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Presentation date: August, 2023
Date of acceptance: October, 2023
Publication date: January, 2024

TURISM

IN PINGAN YUANJIACUN: OPINIONS OF RESIDENTS AND TOURISTS

TURISMO EN PINGAN YUANJIACUN: OPINIONES DE RESIDENTES Y TURISTAS

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It mentions suggested (APA, seventh edition)

Min, K., Echarri Chávez, M., Korstanje, M. (2024). Turism in Pingan Yuanjiacun: opinions of residents and tourists. *Universidad y Sociedad*, 16(1), 218-224.

ABSTRACT

Sustainable development of tourism and its contribution to the 2030 Agenda need transcend the economic effects of the activity, it cannot be limited to the income growth to show positive impacts leading to the satisfaction of residents as well as of visitors and getting an environmental balance that positions the destination as a reference in the segments of demand. The current model of development for Pingan Yuanjiacun village, under the title "Hehuang Impression: Conceptual Planning of the Project" reproduces a paradigm that has been successful in other Chinese rural contexts, even in Pingan itself; nevertheless, it is not exempt from critic observations, considering that it evidences the weaknesses of a touristic management and practice that may have created several benefits, but have also distorted the landscape as well as the very same traditional cultures they claim to be saving which leaves a lot to be desired about the touristic innovation. Amid the constructive process, the fact that rural areas are a regional complex integrated by natural ecology, social and economic culture as well as residential groups with varied social norms that have been established throughout years, even centuries have been forgotten. They need be appropriately understood with the intention of respect and saving "Pingan culture". The present research aims at presenting the opinions of visitors and residents of Pingan Yuanjiacun Village that allow to evaluate the satisfaction levels with the model of touristic development implemented.

Keywords: tourism, satisfaction, residents, visitors

RESUMEN

El desarrollo sostenible del turismo y su contribución a la Agenda 2030 debe trascender los efectos económicos de la actividad; no puede limitarse al crecimiento de los ingresos sino mostrar impactos positivos que conduzcan a la satisfacción tanto de los residentes como de los visitantes y lograr un equilibrio ambiental que posicione el destino como referente en los segmentos de demanda. El actual modelo de desarrollo para la aldea de Pingan Yuanjiacun, bajo el título "Hehuang Impression: Conceptual Planning of the Project" reproduce un paradigma que ha tenido éxito en otros contextos rurales chinos, incluso en el propio Pingan; sin embargo, no está exento de observaciones críticas, al considerar que evidencia las debilidades de una gestión y una práctica turística que pueden haber generado diversos beneficios, pero también han distorsionado el paisaje y las mismas culturas tradicionales que dicen salvar, lo que deja mucho que desear en cuanto a innovación turística. En medio del proceso constructivo, se ha olvidado el hecho de

que las áreas rurales son un complejo regional integrado por la ecología natural, la cultura social y económica, así como grupos residenciales con variadas normas sociales que se han establecido a lo largo de años, incluso siglos. Estos aspectos deben entenderse adecuadamente con la intención de respetar y salvar la cultura de Pingan. La presente investigación tiene como objetivo presentar las opiniones de visitantes y residentes de Pingan Yuanjiacun Village que permitan evaluar los niveles de satisfacción con el modelo de desarrollo turístico implementado.

Palabras claves: turismo, satisfacción, residentes, visitantes

INTRODUCTION

Understanding the attitudes of residents and tourists is an important issue within touristic research, since it is about the integration between host and guest, the experiences of the tourists and the images that are constructed at social level about a destination, all of which are aspects that influence the development of sustainable tourism (Serene and Sun Tung, 2022; Radovic et al., 2021; Piramanayagam et al., 2021).

