

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH IN COMMERCE & MANAGEMENT

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STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

OBJECTIVES

HYPOTHESES

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

FINDINGS

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ROLE OF LOCAL POPULATION IN ECOTOURISM PROMOTION: A STUDY OF SOUTHERN AREA OF KASHMIR DIVISION

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ABSTRACT

Ecotourism has become one of most rapidly growing forms of tourism in recent years as it provides the countries an opportunity to capitalize on their natural attractions and to gain all the economic benefits that tourism has to offer without destroying the resources that they are based upon. The current study is carried out in Kashmir valley which is a popular tourist destination for domestic and foreign tourists. The purpose of the study is to find the general awareness among the local population and at the same time how much importance they give to the ecotourism. A well structured questionnaire was drafted for the purpose to get the response from the different stakeholders. The study revealed that the awareness and importance among the local population about the ecotourism is not that great. The local population has to be educated about the impacts that the conventional tourism has on tourist destination. The study recommends that a participative approach should be adopted where the local community should be taken in confidence at every step in development of Eco-tourism as; after all, it is they who can make a move successful or otherwise.

KEYWORDS

Eco-Tourism, local population, Tourism development, Eco-tourism in Kashmir, Eco- tourism and local community.

INTRODUCTION

The recent growth of sensitivity to ecological issues and awareness of conservation has shifted the way people view travel and energized the rising industry known as eco-tourism. Eco-Tourism, as defined by ICUN, is "environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas, in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and any accompanying cultural features - both past and present) that promotes conservation, has low visitor impact, and provides for beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations."

Ecotourism is currently the fastest growing sector of the global tourism industry. Most estimates indicate that the demand for ecotourism is growing at an annual rise of 10 to 30 percent. Although the origins of the concept of ecotourism are not certain, one of the first sources to have contributed to the discourse appears to be Hetzer, who identified four pillars or principles of responsible tourism. These four pillars are minimizing environmental impact, respecting host cultures, maximizing benefits to local people and maximizing tourist satisfaction.

Early references to ecotourism are found in the work of Miller (1998), who worked on national park planning for eco development in Latin America and documentation produced by Environment Canada in relation to a set of road-based 'ecotours' they developed from the mid-1970s through to early 1980s. Moreover the development of ecotourism is due to the environmental movement during 1970s and 1980s (Honey, 1999, p.19). Environmental concern along with mass tourism led to increase demand for nature-based experiences of an alternative nature. By the mid 1980s, many developing countries had identified ecotourism as a means of achieving both conservation and development goals.

Around the world, ecotourism has been hailed as panacea: ways to fund conservation and scientific research, protect fragile and pristine ecosystems, benefit rural communities, promote development in poor countries, enhance ecological and cultural sensitivity, instill environmental awareness and a social conscience in the travel industry, satisfy and educate the discriminating, and, some claim, build world peace.(Honey, 1999, p.4)

Ecotourism is defined as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people." (TIES, 1990)

Ecotourism is about uniting conservation, communities, and sustainable travel. This means that those who implement and participate in ecotourism activities should follow the following ecotourism principles:

- Minimize impact, build environmental and cultural awareness and respect
- Provide positive experiences for both visitors and hosts.
- Provide direct financial benefits for conservation.
- Provide financial benefits and empowerment for local people.
- Raise sensitivity to host country's political, environmental, and social climate.

Ecotourism can be integrated with other sectors of the rural economy, creating mutually supportive linkages and reducing financial leakage away from the area. It can also be coordinated with agriculture, in terms of the use of time and resources and in providing markets for local produce. Ecotourism markets are small, seasonal and sensitive to external influences such as political changes or economic instability in the host or generating country. On the other hand, ecotourism can shield against threats to other sectors. Ecotourism is important for the livelihood of the local communities. Ecotourism engage local communities so they benefit from conservation, economic development and education. By bringing residents into the business of ecotourism, not only can local people meet their economic needs, but they also can maintain and enhance the sense of place that is critical for guaranteeing long-term conservation. People involved should include representatives of the local community, knowledgeable tourism operators, local entrepreneurs, relevant NGOs, conservation agencies including protected area managers, and local authorities. Links should be made as appropriate to the regional and national government level.

