

TOURISM MISMANAGEMENT AND ITS CONSEQUENCES ON THE FRAGILE ECOLOGY OF GILGIT BALTISTAN, A CASE STUDY OF TOURISM POLICY

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ABSTRACT

The tourism industry, often hailed as the backbone of a nation's economy, has witnessed significant global growth over the past decades. This research focuses on the consequences of tourism mismanagement on the fragile ecology of Gilgit Baltistan (GB), a region renowned for its stunning landscapes and rich cultural heritage. The study explores the impact of uncontrolled tourism on the ecosystem, waste generation, pollution, and the subsequent challenges faced by local communities. While tourism contributes significantly to the economy, particularly in Pakistan where it accounted for 2.7% of GDP in 2016, the unregulated growth of tourism in GB has led to environmental issues. The region's delicate balance faces threats such as waste accumulation, air, water, and soil pollution, soil erosion, and habitat disruption. The study emphasizes the need for responsible tourism practices to prevent irreversible damage to the natural beauty and livelihoods of local communities. The objectives of this case study include investigating instances of mismanagement in GB's tourism sector, examining the direct and indirect consequences on the ecology, exposing social and cultural implications on local communities, and contributing insights for the development of an ecotourism framework specific to GB. The methodology involves primary data collection through in-depth interviews with experts from the tourism department, environmental agency, and local communities in GB. The research area includes tourism-related departments and agencies in the northern areas of Pakistan, with a sample size of six experts and seven locals. In conclusion, the research underscores the urgent need for informed decision-making and sustainable practices in tourism management to strike a balance between economic development and environmental preservation in GB. The study aims to contribute valuable insights for policymakers and practitioners to address the complex challenges associated with tourism management.

INTRODUCTION

The tourism sector is regarded as the foundation of any country's economy. It has a major impact on the nation's economic growth. Local communities, businesspeople, and entrepreneurs have benefited greatly from the growth of the tourism industry. In a same vein, it helps to keep the peace and eradicate poverty. Although travel and tourism have been a part of every human society since the dawn of civilization, mass tourism has emerged as a major

global sector since the middle of the current century (Nigar, Ecotourism for Sustainable Development in, 2018).

Over the past few decades, tourism has expanded and changed, becoming a significant driver of socioeconomic development worldwide. The World Economic Forum states that one of the largest and fastest-growing businesses is tourism. It is a sector that contributes 10% of the global

gross domestic product (GDP), or 7% of the economy. It is mainly driven by the US\$1.2 billion in tourism-related spending, which has steadily increased from developed to less developed countries, rising by 5.1% (PKR 833.8 bn) in 2017 and predicted to grow by 5.6% annually to PKR developed nations (Arshad, Iqbal, Shahbaz, 2017). The growth of Pakistan's tourism sector has also had a significant impact on the country's economy; in 2016, it brought in USD 7.6 billion, or 2.7% of GDP, and by 2027, it is expected to generate 1,432.1 billion. Tourism's contribution to GDP was 6.9% (USD 19.4 billion), and it is predicted to grow by 6.0% in 2017 and 5.8% (USD 36.1 billion) in 2027, or 7.2% of GDP (WTTC, 2017). In 2016, tourism directly contributed 1.337 million jobs (2.3 percent of all jobs), and it is expected to grow by more than 2.3% to 1.368 million jobs in 2017 and 2.5% to 1.757 million jobs (2.3 percent of all jobs) in 2027.

Nonetheless, the industry indirectly contributed over 3.550 million jobs to total employment, and the overall employment share was roughly 6.0%. According to Arshad, Iqbal, and Shahbaz (2017), this is likely to increase by 3.0% to 3.657 million jobs in 2017 and by 2.7% per annum to 4.783 million jobs (6.3% of total) in 2027.

In this sense, Gilgit Baltistan, which is renowned for its breathtakingly beautiful snow-capped mountains, verdant valleys, distinctive biodiversity, and rich cultural legacy, makes an excellent case study. Visitors swarm Gilgit Baltistan to take in its breathtaking mountains, unspoiled landscapes, and varied wildlife and plants. There are increasing pressures on the ecosystem's fragile equilibrium (Nigar, 2019). Gilgit Baltistan and its suburbs are experiencing a boom in rural tourism. The simplest definition of rural tourism is travel that takes place in rural regions (Davidson, OECD, 2002).