Local residents, both directly and indirectly, contribute to tourist experiences by providing tourism services and embodying the local culture of a destination. Thus, a favorable attitude in the local population toward tourism is essential to creating a hospitable and appealing environment for tourists (Gyunghoon et al., 2023; Šegota et al., 2022; Josiassen et al., 2022)

According to Zhibin et al. (2017), the creation of value in tourism includes the interactions between residents and tourists, that is why the perception that both make about the project of touristic development promote positive behaviors and high levels of satisfaction globally.

The local population should be at the heart of the implementation and development of tourism. It is a core part of a tourist-receiving region, an element that is key to understand how the tourism system works. Residents have the greatest interest in knowing the situation of their territory and deciding on the tourism development of their area, embracing the benefits and disadvantages this can involve. In this setting, the boom in tourism and the diversification of tourism activities emerge as an opportunity for such cultural assets to be perceived holistically as a tourist product and destination (Echarri et al., 2021).

A recent study conducted by the UNWTO and Ipsos (2019), involving interviews with residents from 15 countries, found that 49 % of the respondents thought measures should be taken to better manage tourism. In addition,

72 % said that experiences and attractions should be created that benefit both residents and visitors and 65 % feel that the aim should be for local communities to reap the rewards of tourism activity. Limiting the number of establishments (16 %) and tourists (12 %) was also mentioned as a measure to be undertaken, albeit to a much lower degree.

Tourist attractiveness is grounded in nuanced aspects of a resident-tourist relationship that acknowledge both the transactional, capitalistic elements, as well as the interpersonal dynamics of the relationship (Gyunghoon et al., 2023).

In the context of the new silk road promoted by the Chinese government, several provinces and towns have benefited from the benefits of a project that, with a regional, national and global scope, has an opportunity in tourism to enhance the benefits of an activity that, when well managed, leads to economic growth on a local scale, strengthens productive and social relationships, and has a positive impact on the environment.

Such is the case of Pingan Yuanjiacun village, Haidong municipality, in Qinghai province, which aims to become a category 5 scenic area, of international standard, for tourism. Undoubtedly, its strategic position on the New Silk Road and as a space for the implementation of Rural Revitalization programs has helped tourism grow in terms of commercial indicators such as total visitors and income. However, both residents and visitors are pointing out that the development project shows gaps that have to be corrected to achieve long-term goals.

The objective of this study is to identify the impacts of tourism in the Pingan Yuanjiacun village based on the criteria of visitors and tourists as the main consumers of the product.

The district of Pingan, having an area of 769 km², is one of the two districts that conform Haidong municipality. In 2014 a new administrative division took place. Ever since it has jurisdiction over three cities (Pingan, Xiaoxia y Sanhe) and 5 ethnic municipalities (Gucheng Hui, Shagou Hui, Shuiquan Hui, Shimeiyao Hui y Ba Zanggou Hui) (Provincial Development and Reform Commission, 2018).

It has a population of 102 975 people, according to the data published during the sixth national census of population (Oficina de Estadísticas, 2020).

Pingan District is an important post on the ancient Tang-bo Route and the southern line of the ancient Silk Road. At the same time, it is an important political, economic, cultural factor, as well as a fundamental piece in the eastern part of Qinghai province in the fields of

transportation, technology and education. Consequently, in September 2018, it was awarded the honorary title of "Rural E-Commerce Comprehensive Demonstration County 2018" by the Ministry of Commerce (Zheng, 2020). Such an acknowledgement indirectly led to the Qinghai Provincial People's Government announced a few days later its official withdrew from poverty-stricken counties.

As can be inferred, progress has characterized this district for the past decade. Its economic and social development rates improve considerably every year, especially after the launch of strategies for the revitalization of the West, and the implementation of the New Silk Road. If in 2011 the regional GDP was 3.55 million yuan (549 million dollars), by the end of 2015 the figure had already reached 6,250 (967 million dollars), and this, in turn, represented an increase of 11.6% compared to 2014.

