)	Key Insights
Tourism-driven conservation	58%	42%	Tourism has promoted conservation efforts, such as archaeological restoration.
Resource depletion concerns	N/A	65%	Concerns about increased water consumption and waste generation were widespread.
Pollution and littering	N/A	60%	Residents expressed concerns about pollution and its impact on local ecosystems.
Habitat destruction	N/A	55%	A majority expressed concerns about damage to natural landscapes caused by unregulated tourism.

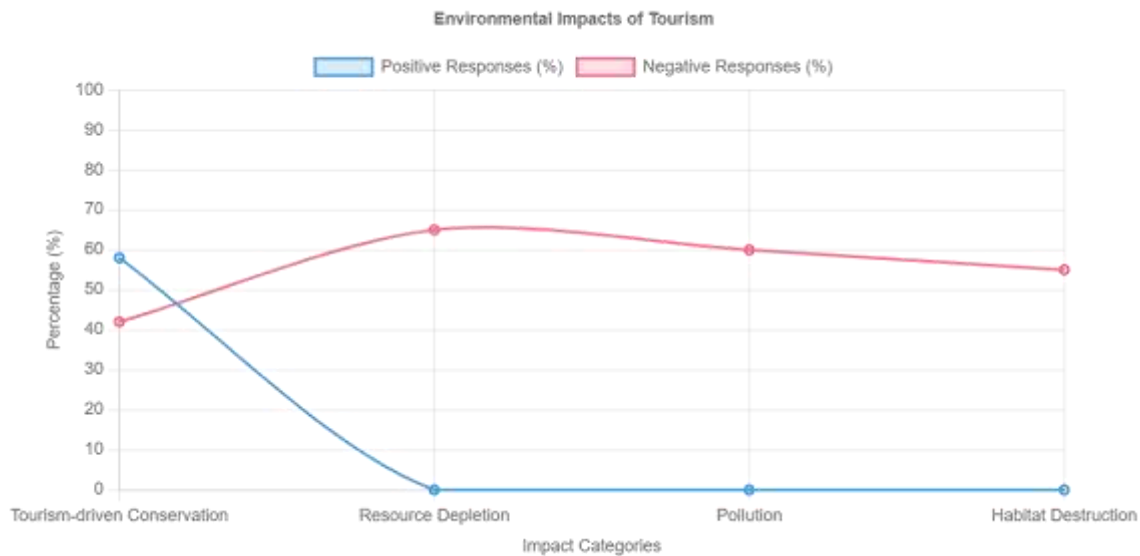


Fig 3: Environmental Impact of Tourism

1.4 Residents' Overall QoUL and Community Involvement

Tourism development in Al Ula has significantly influenced residents' quality of urban life (QoUL) and perceptions of community involvement. The survey findings highlight both the benefits and challenges of tourism growth in the region, underscoring the complexity of achieving a balance between economic progress and community well-being. These findings are analysed.

- **Tourism and overall QoUL**

The findings support H8 (tourism positively influences overall resident satisfaction), with 65% of residents reporting improved QoUL due to contributions like infrastructure improvements (85%), job creation (78%), and income generation (74%), aligning with Kim et al. (2013) and Khizindar (2013) on tourism's role in enhancing QoUL. In Al Ula, Vision 2030 investments have improved roads, utilities, and cultural preservation, boosting livability and economic vibrancy. However, 35% of residents expressed dissatisfaction, citing rising living costs (62%) and unequal benefit distribution (58%), reflecting Telfer & Sharpley's (2015) and Bazazo et al.'s (2017) findings on tourism exacerbating inequalities. These results emphasize the need for equitable policies to ensure broader community benefits.

Community Involvement

The findings show that 75% of residents want a larger role in shaping tourism development, while 52% feel uninformed about current plans, highlighting gaps in communication and engagement. This supports Timothy (1999) and Jamal & Getz (1995), who stress the importance of participatory planning to align tourism with community aspirations. The lack of transparency in Al Ula mirrors Bramwell & Sharman's (1999) findings on how poor communication erodes community support. Given the transformative scale of Vision 2030, this disconnect may fuel dissatisfaction and exclusion among residents. Residents' demand for involvement underscores the need for

inclusive governance, as Nunkoo & Ramkissoon (2012) note that community participation boosts satisfaction and long-term support. For Al Ula, fostering ownership and shared responsibility requires public forums, consultations, and transparent communication channels.

