

STAKEHOLDERS PERCEPTION TOWARDS SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN LESSER HIMALAYAS- A REVIEW STUDY

¹Qazi Ruban, ²Dr. Kushal Singh, ³Dr. Sumaira

¹Research Scholar, SOHMAT, CT University

²Associate Professor SOHMAT, CT University, Ludhiana

³Sr. Assistant Professor, Department of Management Studies, University of Kashmir

qazi.ruban366@gmail.com

Abstract

The Stakeholder Perception factor encompassed the beliefs, concerns, and willingness of stakeholders to engage in sustainable practices. The paper examines the perception of stakeholders towards sustainable tourism development in Lesser Himalayas. Sustainable tourism is increasingly recognized as a crucial approach for balancing economic development with environmental conservation and social well-being.

This paper investigates the various parameters of stakeholder perception and sustainable tourism development in the lesser mountains of Himalayas, focusing on economic, socio-cultural, and environmental sustainability, as well as government support.

This study investigates the ideas of sustainable tourism, stakeholder involvement, and the variables impacting stakeholder perception in the context of tourism development through an extensive analysis of the literature. The study uses a mixed-methods approach to gather information from several stakeholder groups in the Lesser Himalayas, including surveys, interviews, and observations. To find patterns and themes pertaining to stakeholder perception, the data is subjected to content analysis and thematic analysis methodologies. The study will help in knowing the stakeholder perception in attaining the pillars of Sustainable Tourism Development in Lesser Himalayas.

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism Development, Himalayan tourism, Socio-culture, Perception.

1. Introduction

In many parts of the world, tourism has become a major economic force, generating jobs, fostering cross-cultural understanding, and advancing local development. However, there are a number of issues that come with tourism's explosive expansion, such as socioeconomic inequality, cultural commodification, and environmental deterioration. The idea of sustainable tourism has become more well-known as a comprehensive strategy that aims to strike a balance between social progress, environmental preservation, and economic growth in response to these problems. The Lesser Himalayas are one area that demonstrates the opportunities and difficulties of sustainable tourism. The Lesser Himalayas, which are tucked away in India's northernmost region, are home to a wide variety of flora and wildlife, rich cultural legacy, and incredible natural beauty. In recent years, the tourist industry in this region has steadily grown, drawing both local and foreign travellers who are looking for adventure, spiritual retreats, and deeply engaging cultural experiences. But the swift

expansion of tourism in the Himalayan region prompts worries about how it will affect the region's delicate ecosystems, indigenous populations, and customs.

The perspectives of diverse stakeholders are crucial in determining the course of tourist development within the framework of sustainable tourism. A broad spectrum of actors is included in the definition of stakeholders in the tourism industry, including local communities, governmental and non-governmental organizations, travel agencies, travellers, and other entities with a stake in or influence over tourism-related activities. Planning, making decisions, and putting sustainable tourism initiatives into practice all depend on having a thorough understanding of their perspectives, interests, and concerns. Through a comprehensive analysis of the viewpoints of many stakeholders engaged in tourism-related endeavours, this research aims to discern the variables impacting their understanding and illuminate the obstacles and prospects linked to sustainable tourism within the area. In addition, the study seeks to offer suggestions for improving stakeholder perception and involvement in order to develop a more inclusive and sustainable tourist sector in the Lesser Himalayas.

2. Review of Literature

Aiming to maximize benefits for local people and preserve cultural heritage, sustainable tourism seeks to reduce the damaging effects of tourism on the environment. "Tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities" is how the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines sustainable tourism.

According to Gössling et al. (2020), the notion of sustainable tourism development highlights the significance of economic, social, cultural, and environmental sustainability in the tourism sector. It seeks to improve the well-being of the local community and preserve the destination's natural and cultural heritage while achieving long-term economic growth and job creation (Gössling et al., 2020; Buhalis & Darcy, 2011). Collaboration across a range of stakeholders, such as enterprises, government agencies, local communities, and tourists, is necessary for the development of sustainable tourism (Gössling et al., 2020). The notion of sustainable tourism comprises multiple elements and tenets. The three main goals of environmental sustainability are pollution reduction, natural ecosystem preservation, and resource conservation. Social sustainability places a strong emphasis on promoting local communities' well-being, which includes reducing poverty, preserving cultural traditions, and integrating local stakeholders in decision-making. In order to maintain long-term viability and an equitable distribution of tourism profits, economic sustainability seeks to produce economic benefits that are equitably dispersed among all stakeholders.