Key to defining the current direction of tourism in Pingan were the determinations made during the 6th Provincial Tourism Development Conference of Qinghai in August 2015. Here a new provincial tourism development pattern of "one circle, three lines, three corridors and three plates was established." In this plan, Pingan District is benefited twice, being located within the tourist circle one hour from the capital Xining and in one of the "three corridors": the cultural tourism landscape corridor of Qinghai Lake.

According to the Culture, Tourism and Sports Bureau of Pingan District, the general strength of this area is expressed in the fact that its per capita indicators are between 1 and 4 times higher than those of other districts and surrounding counties, although at the end of this period a slight decrease is evidenced (Oficina de Estadísticas, 2020).

Closer to these days, the vitality of economic development has been even stronger: in 2018, the annual GDP of the region was 7.55 billion yuan (approximately US\$1.167 billion), with a 6.5% year-on-year rise (Oficina de Estadísticas, 2020), as a result of the implementation of the aforementioned programs.

The former Zhangjiazhai Village, today known as Pingan Yuanjiacun, is gradually becoming a space of regional significance, especially since 2017 when the Pingan District Administration considered the village as an ideal territory to launch the prelude of the provincial implementation of the Rural Revitalization and New Silk Road strategies, which aim to turn it into a category 5A (international standard) scenic area.

Pingan Yuanjiacun is located northeast of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, in the center of the city of Haidong; it is located 35 km from Xining (the provincial capital), 200 km

from the city of Lanzhou (Gansu province) and 30 km from the Ledu district of the city of Haidong, and is recognized within the region for its privileged geographic position.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The presented results are based on the application of surveys to tourists and residents of the Pingan Yuanjiacun village. The tourist surveys were carried out with the main objective of measuring the level of satisfaction regarding their stays in the village, based on qualitative and quantitative elements. To determine the sample size (383 surveys), the simple random probabilistic sampling method was used which was calculated with the corresponding formula. To calculate the sample, the following it formulae 1 is used:

$$n = \frac{N\sigma^2Z^2}{(N-1)e^2 + \sigma^2Z^2} \quad (1)$$

N = size of the population = 69,000 tourists (corresponds to the visits registered during the Spring Festival of 2021, which in turn is the most recent data offered by the company Haidong Yuanjia Village Cultural Tourism Co., Ltd., in relation to the visits to the village of Pingan Yuanjiacun

Z = Value obtained through confidence levels= 95%

e = Acceptable limit of sampling error = 5%

n = the sample size = 383

On the other hand, the survey of residents was carried out to determine the level of satisfaction with the presence of the Pingan Yuanjiacun complex in the village, as well as the level of participation in the conceptual planning and economic and cultural development of the town. 1 representative of each of the families of the village was chosen for the sample, representing a total of 572 surveys.

The processing of both instruments was carried out from the systematization of the opinions in the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) program, configuring from the establishment of the corresponding codes, a database in which the resulting data were included of the poll.

RESULT-DISCUSSION

Analysis of the surveys to visitors

The visitor survey comprised a total of 383 participants. 88% of the surveyed visitors are Chinese, 10% from border countries (members of the New Silk Road) and the

