

Sustainable Tourism in Galiyat: Sociological Insights into Community, Environment, and Economic Growth

Syed Owais¹, Habib Ullah Nawab*², Sareer Ahmad³ and Adeel Iftikhar⁴

Abstract

This study explores the challenges and opportunities for sustainable tourism in Galiyat, a prominent tourist destination in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province. Data was gathered through in-depth interviews with local business owners, government officials, tourists, and residents, using a qualitative research approach. The research highlights critical issues such as waste disposal management, environmental degradation, water supply shortages, inadequate infrastructure, and limited health services. Key barriers to sustainable tourism include poor waste management practices, deforestation due to the lack of natural gas supply, insufficient parking, and the absence of essential public amenities like toilets and recreational parks. These factors diminish the tourist experience and hinder the growth of local businesses reliant on tourism. The study underscores the need for collaboration between government bodies and local communities to tackle these challenges. It calls for infrastructure development, enhanced environmental awareness, and effective resource management to promote sustainable tourism in Galiyat. By identifying these challenges and offering practical solutions, the study provides insight into fostering economic and environmental sustainability in the region. The findings align with sustainable development principles from the Brundtland Report and the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model. Additionally, it validates Urry's Tourist Gaze, illustrating how tourists' expectations of Galiyat often clash with on-the-ground realities.

Keywords: Sustainable Tourism, Galiyat, Sociology of Tourism, Environmental Sustainability and Waste Management, Deforestation, Tourist Infrastructure, Tourist Inflow, Local Business Impact, Community Development.

Introduction

Tourism is a social, cultural, and economic phenomenon involving people travelling outside their usual environment for personal or professional reasons. These individuals, known as visitors, can be tourists, excursionists, residents, or non-residents. Tourism focuses on their activities, including their spending during their travels, which contributes to money circulation. Likewise, mountain tourism is a form of tourism in geographically

¹Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Email: owais@uop.edu.pk

²Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Chitral, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Email: habib_soc@yahoo.com

³Lecturer; Department of Tourism & Hotel Management, University of Chitral, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Email: sareerahmad33@gmail.com

⁴Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Poonch Rawalakot, AJK, Pakistan. Email: dradeeliftikhar@upr.edu.pk

*Corresponding Author: habib_soc@yahoo.com

defined areas, such as hills or mountains, characterised by distinctive landscapes, topography, climate, biodiversity (flora and fauna), and local communities. It encompasses various outdoor leisure and sports activities (World Tourism Organization, 2019).

Tourism significantly fosters goodwill and socio-economic development and increases a nation's foreign exchange reserves. It generates employment opportunities, aids in preserving cultural heritage, and promotes national and international unity. As one of the main driving forces of the global economy, tourism is closely linked to other sectors such as agriculture, handicrafts, and transportation. In less-developed countries, tourism effectively boosts foreign revenues and creates jobs, leading to sustainable development and poverty reduction. The growth of tourism markets signifies its potential to drive economic growth in developing nations despite facing challenges related to natural resources, global price fluctuations, and financial sensitivity (Thommandru et al., 2023).

Tourism is a crucial driver of economic growth in developing economies, where diversification and a robust primary sector are often lacking. Governments in these countries frequently promote tourism to increase national income, create jobs, and foster regional development. Beyond its economic benefits, tourism also positively influences social development by encouraging cultural exchange, reducing ignorance, and bringing people together through shared experiences.

Recently, the concept of sustainable tourism has gained prominence. Sustainable tourism aims to balance economic growth with environmental protection and social equity. It ensures that tourism development meets the needs of current tourists and host regions while safeguarding resources for future generations. Sustainable tourism enhances the quality of life for local communities by generating employment and providing infrastructure such as transportation, water supply, and public security, which also benefits underprivileged sections of society. Local businesses thrive from the influx of tourists, boosting local economies and promoting cultural pride. Sustainable tourism also seeks to minimise adverse environmental impacts, with a growing demand for cleaner, safer, and more eco-friendly tourist destinations. This approach emphasises protecting ecological processes, biodiversity, and cultural heritage while ensuring tourism's long-term viability. It also supports developing infrastructure that benefits tourists and local communities, enhancing the overall quality of life (Making Tourism More Sustainable - a Guide for Policy Makers (English Version), 2005).

Despite global growth, Pakistan's share in the tourism industry remains low, contributing just 2.7% to its GDP compared to the worldwide average of 10%. Challenges such as terrorism, inadequate infrastructure, and poor law and order deter foreign tourists from visiting Pakistan. While domestic tourism is rising, the country struggles with insufficient facilities and a lack of coherent marketing strategies. The government's recent initiatives, like extending visa-on-arrival facilities, aim to boost tourism. However, to fully realise its potential, Pakistan needs a comprehensive national tourism policy, improved infrastructure, and stronger public-private partnerships to create a competitive tourism market. Learning from successful tourism models in countries like the UAE, Turkey, and Malaysia could help Pakistan develop its tourism industry into a significant economic driver (Ehsan, Hassan, & Rai, 2019).

Pakistan has immense tourism potential due to its breathtaking natural beauty and rich cultural heritage. Notable tourist destinations include Swat (e.g., *Malam Jabba*, *Bahrain*, *Kalam*, *Shangla*), *Kaghan Valley* (e.g., *Balakot*, *Kaghan*, *Naran*), *Galiyat* (e.g., *Ayubia*), *Murree*, *Chitral*, *Gilgit-Baltistan*, and the scenic valleys of *Kashmir* (e.g., *Neelam Valley*) (Arshad & Iqbal, 2017).

