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A Qualitative Study On Socio-Economic Implications Of Ecotourism In District Swat, KP: Perspectives From The Community

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Abstract:

Tourism has the capacity to transform the economic landscape, benefiting both developed and developing countries. While tourism can boost economic growth and provide numerous advantages to local communities, it also has negative implications such as traffic congestion, overcrowding, increased crime rates, and environmental degradation, which frequently upset local norms and culture. The purpose of this study is to look into the local community's perspectives of tourism's socioeconomic. environmental, and cultural impacts in Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. It also tries to examine the extent of community involvement in tourism development. The study illustrates that tourism activities in Swat improve the economic situation of local residents based on primary data collected from 305 respondents via surveys and secondary data. However, they hurt the region's natural environment and upset local conventions and cultures. The study suggests that the local government encourages community engagement in processes decision-making to improve residents' quality of life. Furthermore, it encourages tourists to avoid immoral behaviors that could undermine local customs and traditions. Furthermore, the study proposes improving collaboration and friendliness among residents to boost recurrent tourism visits.

Introduction:

Ecotourism, as a form of responsible travel, goes beyond the mere exploration of natural beauty; it immerses travelers in the cultural tapestry of local communities (Oladi et al., 2010). This conscientious approach emphasizes the protection of both biological and cultural diversity, striving for sustainable biodiversity use with minimal environmental and societal impact (Ryngnga, 2008). The International Union of Conservation of Nature (IUCN) succinctly defines ecotourism as a journey to pristine natural landscapes, fostering biodiversity appreciation, conservation, and constructive engagemen¹t with local communities (Bunruamkaew & Maryam, 2011). Coined by Ceballes-Lascuraine in 1987, the term emphasizes the exploration of untouched areas with the primary goal of understanding local cultures while appreciating the natural landscapes and wildlife (Boo, 1990). Therefore, the core of ecotourism revolves around safeguarding natural and cultural resources while generating revenue. Globally, ecotourism has demonstrated its potential to alleviate poverty and contribute to the conservation of natural resources (Shamsuddoha and Nasir, 2011).

Several studies have clarified the dual impact of tourism, recognizing its advantages as well as disadvantages for society as a whole (Buckley, 2012). The tourist industry has experienced tremendous growth and diversification in recent years, becoming a force to be reckoned with in the socioeconomic expansion process. At the "World Economic Forum" conference, Crotti and Misrahi (2017) emphasized how the tourist industry is quickly growing into one of the biggest in the world, accounting for 10% of the world's gross domestic product. Understanding how local populations in different places perceive and

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are affected by tourism has been the subject of recent research (Almeida-García et al., 2016). Stakeholders are becoming more aware of the tourism industry and its impacts on the community, both positive and bad (Ko & Stewart, 2002; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011). Positive effects of tourism include raising local welfare through promoting economic growth, creating jobs and revenue (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011), and reducing poverty and inequality. Furthermore, tourism drives socioeconomic development in developing countries by providing a vital source of foreign cash (Chang & Lee, 2008).

Travel is a multifaceted, profitable industry that generates income, jobs, and—above all tax money for the lodging and tourism sectors. According to Adnan Hye and Ali Khan 2013, it is the primary source of foreign exchange revenues, economic development, and new commercial and entrepreneurial prospects.; Baloch, 2007; Khalil et al., 2007; Rana, 2015; Goleldner et al., 2000). Support from the local community is essential for ensuring tourism's sustainable success, and this is especially true for regional tourism hotspots. Numerous scholars concurred that local inhabitants must be involved in order to maintain tourist development (Ahn et al., 2002; McCool et al., 2001; Twining-Ward & Butler, 2002). Therefore, taking into account locals' perspectives on how the environment, socioeconomics, and culture affect them would be extremely valuable information for the growth of tourism in the area.