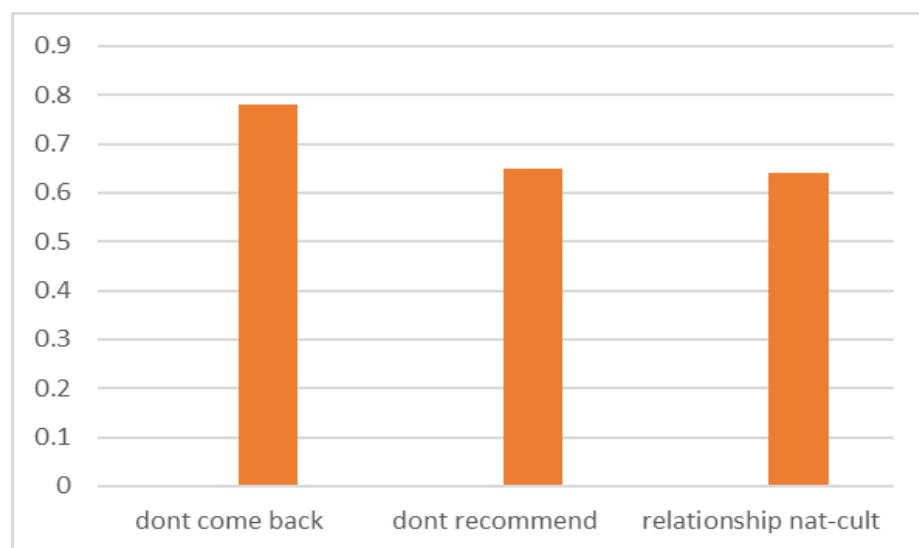
remaining 2% reside in other countries. 80% of those surveyed are between 26 and 65 years old, that is, they are in a working age range, which is positive, as they have stable income. 16% are under 25 years of age and only 4% are over 65 years of age. The visitors maintain a high level of education, reflected in the fact that 63% are professionals or technicians; 27% have secondary studies and 10% primary level. 64% of those surveyed are married, 16% are single and the rest (20%) show another form of union.

Of the total responses, 60% affirm that it is their first time in the province and 94% that it is their first time in the Village, stating that nature tourism (47%) and cultural tourism (40%) are the main reasons for their trip; 13% respond that their travel motivations are other, without specifying. This answer indicates that the Village has not clearly defined its type of differentiating product.

The most significant features during the visit to the Village are its safety and comfort (98% and 96% respectively), the sensation of warmth and the adequate quality-price ratio (both with 74%), aspects that must undoubtedly remain as destination qualifiers.

In contrast to these percentages of approval, the lack of originality (77%) and the falseness of the product (63%) are presented as the greatest dissatisfactions, aspects that also condition the responses related to the desire to repeat the visit (78% would not) or 65% who would not recommend the Village to another person (Figure 1).

Fig 1: Criteria for evaluating visitors.



Source: own elaboration.

The stated elements show that 51% of visitors are moderately satisfied with their visit, which is alarming if also the 21% that claim to be dissatisfied or not very satisfied, representing 72% of those surveyed is considered. Only 28% reported being satisfied or very satisfied with the visit. In general, those who evaluated their stay on the scales corresponding to levels 1 and 2 (being dissatisfied or not very satisfied) belong to the professional sector, and work mainly in the field of research and journalism.

The results of the survey show that even when the levels of tourist arrivals have been high in Pingan Yuanjiacun, contrary to the expectations of the project management, the sustainability of the tourism development program at medium and long term may be in danger.

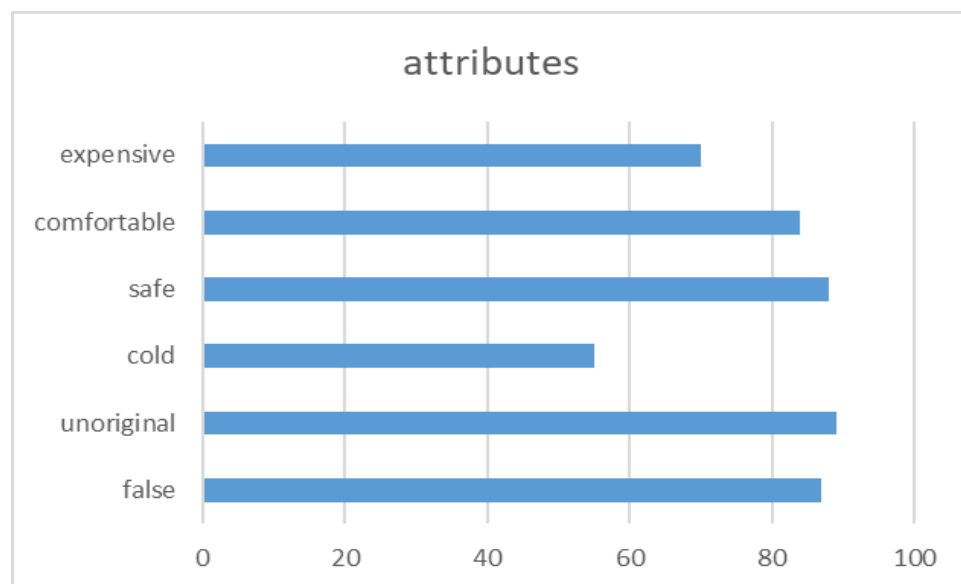
Analysis of the surveys of the residents