Galiyat, located in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, offers a cool climate and picturesque landscapes, making it a popular retreat from the sweltering summer heat. However, the region's tourism industry faces significant challenges, including political instability, inadequate

infrastructure, and a lack of environmental sustainability practices. This study was conducted at *Nathia Gali and Ayubia*—two of the most popular destinations in *Galiyat*—to identify factors inhibiting sustainable mountain tourism. The study also recommends fostering sustainable mountain tourism in *Galiyat* to make it economically and environmentally sustainable.

2. Literature Review

Tourism refers to activities where visitors travel and stay in places outside their usual environment for various purposes such as leisure, business, and health (UNWTO, 2017). The United Nations World Trade Organization (UNWTO) and scholars like McIntosh and Goeldner (1986) emphasise the interaction between tourists, businesses, and communities in defining tourism. Tourism plays a crucial role in sustainable development, touching on economic, social, environmental, and cultural aspects.

WCED's Brundtland Report (1987) laid the foundation of sustainable development, emphasising that current development should meet human needs but take care of future generations and not exhaust the current resources of the world without taking care of environmental protection and social equity. The report framework led to suitability principles in every sphere of life, including tourism, agriculture, energy, and industry, to have long-term sustainable solutions that protect natural resources like trees and rivers and ensure the social well-being of the population as well (World Commission on Environment and Development [WCED], 1987). Suppose we don't prioritise sustainability in tourism. In that case, the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) Theory, formulated by Richard W. Butler (1980), suggests that tourist destinations could eventually decline, leading to economic hardship and abandonment. Butler analysed that tourist destinations evolve through six stages: exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation, and either decline or rejuvenation. Initially, tourist spots attract visitors, but as tourism develops and becomes commercialised, they may reach a stagnation point. Without rejuvenation efforts, interest can decline. Butler's theory guides sustainable tourism development and management.

John Urry's *Tourist Gaze* (1990) explains how those tourists experience destinations through a socially constructed "gaze." This gaze is shaped by cultural, societal, and media influences, creating expectations about a destination. Tourism commodifies places and cultures to meet this gaze, with tourists seeking either unique or exotic experiences. It draws out the relationships that exist between tourism, media representation, and commercialisation of destinations, therefore providing insight into how tourism impacts local economies, cultures, and environments.

Building on this broad perspective, McCloskey (2015) critiques the overreliance on statistical measures, arguing that these alone are insufficient for sustainable economic development. She advocates for a more humanistic and qualitative approach to financial analysis, where freedom, dignity, and ethics are equally important. Echoing McCloskey's call for a broader perspective, Boluk et al. (2019) emphasize the necessity for a comprehensive approach to tourism development. Their framework examines the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda through six key themes: gender equity, indigenous perspectives, alternative economic models, ethical consumption, and effective governance. This underscores the importance of redistributing power and promoting inclusive sustainability in tourism, especially in developing regions.

Strategic framework development is intrinsically important to sustainable tourism. Kisi (2019) discusses the use of the A'WOT method in Zonguldak, Turkey. A'WOT is a hybrid strategic technique that combines SWOT with AHP analysis. While SWOT analysis identifies strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats in any given context, the integration with AHP allows these factors to be prioritized and ranked in importance. This

approach provides stakeholders with ways to diversify tourism products, manage visits, and enhance economic resilience. The adaptability of the framework makes it applicable to regions with similar characteristics, such as *Galiyat* in Pakistan, highlighting the importance of integrating sustainability into long-term tourism planning.

Apart from strategic planning, the emotional experiences of tourists also have a vital role to play in shaping sustainable tourism. In relation to this, D'Hauteserre (2015) thinks that the love or emotional interaction a tourist has with the destination he or she intends to visit is what determines his or her passionate longing to revisit. Positive affective atmospheres enhance visitor experiences and allow for longer-term visitor engagement in loyalty to destinations. This valuable perspective has significant interest for tourism promoters looking to develop long-term emotional attachment on the part of visitors because emotionally charged experiences have the potential to lead to sustainable tourism through repeat visitation and positive word of mouth.

Of particular importance is the aspect of sustainable tourism that involves the conservation of cultural heritage. Ali et al. (2013) highlight some of the archaeological and heritage work that needs to be implemented at Chitral in Pakistan, as a result of its external exposure threatening to wipe out the local cultural identity. Their work brings into perspective the necessity of awareness raising amongst both locals and tourists within the context of the value of cultural preservation. This way, sites such as Chitral will retain their unique identities and there will be economic gain through increased visitor interest, as heritage management is integrated with tourism development. This also agrees with McCloskey's proposal for a qualitative analysis of economic activities that highlight human dignity and the integrity of culture.

Dangi and Jamal (2016) extend the discussion of sustainability by focusing on community-based tourism (CBT), advocating for ethical and community-based principles that emphasize fairness and equity, and showing how community empowerment can offer equitable distribution of tourism benefits among stakeholders. Their integrated approach calls for collaboration between academia, governments, and practitioners to address social justice, gender equity, and power imbalances in tourism development. This approach complements the holistic frameworks proposed by Boluk et al. (2019) and further reinforces the importance of inclusive sustainability.

