

## **Socio-economic factors affecting attitudes of local people on cultural and eco-tourism development in Central Province in Sri Lanka**

**H.R.H. Gamage<sup>1</sup>, S.K.N. Gamage<sup>2</sup> and O. Gasimli<sup>3</sup>**

### **Abstract**

Sri Lanka is a well-identified cultural and eco-tourism destination, as it offers inherited culture and world heritage, community, spiritual attraction, tropical wildlife, and nature. The environmental sustainability is the key feature of sustainable tourism development. Cultural and eco-tourism development is known as a socio-cultural event. People's attitudes are feelings about someone or something which include human beliefs and growing and conflicting feelings about the person or object. Several studies found in literature report that local community attitudes towards cultural and eco-tourism mainly depend on socio-economic impacts of tourism and socioeconomic characteristics of the residents. Correspondingly, residents' views and perceptions towards cultural and eco-tourism have a strong association with sustainable tourism development. The primary objective of this study was to examine the socio-economic factors affecting local attitudes towards the cultural and eco-tourism development in Sri Lanka. The theoretical development of the investigation is based on the social exchange theory. This research was developed using field data collected from Mathale and Kandy districts of the central province that were designated as the study area. A structured questionnaire was engaged for field data collection from randomly selected 180 household heads from both rural and urban communities of the chosen regions. Local attitudes towards tourism worked as dependent variable and socioeconomic characteristics of residents were considered as independent variables in the empirical model, and the logistic regression with descriptive statistical methods was applied to reach the research objectives. The results revealed that household's income, occupation status, use of social media, social trust, and memberships of community association were the significant determinants of residents' positive attitudes towards cultural and eco-tourism development in the Central Province of Sri Lanka. On the other hand, the level of education and the length of residency in the community have a negative effect on attitude towards cultural and eco-tourism. Conversely, urban residents believe in future cultural and eco-tourism development in the province. This study recommends that policy decisions related to cultural and eco-tourism development should consider the residents' attitudes towards cultural and eco-tourism to achieve an environmental-friendly development process. Future research directions are presented.

**Keywords:** *Central Province, Cultural and eco-tourism, Social exchange theory*

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<sup>1</sup> *Land Use Policy Planning Department, Ministry of Land and Parliamentary Reforms, Colombo, Sri Lanka. Corresponding author's email: gamagehrh@gmail.com*

<sup>2</sup> *Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka.*

<sup>3</sup> *School of Economics and Trade, Hunan University, Changsha, P.R China.*