Swat is well-known for its cultural tourism and scenic beauty. It is home to many different cultural, linguistic, and ethnic groups. The country's cultural, physical, and landscape appeal to both domestic and international tourists. But the increased tourism-related economic activity has also resulted in higher levels of noise pollution, traffic jams, and pollution, as well as more demands on water and energy resources. Both positive and negative effects of tourism on the surrounding community and environment have been identified by researchers in the tourism sector (Buckley, 2012; Ko & Stewart, 2002). Additionally, unplanned and poorly managed tourism has an impact on the surrounding ecosystem and local residents (Sadiq et al., 2019). In addition, people from many sects have left their mark on Swat, resulting in a diversity of cultures, customs, and traditions. Nonetheless, the significant influx of tourists negatively impacts the customs, traditions, and culture of the surrounding community.

Given this context, the current study aims to investigate how the local community in Pakistan's popular tourist destination of Swat views the socioeconomic, environmental, and cultural effects of tourism. The local community's involvement in the growth of Swat's tourism industry is also evaluated in this article. By include the local population and taking into account their decisions in tourist development programs, the paper's findings will assist policy makers in creating sustainable tourism strategies for Swat. The paper's conclusions can be applied to enhance Swat's tourism, sustainability, and hospitality sectors. Literature review

Ecotourism has emerged as a significant phenomenon globally, presenting both opportunities and challenges for local communities in destinations such as District Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), Pakistan. Scholars have extensively studied the socioeconomic implications of ecotourism, highlighting its potential to stimulate economic growth, alleviate poverty, and promote environmental conservation (Adnan et al., 2021). Ecotourism stands as a beacon of hope, linking positive environmental ethics with the preservation of natural ecosystems and the promotion of cultural heritage (Lemelin, Fennell, & Smale, 2008; Bauer, 2011). It embodies a delicate balance, reconciling the seemingly disparate realms of tourism and environmental conservation (Hovardas & Poirazidis, 2006). This multifaceted approach not only safeguards our planet's biodiversity but also fosters sustainable local development, making it a vital strategy for harmonizing societal progress with ecological preservation (Ross & Wall, 1999; Iqbal et al., 2010). In the midst of a booming tourism industry, ecotourism emerges as a beacon of sustainable growth, catering to the increasing number of travelers drawn to its ethos of environmental stewardship (Budeanu, 2007; Honey, 2008; Campbell, 1999). It holds promise as a tool for rural poverty alleviation, leveraging the rich natural and cultural assets of rural areas to empower local communities (Gurung & Seeland, 2008; Moinuddin & Begum, 2004; Suntikul & Ugyen, 2016). By providing employment opportunities, fostering cultural

exchange, and generating economic benefits for marginalized populations, ecotourism paves the way for inclusive and sustainable development (UNWTO, 2011). Accounting for 10% of the global GDP, it generates substantial employment opportunities, contributing to 8.2% of global employment (Khan et al., 2011). With an estimated income of \$700 billion, representing around 10% of total world gross incomes, ecotourism has evolved into a major global business. In addition to economic benefits, it plays a pivotal role in fostering cultural exchange, mutual understanding, and environmental appreciation (Shapley & Telfer, 2002; Ahmed et al., 2021).

Recognized by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) as a significant economic driver, ecotourism provides diverse financial benefits to communities, including job creation, service provision to tourists, and the sale of local goods and handicrafts (UNWTO, 2011). Notable examples of highly ecotourism-oriented economies include Costa Rica, Ecuador, Nepal, Kenya, Madagascar, and Antarctica. The burgeoning ecotourism sector presents both challenges and opportunities for developing countries, particularly those in South Asia. Rich in natural resources and cultural diversity, South Asian countries, including Pakistan, possess the potential to harness ecotourism for economic development. However, factors such as poverty, health issues, unemployment, and gender-related problems pose substantial hurdles to their growth (World Bank, 2015). Specifically, Pakistan, with its diverse geography and cultural heritage, holds immense potential for ecotourism, particularly in the northern region (Rana, 2015). Yet, the sector faces challenges related to infrastructure, security concerns, and insufficient government support (Israr et al., 2009).