The Village is made up of 572 families of which 1 representative was selected to apply the survey. 66% of the surveyed subjects are men, 80% are between 26 and 65 years of age (although 60% are concentrated between 46 - 65 years), 46% have reached secondary level of education and 52% is married.

53% of the participants in the survey declared that they were the financial support of their family and the phenomenon of the empty nest could be verified: families lack the presence of young professionals, and are mainly made up of parents and grandparents. Regarding the professions/occupations, the most repeated are farmer (22%), seamstress (21%) and seller (21%), and it is verified that 99% of the families do not have any position or business in the tourism project of the Village, highlighting that only 8 (1%) actively participate in it, as owners of small stalls selling agricultural or textile products.

70% of residents state that the cost of living has increased with the arrival of tourism. The level of satisfaction with the changes that have occurred in the Village can be considered low, considering that 82% of those surveyed report between a low and medium level of satisfaction; only 13% consider themselves very satisfied. These affirmations are based on the fact that 98% of those surveyed consider that the Village does not preserve its historical identity, therefore 100% of the residents do not feel identified with the new landscape and place (Figure 2).

Fig 2: Tourism project evaluation attributes.



Source: own elaboration.

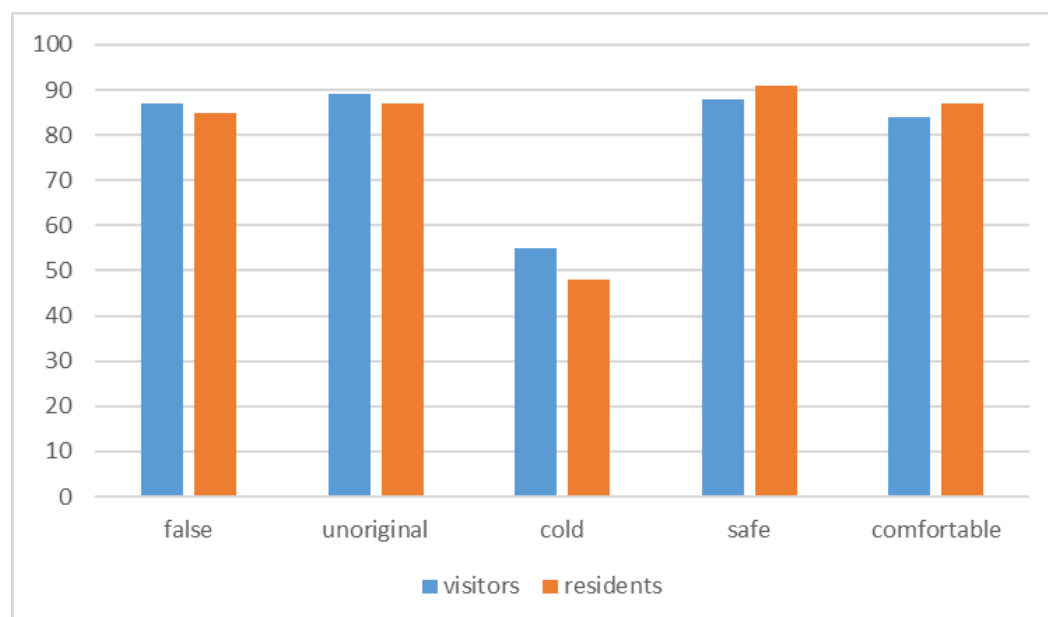
The attributes declared by the residents show that, beyond the comfort that the new infrastructures created have brought with them, the warmth of the welcome has been lost because the products do not show the reality of daily life, nor the traditional local culture, elements that reinforce their disagreement with the tourism development project. 88% of the respondents consider that they do not participate in the economic or cultural activities of the village, nonetheless, 67% expressed that they consider that their knowledge of the local culture can improve the image and the tourist offer. In relation to the willingness to participate in economic or cultural activities, the respondents answered affirmatively in 95% of the cases.

