

Responsible Tourism and Commitment of Community

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Abstract Deterioration of traditions, culture and heritage in tourism destination is often cited as a looming crisis. Direct and long exposure to diverse culture and the community's temptation to economic opportunities sometimes force them to move away from the main stream indigenous characters. When financial objectives score over all other aspects, need for strategic interventions to preserve and maintain indigenous culture and tradition arise. Empowerment of community to own their own recourses and develop an affective commitment among themselves is a need of this hour. Being Responsible Tourism emerge as a most popular sustainable tourism theme, present study proposes a model comprises Responsible Tourism, material well-being, community engagement, cultural identity, cross cultural interaction, community services, exposure and awareness of the local community along with sustaining the commitment of community towards cultural preservation (Sustainable Commitment) as a strategy for sustainable cultural preservation.

Keywords: *sustainable development, responsible tourism, cultural sustainability, cultural identity, material well-being, social empowerment*

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1. Introduction

The passage of time and the various social, environmental, economic and global impacts render already-fragile places of culture and heritage ever more vulnerable [1,2,3]. Lack of scientific preservation and management, unregulated intervention and development, and inadequate financial support add the risk of cultural and heritage destinations [4,5]. Traditions, Culture, and Heritage are always having a sensible link with tourism which either explore or exploit its opportunities [6,7,8,9]. It is apparent that tourism can effectively nurture and foster these valuable assets, if we keep the agenda of conservation in the forefront of planning and development [10,11,12,13].

The concept of Responsible/Sustainable Tourism brings more hope in this regard by striking a balance between the sustenance of community and sustainability of culture [14,15,16,17]. Responsible Tourism aims at the betterment of material well-being, community engagement, cultural identity, cross cultural interaction, community services, exposure and awareness of the local community along with sustaining the commitment of community towards cultural preservation (*Sustainable Commitment*). Sustainable Commitment of Community is a sign of cultural sustainability too [18-23]. Being the custodians of authentic culture, tourism development should take the local community in to confidence and strive to make their commitment towards conservation sustainable [24,25,26,27]. In this perspective, an endeavour to determine the strengths of the antecedent variables of Sustainable Commitment which are the

outcome indicators of the Triple Bottom Line (TBL) responsibilities of Responsible Tourism (RT) seems very relevant [28,29,30,31].

The present study envisages examining the role of Responsible Tourism in raising the commitment of local community towards preservation of heritage and culture [32,33]. Survey conducted using a structured questionnaire from the five tourism related tribal tourism destinations in Lorestan where Responsible Tourism is being implemented will be analysed through Partial Least Square (PLS) technique using WARP PLS [34,35,36]. The results might be a valuable insight for policy makers and officials working in this area [37,38,39,40].

2. Research Problem

The fast pacing development and continuous exposure of ethnic communities towards outside world dilute the authenticity and richness of culture and heritage [41,42,43]. When the custodians of the heritage leave their assets in to oblivion, the duty to preserve our diversity is more on the shoulders of its stakeholders [44,45,46]. It is understood that Commitment of authorities and Affective Commitment of communities are crucial for the sustainability of culture and heritage [47,48,49]. When authorities strive to devise plans and proposals for the benefit of local people, commitment of community members towards cultural preservation leads to the accomplishment of cultural sustainability [50,51]. In other words, interventions of stakeholders should aim at the sustainable commitment of local community [52,53,54].

In the backdrop of the above assumptions, present study put forward a conceptual model which explains the

relationships between Responsible Tourism (RT), Outcomes and Sustainable Commitment of Community [55,56,57].



Figure 1. Conceptual Model explaining the impact of Responsible Tourism (RT) outcome variables on Sustainable Commitment of Individual towards their culture, heritage and tradition

Operational Definition of the variables and the hypothesis formulated on the basis of literature review are as follows.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

Responsible Tourism

Tourism that enables local communities to enjoy a better quality of life through increased socio-economic benefits, cultural preservation and improved natural resource management.

Material Well-being

Satisfaction of community towards cost of living, income and employment

Cross Cultural Interaction

Overall positive experiences gain by an individual from the interaction with other culture, tourists and people

Community Engagement

Involvement and participation of community in planning, decision making and management of tourism related activities

Cultural Identity

It is the proud and affinity of an individual towards his/her culture, tradition and heritage

Service Satisfaction

Satisfaction of the individual towards various services like basic infrastructure (food, drinking water, electricity, medical care etc.) and other supports from government and different agencies

Awareness

Knowledge and consciousness of community about the importance of value, richness and preservation of their own culture and heritage

Exposure

Knowledge of Community members and their interaction with the outside world

Sustainable Commitment

Lifelong commitment of an individual towards the protection and preservation of their cultural heritage

3. Rationale and Justification

The lives of community members are being influenced by tourism [58,59,60]. Previous studies proved the ability of tourism to both enhance and diminish the QOL of life local residents in the host community [61,62,63].