The tourism industry has been growing significantly in Pakistan, with international tourist arrivals tripling to 1.75 million by 2016 (Bashir et al., 2024). Despite its rich cultural history and diverse landscape, Pakistan has faced persistent issues such as poor infrastructure and security concerns (Khan, Syed, & Ahmad, 2011). According to Arshad et al. (2017), Pakistan's immense tourism potential remains untapped due to political instability and a lack of infrastructure. They recommend that the government should promote tourism by improving safety, developing infrastructure, and encouraging public-private partnerships.

Furthermore, the resurgence of tourism after 9/11 showed that the industry can be used not only for economic development but also for the rebranding of Pakistan internationally. In fact, Harun et al. (2018) indicate that in the context of the Kurdish region, tourism can play an important role in community support, recreation, and rural development. In Pakistan, this potential could be realized by focusing on adventure, ecotourism, and cultural tourism sectors.

Tourism has the potential to affect the environment in a negative or positive way, depending on the way in which it is managed; ecotourism motivates environmental stewardship, while mass tourism destroys habitats. Generally, the ecological impacts of tourism have been divided into three major categories: facility impacts, tourist activities, and transportation effects (World Tourism Organization, 2016).

The main hurdles to sustainable tourism, as identified by Luo et al. (2019), in urban areas like Macau, pertain to policy deficiencies, pressures for economic gain, and marketing inefficiencies. These barriers can be addressed through cooperation between government support, improved infrastructure, and strong destination branding. Tourism is, therefore, a key driver of economic development, generating both direct and indirect benefits. According to Turner (2015), 3.7% of the world's GDP generated US\$2.5 billion from tourism in 2014. These economic flows, through infrastructure investment and induced spending, trickle down and distribute wealth within local communities. Haq et al. (2018) further explore socio-economic factors, such as household income and education, that influence participation in tourism and spending. Their findings suggest that empowering women and promoting community-based tourism could enhance participation, making the industry more inclusive and sustainable.

Jalil et al. (2013), in the context of international tourism and economic growth in Pakistan, affirm a positive relationship. According to them, when tourism receipts increase by 1%, there is an increase in real per capita GDP by roughly 0.1987%. To sustain this growth, the authors propose that long-term policies should be formulated by the government, focusing on sustainable tourism development through green innovation and infrastructure improvements. This aligns with the broader discussion on the need for strategic frameworks and the integration of sustainability into tourism planning (Kişi, 2019).

It has become a dire need for the promotion of tourism, particularly in rural settings. Marin-Pantelescu et al. (2019) elaborate on how social media platforms can promote sustainable tourism and job creation in remote areas like Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan. Social media can foster positive relationships between tourists and local communities, thereby encouraging sustainable practices and stimulating economic development in these communities.

Sustainable tourism is a means to balance economic growth with social and environmental responsibilities. Insights by McCloskey (2015) and Boluk et al. (2019) reveal that moving away from mere quantitative measures to more holistic, humanistic approaches in tourism development is essential. This includes addressing gender equity, promoting indigenous perspectives, and fostering ethical consumption. For Pakistan to expand its tourism industry, integrating sustainability into policy and practice will be crucial for long-term success.

3. Theoretical Framework

This paper welds the general sociological notion of tourism as a means of social change, the concept of Sustainable Development (WCED, 1987), and the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) Theory (Butler, 1980). These frameworks help explain tourism dynamics in *Galiyat* and offer insights into the social, environmental, and economic factors affecting sustainable tourism development. Tourism as a social phenomenon involves interactions between locals and tourists, influencing cultural exchange, social norms, and community structures. Drawing on the work of Urry's Tourist Gaze (1990), the study recognises that in addition to being an economic activity, tourism is also a way of seeing and interacting with places and cultures. The 'gaze' of tourists, shaped by expectations and desires, influences how destinations are marketed and experienced. *Galiyat's* attraction for tourists relies heavily on its natural beauty and cultural uniqueness, but unregulated tourism could result in cultural commodification and social disruptions. Considering this, the research explores how tourism contributes to social change, particularly its socio-ecological effects. The involvement of local communities in tourism activities is critical to ensuring that the economic benefits of tourism are shared and that cultural traditions are preserved.

The concept of sustainable development focuses on meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (WCED, 1987). This concept is central to understanding how tourism can contribute to long-term socio-economic development while preserving cultural and environmental resources. The

principles of sustainable development guide the research by emphasising a balance between economic growth, social equity, and environmental protection in tourism practices. In the context of *Galiyat*, sustainable development theory highlights the importance of maintaining the region's natural beauty and cultural heritage while fostering economic growth through tourism. Sustainable tourism, as a subfield of sustainable development, involves practices that minimise negative environmental impacts, promote community participation, and ensure long-term benefits for both the local population and visitors. The theoretical approach used in this study is based on the idea that tourism development must be socially inclusive and environmentally responsible, ensuring that local communities benefit economically without degrading their natural surroundings.

Butler's (1980) Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model provides another essential framework for this research. TALC outlines the evolution of tourist destinations through several stages: exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation, and decline or rejuvenation. This model helps explain the growth and challenges of tourist areas like *Galiyat*, which is transitioning through various stages of development and attracting increasing numbers of tourists. The TALC model helps us understand how tourism in *Galiyat* has evolved. Initially, the region was less accessible and less known, placing it in the exploration stage. With improvements in infrastructure and increased promotion, *Galiyat* moved into the involvement and development stages, attracting more tourists each year. However, unchecked growth, poor waste management, and environmental degradation risk pushing the area towards stagnation or decline unless sustainable practices are implemented. By applying the TALC model, this research aims to assess whether *Galiyat* is currently at a crossroads between development and stagnation. It suggests that adopting sustainable tourism practices could lead to rejuvenation, helping the region maintain its appeal while preserving its natural and cultural resources.