This research focuses on the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in Pakistan, a region rich in tourism attractions. Highlighting the role of the Tourism Corporation of KP (TCKP) and the Department of Tourism Services (TDS), alongside the efforts of the Pakistan Austrian Institute of Tourism and Hotel (PAITHOM), it aims to explore the ecotourism potential of the Swat district. The study aims not only to identify ecotourism potential sites but also to formulate sustainable development strategies. The research gap stems from the insufficient exploration of the intricate socio-economic implications of ecotourism in District Swat, KP, particularly from the perspective of the local community. Previous studies have predominantly relied on quantitative methodologies, leaving uncharted territory in understanding the qualitative dimensions of community perceptions. This gap underscores the need for an advanced approach that delves into the nuanced attitudes, beliefs, and experiences of local residents regarding the socio-economic effects of ecotourism. By addressing this gap through a qualitative inquiry, we can pave the way for a more comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between ecotourism and the socioeconomic landscape of the region. The paper's findings will assist policy makers in creating sustainable tourism strategies for Swat by including the community and taking their decisions into account when developing tourism-related projects. The paper's conclusions can be applied to enhance district Swat's tourism, long-term sustainability, and hospitality sectors.

Objective of the Study

This study seeks to analyze various key features of tourism and its impact on the host community. First, it aims to identify and study the factors that influence the host community's view and attitude toward socioeconomic growth through tourism. By investigating these aspects, the study hopes to acquire a better understanding of how the local populace sees tourist activities and how these perceptions influence their attitudes toward economic growth and community development. Additionally, the study will look at the immediate effect of tourism on the host community, taking into account both good and negative aspects. This analysis attempts to give an in-depth evaluation of the entire repercussions of tourism operations on the local people, highlighting both areas of advantage and potential obstacles or negatives. Finally, the study will analyze local

inhabitants' satisfaction with tourism activities, with the goal of determining how well these programs fit the host community's expectations and requirements.

Study Area

The captivating Swat Valley, often referred to as the Switzerland of the East, stands as an enchanting haven for tourists, abundant fruit, alpine meadows, meandering streams, and snow-capped peaks like Mankial and Flaksair boasting breathtaking landscapes and a rich historical legacy. Functioning both as an administrative district and a valley, Swat's geographical coordinates range from approximately $34^{\circ} 36' 59''$ to $35^{\circ} 44' 51''$ N Longitude and from 72 ° 29' 52'' to 72 ° 09' 52'' E Latitude. Surrounded by the lofty Himalayan Mountain range to the north, the mountainous ridge of Malakand pass to the south, the Kohistan area bordering the Indus River to the east, and the district of Dir to the west, Swat's average elevation of 980 meters results in a cooler and wetter climate compared to other areas of Pakistan.

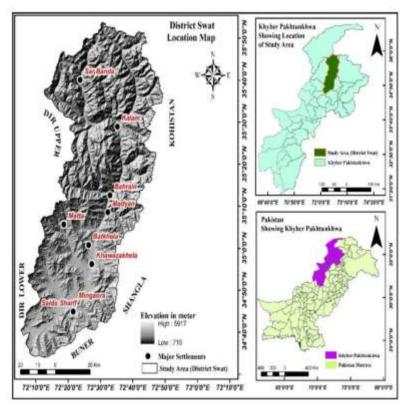


Figure 1. Locational map of the Swat District.

Material and Methods

Data Collection

Research methodologies include quantitative, focusing on numerical data, and qualitative, which explores into behaviors and motivations through methods like content analysis, interviews, and focus group discussions. We have opted for a qualitative approach for our study to gain a deeper understanding of ecotourism and its impacts. This allows us to explore complex perspectives and perceptions surrounding the subject matter. Through qualitative methods such as ethnographic research, interview, observation and focus group discussions, we aim to conduct a comprehensive exploration, acquiring profound insights into our study area. To achieve the objectives of the study, **quantitative research** was conducted by means of a survey, conducted in June-July 2023 during summer season in district Swat. To represent the total population, an appropriate sample of **500** questionnaires

was selected for which purposive quota sampling approach was used. The majority of researchers in the qualitative research approach use purposive sampling (**Bryman, 2015**). The quotas were specifically based on residents' occupational status with a view to make the sample as representative as possible. The data was captured in Microsoft Excel and analyzed by using the Statistical Programe for Social Sciences (SPSS 16.0).