Uncontrolled tourism has numerous negative effects on Gilgit-Baltistan's ecosystem, and one of the biggest environmental problems is garbage generation. Waste production, including food waste, plastic trash, and air pollution, has increased as a result of the region's tourism industry's explosive rise. The majority of the trash produced by visitors is left unattended in parks and on the streets, damaging the environment and harming

wildlife and local populations. The absence of appropriate waste management facilities and legislation exacerbates the issue (Saqib et al., 2019). Air, water, and soil pollution have all increased in Gilgit Baltistan as a result of the tourism industry's explosive rise.

In addition to directly affecting the air, soil, water, and biota of local habitats, the increased tourist traffic is also causing soil erosion, which can result in landslides and other natural disasters. Indirect effects are linked to the production, processing, and movement of goods. Parks and protected lands are examples of natural environments that may be directly impacted by pollution and garbage introduction, or indirectly by animals. Additionally, the growth of the tourism industry is linked to the addition of solid waste and increased pollution.

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Locals begin erecting structures without the required planning authorization when tourism takes off in any place, which can seriously harm the ecosystem and deplete natural resources like soil, water, and wood. Both the local ecosystem and human livelihoods are impacted by such environmental changes (Alshuwaikhat, 2004).

Rural tourism is an important industry for the host communities since it creates jobs and revenue for them. However, it may also be risky because it is linked to the growth of revenue that leads to the development of commercial infrastructure, which is completely unplanned. Two notable instances are Atta Abad Hunza and Ghulmet Nagar (Baig, et al, 2019).

The effects of poorly managed tourism on Gilgit Baltistan's delicate environment are examined in this case study, bringing attention to the ways that

inappropriate actions might endanger not only the area's natural beauty but also the livelihoods of nearby communities that rely on the ecosystem (Najum us Saqib et al., 2019).

Objectives

- To Investigate and document specific instances of mismanagement in the tourism sector of Gilgit Baltistan.
- To Examine the direct and indirect consequences of tourism mismanagement on the ecology of Gilgit Baltistan.
- To Expose the social and cultural implication of tourism mismanagement on local communities in Gilgit Baltistan.
- To Contribute insight to the development of ecotourism framework specific to Gilgit Baltistan.

Literature review

The global economy depends heavily on tourism, which provides jobs and revenue for many nations. Additionally, it encourages understanding between other communities, facilitates cultural interchange, and aids in the preservation of natural resources and cultural legacy. However, if it is not handled responsibly, it can also have beneficial negative effects on local communities, cultures, and habitats. In order to enhance and promote trade and economic growth within the tourism sector, policies pertaining to tourism development are essential. (Ramaano, 2021).

Dredge (2012) and Dredge L. a. (2012) reanalysed the establishment of central tourist policies in Brazil, starting with the 1990s when Brazil launched its tourism development policy and planning, in a manner similar to the African scenarios. By claiming that tourism has emerged as a key driver of Brazilian economic growth and community development, they broadly incorporated such policies into the travel and tourism sector. However, cultural, social, and environmental resources might be established through poorly managed tourism development (Ramaano, Tourism policy and environmental, 14 January 2021).

Despite its enormous significance to Pakistanis, the tourism industry had been ignored at both the federal and provincial levels until the June 2011

demolition of the ministry of tourism following the 18th amendment to the constitution. Shahbaz, Iqbal, and Arshada (2017). Travelers could find it difficult to obtain visas for Pakistan because of the uneven geopolitical situation and inadequate security. Pakistan is dealing with severe issues that are having a negative impact on tourism. Following 9/11, Pakistan joined the United States in the fight against terrorism in Afghanistan. Pakistan had significant financial losses, a downturn in the travel and tourism industry, and infrastructural destruction due to terrorism.

Because of the terrible surroundings, foreign visitors did not enjoy their time in Pakistan. Shahbaz, Iqbal, and Arshad (2017). Pakistan's ranking in the 2015 tourism competitive report was 120 (WEF, 2015), and it rose to 122 in 2017 (WEF, 2017).

As a result, there is a growing emphasis on ethical and sustainable tourism practices to strike a balance between the need to support local communities and preserve the environment and the financial gains. To guarantee that the growth of ecotourism in Gilgit-Baltistan is in line with sustainable practices, effective laws and regulations are essential. In order to create policies that strike a balance between economic development, environmental preservation, and cultural preservation, governments, local communities, and private sector organizations must collaborate and engage stakeholders. The distinctive natural beauty, varied fauna, and lively culture of Gilgit-Baltistan offer a great starting point for the growth of ecotourism (Ahmad, 2021). There are encouraging opportunities for the growth of sustainable ecotourism in the area as a result of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor's improved connectivity and infrastructure. To guarantee that ecotourism benefits local populations and the environment without jeopardizing the region's delicate ecosystems and cultural heritage, this must be accomplished through meticulous planning, community involvement, and prudent legislation (Nigar, 2017). Community support can be greatly impacted by the degree of community involvement in the decision-making process surrounding tourism development. Residents' feelings of empowerment and ownership can be increased by involving them in planning and policy-making

processes and taking into account their opinions, worries, and goals. This will result in more positive views toward the growth of the tourism industry (Alim et al., 2021).

