

The Local Community's Perception of the Cable Car Project and its Role in Tourism Development in Ajloun

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: The aim of this study is to understand the local community's perception of the cable car project and their level of satisfaction with it in Ajloun Governorate.

Methods: A descriptive methodology was used to measure the local community's perception of the role of the cable car project in tourism development in Ajloun. A total of 247 questionnaires were distributed, and a sample was taken from the local community in the cable car area. To achieve the study's objectives, the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) program was used for data analysis.

Results: The study results revealed strong support from local residents for tourism projects and an indication that they are not significantly affected by the socio-cultural aspects of tourism. This suggests that the cable car project is of considerable importance for the development of the governorate, encouraging and attracting tourism investments, supporting the economy, and creating job opportunities. Local residents have high expectations for the cable car project to alleviate economic difficulties and are prepared to initiate their own tourism ventures.

Conclusions: Based on reached in this study, the study recommends emphasizing the potential benefits of the cable car project and educating local community members about their aspirations and perceptions through organized dialogue sessions, comprehensive training, and guidance crucial for tourism development in ajloun.

Keywords: Local Community Perception, Cable Car, Tourism Development, Ajloun Governorate.

INTRODUCTION

The transportation sector plays a critically important role in tourism and economic development strategies aimed at enhancing recreational opportunities in both rural and urban areas. It constitutes essential infrastructure and a necessary enabling factor for regions characterized by tourism activities, significantly contributing to economic support and enhancement (Brid et al., 2014). The cable car provides a dynamic and unique perspective in mountainous areas compared to other modes of transportation. It has a substantial impact on tourists' perceptions, serving as a significant attraction through various means. The cable car offers scenic views, especially in attractive areas that are difficult to access via other transportation systems. Additionally, it provides opportunities for direct engagement with nature, facilitating comfortable and seamless travel between natural areas and enjoying their facilities across multiple regions. These factors make the cable car not only a mode of transport but also an integral part of the tourist experience (Saver, 2002).

Ajloun Governorate is one of the administrative divisions of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and boasts numerous tourist destinations due to its historical significance and strategic location amidst Jordan's stunning mountains. Known since ancient times, especially during the Roman era, Ajloun has always held considerable historical importance. Tourism plays a vital role in developing the economy and community, positively influencing social,

economic, and environmental development. It benefits rural communities by improving job opportunities, living standards, infrastructure, and increasing the availability of recreational and entertainment facilities. Additionally, tourism helps in the preservation and promotion of local culture, all supported by the economic benefits derived from an increase in visitor numbers (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2017).

In a 2023 interview with the Jordanian channel almamlaka, the Director of the Ajloun Development Area highlighted that since its opening in June, the Ajloun mountain range and its nature reserve have welcomed approximately 400,000 local and international visitors, thanks to the cable car. This attraction allows visitors to experience breathtaking views of the mountainous slopes and natural landscapes stretching approximately 20 kilometers. Consequently, the current study focuses on the local community's perceptions of the cable car project in Ajloun and aims to understand their awareness of the cable car and its benefits to their well-being. This understanding can assist policymakers in long-term development and implementation. The significance of the study lies in investigating local perceptions to facilitate the establishment of a cable car system in Ajloun Governorate.

Study Problem and its Importance

The cable car project plays a significant role in developing the tourism sector in Ajloun Governorate, following the Hashemite Royal directives aimed at revitalizing tourism in Ajloun in January 2019 (Jumaisat, 2021). The project was inaugurated in June 2023. Its goal is to promote sustainable tourism in northern Jordan, including Ajloun, and to enhance mountain tourism in the region. Additionally, the project aims to create job opportunities for local residents, both within the project itself and in related logistical services, such as hotels, eco-lodges, tourist restaurants, conference centers, and other businesses. The core issue of the study revolves around assessing the local community's perception of the cable car's role in tourism development, focusing on its economic, cultural, and environmental impacts. The study specifically targets Ajloun Governorate, which is experiencing notable growth in the local tourism sector.

Given the limited research on the role of the cable car in Ajloun Governorate and its impact on sustainable development, this study addresses the measurement of the local community's perception of the cable car project and its role in tourism development in Ajloun. This study is distinctive as it represents one of the most recent investigations into understanding the local community's awareness and perceptions of the cable car's role in Ajloun.