Balancing Tourism Growth and QoUL

While 54% of residents are satisfied with efforts to balance tourism growth and QoUL, 46% view these measures as inadequate, raising concerns about social and environmental sustainability. As Butler (1980) and Kim et al. (2013) note, balancing tourism growth with QoUL requires integrating economic, social, and environmental dimensions. Although tourism has brought benefits to Al Ula, challenges such as rising living costs, social tensions, and environmental degradation persist, reflecting the need to align tourism development with residents' needs and aspirations (Hall & Lew, 2009; Almeida-García et al., 2016).

Table 7: Residents' Overall QoUL and Community Involvement– Positive and Negative Responses

Residents' Perception	Positive Responses (%)	Negative Responses (%)	Key Insights
Tourism has improved the overall QoUL for residents in Al Ula.	65%	35%	Most residents feel that tourism has positively impacted their quality of life, with improvements in infrastructure and services.
Tourism development aligns with the community's needs and aspirations.	58%	42%	While most residents agree, a significant portion feels their needs and aspirations are not fully considered in tourism planning.
I feel I am well informed about the tourism development plans in Al Ula.	48%	52%	A slight majority feels uninformed about ongoing tourism development plans, highlighting the need for better communication.
I think the people of Al Ula should have a bigger role in how to develop tourism.	75%	25%	A significant majority believe that residents should have greater involvement in shaping tourism policies, reflecting a strong desire for inclusivity.
I am satisfied with the current measures to achieve a balance between tourism growth and the QoUL of the residents in Al Ula.	54%	46%	While some residents are satisfied, nearly half feel that the current measures are insufficient to balance tourism growth and urban quality.

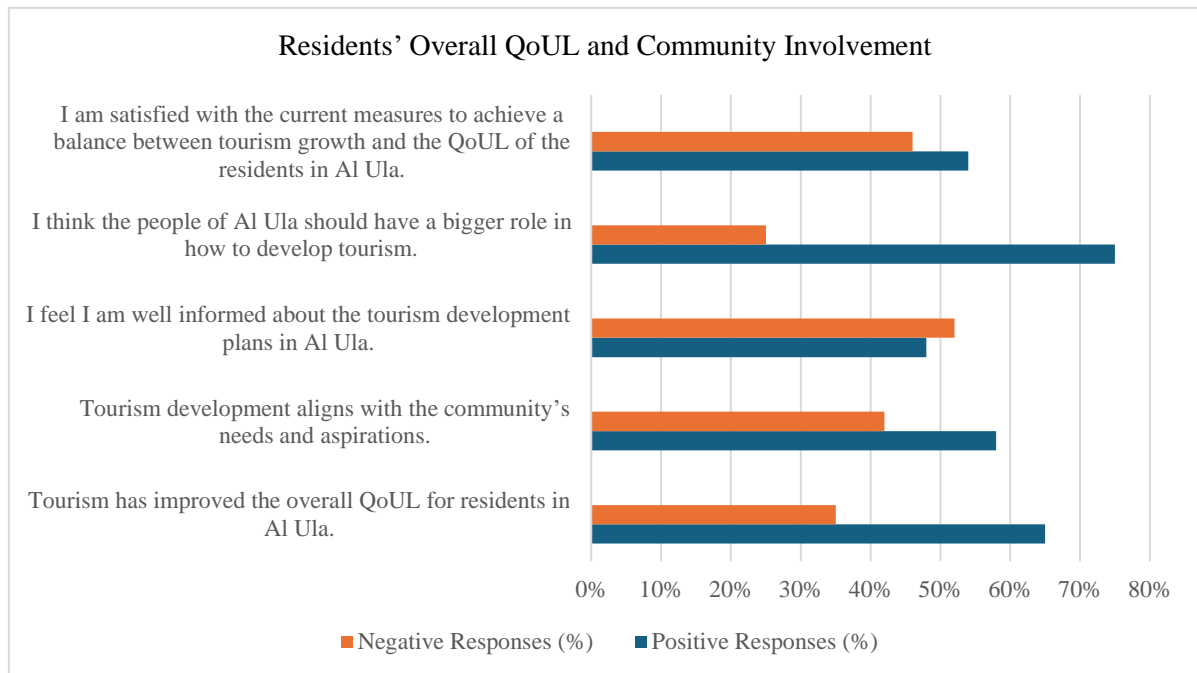


Fig 4: Residents' Overall QoUL and Community Involvement

Perception across key demographic factors

The perceptions of overall QoUL and community involvement varied significantly across key demographic factors, including gender, age, education level, and involvement in tourism. These variations highlight the diverse experiences of different groups within the community and align with findings from the literature on resident perceptions of tourism impacts.