A crucial component of planning for sustainable tourism is the connection between the growth of road and transportation infrastructure and local support for travel. In tourist areas, enhancing transportation systems can affect local populations in both positive and bad ways. Making better decisions and developing sustainable tourist development plans can be facilitated by having a better understanding of these factors. Development of roads and transportation infrastructure may have negative effects on the environment, including increased carbon emissions, pollution, and habitat destruction. The local community may become concerned about the sustainability and long-term environmental repercussions of tourism as a result of these issues (Kanwal, Rasheed, Pitafi & Imran, 2020).

In order to build sustainable tourism, lodging businesses play an essential role. These businesses have the power to influence positive change by encouraging responsible tourism, community involvement, and environmental preservation. Accommodation businesses may support the comprehensive development of locations by incorporating sustainability into their operations, creating a mutually beneficial interaction between the environment, local communities, and tourists (Çelik & Çevirgen, 2021).

A sustainable tourism sector that benefits both tourists and the destinations they visit can be achieved via industry collaboration, education, and innovation. Even if a lot of lodging businesses are moving in the direction of sustainability, problems still exist. It's possible that some smaller businesses lack the tools or expertise necessary to successfully execute sustainable initiatives. Furthermore, it might be challenging to strike a balance between sustainability and economic viability, particularly for larger hotels and resorts with high operating needs (Muhammet Necati Çelik, Aydın Çevirgen, 2 July 2021).

Marketing is essential for promoting off-peak travel times in locations where visitor arrivals fluctuate seasonally. Hotels and locations can increase tourism during the customarily slower

months by developing alluring promotional campaigns and providing alluring bargains throughout the shoulder seasons. This will result in a more balanced and sustainable flow of visitors. In Gilgit Baltistan, marketing plays a crucial role in the travel and hospitality sectors. By using strategic marketing techniques, companies may stand out from the competition, draw in the correct target market, build a strong brand presence, and improve the general customer experience (Mavlanov, 2023).

Furthermore, marketing helps the industry overcome obstacles and seize opportunities, which promotes long-term success and sustainability and results in a more balanced and sustainable flow of tourists in Gilgit Baltistan. There are a number of factors at play, and the people of Gilgit have built hotels and other restoration projects. In order for tourist and hotel businesses to remain competitive and prosper in a dynamic and constantly shifting market, they must continue to embrace innovative marketing approaches and data-driven strategies (Sobirjon, April 2021). Beautiful scenery, a wide variety of plants and animals, and a rich cultural legacy are the hallmarks of Central Karakoram National Park.

This study may examine the ways in which these tourist destinations support the growth of the local tourism industry and investigate methods for safeguarding these cultural and natural assets while encouraging eco-friendly travel. The facilities and services that visitors can access within the destination are referred to as amenities. This study could look into how facilities like visitor centers, hiking routes, guided tours, and recreational opportunities can improve tourists' overall experiences and lengthen their stays. A key component of tourism development is the availability and quality of lodging; the presence of different kinds of lodging, including hotels, lodges, and guesthouses, affects the number of visitors to the national park. The effect of environmentally friendly and sustainable lodging options on the park's overall visitor growth (Karim, Latip, Marzuki & Shah, 2021),

Gilgit Baltistan's four seasons, the second-highest peak in the world (K2), the coldest spots in the north, and the warmest places make it an ideal destination for tourists. Rizvi (2022). The influence

of tourism on delicate ecosystems is a developing worry, and environmental consciousness is rapidly expanding as a global political issue. The ecosystem of Gilgit Baltistan is being harmed by tourism, as evidenced by lakes that are overflowing with tourists' cars and rivers that are contaminated with sewage. The study looks closely at the main problems and the ecosystems that are most impacted, and it looks at some of the suggested solutions for resource management.

Although the research's problem statement attempts to investigate the facts, it appears that local communities are not benefiting from tourism, despite it being one of the major tourist potentials. Instead, the region and its inhabitants are experiencing the adverse biological and environmental effects of tourism as well as the inadequate execution of policies aimed at promoting tourism.