Study Objectives

The main objective of this study can be to measure the extent of the local community's perception of the cable car project and its role in tourism development in Ajloun. The sub-objectives can be summarized as follows:

1. **Assess the Local Community's Economic Perception:** To understand the local community's views on the economic impact of the cable car project in Ajloun.
2. **Examine Cultural and Social Perceptions:** To study the local community's perceptions of the cable car project from cultural and social perspectives.
3. **Determine the Level of Local Satisfaction:** To evaluate the level of satisfaction among the local community regarding the cable car project.

Theoretical Framework

According to Murphy (1980), tourism is an industry that utilizes the community as a resource and sells it as a product, impacting everyone's lives in the process. Andriotis (2000) explained that tourism generates job opportunities and income for local residents and serves as a means for heritage preservation, environmental conservation, infrastructure development, cultural exchange, and political stability. However, Pfister (2008) noted that tourism is a "double-edged sword" due to its positive and negative aspects for host communities. Jimura (2011) highlighted that local residents ultimately decide the acceptable and unacceptable impacts of tourism, even though they often anticipate economic benefits such as additional cash gains, increased job opportunities, or improved infrastructure, while paying less attention to social benefits and environmental costs. Boley (2014) demonstrated that Social Exchange Theory (SET), which emerged from the sociological literature, has been adopted to understand and explore the meanings and mechanisms underlying interactions between distinct groups.

Mattsson et al. (2005) argue that cable cars are technological innovations applied in mountain tourism, originating from the passenger transport machinery industry. They note that cable cars are not a tourism innovation per se; in reality, pure tourism innovations are extremely rare. Innovative cable cars are as much a tourism innovation as jet

aircraft were in the late 1960s. On the other hand, Bieger (1999) emphasized that since the 1930s, cable cars have been a major driving force behind tourism in the Alps. They have facilitated access to ski resorts and enhanced mountain tourism, leading to substantial direct and indirect financial benefits in surrounding areas. Cable car companies are considered site-specific attractions that offer recreational experiences to their customers and form part of the service sector (Bieger, 2005).

Previous Studies

The study by Medina et al. (2024), titled "Capital Investment in Tourism Infrastructure: The Case of the Cable Car System in Quellab," aimed to examine the relationship between capital investment in tourism infrastructure and improvements in tourism services. The integration of public-private partnerships facilitated enhanced accessibility and tourist information facilities. The implementation of the cable car system at the fortress, the first of its kind in the country, significantly reduced the travel distance from a two-hour walk to just 20 minutes. The inclusion of guidance signs, charts, and rest areas also contributed to increased tourist satisfaction. Furthermore, local residents are expected to benefit from community product and service development due to the rise in visits. As a result of these advancements, the number of tourists showed a positive increase, which contributed to the local economy. This case study examines these current impacts and provides an analysis of other factors related to the management of heritage sites and their long-term implications.

The study by Gannon et al. (2021), titled "Assessing the Mediating Role of Residents' Perceptions Towards Tourism Development," aimed to investigate the mediating role of residents' perceptions of tourism impacts. The study explored whether community attachment, environmental and cultural attitudes, economic gains, and community participation directly affect residents' support for tourism development, or if their effects are mediated through perceptions of tourism impacts. Data was collected from residents of two historic cities in Iran: Kashan and Tabriz, with 404 responses from Kashan and 515 from Tabriz. The results reveal that residents' perceptions of tourism impacts play a crucial and significant role in shaping the relationships between community attachment, environmental attitudes, economic gains, and support for tourism development. However, the findings also indicate that cultural attitudes and community participation have indirect effects on supporting tourism development.

The study by Padilla (2020) aimed to explore the accessibility of public transportation and mobility through an ethnographic case study of two neighborhoods in Ciudad Bolívar, a poor area in Bogotá where an aerial cable car system was built. The geography of the area limits the efficiency and feasibility of more traditional transportation modes such as cars, buses, subways, and trains. The research addressed two main questions: How do residents of the peripheral areas of Ciudad Bolívar perceive the impact of the aerial cable car system on their urban mobility? And how can city government policies and investments in public transportation, particularly aerial cable cars, address historical inequalities and improve access to public transportation? The study involved 13 interviews and 8 focus group discussions, primarily with adult residents of Ciudad Bolívar. The interview and observation questions were designed to elicit participants' personal experiences with public transportation and their perceptions of the TransMiCable system's impact. The results revealed that the TransMiCable system has made trips for users to the urban center faster, safer, and more comfortable than before. The system instills pride and hope in some residents of Ciudad Bolívar. However, participants also identified limitations that prevented them from fully benefiting from improved mobility despite the new TransMiCable system. Users noted that although they saved a significant amount of time using the cable cars compared to public buses, budget constraints still limited their ability to engage in activities around the city. From a policy perspective, the findings are particularly relevant for Bogotá and other cities with similar geographic, spatial, and economic contexts—urban centers experiencing high levels of income inequality with poorer populations residing on the periphery of mountainous areas.