• Gender

Male residents were more likely to report positive impacts of tourism on their QoUL (68%), focusing on economic benefits like job creation and income, while females had lower positive perceptions (59%) and greater concerns about social disruptions, such as rising living costs (65%) and unequal benefit distribution (62%). This aligns with Bazazo et al. (2017), who noted men prioritize economic opportunities from tourism, as they are more involved in the industry, while women, especially in traditional societies like Saudi Arabia, are more affected by social costs and limited participation (Andereck et al., 2005; Bazazo et al., 2017).

• Age

Younger residents (18–34) had the highest positive perceptions of tourism's impact on QoUL (72%), focusing on job opportunities and infrastructure improvements, while middle-aged residents (35–54) were moderately positive (61%). Older residents (55+) were the least positive (52%), expressing concerns about cultural commodification and environmental degradation. Younger residents view tourism as a source of modern opportunities like jobs, mobility, and global exposure (Yu et al., 2011), while older residents, more attached to traditions, see it as a threat to cultural authenticity and fragile ecosystems. This generational divide reflects trends in rapidly transforming destinations (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011; Yu et al., 2011).

• Education Level

Residents with lower education levels (secondary or below) showed higher positive perceptions of tourism's impact on QoUL (70%), emphasizing economic benefits like job creation, while those with higher education (bachelor's or postgraduate) were more critical (58%), citing concerns about environmental degradation (68%) and cultural commodification (55%). Less educated residents may benefit directly from tourism-related jobs in manual or service roles, fostering a favorable view (Andereck et al., 2005), while educated residents, more aware of sustainability challenges, focus on long-term negative impacts like resource depletion and cultural commercialization (Almeida-García et al., 2016).

• Involvement in Tourism

Residents directly involved in tourism reported the highest positive perceptions (80%), highlighting economic benefits like increased income and job opportunities. Indirectly involved residents showed moderate positivity (65%), while uninvolved residents were the least positive (50%), citing exclusion from benefits (65%) and concerns about environmental degradation (62%). Those directly involved experience tangible economic gains, improving their QoUL perceptions (Andereck et al., 2005), while uninvolved residents feel excluded and more burdened by tourism's costs (Telfer & Sharpley, 2015). This aligns with Andereck et al. (2005), who found that active involvement in tourism correlates with higher perceived benefits.

Targeted policies are crucial to address diverse demographic concerns. Women may benefit from affordable housing and inclusive economic initiatives, while older and highly educated residents need a stronger focus on sustainability and cultural preservation. Uninvolved residents require inclusion strategies for equitable benefit distribution. Addressing these issues can improve residents' QoUL, strengthen community support for tourism, and align with Vision 2030's goals of sustainable, inclusive growth.

• Broader Implications for QoUL and Sustainability

This study highlights the complex relationship between tourism development and QoUL. While tourism has provided economic and cultural benefits to Al Ula, concerns about social inequalities, cultural authenticity, and environmental degradation stress the need for balanced, sustainable approaches. The findings support H8 (tourism development positively influences resident satisfaction) but reveal challenges requiring attention for long-term well-being. As Khizindar (2013) and Almeida-García et al. (2016) note, sustainable tourism must integrate economic growth, environmental conservation, and social equity. For Al Ula, leveraging Vision 2030 offers a chance to prioritize community engagement, cultural preservation, and ecological sustainability, positioning it as a global model for sustainable tourism.

4. Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study offers valuable insights but has limitations inclining (1) the cross-sectional design limits tracking perception changes over time; future studies should use longitudinal approaches; (2) self-reported data may be influenced by social desirability bias and (3) findings are specific to Al Ula and may not apply to other regions or emerging tourism destinations. Future research should address these issues by increasing sample

sizes, studying other Vision 2030 destinations, and using qualitative methods for deeper insights (e.g., residents' experiences).

Conclusion

This study examined Al Ula residents' perceptions of tourism's impact on their QoUL, highlighting its economic, social, cultural, and environmental effects. Linking findings to existing literature, it contributes to understanding sustainable tourism and its role in community well-being, especially in culturally and environmentally sensitive regions.

The results show that tourism in Al Ula has boosted QoUL through job creation, income generation, and infrastructure improvements, consistent with Khizindar (2013) and Almeida-García et al. (2016), who emphasized tourism's role in local economic growth. However, unequal benefit distribution highlights ongoing economic disparities, aligning with Telfer & Sharpley (2015). This calls for policies to ensure equitable benefit sharing and empower marginalized communities in tourism opportunities.