By combining Sustainable Development Theory, the TALC model, and sociological perspectives, this theoretical framework allows for a comprehensive examination of sustainable tourism in *Galiyat*. These theories provided a lens through which the researchers could analyse the relationship between tourism growth, environmental sustainability, and social impacts. The framework has guided the analysis of the data collected from interviews and observations in *Galiyat*, offering insights into how sustainable tourism can be achieved in the region. In the next section below, we present the methodology of empirical data on which this article is based.

4. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology to investigate sustainable tourism in *Galiyat*. Our objective was to capture the lived experiences, perceptions, and insights of the local population engaged in providing goods and services to tourists in the area. These aspects of the host community's social life could not be captured by adopting, e.g., a social survey based on the positivist approach. Also, most private sector tourist service providers were either illiterate or semi-literate, thus making it necessary to adopt a qualitative research design.

The universe for this study was the *Galiyat*, a popular tourist destination in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The data was collected at *Nathia Gali*, *Ayubia*, and *Donga Gali*, as these areas are easily accessible and attract the highest number of tourists compared to other parts of *Galiyat*. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who could provide relevant insights about sustainable tourism. This method ensured that the chosen interviewees, including hotel managers, tourists, local business owners, and government employees, were strategically selected based on their connection to the tourism industry. A total of 26 interviews were conducted, involving four hotel managers, six tourists, four *Galiyat* Development Authority (GDA) officers, two horse riders, one GDA sweeper, four shopkeepers, and five residents. These participants were selected based on their direct or

indirect involvement in tourism and their ability to offer diverse perspectives. The research also included observations from popular treks, such as the 5-kilometer *Donga Gali-to-Ayubia* (Pipeline) Trek and *Mushkpuri* Top, to gain insights into how tourists interact with the environment.

We employed semi-structured interviews (SSIs) for data collection, which provided flexibility in the conversation while ensuring that critical topics were covered. All interviews were conducted in Urdu, and responses were recorded with the interviewees' consent. Observations and visual data from treks and tourist sites further enriched the dataset. The collected data was analysed thematically to interpret the findings. Interviews were transcribed and translated from Urdu into English before being organized into thematic categories aligned with the research objectives. This process involved sorting the data into key themes, such as environmental sustainability, economic impact, and local infrastructure.

Several limitations impacted the data collection process. A major challenge was that a significant portion of the local population spoke only regional languages such as *Potohari* and *Hindko*, making communication difficult in Urdu. This affected both data collection and analysis, as the interviews were conducted in Urdu and later translated into English. Additionally, cultural differences surfaced during the initial interviews, influencing how participants understood and responded to questions. As a result, adjustments were made to the interview approach, and one early interview had to be excluded due to insufficient responses. Some participants, particularly shopkeepers, were busy with customers, which made scheduling interviews challenging. Moreover, rain during the research period hindered travel and access to certain areas, limiting data collection. Despite these challenges, the researchers successfully gathered relevant data to gain valuable insights into sustainable tourism in *Galiyat*.

5. Data Analysis and Themes

The data collected during interviews and observations were systematically analysed using a thematic approach. Themes were developed based on common patterns identified in interviewees' responses, offering insights into the challenges, opportunities, and sustainability of tourism in *Galiyat*.

5.1 Solid Waste Disposal Management

Waste disposal is a significant issue in *Galiyat*, affecting the environment and tourism. A janitor, *Tarah Masih* employee of Galiyat Development Authority (GDA), mentioned:

We collect waste from all areas and transport it to Abbottabad for disposal. However, much of the waste is irresponsibly discarded by hotel staff, negatively impacting the area's natural beauty. Hotel owners are limited to their profit; we face difficulties in picking them from down the hill. It is challenging to take the waste scattered in the entire area. We have limited resources (T. Masih, personal communication, January 2024).

“On the other hand, one of the hotel managers commented that GDA staff do not fulfil their duty.” The waste was at the back of the same hotel he argued that tourists throw it. This was cross-confirmed by the GDA sweeper, who stated: “that all rubbish is thrown by hotel staff”.

When the researchers asked *Shujah Malik*, a 50-year-old resident, about the solid waste issue in *Nathiagali*, he commented that;

You can see large piles of waste at the end of the *Nathiagali bazaar* because the sweepers from the Galiyat Development Authority (GDA) dump the waste here

without proper disposal or recycling measures in place. This negligence is directly impacting the environment and local wildlife, especially monkeys. Hotel owners and tourists are also responsible for the piles of waste. Everyone should take care of the environment including the permanent residents of *Galiyat*. I suggest an organised recycling system to effectively manage the waste, allowing it to be reused sustainably (S. Malik, personal communication, January 2024).

A hotel manager shifted the blame to tourists, but our observations and conversations confirmed that both groups contributed to the problem. The absence of proper waste management systems and a lack of awareness among visitors aggravate the issue, which must be addressed to protect the environment.

The responsibility for waste management in *Galiyat* is viewed as a shared duty among stakeholders; however, the government lacks an adequate mechanism to address waste disposal effectively. The relevant authorities have not established locations where waste can be discarded appropriately to protect the environment.