Methodology:

The study aimed to analyse tourism mismanagement and its consequences on fragile ecology in Gilgit Baltistan. The research methodology used in this paper is based on primary data relevant to study. The primary data is having been collected through in-depth interview from the experts (of tourism department, Environmental agency Gilgit and local peoples).

Research Area and Simple Size:

Our research areas were tourism department Municipal department and Environment agency Gilgit. Which are located in Northern area of Pakistan? Our simple size consists of six experts and seven locals from the given three department and agency. The area selected through to systematic sampling. Experts were selected through systemic sampling and took data through in-depth interview from them. We have been used Qualitative research method to collect data.

Tool and Technique:

The following tools have been used for the collection of primary data.

Interview Guide:

Firstly, we make an interview Guide. Our main question of research was tourism mismanagement and consequences on fragile ecology in Gilgit Baltistan. We asked open ended questions relevant to our study.

Through note book and voice recordings we collect data from responds.

Ethical Considerations:

First of all, we get consents from our respondents before conducting interview. We provide them permit letter which was assigned from department of sociology and anthropology. We ensure to keep confidential their names and identities we make record their interview after got permission.

Observation:

Formal and informal interaction carried out with experts and enrolled employer during the study in departments and agency. We asked some local persons about the works done by the tourism is satisfied or not they respond department of tourism is not working well.

Discussion

In the response to the question about the current state of tourism in Gilgit Baltistan. Respondent from the tourism department emphasized that tourism in Gilgit Baltistan is flourishing, with a steady increase in visitors attracted by its stunning landscapes and cultural richness. While one the respondents from the environmental agency stated that the influx of tourists to Gilgit Baltistan is putting pressure on the region's fragile ecosystem and natural resources.

Upon analysing the responses regarding tourism practices in Gilgit Baltistan. Respondents form the tourism department argued that the unchecked tourism has led to environmental degradation, waste accumulation, and strain on resources, negatively impacting the natural beauty of Gilgit Baltistan. The tourism department is working to implement sustainable practices to mitigate these issues. While the respondents from environmental agency stated that the unchecked tourism has resulted in habitat disruption, pollution, and deforestation Gilgit Baltistan. The environmental agency is striving to enforce regulations and

promote responsible tourism to mitigate these impacts. So, in nutshell all respondents from both tourism department and environmental agency had similar responses.

Respondents from both tourism department and environmental agency gave various responses. The respondent from the tourism department stated that the policy is not made by tourism department; rather it passes through a process. The director and responsible personnel of tourism department make rules and regulation and it is forwarded to the tourism secretary for further process, and then the secretary dispatches to the law department, after that it processed to the legislation having overviewed the legislation passes the bill by majority and it becomes a policy.

Independent responses were given by respondents. The respondent from the tourism department retorted that the tourism department of Gilgit Baltistan faces several obstacles in implementing its policies. These challenges can make it difficult for them to effectively promote and manage tourism in the region, which are included as cultural sensitivity, political instability, and ecological changes. Balancing tourism development with preserving local cultural traditions, political instability and ecological changes are obstacles, the best examples, are floods in Ghizer, regime change in Gilgit. While the environmental agency asserted that we do not face any specific issues in implementing rules and regulations, like cultural, political, but only we had seen resistance from the business community when we were running the campaign of plastic free GB, they said that they have produced huge number of plastic bags and they cannot throw it away, because have spent thousands of amounts.

The responses gathered from participants in this study have revealed a notable consistency in their viewpoints concerning the collaboration of institution. They stated that both tourism department and environmental agency and other institutions work together in developing and implement policies and regulations that promote sustainable tourism and conserve the ecology. This involves setting guidelines for waste management, restricting certain activities in ecologically sensitive areas, and establishing carrying capacities for tourist sites. The tourism department and

environmental agencies share data and research findings related to the environmental impacts of tourism. This can help in making informed decisions and adapting strategies to address emerging challenges. Foster partnerships between the public and private sectors to jointly invest in sustainable tourism infrastructure and practices.

The tourism department can develop and distribute eco-friendly guidelines to tourists. These guidelines could include information about waste disposal, energy conservation, water usage, and wildlife protection. Establishing visitor centres at popular tourist sites can serve as educational hubs. These centres can provide information about the local environment, biodiversity, and sustainable practices.

The responses received from participants in this study exhibit a range of perspectives regarding the question about the steps which are presented the policy which play crucial role in the promotion of tourism in Gilgit Baltistan. Respondents from tourism department expressed that we develop comprehensive sustainable tourism master plan that outlines the goals, strategies, and actions for promoting tourism while ensuring minimal negative impacts on the natural environment. This plan involves from various stakeholders, including local communities, environmental experts, and tourism industry representatives and this ensures the potential environmental impacts which are assessed before any project is approved and provides the opportunity to mitigate or avoid negative effects, this can help prevent overcrowding in sensitive ecosystems and ensure that development occurs in appropriate locations. Determine the maximum number of tourists an area can accommodate without causing harm to the environment. Establish mechanisms to monitor and manage visitor numbers accordingly.