The study by Czarnowska et al. (2019), titled "Nature-Based Tourism or Mass Tourism in Nature? Segmenting Visitors to Protected Mountain Areas Using Self-Organizing Maps (SOM)," aimed to identify visitor profiles at a heavily frequented tourist destination, Kasprowy Wierch, within Tatra National Park in Poland. Using Self-Organizing Maps (SOM) as an analytical method, the study explored the socio-demographic and behavioral characteristics of visitors. A total of 2,488 participants were interviewed on-site. The Self-Organizing Map (SOM) analysis relies on brain-like processes for managing and storing information to classify subjects and/or find relationships between variables. The results revealed four heterogeneous tourist profiles. Interestingly, two of these profiles (Groups 1 and 3) were identified as particularly challenging for management purposes, as they visited the national park for reasons other than the natural attractions. Specifically, one subset of Group 3 was motivated by the

opportunity to use the cable car, enjoy the views, and remain close to the cable car's upper station. Conversely, Groups 2 and 4, comprising less than half (42%) of the visitors to Kasprowy Wierch, sought a natural experience during their trip. The findings offer a new perspective on visitor management within the Kasprowy Wierch area, particularly by intersecting visitor segmentation with types of trips or cable car tickets sold in an international context. This highlights the SOM technique as a valuable tool for classifying tourists and underscores the issue of mass tourism destinations within protected areas.

The study by Zhu et al. (2017), titled "Residents' Attitudes Towards Sustainable Tourism Development in a Historical Cultural Village: The Impact of Perceived Impacts, Place Attachment, and Tourism Development Potential," aimed to evaluate resident support for sustainable tourism development in a destination at the early stages of tourism development. The study focused on residents' perceptions of the potential for sustainable tourism development, their sense of place, perceived tourism impacts, and support for tourism development. A total of 331 completed surveys were collected in Luzhou, a historical cultural village in China. The data was analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). The results revealed that perceived collective benefits had a significant positive impact on support for tourism development, while the impact of the other three perceived effects was not significant. The relationship between residents' sense of place, perceived collective and personal benefits, perceived personal costs, and support for tourism development was significant. Additionally, residents' perceptions of tourism development potential had a significant impact on perceived effects and support for tourism development, except for perceived personal benefits. The study also discussed some practical implications of these findings for tourism planning and development.

The study by Brida et al. (2014), titled "Tourism and Transport Systems in Mountain Environments," aimed to analyze the economic efficiency of cable cars in South Tyrol, specifically in the autonomous province of Bolzano, and relate it to sustainability issues. The study found that this mode of transportation in the Italian Alps could be considered relatively economically inefficient, with most cable cars demonstrating decreasing returns to scale. However, the study also revealed some distinctive features among cable cars based on their regional context. Additionally, the study identified policy implications that could assist economists in improving the efficiency of these transportation systems.

The study by Kim (2011), titled "Perceptions and Views of Visitors Regarding the Construction of a Cable Car in Mudeungsan Regional Park," aimed to investigate visitors' perceptions and attitudes toward the proposed cable car construction in Mudeungsan Regional Park. Data was collected from 401 respondents through a field survey conducted in the park in September 2010. The study found that 61.7% of respondents opposed the construction of the cable car, while 20.6% supported it. Respondents expressed a high level of concern about the potential consequences of the cable car, including environmental degradation, deterioration of natural landscapes, congestion due to increased visitor numbers, and the loss of previous natural experiences within the park. Despite these concerns, respondents showed a low level of belief in the positive economic impacts of the cable car, such as increased income and local economic growth through attracting tourists.

Cable Car Project in Ajloun Governorate

The Ajloun Cable Car is a significant development project that contributes to economic activity, provides job opportunities, and enhances tourism in the governorate while attracting investments. The cable car has notably increased the number of tourists visiting various sites in the region and beyond, positively impacting the local community and commercial and hospitality establishments in Ajloun (Al-Hamamsa, 2023). The government views the Ajloun Cable Car as a new, environmentally friendly tourism product, benefiting from its elevated location overlooking the Ajloun mountains. It is also strategically positioned near several tourist attractions, such as Ajloun Castle, the Visitor Center, the Shouf Forest, and the environmental tourism site of the reserve. This location is crucial in evaluating the tourism destination, serving various functions at multiple levels by utilizing the cable car for practical transportation of tourists in the high mountainous areas (Ministry of Tourism, 2023).