Interviewees highlighted that the current placement of waste bins is insufficient, with dustbins located too far apart, leading to improper disposal along roadsides. During the research, several individuals proposed practical solutions for improving waste management. Sajid Khan, a 38-year-old waiter in a *Nathia Gali* restaurant, commented:

“There is no proper waste management system. People throw their waste anywhere because the dustbins are too far away. So, they end up tossing waste on the roadside. Waste bins should be near every shop and restaurant so people can easily dispose of their trash. Additionally, dedicated staff should clean these bins every morning” (S. Khan, personal communication, January 2024).

Some participants emphasised the importance of making it mandatory for every hotel and shop to have a dustbin placed outside and suggested penalties for non-compliance.

Conversely, others argued that placing waste bins closer or imposing fines on shopkeepers, restaurant owners, or tourists would not tackle the issue. They stressed the need for public involvement in waste management and advocated for raising awareness about environmental cleanliness. Amjad Karam, a 39-year-old police officer at the Tourist Facilitation Center, remarked, “Based on my experience, penalties alone won’t solve the problem. The key to effective waste management is creating awareness among the people through various means” (A. Karam, personal communication, January 2024).

In an attempt to distance themselves from being labelled as contributors to the waste problem, business people argued that shopkeepers and restaurant owners are not responsible for littering due to their concern about penalties. Nazim Salim, a 48-year-old restaurant waiter in *Ayubia*, remarked, “Tourists never care about the waste; they throw it anywhere they want. Local people are more careful. Hotel owners and shopkeepers never throw waste near their shops and restaurants because of the fear of penalties” (N. Salim, personal communication, January 2024). Another interviewee from *Ayubia*, a hotel owner, also pointed fingers at tourists as the main culprits behind the littering issue. He commented, “Even on the Pipeline Trek, people wearing socks often leave them among the trees when they finish their hike” (Hotel owner, personal communication, January 2024).

Interviewees recommended that to address the issue of waste management, specific steps should be taken. Some participants suggested practical measures to improve the cleanliness of the environment. They recommended placing instructional boards with clear messages about waste disposal and maintaining a clean environment in prominent locations, especially near waste bins. Additionally, they emphasised that waste containers should be

positioned closer together to make them easily accessible to tourists. Sardar Hussain said, “There are two roles for managing waste. First, by force, imposing penalties for any wrongdoings. Second, by raising awareness through banners, posts, boards, etc.” (S. Hussain, personal communication, January 2024).

5.2 Challenges to Tourism

Tourism in *Galiyat* faces numerous challenges that hinder its growth and affect both locals and tourists. A significant issue is the lack of water, with one tourist stating:

We pay for bottled water like Nestle water, although we expect to have natural pure water. Another issue is inadequate parking, as tourists often struggle to find parking spaces. Tourists can't even park their cars in front of any hotel as each hotel or restaurant has a statement on their doors that 'Park your cars only if you eat the food here'. We must pay 700 to 900 rupees for parking overnight during peak season (K. Ilahi, personal communication, January 2024).

Additionally, the lack of gas supply forces locals to resort to cutting trees for fuel during the winter despite strict laws against deforestation. The absence of public toilets and parks, particularly for families, further diminishes the appeal of *Galiyat* as a tourist destination.

5.3 Areas of Improvement

Several areas require improvement to sustain tourism in *Galiyat*. These include better management of waste disposal, increased parking spaces, promoting local people to own hotels, and improved water supply systems. One hotel owner remarked:

Tourists prefer to stay in Murree because of the efficient mechanism of waste disposal, and you will not see debris or waste; also, their water supply system is functional. We don't have gas supply facilities, car parking and children's parks. (A. Qaisar, personal communication, January 2024).

Some interviewees claimed that GDA (Galiyat Development Authority) does not allow people to invest and build infrastructure. Residents of these areas, who have limited capital, cannot invest or start businesses in these areas. Imran Tahir, who is the owner of a restaurant in *Nathia Gali*, said:

Pakistan is our country, and we can work in any part. However, working in one's village is very comfortable, allowing one to rejoin their family after work quickly. Poor persons in this area cannot invest in building hotels and restaurants in their village, forcing them to seek employment in megacities such as Karachi and Lahore. Formal rules and bureaucratic approaches from various government sectors restrict people's ability to work and develop tourism infrastructure. If the poor residents of *Galiyat* are facilitated through government loans or at least make the rules easy for us, we can serve tourists better than the hotel owners who come from outside *Galiyat* (I. Tahir, personal communication, January 2024).

The government must provide basic amenities like public toilets, gas supply, and proper parks to enhance tourist and locals' experience. Also, local people should be encouraged to invest in the tourism sector.

5.4 Environmental Issues

The environmental degradation in *Galiyat* is exacerbated by deforestation, caused mainly by the unavailability of gas. As one resident noted:

We don't have a natural gas pipeline, as it is available door-to-door in cities. We, as residents of *Galiyat*, have to live our life here around the year we need fire to

cook our meals to keep ourselves warm in the chilling winter. Therefore, we have no choice but to cut trees for fuel in the winter. It is our compulsion to cut down trees; we know it is unsuitable for the environment (M. Khan, personal communication, January 2024).

Deforestation affects the local climate and reduces the region's attractiveness to tourists. The lack of government intervention to protect the environment further exacerbates the problem.