Questionnaire Survey

A questionnaire survey is a valuable tool for collecting data in communities about ecotourism. Several other researchers have employed questionnaires to collect meaningful data. The questionnaire covered aspects of livelihood sources in the region, public perceptions about ecotourism, impacts of ecotourism on various sectors, and local adaptation strategies. Great care was taken in designing the questionnaire to include questions and terms that are easily understandable to respondents and can have a significant effect on the answers obtained. The original questionnaire was pre-tested on a small number of respondents in the study area, which resulted in some modifications. The questionnaire consists of both quantitative and qualitative questions. The open-ended questions can elicit detailed and personal opinions about ecotourism impacts.

Survey Instrument

A self-administered survey questionnaire was used to collect the data. The survey instrument consisted of three sections. The first section of the questionnaire gathered demographic information on residents in communities. Second section consists of items that utilize a 5-point Likert type scale. The anchors include: strongly disagree to strongly agree and the last section consist of items based on interval scale.

Sample Size

The sample for study included residents in rural and urban regions of Swat who were at least 19 years of age or older. Purposive quota sampling selection based on occupational status for sample size of **500 respondents** was utilized to make the sample as representative as possible. To gauge community perceptions regarding the socio-economic and environmental impacts of ecotourism in the study area, **ten** villages were selected for field surveys. These villages were chosen from areas identified as having high potential for ecotourism, with a mix of urban and remote locations to capture diverse perspectives. A total of **500** questionnaires were distributed, with **50** questionnaires administered in each selected locality, addressing perceived economic, socio-cultural, and environmental impacts of tourism. The responses were subsequently tabulated and the data was analyzed. The questionnaire can be found in Annexure 1.

Data Collection Timeline

The research team stayed in Swat for two weeks, from June 21, 2023 to July 9, 2023.

Secondary Data Acquisition

In addition to primary data collecting, secondary sources like as promotional materials, literature, magazine articles, local newspapers, VCDs, and official records (including written reports, maps, and village layouts) were used. These secondary sources supplied additional information about ecotourism management activities, facilities, and attractions, supplementing the qualitative data gathered through primary approaches.

Table 6.1. Showing the characteristics of the selected villages

	Village	Population 2017	Tourism Potential
1	Banda Besigram	8,033	In the vicinity of Beshigram Lake

2	Malam Jaba	6,347	Pakistan first Skiing Resort
3	Mingaora		Handy craft, largest Urban center
4	Puchar	5,576	Scenic beauty
5	Saidu Sharif	1,924	Historical and archeological sites
6	Beha	30,012	Scenic beauty
7	Behrain M.C.	61,787	Scenic beauty and Daral lakes
8	Chuprial	21,280	Scenic beauty, dense forests
9	Slampoor	17,183	Famous for its handloom weaved Shawls
10	Maindam	15,095	Scenic beauty, dense forests
11	Kalam	12,363	Lakes and Scenic beauty
12	Sherpalam	9,135	Scenic beauty
13	Odiaram	22281	Historical and archaological sites

3. **Results**

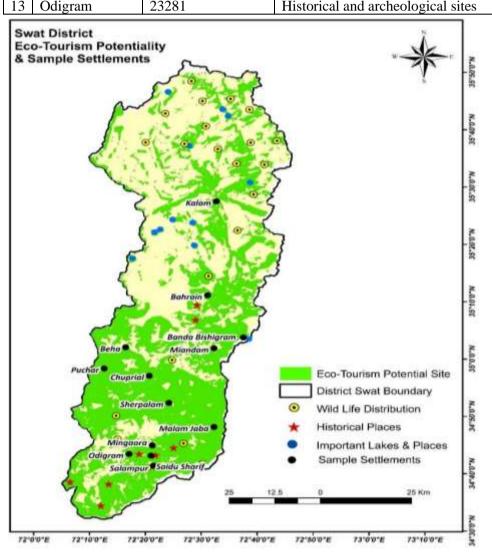


Figure 2. Showing the location of selected sample villages.

and Discussion

3.1 Demographic profile (Respondents)

Gender and Nationality Distribution

The majority of respondents (93%), came from various cities in Pakistan, including Abbottabad, Attock, Nowshera, Peshawar, Islamabad, Lahore, Mardan, Multan, Karak, Okara and Quetta.