The Ajloun Cable Car was established in 2021, with construction commencing at the end of 2020 following the award of the project to the company "Doppelmayr Garaventa." It began operation on June 16, 2023. The cable car spans approximately 2.5 kilometers and is equipped with forty cabins, each with a capacity of five people. The first station is located in the Suwan Development Area at the Mar Elias site, while the second station is near Ajloun Station. The project occupies an area of 14 dunams. The Ajloun Cable Car represents a significant enhancement for tourism in Ajloun, being the first such project in Jordan (Al-Momani, 2032).

Study Methodology

In this study, a descriptive approach was employed to assess the local community's perceptions of the role of the cable car in tourism development in Ajloun. This approach was used to achieve the study's objectives and answer its research questions. The descriptive method involved studying the research topic using an appropriate tool to collect information and data. The study population comprised the local community of the cable car area. A total of 247 questionnaires were distributed to the study sample. To achieve the study's objectives and answer its questions, the researchers developed a questionnaire to collect primary data based on the study variables. This questionnaire was informed by relevant scientific studies and expert opinions. The questionnaire consisted of two sections and was distributed as follows:

Demographic Data

This section aims to identify the key personal and professional characteristics of the study sample. The demographic data collected include:

-Gender

-Age

-Educational Qualification

Table 1 presents the demographic data.

Table1 Frequencies and Percentages of Study Sample by Study Variables

Variable	Category	Frequencies	Percentage
Nationality	Jordanian	235	95.1%
	Non-Jordanian	10	4.0%
	Other	2	0.9%
	Total	247	100%
Gender	Male	141	57.1%
	Female	105	42.5%
	Prefer not to state	1	0.4%
	Total	247	100%
Educational Qualification	Less than Secondary	10	4.0%
	Secondary	35	14.2%
	Diploma	29	11.7%
	Bachelor's	99	40.1%
	Graduate Studies	47	19.0%
	Other	27	10.9%
	Total	247	100%
Age	18-30 years	102	41.3%

	31-40 years	78	31.6%
	41-50 years	58	23.5%
	Over 50 years	9	3.6%
	Total	247	100%

From Table 1, the following observations can be made:

Nationality: The frequency and percentage for the study sample by nationality show that the largest group is Jordanian, with 235 individuals representing 95.1% of the sample. This is followed by non-Jordanian individuals, with 10 participants making up 4% of the sample. The "Other" category has the smallest representation, with 2 individuals accounting for 0.8%.

Gender: For the gender variable, the highest frequency is observed in males, with 141 individuals constituting 57.1% of the sample. This is followed by females, with 105 participants representing 42.5%. The "Prefer not to state" category has the lowest frequency, with only 1 individual, which is 0.4% of the sample.

Educational Qualification: The data for educational qualification show that the majority of respondents have a Bachelor's degree, with 99 individuals, representing 40.1%. This is followed by those with Graduate Studies, totaling 47 individuals or 19%. Secondary education is represented by 35 individuals, making up 14.2% of the sample, while those with less than Secondary education are the smallest group, with 10 individuals, representing 4%.

Age: Regarding age distribution, the largest age group is 18-30 years, with 102 individuals making up 41.3% of the sample. This is followed by the 31-40 years age group, with 78 individuals, representing 31.6%. The 41-50 years age group includes 58 individuals or 23.5%, and the age group over 50 years has the smallest representation, with 9 individuals, accounting for 3.6%.

Study Tool Stability

To ensure the reliability of the study tool, Cronbach's alpha was applied to all areas of the study. The study tool is considered reliable if the Cronbach's alpha coefficient is 0.70 or higher, with values closer to 100% indicating higher reliability. Table 2 presents the reliability coefficients of the study tool as follows:

Reliability Coefficients of the Study Instrument are as Follows:

Table 2 Cronbach's Alpha Coefficients

Measure	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Overall Perception	10	0.73

It is evident from Table (2) that the reliability coefficient for the "Overall Perception" measure is 0.73, indicating that all reliability coefficients are high and acceptable for the application of this study.

Study Tool Correction

The final version of the questionnaire consisted of 10 items. A five-point Likert scale was employed to measure the opinions of the study sample. The scale was structured as follows:

- Strongly Agree (5)
- Agree (4)
- Neutral (3)
- Disagree (2)
- Strongly Disagree (1)

Respondents were instructed to mark (✓) next to the option that best reflects their level of agreement.