5.5 Unavailability of Health Services

Health services in *Galiyat* are severely lacking, with no hospitals in the area. Tourists and locals must travel to Abbottabad for treatment in case of emergencies. One resident shared:

In emergencies, we have to travel one hour to receive initial treatment. Tourists include all age groups, from kids to old persons, and they can have previous health issues or may have sudden health complications. There is only one dispensary in *Ayubia Bazar* that works till evening. It has limited facilities. For severe health issues and injuries, people need to go to Abbottabad." So, in such emergencies, the health facilities are inadequate and can result in severe health consequences (S. Rehman, personal communication, January 2024).

The lack of healthcare facilities discourages extended tourist stays and poses a risk to the local population. The government should invest in healthcare infrastructure, including mobile health units, to serve tourists and locals in remote areas.

5.6 Tourist Inflow and Its Significance

The number of tourists visiting *Galiyat* has increased recently, especially during summer vacations and festive periods. However, this influx benefits shopkeepers more than hotel owners, as many tourists do not stay overnight due to the lack of recreational centres and facilities. One shopkeeper noted:

Most tourists come here for shopping and then leave for *Ayubia* or *Murree*. Local shopkeepers get some benefits, but the short stay of tourists at *Galiyat* does not benefit the whole community. Shopping at *Murree* is much more expensive than in *Galiyat*, but tourists' aim is entertainment and enjoyment. Also, tourists have kids and are more attracted to children's parks (S. Javeed, personal communication, January 2024).

Similarly, one of our tourist interviewees, *Nadeem Khan*, aged 51, from *Charsadda*, said that Although

Galiyat is a beautiful location that everyone should visit. One of the area's shortcomings is the absence of public parks since we visit it for activities, and the weather here causes many difficulties for us. Like when we are with family, the sudden downpour leaves no suitable cottages or shelters where our children can hide and cause their illness. I will visit *Galiyat* again, but not with my family (N. Khan, personal communication, January 2024).

Our observations revealed that one park was used for family outings and lacked the appropriate infrastructure to make visitors comfortable under rainy conditions. Addressing infrastructure gaps, such as parking and parks, could encourage more tourists to stay longer, benefiting the local economy.

5.7 Business Improvement Factors

Local business owners stressed the importance of improving infrastructure, including parking spaces, public toilets, and street lights. One hotel owner stated:

We need car parking or parking plazas so that tourists can safely park their vehicles. It will resolve the issue of traffic jams. Car parking can be a new business; GDA can tax these car parking. In return, tourists will feel comfortable and stay longer to enjoy the beauty of *Galiyat*. It will lead to money circulation in the area (N. Deen, personal communication, January 2024).

Local businesses rely heavily on tourism, and improving these basic amenities could significantly boost their revenue.

5.8 Government and Non-Government Support

The Galiyat Development Authority (GDA) has made some efforts to improve infrastructure, including roads and waste management. However, locals feel these efforts are insufficient. One interviewee commented,

We appreciate the government's initiative to widen roads but need more tourist facilities, like parks and public toilets. In Pakistani society, women face troubles if there are no proper public toilets. Also, they have small kids, so they needed places to clean their kids while maintaining their privacy. In district Swat, some local communities have built separate places in mosques for women to pray and rest; the same model should be adopted here in *Galiyat* (A. Mehmood, personal communication, January 2024).

“One of the serious issues highlighted by an interviewee poses a direct threat to tourists and negatively impacts tourism in the area. *Sardar Hussain*, a 30-year-old hotel owner in *Nathia Gali*, remarked,

Numerous stray dogs wander the streets at night, preventing tourists from walking safely. The GDA must address this issue and remove the dogs from the area, as it significantly affects tourism. Tourists, having invested their time and money, want to make the most of their visit, but the presence of stray dogs makes them feel unsafe (S. Hussain, personal communication, January 2024).

Additionally, interviewees expressed mixed views on whether governmental or non-governmental organisations have taken steps toward the area's development or provided necessary facilities. Regarding government efforts toward sustainable tourism, some interviewees shared their views: They believe that the infrastructure and facilities inherited from the British era remain unchanged. *Malak Roman*, a shopkeeper in *Nathia Gali*, stated,

The government is not focusing enough on road maintenance or keeping the environment clean. No other organisations are actively working on developing this area. During my two months of working here, I didn't notice any efforts from either governmental or non-governmental organisations to improve the situation (M. Roman, personal communication, January 2024).

However, another interviewee named Imran Khan, a resident of *Galiyat* shared a different perspective; he highlighted the significant efforts made by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government to boost tourism in *Galiyat*.

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government has made significant efforts to enhance tourism in *Galiyat*, mainly through promoting eco-friendly practices and improving infrastructure. The *Galiyat* Valley has experienced noticeable growth in tourism due to the government's focus on sustainable tourism practices that drive economic growth and ensure environmental conservation. The development of modern facilities, such as state-of-the-art car parking, has dramatically improved the overall visitor experience. The government's emphasis on community

engagement has also created Job opportunities and supported local businesses, building a sustainable economic model that benefits the community while attracting tourists. Events like the *Galiyat* Snow Festival, organised by the Galiyat Development Authority (GDA), highlight the region's natural beauty and cultural richness, further enhancing its appeal as a tourist destination" (I. Khan, personal communication, January 2024).

We interviewed a police officer from the Tourist Facilitation Centre in *Nathia Gali*, who said, "Facilities are normal, not that good. The number of tourists has decreased due to snowfall. We will expand our services after the season starts. Two individuals will be patrolling around *Nathia Gali*" (Police Officer, personal communication, January 2024).