Table 2 shows	that male respondents	dominated at	86%, while	females constituted
14%.				

Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	24	86%
Female	4	14%
Total	28	100%
Nationality		
Pakistani	26	93%
Foreigner	2	7%
Total	28	100%

3.2. Occupational Distribution of Respondents

Respondents had a wide range of occupational backgrounds, with 25% coming from government/semi-government and 25% from the private sector. Table 3 shows the distribution across different professions.

Table	3 shows	the occuj	pational	distribu	ution of	f resp	ondent	is.

Profession	Frequency	Percentage
Government/semi-gov	7	25
Private	7	25
Business	6	21
Housewife	1	4
Students	6	21
Retired persons	1	4
Total	28	100

Source: Survey data 2023

Sample respondents on literacy level

Education is essential for communicating and interacting with others. Literate individuals have a higher level of knowledge and are more equipped to deal with situations than illiterates. Table 5 reveals that all respondents were literate. The sample included 61% graduates, 29% Masters, 7% PhDs, and 4% with a higher secondary degree.

Sample Group	Higher	Graduate	Masters	PhD	Total
	Secondary				
Tourists	-	14 (70%)	4 (20%)	2 (10%)	20
KNP	1 (20%)	2 (40%)	2 (40%)	-	5
Management					
Village	-	1 (33%)	2 (67%)	-	3
Community					

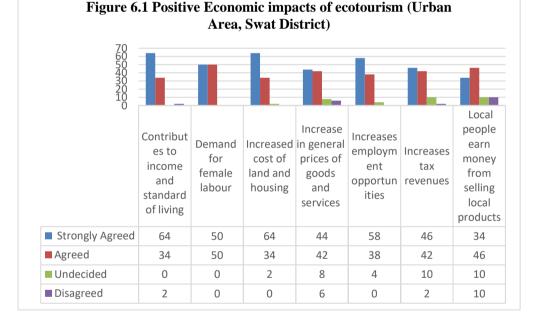
Sample respondents on literacy level

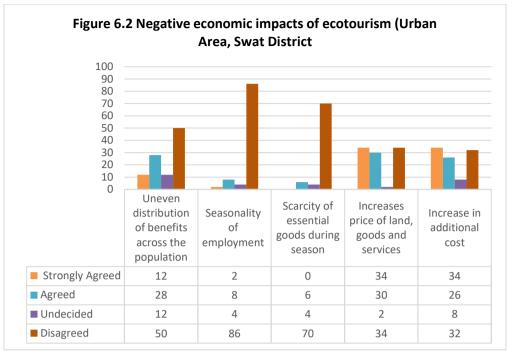
Total 1 (3.5%)	17 (60.7%)	8 (28.5%)	2 (7%)	28
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Economic impacts of ecotourism (Urban areas)

The questionnaire survey was conducted from the selected five urban settlement of the study area hich have ecotourism potential. The positive and negative economic impacts of ecotourism on the settle areas are shown in the table 6.1. The table 6.1 has shown the end result that 64% of the respondence strongly agreed that the ecotourism will contribute to income and improvement the standard of living. Apart from these, it was also concluded that almost 100% of the respondence favored the demand of female labour for the ecotourism activates because the area are settled and possess highly educated and liberal minded people. Similarly, according to the respondence view there are notable increased the cost of land and house by 44%. The tourist and its supported activates created the employment opportunities in various sectors.

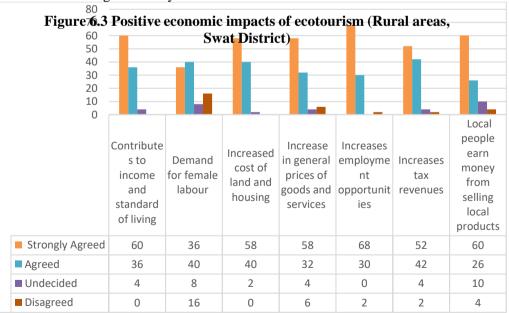
The table 6.2 show the negative economic impacts, 34% of the respondence supported the increased of price of land, goods and services. However, the survey concluded that the uneven distribution of benefits across the population are strongly disagreed which is 84 %. Its means that each section of the society gets the fruit of the ecotourism. This result also concluded that 86% of replied disagreed regarding the seasonality of employment. Simply to say that there is no seasonality of employment if the ecotourism development is initiated.