STUDY AREA

The State of J&K has three distinct regions, viz. Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh and all three have immense potential for tourism from both domestic as well as international tourists. There are number of locations which are untapped and can be developed as major tourist destinations, having all the natural as well as the cultural resources for attracting tourists. Some of the important natural resources are excellent climate, beautiful lakes, locations for adventure sports, wild life, trout fish, natural and manmade parks like Shalimar and Nishat of the Mughal period, flora and fauna, alpine forests, natural waterfalls and streams etc. As for the cultural resources, the state has some of the most important religious shrines of Hindus, historical monuments, plethora of local festivals, distinct cuisine, craftsmanship skills for intricate and fine woodwork, woolens, carpets, textiles, paper mache, inlay work etc.

Kashmir valley is particularly, a popular tourist destination for domestic and foreign tourists. Among the popular tourist places in the valley are Gulmarg that has a ski resort, Dal Lake that has popular house boats, Pahalgam and Amarnath Shrine. Tourism is an important part of the Kashmiri economy Thousands of Hindu pilgrims visit holy shrine of Amarnath every year and this significantly benefits the state's economy. But this yatra has put Kashmir on the verge of ecological disaster.

The southern part of Kashmir Valley consists of four districts namely Anantnag, Pulwama, Shopian and Kulgam. There are numerous tourist destinations that fall within this area. Among the prominent ones are Pahalgam, Kokernag, Verinag, Daksam, Achabal, Aharbal and trekking base from Kungawattan meadows to Kounsar nag Lake. These destinations provide variety of tourist attracts including mountain biodiversity, pastures, clean environment, wildlife viewing, mountain biking, rafting, skiing, rivers and streams, springs, village's greenery, archeological and built heritage, climbing and the most important is the hospitality of the host community.

Resting on the above logic and notions of host community importance and sustainable role in the development of ecotourism the study in hand is design with the following objectives.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the role of host community in promotion of eco-tourism in Southern Areas.
2. To find the importance of eco-tourism opportunities in the study area.
3. To give recommendations on the basis of study findings

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study was conducted during May 2014, with the main objectives to identify the role of host community in the promotion of eco-tourism in Southern parts of Kashmir valley. The universe of the study comprised purposively selected three village's i.e. Pahalgam, Achabal and Verinag of district Anantnag. District Anantnag consists of many tourist places and every year a large numbers of tourists visit this area. Also in these villages a large segment of the society are involved in tourism industry and depends on it for their livelihood on one way or the others. Stakeholders involved in ecotourism activities i.e. tour operator, tour guides and tourist were the respondents of the study. But due to time limitation and financial constraints data were collected for 15 tour operators, 45 tour guides, 15 tourists and 25 local residents. Thus the total sample size reached to 100. Data were collected with the help of a pre-tested interview schedule. The instruments used for data collection was pre- tested structural questionnaire having closed ended questions. Data collection through questionnaire is a useful tool in social and scientific research (Cohen et al. 2002, Bassey, 1999). But large scale surveys through questionnaire are sometimes difficult because of their high costs, errors and other defects (Gill, 1993, Inglis, 1991, 1992). Data collected through questionnaire was edited, coded and analyzed for determination of frequencies and percentages.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Following are some of the limitations of this study:

1. Firstly, the research work covered only 03 villages of Anantnag district.
2. Secondly, the respondents didn't want to disclose their lack of personal knowledge.
3. Thirdly, the sample size taken in this study does not ensure representativeness and conclusive findings.
4. Finally, detailed study is needed to be taken at larger scale to reach a strong conclusion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

KNOWLEDGE OF THE SAMPLE RESPONDENTS ABOUT ECO-TOURISM

Knowledge and educational background played important role in identifying the level of awareness among the community on the importance of taking care of different nature resources. There is general lack of understanding, knowledge and confusion about eco-tourism by the stakeholders. A proper understanding is essential because eco-tourism, if not properly planned and managed can do more harm than conventional tourism. Data presented in Table I shows that 49% respondents having enough knowledge, 20% have much knowledge about eco-tourism, 17% having very much and 14% sample respondents have little knowledge about eco-tourism. The table concludes that majority of the respondents having enough knowledge about ecotourism in the area. According to Watkin (2003) knowledge, capacity building and training of the stakeholders is necessary for tourism development. Moreover, communities have to agree that ecotourism is a business venture that they are prepared to endeavor to make it successful. The Howe (1983) also said that education and knowledge acquisition have long been themes guiding ecotourism. UN, (1992) mentioned that education is critical for promoting sustainable development and improving capacity of people to address environment and development issues. There is a growing recognition that sustainable policies, plans, and action have more chances of implementation when they are supported by an educated, informed people (UNEP, 1999).