Despite the pessimistic views of the tourism facilitation centre's police officer, tourists interviewed in *Ayubia* expressed varying opinions about the ongoing situation in the area.

Gul Zada, a 45-year-old tourist from district Dir, stated,

This area has numerous shortcomings. The roads in *Galiyat* are incredibly narrow, and the prices are significantly elevated. Different places offer similar products at varying prices. The uniformity in prices will increase the number of tourists, who will return happy and satisfied. Before coming to *Galiyat*, I was not expecting it, otherwise I would have preferred Laram Top at district Dir. So, there should be a government mechanism in place to control the prices (G. Zada, personal communication, January 2024).

Besides that, another issue is pointed out by some of the interviewees. The interviewees stated that the government has denied access to some historical places, preventing the public from entering. Higher authorities reserve some of these places but don't use them.

Sardar Hussain, a 30-year-old resident and hotel owner at *Nathia Gali*, highlighted the following issue:

"There are lots of places for tourists to visit, but some of them, like Governor House, are now not allowed for the public, which was allowed previously. Tourists can no longer visit KP House (where Imran Khan once lived), Speaker House, Valley Hotel, Shingla Hotel, which falls under GDA, and other British-built historical sites. It reduces the number of tourists visiting these sites" (S. Hussain, personal communication, January 2024).

There is also a need for better collaboration between government and local communities to develop sustainable tourism initiatives.

5.9 Water Supply System

The poor water supply system in *Galiyat* is a critical issue for tourists and local businesses. Hotels receive water only once a week, forcing them to buy expensive water tanks. One hotel manager said:

We must buy water tanks costing 12,000 rupees each to meet our daily needs. Tourists don't care to utilise the water properly. While shaving and brushing, much water is wasted, they keep the water tap on. On bathing, they consume a lot of water and sometimes forget to close the shower. They assume that the water is free of cost in these areas. However, they don't know that we must buy water tanks costing 13,000 rupees each to meet our daily needs (Z. Khan, personal communication, January 2024).

Improving water infrastructure is essential for sustaining tourism and supporting local livelihoods.

5.10 Sustainability of the Area

Sustainable tourism in *Galiyat* requires a collaborative effort between the government and local communities. Increased awareness of environmental issues, better waste management, and tree conservation are crucial. As one interviewee suggested:

Local people should be taught in schools and colleges to make their environment clean and green. Local people should be supported and trained in greenery, farming, and tree planting. Several trees have been cut down for wood fire; I was not expecting it. Tourists visit these places because of the greenery and natural environment. If disturbed, people will not see the places (A. Ali, personal communication, January 2024).

Establishing parking areas, enhancing infrastructure, and promoting environmental awareness will ensure long-term sustainability.

6. Conclusion

As one of the largest industries globally, tourism holds significant economic, environmental, and social importance, particularly in regions like *Galiyat*, which attract substantial domestic and international tourists due to their natural beauty. However, aligning with the principles of sustainable development, the region faces critical challenges that threaten the long-term viability of its tourism sector. Government neglect and insufficient infrastructure—such as inadequate water supply, poor waste management, limited parking, and the lack of basic public facilities like health centres and toilets—are vital issues that must be addressed. These infrastructure gaps and environmental degradation, exacerbated by unsustainable practices from tourists and locals, pose severe risks to *Galiyat's* sustainability.

Our findings align with the principles of sustainable development outlined in the Brundtland Report (WCED, 1987), which stresses the importance of creating employment opportunities and fostering economic growth for local residents. The challenges faced by the underprivileged in *Galiyat* highlight the necessity for government support to facilitate access to resources like loans and relaxed regulations. Empowering locals to develop tourism infrastructure within their villages not only promotes local employment but also ensures that the benefits of tourism are distributed more equitably. This approach underscores the idea that local communities are best suited to serve tourists and sustain the region's long-term development.

Our findings validate Urry's Tourist Gaze (1990). Tourists visiting *Galiyat* expect a serene, peaceful environment, surrounded by natural beauty and cleanliness, with ample parking and necessary facilities due to its mountainous location. However, many are disappointed upon arrival when the reality falls short of their expectations.

Through the lens of the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model, *Galiyat* seems to be at a critical juncture between development and stagnation, where unchecked growth and environmental degradation threaten to diminish its appeal. From a sociological standpoint, the lack of community involvement and poor resource management after the devolution of tourism to provincial governments have hindered equitable distribution of benefits and the preservation of cultural heritage. Sustainable tourism practices, which balance economic growth, social well-being, and environmental conservation, are essential for *Galiyat's* future.

To address these challenges, an integrated approach is needed, involving government action, infrastructure development, improved waste management, and the participation of both public and private sectors in sustainable planning. Only through such collaboration can *Galiyat's* natural beauty be preserved, ensuring tourism continues to drive economic and social development while safeguarding the region's ecological and cultural integrity for future generations.

7. Recommendations

Managing waste, securing water supply, and conserving natural resources are key issues that must be addressed when pursuing sustainable tourism in areas like *Galiyat*. Encouraging eco-friendly practices and investing in infrastructure improvements could enhance the region's tourism appeal while benefiting the local economy and environment. Sustainable mountain tourism can create opportunities for generating revenue, creating jobs, and preserving the natural and cultural resources that make *Galiyat* unique.