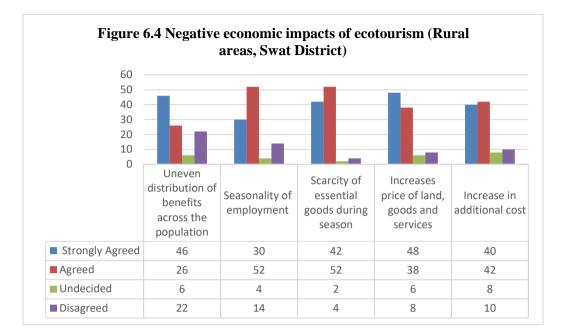




Economic impacts of ecotourism (Rural areas)

The economic impact of ecotourism in five selected rural areas is depicted in Table 6.2. The findings reveal that 60% of respondents agree that ecotourism contributes to income generation and improves living standards. Additionally, 68% strongly advocate for ecotourism to create employment opportunities in the study area. However, there is a reported demand for female labor at only 26%, with 18% expressing reluctance to support female involvement in ecotourism activities due to conservative attitudes in rural settlements. Moreover, Table 6.2 highlights that 72% of respondents acknowledge the seasonality of employment in ecotourism due to harsh winter conditions, leading to scarcity of food and goods in these areas during winter. Specifically, 62% agree that essential items become scarce in winter, while 36% disagree. Notably, only Salampur has accessible road infrastructure among the surveyed rural areas.

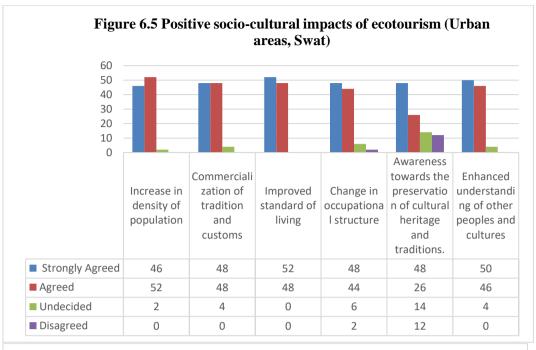


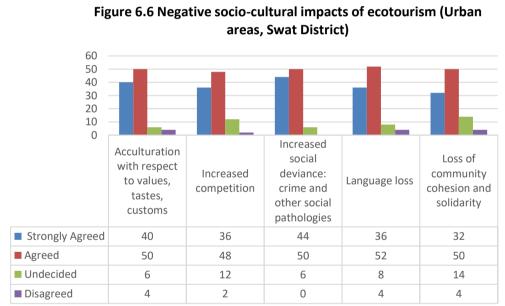


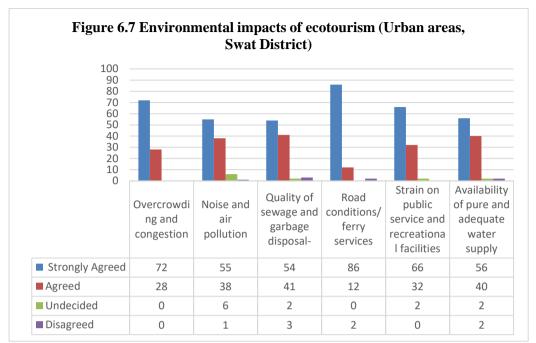
Socio-cultural and environmental impacts

Over half of the responses affirmed that ecotourism contributes to a better understanding of both host and tourist cultures, as well as to the preservation of cultural and historical heritage, ultimately leading to an improved standard of living. However, this transformation in living standards stems from shifts in occupations and the commercialization of traditions. Nonetheless, concerns were raised regarding the potential loss of traditional values, customs, and norms by 40%, alongside a rise in competition and social deviance by 36%. Table 6.3 further illustrates that increased interaction between visitors and hosts has led to the erosion of norms, an uptick in social crimes, and a loss of community cohesion.