While culture and heritage treasures can reap necessary financial and social benefits, successful long-term sustainability is ultimately dependant on local community engagement and stewardship [64,65,66]. Technical management capacity of the governments to conserve cultural heritage assets is also very vital in this regard [67,68,69]. The essence of strategies is that unless and until the ownership of heritage assets is being owned by the 'authentic custodians' - the community, all the efforts for conservation will be in vain.

Responsible Tourism emerged as the most suitable option for sustainable management of heritage sites all over the world. Experiences from South Africa, Mexico and Ghana invariably proved that responsible tourism results in social, economic and cultural empowerment of local residents that leads to the Sustainable Commitment of traditional communities. The outcomes of the study will be highly applicable for the strategic decision makers in the fields of culture, heritage and traditions.

4. Background to the Problem

Accepting economic development often means accepting the cultural changes that accompany tourism development (UNWTO). Locals can become increasingly irritated by the influx of greater numbers of tourists. A World Bank report [70] mentioning tourism development

in Latin America and the Caribbean revealed that though tourism reaped financial benefits, it also costs to the region's indigenous peoples.

A research conducted at Thekkady and Vembanad region in Alappuzha of Kerala [71] identified that local communities often bear the costs of tourism development and suffer from restricted access to resources. Their study at the Periyar Tiger Reserve region (Thekkady) in connection with the Eco Tourism project concluded that though the eco tourism program achieved the mission community engagement in tourism, it failed to arrest the gradual degradation of authentic culture and the uniqueness traditional lifestyle of tribal settlements. But it concludes that engagement of community in conservation and tourism has a manifold impact on sustainable development of the destination.

An interesting case study [72,73,74] examining the impact of tourism on the culture and environment of Luang Prabang (World Heritage Site) gives a lot of reflections on the conservation and management of culture and heritage. The study reveals that behaviour, speech and attire of community members are influenced by their exposure to western culture. Cross cultural interaction is a cause of concern in the religious community that their tradition of making merit is being compromised. Another consequence it unravelled is that the interest of monks to learn English and other languages in order to help them find work in the tourist industry has had the negative effect of a decline in the study of traditional subjects, as they are being dropped in favour of language courses. The same issue has been addressed in the UNWTO report that local people may try to imitate tourists which can lead to disillusionment, and cultural drift. Tourism can lead people to change their cultural practices (e.g. arts, craft, dress, festivals) to meet the real or perceived needs of tourists. The report cautions that, culture should not be undermined through 'performance' on behalf of tourists. Cultural integrity should be maintained for the long-term benefit of the host community, and for tourism potential.

The policy approach of UNEP on Sustainable Tourism pinpoints the implications of Limits of Acceptable Change (LAC), Carrying Capacity, Management-by-objectives (MBO) that are vital for sustainable management of tourism destinations. The Tourism policy guidelines of UNESCO reiterate the relevance of government intervention, community awareness and local ownership for the effective management of tourism areas.

Citing various case studies the Mountain Institute, [75,76,77] concludes that Community-Based Tourism (CBT) is the most feasible option for the conservation and development of heritage areas. Mentioning CBT, Borrini-Feyerabend, G., Kothari, A. and Oviedo, G. [78,79,80] he substantiates that awareness; commitment and engagement are the most crucial factors for conservation.

Responsible Tourism Manual of South Africa envisions building community pride; enhancing the sense of identity of a community or region; promoting intercultural/international understanding; encouraging revival or maintenance of traditional crafts; enhancing external support for minority groups and preservation of their culture; broadening community horizons; providing funding for site preservation and management; and enhancing local and external appreciation and support for cultural heritage through tourism [81]. it also aims at preventing

commodification and cheapening of culture and traditions; alienation and loss of cultural identity; undermining of local traditions and ways of life; displacement of traditional residents; increased division between those who do and do not benefit from tourism; conflict over (and at times loss of) land right and access to resources (including the attractions themselves); damage to attractions and facilities; loss of authenticity and historical accuracy in interpretation; and selectivity in which heritage attractions are developed. The author also reminds that the "demonstration effect," "resulting from exposure to Western habits and lifestyles because of tourism, is blamed for eroding local culture.

It is apparent from the literature survey that most of the research works adopt Case Study as the key method for reaching conclusions which are focusing on the outcomes and strategies. Though many studies discuss on the sustainability of culture, a very few empirical studies consider the antecedents of sustainable commitment of local community towards culture and heritage preservation which is having an utmost importance.

5. Conclusion

The proposed model anticipates a result which proves that Responsible Tourism has a decisive role in promotion and preservation of culture and heritage [82,83,84]. Being socio-cultural responsibility as a major factor in the triple bottom line responsibility areas of Responsible business, its impact on destination sustainability and community life may infer from the study; which will be of highly useful for practitioners, policy makers and social scientists [85,86]. Considering the prevailing issues like cultural degradation, loosing of originality of natural attraction and over exposure towards development, constructive interventions are sought in the sector of traditions, culture and heritage [87]. As the selection of variable is on the basis of an extensive literature survey and the scope of expansion of variable still exists, the result will throw a lime light to the endeavour of art culture and heritage conservation initiatives [88].

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