DISCUSSION

The answers given by all the respondents indicate that the Village does not have a clearly defined type of differentiating product, with evidence of a low perception regarding the relationship between nature and local culture and the similarity of the product compared to others of the same type. type in the region, and little or no differentiation in cultural, gastronomic or craft aspects.

Due to the levels of approval, both by visitors and residents, safety, comfort, a feeling of warmth and the adequate quality-price ratio, are the aspects that must undoubtedly remain as qualifiers for the destination (Figure 3).

Fig 3: Comparative attribute evaluation.



Source: own elaboration.

However, the main weaknesses of the tourism development project are related to the lack of originality and the falsehood of the proposal.

This situation stems from the fact that the criteria of the residents were not listened to for the construction of the project, and that even today their level of interaction with the developers is nil, so that the scarce local participation is not only visible in the distribution of jobs, but also in decision-making regarding the course of the project, both conceptually and constructively.

This reinforces the criteria of Qilou et al. (2018) who state that, as opposed to allegedly positive authenticity, negative authenticity is something that is authentic but which tourists and residents consider not valuable enough to be preserved. However, researchers rarely pay attention to it, and there remains a lack of theoretical recognition and in-depth understanding of it.

The residents express agreement with the benefits of the urbanization, but they have stopped identifying with the landscape and the place, limiting the direct positive impacts with the payments for the transfer of land that the families have received from the investors.

The disconnection of the residents with the new landscape and the place is based on the fact that the historical identity of the Village is not preserved, and that it reinforces previous problems related to the enhancement of culture, which have not yet been overcome and which are summarized in:

- Cultural image - poor cultural display
- Deficient cultural production
- Lack of a solid demonstration of the Hehuang culture, which need be strengthened outside the region

Tourism development requires harmonizing the efforts of the participating agents and leading entities that guarantee a balance between the dimensions of sustainability, especially when it comes to reconciling the interests of the resident population and visitors to the destination. When the social actors converge their opinions and highlight in parallel the critical points of the development projects and models, tourism can become an unwanted alternative and the objectives linked to the sector cannot be achieved.

The tourism development program for Pingan Yuanjiacun Village is at a critical moment for decision-making, as tourists and residents expose their dissatisfaction with the product, elements that put the future of the project at risk. Corrective actions are required to help overcome the distortions in the creation of a commercial brand that is based on an ancient culture, but that is not yet inserted as a differentiator in a context of high levels of competition based on the uniqueness and singularity of the tourist product.

CONCLUSIONS

The present research aims at presenting the opinions of visitors and residents of Pingan Yuanjiacun Village that allow to evaluate the satisfaction levels with the model of touristic development implemented. The research is based on the application of two surveys, one directed to the locals and another to the visitors of the village. The data was coded on the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences which allowed to create a database including the results of the survey. These results evidence that either residents or visitors give a low satisfactory evaluation to the features of the touristic product.

The present study contributes to identify the gaps existing in the model of development implemented by Pingan Yuanjiacun, since as empirical research it permits an approach to the social dimension of sustainable development. Furthermore, such a study is presented as a tool for administrators and local decision-making board of the touristic project as it recognizes improvement opportunities for the objective's fulfillment at medium and long terms.

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