TABLE I: DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLE RESPONDENTS ON THE BASIS OF KNOWLEDGE ABOUT ECO-TOURISM

Sample Respondents	Little		Enough		Much		Very Much		Total
	No.	%age	No.	%age	No.	%age	No.	%age	
Tourists	---	----	8	53.3	4	26.7	3	20.0	15
Tour Operators	---	----	6	40.0	5	33.3	4	26.6	15
Tour Guides	10	22.2	20	44.4	8	17.8	7	15.6	45
Local Residents	4	16.0	15	60.0	3	12.0	3	12.0	25
Total	14	14.0	49	49.0	20	20.0	17	17.0	100

IMPORTANCE OF ECO-TOURISM FOR THE AREA DEVELOPMENT

The Southern Areas of Kashmir are one of the important international tourism destinations. The region is renowned for its natural beauty, including its rugged valleys, high mountain peaks and waterfall s. These features attract a significant number of trekking and mountaineering expeditions every year. In order to sustain these attractions, it is vital that the stakeholders are fully aware of its importance. Ecotourism generates local jobs and income and provides opportunities for local community to earn their livelihood at local level through a sustainable way. The data in Table II depicts that 26% of respondents think eco-tourism is very important. Fifty five percent of the sample respondents mentioned that it is important. While 19% respondents think it is not important. This concludes that most of the respondents were aware about the importance of ecotourism. Liu (2005) argued that the current academic understanding of community participation suggests that if local residents want to benefit from tourism they must be integrated into decision-making process.

TABLE II: DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLE RESPONDENTS ON THE BASIS OF IMPORTANCE OF ECO-TOURISM IN THE AREA

Sample Respondents	Not Important		Important		Very Important		Total
	No.	%age	No.	%age	No.	%age	
Tourists	---	----	10	66.7	5	33.3	15
Tour Operators	---	----	9	60.0	6	40.0	15
Tour Guides	10	22.2	25	55.6	10	22.2	45
Local Residents	9	36.0	11	44.0	5	20.0	25
Total	19	19.0	55	55.0	26	26.0	100

STATUS OF STAFF TRAINING

Training is an effective people skill necessary for the development of an organization. It provides tremendous advantages in building the capacity and skill of the new hired employees. It improves the productivity of an organization; motivate the organization staff, building consistency and improve their overall performance. The data in table III present the status of staff training according to the sample respondent's view. The staff includes all those stakeholders who directly involved in the management of ecotourism in the area. The data reveals that 59% of the sample respondents thought that the staff is well trained, while 41% of the respondents said that the staff is not well trained.

TABLE III: DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLE RESPONDENTS ON THE BASIS OF STATUS OF STAFF TRAINING

Sample Respondents	Well Trained		Not Well Trained		Total
	No.	%age	No.	%age	
Tourists	9	60.0	6	40.0	15
Tour Operators	10	66.7	5	33.3	15
Tour Guides	30	66.7	15	33.3	45
Local Residents	10	40.0	15	60.0	25
Total	59	59.0	41	41.0	100

TRAINING NEEDS IDENTIFICATION BY THE SAMPLE RESPONDENTS

Training needs identification allows organizations to identify their training needs. It also helps the organization to identify complete organization needs. Proper training of staff in the form of hotel management courses, refresher courses and tour guide training is important for tourism development in the area. Training need identification is important for such courses which are relevant to the staff needs, improve the performance, create a difference in the work and to solve the organization problem. The sample respondents were asked whether there is a need for training of the staff or not. Table IV shows that the majority (60%) of the sample respondents urged the need for training, while 40% did not feel such a need.

TABLE IV: DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLE RESPONDENTS ON THE BASIS OF TRAINING NEEDS IDENTIFICATION

Sample Respondents	Training Needed		No Training Needed		Total
	No.	%age	No.	%age	
Tourists	8	53.3	7	46.7	15
Tour Operators	7	46.7	8	53.3	15
Tour Guides	30	66.7	15	33.3	45
Local Residents	15	60.0	10	40.0	25
Total	60	60.0	40	40.0	100