Develop infrastructure that can handle the influx of tourists, including waste disposal, sewage treatment, and recycling facilities. Implement strict waste management practices to prevent pollution and degradation of natural resources. While the respondents from the environmental agency asserted that we do not have any particular steps in our policies that we could provide to people, but we make the EAI report, when there is any construction, like restaurant, hotel and other

projects and look at its negative and positive consequences and then allow people to construct the building. Because unplanned projects may have impacts on environment.

Analyses

This case study investigates the complex relationship between tourism mismanagement and its consequences on the fragile ecology of GB. By examining the evolution of tourism policies, the factors driving their implementation, and the subsequent ecological implications, we aim to shed light on the importance of arresting a harmonious balance between economic development and environmental preservation. Through a comprehensive analysis of this critical issue, we can better understand the challenges that arise when tourism policy neglects the intricate ecological barriers that sustain GB's unparalleled beauty, ultimately emphasizing the urgent need for informed decision-making and sustainable practices in the realm of tourism management. Identify the various stakeholders involved in tourism in GB, such as government bodies, local communities, tour operators, environmental organizations, and tourists themselves. Evaluate their roles, interests, and influence on policy decisions the tourism department focal person saw the USAID have ready to investing in the sustainable ecology it will be happen very soon. But there will be some hurdles to implement that program as the political instability and lack of inattention of administration. Before that some projects were rejected because of inattention of government. But now it will work because tourism department draft the policy to assembly and assembly ensure the tourism department to implement the project in Gilgit Baltistan. the collected data using appropriate statistical or qualitative methods. Look for patterns, trends, correlations, and causal relationships.

Report

Tourism has become a crucial operator of economic growth in many countries and remarkably contributing in the development of GDP, but ungoverned tourism activities may have potential consequences on fragile environments. This policy paper lines up to give an address to the

issue of tourism mismanagement and its harmful effects on fragile environment of Gilgit Baltistan, and explores the key challenges and presents policy recommendations to maintain a balance between tourism development and environmental and ecological conservation.

Amidst the breath-taking landscapes of Gilgit Baltistan lies a paradoxical tale of tourism mismanagement, where the very beauty attracts visitors also serve as a backdrop to mounting challenges that threaten the delicate balance of this region's ecosystem, culture, and local communities.

Mismanaged tourism has destroyed local cultures, traditions, and heritage as communities adapt to meet tourist demands, and traveller's cultures and tradition are getting dominant in terms of language, and dress, and local cultures of GB have got disrupted.

The mismanagement of tourism has created significant challenges to the ecosystem and fragility of ecology. Due to unchecked tourist activities have led ecological degradation, such as pollution, land pollution, and environmental problems. Unplanned over construction of infrastructure like, restaurants, and other tourist destinations have disrupted the elegant balance of ecosystem. Unregulated tourism has depleted local resources such as energy, wildlife, and water. So, it is important to implement regulations to conserve all-natural resources.

Likewise, the tourism department itself faces various challenges in terms of making and implementing policies. These challenges can make it difficult for them to effectively promote and manage tourism in Gilgit Baltistan; those challenges are included as cultural sensitivity, political instability, and ecological changes.

- **Recommendations**
- Implement effective waste management system, including waste segregation, recycling waste and disposals.
- Promote guide tours and permits should be given to educated people who can educate the tourists about municipal ecology.
- Provide the facilities to stockholders for investment.

- Prioritize sustainable planned infrastructure development to reduce the impact on the environment.
- Use eco-friendly materials while constructing infrastructure of tourism.
- Involve local communities in tourism planning and decision-making process.
- Invest on researches and monitoring to highlight the impacts of tourism mismanagement on ecological.
- Implement strict regulations on tourism activities in sensitive ecological areas to conserve the environment.

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Questioners

- How would you describe the current state of tourism in Gilgit Baltistan?
- In your opinion, how has unchecked tourism affected the natural environment of Gilgit Baltistan?
- How do you make policy?
- What obstacles do you face in implementation of policy?
- How does the tourism department collaborate local environmental protection agencies to insure sustainable tourism practices?
- What initiative or program does tourism department offer to educate the tourist about eco friendly behaviour?

What steps are there in your policy to balance between promoting tourism and considering natural environment?