To evaluate the mean scores, the following classification was used:

- **Low:** 1.33 – 2.33
- **Medium:** 2.34 – 3.66
- **High:** 3.67 – 5

The length of each category was calculated using the formula: (Highest value – Lowest value) / 3, which equals $(5 - 1) / 3 = 1.33$.

Statistical Processing

To address the study's questions, appropriate statistical methods were applied using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 25. The procedures included:

- Calculating frequencies and percentages for the distribution of the study sample according to the study variables.
- Computing means and standard deviations for the scale items and the overall scale.

Results

Local Community Perception of the Ajloun Cable Car Project

To address this question, the means and standard deviations of the local community's perceptions of the Ajloun cable car project were calculated, as shown in Table (3).

Table3 Means and Standard Deviations of Local Community Perceptions of the Ajloun Cable Car Project

No.	Item	Mean	Standard Deviation
1	In your opinion, do you expect an increase in job opportunities for the local community?	3.86	1.15
2	Are you excited about using the services provided at the cable car project site?	3.91	1.01
3	Do you think there have been changes in Ajloun Governorate since the start of the cable car project (e.g., infrastructure improvements)?	2.53	1.36
4	Do you expect the cable car project to contribute to diversifying services for the local community and tourists, and to be a distinctive attraction for Ajloun Governorate?	4.15	0.97
5	Do you expect the cable car project to support the local market with new products?	3.97	1.04
6	Do you expect the cable car project to improve the quality of life (e.g., development of parks and recreational areas)?	3.98	1.04
7	In your opinion, does an increase in the number of tourists negatively impact the local community's culture through the imitation of tourist consumption behaviors?	2.92	1.43
8	Could the cable car project promote local culture, customs, and traditions?	3.88	1.00
9	In your opinion, does an increase in the number of tourists have a positive effect on the local community by learning English?	4.02	0.98
10	Do you think that an increase in tourists has a negative impact on youth through school dropout and drug use?	2.43	1.27
Overall Perception		3.56	0.62

Analysis:

From Table (3), it is evident that the mean scores and standard deviations for the items related to the local community's perception of the cable car project and its role in tourism development in Ajloun are as follows:

- Item (9), "In your opinion, does an increase in the number of tourists have a positive effect on the local community by learning English?" had the highest mean score (4.02) with a standard deviation of (0.98).
- This was followed by Item (6), "Do you expect the cable car project to improve the quality of life (e.g., development of parks and recreational areas)?" with a mean score of (3.98) and a standard deviation of (1.04).
- Item (5), "Do you expect the cable car project to support the local market with new products?" had a mean score of (3.97) and a standard deviation of (1.04).

These items had relatively high scores, indicating positive perceptions.

- In contrast, Item (7), "In your opinion, does an increase in the number of tourists negatively impact the local community's culture through the imitation of tourist consumption behaviors?" had a lower mean score (2.92) with a standard deviation of (1.43).
- Item (3), "Do you think there have been changes in Ajloun Governorate since the start of the cable car project (e.g., infrastructure improvements)?" had a mean score of (2.53) and a standard deviation of (1.36).
- Item (10), "Do you think that an increase in tourists has a negative impact on youth through school dropout and drug use?" had the lowest mean score (2.43) with a standard deviation of (1.27).

These items had medium to low scores, indicating concerns or negative perceptions.

Overall, the mean score for the perception of the cable car project was (3.56) with a standard deviation of (0.62), reflecting a generally moderate perception of the project's impact on tourism development in Ajloun.

Conclusion

This study examined the local community's perception of the cable car project and its role in tourism development in Ajloun, as it is one of the new studies being written in Jordan, especially in Ajloun Governorate. After studying the study area and analyzing it, the study reached important results through the response of the study sample. The following recommendations were reached:

1. Conducting educational campaigns on the benefits of sustainable development through the use of various social media and innovation for new tourism activities, in addition to creating awareness programs targeting local community youth.
2. Coordination and cooperation between governmental and non-governmental organizations, especially those related to tourism activity, to facilitate investments and involve the local community in planning, choosing designs, choosing the path and other aspects of the cable car project that may affect their daily lives.
3. The government should improve the infrastructure in a number of marginalized sites in hosting tourism.
4. Conducting a comprehensive community participation process to understand their perceptions, aspirations and interests regarding the cable car.

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