This study examines local community attachment to their place of living and their perceptions toward social and economic impacts of tourism development in the city of Bistoon in Iran. The study focused on residents in the vicinity of popular heritage attractions in the region. According to the survey, residents in this study expressed slightly high place attachment to their community and most of the respondents recognized and appreciated the positive impacts of tourism towards the local people. The findings of semi structured interviews with residents supported the survey results.

Key Words : Residents, Place Attachment, Tourism Impacts, Perceptions, Iran

Residents of tourism destinations have a major role in sustainable tourism development in their areas. Tourism has to be managed with the help and interest of all stakeholders in a given territory with a focus on local inhabitants (Guyer and Pollard, 1997). In this way, many studies have been carried out by the researchers in developed countries about local community perceptions toward tourism. Among them are Schroeder (1996), Ryan and Montgomery (1994), Nicholas (2007), Williams and Lawson (2001). But not many studies have been devoted to examine residents’ attitudes in developing countries (Lepp, 2007). This study will focus on the residents in historical city of Bistoon, recognized as one of the popular cultural heritage destinations in the region. The purposes of this study are to identify the place attachment of residents and their perceptions about tourism social and economic impacts.
II. Study Area

Iran is the eighteenth largest country in the world in terms of area. It is located in southwestern Asia and covers the land area of more than 1,648,000 km². It has a population of over seventy million (Statistical Centre of Iran, 2006). Throughout history, Iran has been of geostrategic importance because of its central location in Eurasia. It occupies an important position in the world economy due to its large reserves of petroleum and natural gas. The country possesses one of the world's oldest continuous major civilizations, with historical and urban settlements date back to more than 5000 BCE. It is rich with the history of humanity and has a high concentration of archaeological sites (Safaei, 2007). There are ten historical sites listed under the World Heritage list, while many more sites are tentatively listed (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2009). Heritage attractions give the country a good potential for tourism development. The government intends to develop the tourism sector as a key factor mentioned in the national economic and social development plan.

The city of Bisotun is located in Western Iran, 30 kilometers from the city of Kermanshah, the capital of Kermanshah province and 1303 meter above the sea level. It is along ten ancient trade routes linking the Persian high plateau to Mesopotamia (Iran Cultural Heritage, Handicraft and Tourism organization, 2004). 2500 people inhabit the city during fall and winter (statistical center of Iran, 2006); however, the number escalates in spring and summer because of desirable weather and more job opportunities especially in the tourism sector. In the past Bisotun was a village with only 100 houses. It was a crossroads among traders from other regions. It had about 25 shops including butchery, bakery, grocery stores. After the Islamic revolution of Iran, population increased and people started building shops and houses in the region. In 1996, government approved to change the name of the village into the city of Bisotun. Now, they are more than 500 families living in the city. The economy of families is depended to farms, tourism and some industrial factories around the city. Considering the unique heritage attraction, which the city possesses, government is planning to help the economy of the region by developing tourism sector.

Besides the attracting sights, rivers and springs, Bisotun is full of archaeological objects and monuments from different periods of Iranian history. The origin of the name Bisotun can be recovered from the Greek rendering Bagistanon, cited by Ctesias, as Bagastana, meaning place or stand of Gods. The name clearly shows that the place had been holy from time immemorial and Darius' monument in there, was well known to the ancients, with its sheer height cliff sacred to Zeus, to the supreme god Ahura Mazda (Zolfaghari et al., 2006). The site covers an area of 116 hectares. Archeological evidence indicates that this region became a human shelter 40,000 years ago. Its primary monument is the Bisotun Inscription, made in 521 BC by Darius the Great when he conquered the Persian throne. The inscription is written in three languages: Elamite, Babylonian and Old Persian (UNESCO, 2006). It represents the victory of Darius the Great over Gaumata and the nine rebellious kings. It covers an area of about 20 meters by 10 meters.