According to Zhuang et al. (2019), a global analysis of several economic sectors reveals tourism to be a significant and rapidly growing business. "The phenomenon under investigation creates opportunities for employment, fosters economic advancement, enhances cultural development, and advances societal progress." The tourism sector contributes around 10% of the global gross domestic product (GDP) and ranks third in terms of export income worldwide, according to Sthapit (2021) and the World Travel & Tourism Council (2019) data.

Specifically, out of the previously listed studies, 55 demonstrated a clear and unambiguous link, whilst 16 studies yielded inconclusive data. Over the past few decades, the tourism sector has grown significantly, and this trend is expected to continue (UNWTO, 2018; WTTC, 2018). Globally, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused significant disruptions in a number of domains, including social, psychological, and economic dimensions. The significant negative effects on the tourism and hotel industries (Dube et al., 2021; Nicola et al., 2020) demonstrate how terrible the consequences have been.

3. Objectives of Study

- a) To study the tourism scenario in lesser Himalayas.
- b) To study the stakeholder perception towards sustainable tourism development.
- c) To find out the perception of stakeholders towards various pillars of sustainability in lesser Himalayas.

4. Findings of the study

Economic Sustainable Development: The last crucial component of the development of sustainable tourism is economic sustainability. The local economy can benefit greatly from the growth of tourism in terms of jobs, revenue, and foreign exchange profits. Yet, the growth of the tourism industry may also have unfavourable effects on the economy, such as leakages and dependence on travel. As a result, it's critical to evaluate how stakeholders perceive how tourist development will affect the economy. Understanding stakeholders' perspectives on economic sustainability, according to Baum et al. (2008), can aid in the creation of strategies and policies that support the growth of sustainable tourism. The local economy, community, culture, and ecology can all be significantly impacted by the growth of tourism in mountainous places (Djurdjev & Cerovic, 2021). The assessment of stakeholders' perceptions of these impacts requires the application of science. A poll asking stakeholders to rank the effects of tourism development on the local economy, society, culture, and environment is one potential approach. Additionally, participants might be asked to provide particular instances of both positive and negative effects they have observed. Bulalis and Foerste (2015) Interviews, focus groups, or simply observing how tourism impacts the neighbourhood and environment are some options.

Economic growth and mountain tourism have been found to be strongly correlated, particularly in areas with breath-taking mountain scenery.

Adventure, the environment, and cultural tourism have emerged as important drivers of economic growth, offering a unique combination of experiences. This paragraph examines the relationship between mountain tourism and economic development, highlighting the mutual benefits and significance of these two sectors for promoting sustainable growth in mountainous areas.

It is imperative to adopt sustainable tourism practises to protect the environment and provide local communities with economic opportunities through community-based tourist initiatives. In regions where agriculture is the primary industry, the growth of mountain tourism might improve economic diversification and lessen the impact of climate change on those communities. There are numerous barriers to the growth of economic endeavours, such as

unequal profit distribution and environmental degradation. As a result, it is imperative to achieve a precise balance between environmental protection and economic progress. In order to support economic growth, preserve cultural heritage, and preserve the environment in these unique locations, mountain tourism is essential. The economic and social well-being of mountain towns and their adventurous visitors is greatly enhanced by this phenomenon.

Assessing stakeholder views of the economic impact of tourist growth is therefore crucial. According to Baum et al. (2008), creating policies and strategies that support the development of sustainable tourism can be aided by having an awareness of stakeholders' perspectives of economic sustainability.

Socio-Cultural Sustainability: This variable examines how to preserve and promote the sociocultural components that make a location unique, especially in light of how tourism has the potential to change an area. The study by Zhang et al. is a lighthouse, illuminating the complex dynamics involved in maintaining a place's cultural fabric and customs within the framework of tourism. Preserving regional customs, cultures, and communal welfare constitutes a significant element impacting the perspectives of stakeholders. Stakeholders evaluate how much tourism upholds and supports regional cultures, fosters cultural heritage, strengthens social cohesiveness, and gives marginalized people more power. Numerous scholarly investigations have underscored the significance of scrutinizing sustainable tourism development across various locales. Reisinger and Turner (2003), for instance, made the case that destinations should prioritize sustainable tourism development in order to guarantee that tourism may continue to have a good impact on the economy and society. In a similar vein, Becken and Hay (2007) proposed that developing nations can benefit from sustainable tourist development by means of reduced poverty and increased economic growth.

Furthermore, research (Gössling et al., 2012; Styliadis & Biran, 2016) have emphasized the significance of sustainable tourism development for the preservation of natural resources and cultural heritage.