1. The government must establish a robust waste disposal system, with frequent placement of dustbins and effective recycling mechanisms to maintain environmental sustainability. It includes securing dustbins from animals and raising public awareness of proper waste management practices.
2. To combat deforestation and improve living conditions, it is essential to ensure a consistent supply of gas, electricity, and clean water to locals and tourists alike. Water scarcity is a pressing issue, particularly in *Ayubia*, and must be addressed immediately.
3. Improving roads, parking facilities, and recreational facilities such as parks, family zones, and viewpoints should be a priority. Additionally, constructing well-maintained public toilets and hospitals will enhance tourist convenience and promote health and safety.
4. The government should facilitate local entrepreneurship by offering financial support and regulating business quality to meet international standards. This will improve the tourist experience and stimulate economic growth.
5. A mechanism to regulate pricing during peak seasons is needed to prevent inflation. The government should create off-season employment opportunities to support locals year-round and stabilise the economy.
6. Regular police patrolling should be instituted to ensure the safety of tourists, particularly women. Public awareness campaigns, including signage in multiple languages, should encourage environmental care and responsible tourism.
7. The government should organise seminars and training for locals on ecological sustainability, promoting activities such as tree planting and proper land use to preserve the natural beauty of *Galiyat*.

References

1. Ali, I., Shah, I., Samad, A., Zahir, M., & Young, R. (2013). Heritage and archaeology in Chitral, Pakistan: exploring some local views and issues. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 19(1), 78–97. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13527258.2011.643909>
2. Arshad, M. I., Iqbal, M. A., & Shahbaz, M. (2017). Pakistan tourism industry and challenges: a review. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 23(2), 121–132. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10941665.2017.1410192>
3. Bashir, M., Asghar, S., Ashfaq, M., Raza, S. S., & Zahoor, S. (2024). Digitalizing tourism and interactive navigation: A case study of Pakistan. *Journal of Asian Development Studies*, 13(1), 547–563. <https://doi.org/10.62345/jads.2024.13.1.46>
4. Boluk, K. A., Cavaliere, C. T., & Higgins-Desbiolles, F. (2019). A critical framework for interrogating the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2030 Agenda in tourism. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 27(7), 847–864. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2019.1619748>

5. Butler, R. W. (1980). The concept of a tourist area cycle of evolution: Implications for management of resources. *The Canadian Geographer/Le Géographe canadien*, 24(1), 5-12. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-0064.1980.tb00970.x>
6. D’Hauteserre, A. M. (2015). Affect theory and the attractivity of destinations. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 55, 77–89. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2015.09.001>
7. Dangi, T., & Jamal, T. (2016). An Integrated Approach to “Sustainable Community-Based Tourism.” *Sustainability*, 8(5), 475. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su8050475>
8. Ehsan, M., Hassan, & Rai, N. A. (2019). Pakistan’s tourism: Huge untapped potential and the way forward. *The Express Tribune*. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/1898259/pakistans-tourism-huge-untapped-potential-way-forward>
9. Haq, Z. U., Ullah, Z., & Sajjad, N. (2018). Households’ participation in and expenditure on recreation and tourism in Pakistan. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 24(3), 206–218. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10941665.2018.1557227>
10. Harun, R., Chiciudean, G., Sirwan, K., Arion, F., & Muresan, I. (2018). Attitudes and Perceptions of the Local Community towards Sustainable Tourism Development in Kurdistan Regional Government, Iraq. *Sustainability*, 10(9), 2991. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su10092991>
11. Jalil, A., Mahmood, T., & Idrees, M. (2013). Tourism–growth nexus in Pakistan: Evidence from ARDL bounds tests. *Economic Modelling*, 35, 185–191. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econmod.2013.06.034>
12. Kisi, N. (2019). A Strategic Approach to Sustainable Tourism Development Using the A’WOT Hybrid Method: A Case Study of Zonguldak, Turkey. *Sustainability*, 11(4), 964. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11040964>
13. Luo, J. M., Lam, C. F., & Ye, B. H. (2019). Barriers for the Sustainable Development of Entertainment Tourism in Macau. *Sustainability*, 11(7), 2145. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11072145>
14. Making Tourism More Sustainable - A Guide for Policy Makers (English version). (2005). <https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284408214>
15. Marin-Pantelescu, A., Tachiciu, L., Capusneanu, S., & Topor, D. I. (2019). Role of Tour Operators and Travel Agencies in Promoting Sustainable Tourism. *Amfiteatru Economic*, 21(52), 654. <https://doi.org/10.24818/ea/2019/52/654>
16. McCloskey, D. N. (2015). *The cult of statistical significance: How the standard error costs us jobs, justice, and lives*. University of Michigan Press.
17. McIntosh, R. W., & Goeldner, C. R. (1986). *Tourism: Principles, practices, philosophies* (5th ed.). Wiley.
18. Thommandru, A., Espinoza-Maguiña, M., Ramirez-Asis, E., Ray, S., Naved, M., & Guzman-Avalos, M. (2023). Role of tourism and hospitality business in economic development. *Materials Today: Proceedings*, 80(Part 3), 2901-2904. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.matpr.2021.07.059>
19. Urry, J. (1990). *The tourist gaze: Leisure and travel in contemporary societies*. Sage Publications.
20. World Commission on Environment and Development. (1987). *Our common future*. Oxford University Press. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/139811>
21. World Tourism Organization. (2019). UNWTO tourism definitions. UNWTO. <https://doi.org/10.18111/9789284420858>