ROLE OF HOST COMMUNITY IN THE PROMOTION OF ECO-TOURISM

Local community should be benefited from employment opportunities, conservation, social services, more jobs, better infrastructure, improving their livelihood by having opportunity for multiple portfolio of income. The direct beneficiaries from ecotourism development seem to be the employees, craft producers, guides and committee members for they will have additional earnings. The host community plays an important role in the promotion of ecotourism in the area. The data in Table V illustrates that majority (69%) of the sample respondents were of the view that the host community has a role to play in the promotion of ecotourism, while 31% of the sample respondents denied the role of host community in this connection. So, maximum respondents think that host community has a significant role in the promotion of eco-tourism in the area. Most of the denied reasons were the illiteracy of the tour guides respondents, who lacking knowledge about the ecotourism in the area. This statement was supported by UN (1992) findings, stated that education is critical for promoting sustainable ecotourism and improving capacity of people to address environment and development issues. Also Sproule (1996) noted that community-based ecotourism the local community play a key role in the development of tourism. Watkin (2003) argued that local community plays a key role in the development and implementation of ecotourism. He further stated that education, capacity building and training opportunities for community members should also be included in the development of ecotourism. The data conclude that majority of the respondents replied for the role of host community in the ecotourism in the area.

TABLE V: DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLE RESPONDENTS ON THE BASIS OF ROLE OF HOST COMMUNITY IN THE PROMOTION OF ECOTOURISM

Sample Respondents	Having Role in ecotourism		Having No Role in Ecotourism		Total
	No.	%age	No.	%age	
Tourists	12	80.0	3	20.0	15
Tour Operators	11	73.3	4	27.7	15
Tour Guides	30	66.7	15	33.3	45
Local Residents	16	64.0	9	36.0	25
Total	69	69.0	31	31.0	100

ATTITUDE OF HOST COMMUNITY TOWARDS ECO-TOURISM

It is imperative for the promotion of any cause that its promoters must be clear in their thinking and attitude towards the very cause in its entirety. So, it was deemed necessary to determine the attitude of host community, being a stakeholder and partner in promotion of eco-tourism, as seen by the respondents in positive or negative. It is evident from the data in Table VI that 85% of the sample respondents were of the view that the attitude of host community is positive towards eco-tourism while 15% of the sample respondents replied in negative. McCool & Moisey (2001) argued that if local people are not included in ecotourism development, thus remaining far away from the desired sustainability. Lawrence (1997) also argued that when people do not receive sufficient benefits from ecotourism, they are prone to develop a negative attitude towards ecotourism development. So, an overwhelming majority of respondents see the attitude of host community positively, which is a significant factor for the promotion of eco-tourism.

TABLE VI: DISTRIBUTION OF SAMPLE RESPONDENTS ON THE BASIS OF ATTITUDE OF HOST COMMUNITY TOWARDS ECO-TOURISM

Sample Respondents	Positive Role		Negative Role		Total
	No.	%age	No.	%age	
Tourists	12	80.0	3	20.0	15
Tour Operators	13	86.7	2	13.3	15
Tour Guides	40	88.9	5	11.1	45
Local Residents	20	80.0	5	20.0	25
Total	85	85.0	15	15.0	100

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It is evident from the main findings of the study that the host community plays a vital role in the promotion of eco-tourism. The attitude of the host community is also positive towards it. The study reveals that majority of the tour operators, tour guides and tourists had enough knowledge about eco-tourism. They also considered eco-tourism very important. The staff engaged with tourism is not that well trained and there is a need for further trainings. These trainings when further imparted by the government, tour operators and NGO's collaboratively for building the capacity of different stakeholders will see an increase in the tourism development in the area. The study as a whole concludes that for the promotions of eco-tourism, the local community and their attitude plays an important role in the establishment of sustainable tourism. Therefore, the role of local community cannot be neglected in the promotion of eco-tourism in Southern Areas.

Ecotourism, often occurring in regional, rural and remote areas where alternative sources of livelihood are scarce and levels of poverty are frequently high, can provide a much needed addition to local income from an activity that values and supports conservation. Attention must be paid to sound business practices and market access if it is to be economically sustainable. Local and Indigenous communities should not only be involved in the planning and benefits of ecotourism products, but must also be recognized and supported as equal stakeholders and business leaders in the continued development of sustainable enterprises.

In conclusion, community awareness and knowledge of ecotourism is limited and this lack of knowledge will hinder efforts to promote ecotourism within the community. Unless further and appropriate education is provided, the community will not obtain a proper understanding of ecotourism and misconceptions about this form of tourism is likely to continue. It is likely that similar results would be found in other communities elsewhere around the world and it would be interesting to extend this study to compare community perceptions towards ecotourism with other communities.

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