A key component in maintaining the socioeconomic well-being of nearby communities and the preservation of natural and cultural resources is the development of sustainable tourism. Sustainable tourist development in the lesser Himalayan region, offers the ability to safeguard the indigenous culture and ecology while fostering economic progress. Another important aspect of sustainable tourism development is the promotion of responsible tourism practices. According to a study by Shah et al. (2021), responsible tourism practices can help to reduce the negative impacts of tourism on the environment and local communities. The authors suggest that tourism stakeholders should prioritize sustainable practices such as waste management, energy conservation, and water conservation, as well as promote responsible visitor behavior. This can help to ensure that tourism activities are carried out in a way that minimises harm to the natural and cultural resources of the Lesser Himalayas (Shah et al., 2021).

Ullah et al.'s research from 2021, for example, emphasizes the significance of tourist development in attaining sustainable tourism in mountainous areas. The writers contend that sustainable tourism development should be the cornerstone of the industry, with the

preservation of the area's natural and cultural assets receiving first priority. Marzuki and Kozak's (2017) study highlight the significance of tourism development in bolstering economic growth and creating job possibilities in tourist areas.

A study by Suhail et al. (2021) shows how important community involvement is for developing tourism in a sustainable way. The authors say that involving local communities in the process of developing tourism can help to build trust, ownership, and commitment to sustainable tourism practices.

Environmental Sustainability: One of the main tenets of the development of sustainable tourism is environmental sustainability. The growth of tourism may have detrimental effects on the environment, such as pollution, depletion of natural resources, and extinction of wildlife.

As a result, it's critical to evaluate how stakeholders view how tourist development will affect the environment. Understanding stakeholders' attitudes toward environmental sustainability, according to Saarinen (2006), can aid in the creation of policies that support the growth of sustainable tourism. In addition, Ganie et al. (2021) stress how crucial it is for the Himalayan region to embrace ecotourism methods in order to support the growth of sustainable tourism. Promoting eco-friendly travel that helps local communities and the environment is known as ecotourism. This could be accomplished by engaging in pursuits like hiking, bird watching, and wildlife observation. Local populations can profit economically from ecotourism while the environment is preserved.

Carlo Aall states in the research conducted for the Norwegian government on sustainable tourism in practice, the lack of importance given to the environmental issues related with tourism discussed in the UN world commission report in 1987. It was in 1992 Rio conference where the UN plan for action on sustainable development Agenda 21 adopted covering 40 topics and 115 programs and tourism industry was the first to follow Agenda21. The author pointed out the sustainable development as a two folded concept in which the first one refers to the environment discourse and the need to protect nature from the misbehaviour of human beings and the second based on the human needs. The balancing of this relationship, protection of the environment from the human incursions and to use the natural resources for the betterment or the need of the human beings is the major goal of sustainable development. The author also described the process of transforming tourism to sustainable tourism is to differ between the 3 modes of relations between tourism, a) sustainable development tourism as victims of an unsustainable development, b) tourism as a cause of an unsustainable development and c) tourism as a part of the solution of creating the sustainable development.

5. Conclusion

Finally, the perception of stakeholders in the development of sustainable tourism in the Lesser Himalayas was investigated in this study article. The results showed that stakeholders had a variety of perspectives, some of which were favourable and had to do with the possible financial gains, cultural preservation, and community empowerment that come with sustainable tourism. On the other hand, issues with overdevelopment, the unequal distribution of benefits, and environmental deterioration were also raised. The economic, environmental, sociocultural, and stakeholder involvement aspects were among the major determinants of

stakeholder perception that the study revealed. In the context of sustainable tourism in the Lesser Himalayas, it was discovered that stakeholder perception was considerably shaped by economic advantages and costs, environmental protection, cultural preservation, and stakeholder involvement.

Stakeholder perception and its implications for sustainable tourism development were examined, with a focus on the importance of involving stakeholders in policy formation, planning procedures, and implementation strategies. Positive transformation, informed decision-making, and the promotion of sustainable tourist practices that strike a balance between economic development and environmental and sociocultural preservation can all be influenced by stakeholder perception.

The present study establishes a baseline for future research endeavours in the selected field and offers a fundamental framework for additional investigation. Success in sustainable tourism necessitates the involvement of numerous parties in a convoluted process, including locals, government agencies, businesses, and tourists. The Himalayas location offers important advantages in addition to noticeable challenges. The creation of a wealthy and sustainable region that engages people on an intellectual and emotional level while also protecting its pristine natural beauty for the benefit of future generations is one of the previously mentioned advantages.

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