Tourism's cultural impacts were mixed. Residents recognized its role in preserving Al Ula's heritage and fostering pride but expressed concerns about cultural commodification, especially older and educated residents. This aligns with Sharpley (2014), who warned of cultural authenticity erosion in tourism economies. To preserve Al Ula's identity, strategies must prioritize safeguarding the authenticity of local traditions over mere tourism-focused showcasing. Tourism brought both opportunities and challenges, increasing community pride and global recognition but also causing overcrowding and social inequalities. These issues align with Andereck & Nyaupane (2011) and Khizindar (2013), who highlighted tourism's potential to heighten social tensions if mismanaged. For Al Ula, tourism development must align with local social systems' capacity to adapt without harming cohesion or QoUL.

The findings show that 75% of residents want a larger role in tourism development, and 52% feel uninformed about ongoing plans, highlighting the need for greater community involvement and transparency. This aligns with Timothy (1999) and Jamal & Getz (1995), who stress participatory planning to build trust and meet residents' aspirations. The lack of communication in Al Ula echoes Bramwell & Sharman's (1999) view that poor transparency undermines support for tourism. Inclusive governance and community-focused policies are crucial to improving satisfaction and ensuring long-term support.

Environmental concerns, including resource depletion, pollution, and habitat destruction, were significant. While tourism aids conservation and archaeological restoration, these efforts are seen as inadequate to address broader ecological risks. This aligns with Hall & Lew (2009) and Bazazo et al. (2017), who emphasized environmental vulnerabilities in emerging destinations. For Al Ula, sustainable practices like eco-friendly infrastructure, waste management, and renewable energy are crucial to protect its fragile ecosystems.

Demographic variations showed differing perceptions of tourism impacts by gender, age, and education, highlighting the need for inclusive planning. Younger residents prioritized economic and social opportunities, while older residents were more concerned about cultural and environmental impacts. Female respondents noted social disruptions, whereas males focused on economic benefits. These findings support the need for tourism policies sensitive to diverse group priorities, as emphasized by Nunkoo & Ramkissoon (2012).

Findings on residents' QoUL and community involvement highlight the need to align tourism with residents' aspirations. While 54% were satisfied with efforts to balance tourism and QoUL, 46% found them inadequate, emphasizing the need for sustainable, equitable, and participatory policies. As Kim et al. (2013) and Butler (1980) suggest, balancing tourism growth and QoUL requires integrating economic, cultural, environmental, and social priorities. For Al Ula, Vision 2030 presents an opportunity to develop a sustainable tourism model that enhances QoUL while preserving cultural and environmental integrity.

The findings highlight key implications for policy and practice. To position Al Ula as a global tourism hub, Saudi Arabia must prioritize sustainability and community well-being through inclusive, resident-focused approaches. Policies should aim to (1) promote economic equity, where distribute tourism benefits fairly, supporting marginalized groups and small businesses (Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2012) (2) preserve cultural authenticity including the protection of Al Ula's heritage from over-commercialization to maintain traditions; (3) address environmental sustainability including the implementation of eco-friendly practices to reduce resource depletion, pollution, and promote conservation and (4) mitigate social impacts by addressing issues such as overcrowding and social inequality. Achieving these goals is crucial for Al Ula as a flagship destination under Vision 2030, which focuses on economic diversification, cultural preservation, and environmental stewardship. While progress has been made in using tourism for development, significant challenges remain in ensuring this translates into sustainable improvements in residents' QoUL.

Finally, this study highlights several avenues for future research. First, longitudinal studies are needed to track changes in residents' perceptions over time, particularly as tourism development continues to evolve. Second, qualitative research could provide deeper insights into the lived experiences of residents, capturing nuances that may not be evident in quantitative surveys. Third, comparative studies across different regions of Saudi Arabia or other emerging tourism destinations could shed light on the generalizability of these findings and identify best practices for balancing tourism growth with community well-being.

In conclusion, this study underscores the transformative potential of tourism in enhancing QoUL while highlighting the critical need for sustainable and inclusive development strategies. By integrating residents' perspectives into tourism planning, policymakers can create a model for Al Ula that not only attracts global visitors but also ensures that the local community thrives economically, socially, culturally, and environmentally. These insights contribute to the broader discourse on tourism and urban life, offering valuable lessons for other destinations seeking to balance development with sustainability in an increasingly globalized world.

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