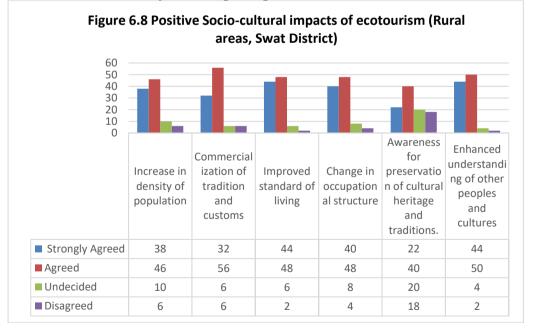
Environmental impacts in settled areas have also been significant, with overcrowding and congestion rising by 72% and noise and air pollution increasing by 54%, as shown in Table 6.3. This strain is evident on public services, recreational facilities, and water quality, as well as garbage disposal. However, it's important to note that while these impacts are notable, they don't necessarily signify an overwhelmingly negative outcome. Tourist visits have also brought about positive effects, such as job creation, local economic benefits from the sale of goods, increased tax revenue, and heightened awareness of the natural and cultural beauty of the area.

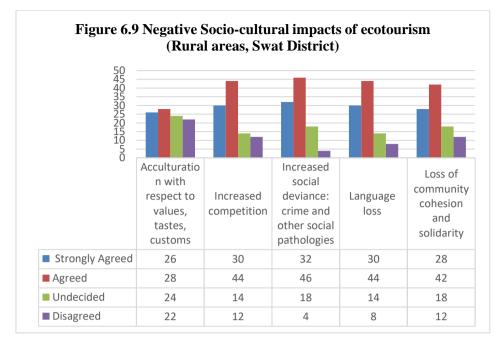


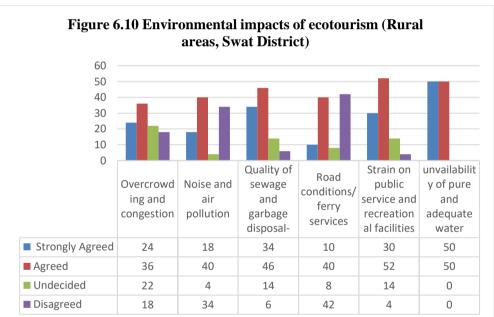




The survey yielded significant findings indicating that ecotourism has positively impacted the standard of living in the area by 44%. This improvement is attributed to the region's natural beauty and picturesque lakes, which draw more tourists and subsequently increase job opportunities related to ecotourism. Furthermore, there has been a notable shift of 40% in the traditional occupations of the local community due to tourist visits. The survey also revealed that there is a 44% chance for tourists to gain insights into the local culture and traditions. Despite the area's remote and scenic attributes, its cultural and historical heritage is relatively low. Consequently, 18% of respondents disagreed with the notion that ecotourism contributes to cultural heritage preservation awareness, and 20% were unfamiliar with the concept of heritage altogether.







Conclusion

In conclusion, the research sheds light on the multifaceted economic, social, and environmental impacts of ecotourism in five selected rural areas. The findings underscore the significant role of ecotourism in income generation and the improvement of living standards, with a majority of respondents acknowledging its potential to create employment opportunities. However, challenges such as the seasonality of employment, reluctance towards female labor participation, and concerns about the erosion of traditional values highlight the need for nuanced approaches to sustainable ecotourism development. Despite these challenges, ecotourism has positively contributed to local economies, cultural exchange, and environmental awareness, albeit with some adverse effects on congestion, pollution, and community cohesion. Moving forward, addressing these challenges while capitalizing on the benefits of ecotourism will be crucial for fostering sustainable development in these rural areas.

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QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY

Respo	ndents'profiles	Gender	Age	Edu:	
		_ Occupation			
Nature other	of Address: Loca	al / Out Distt / Gov	/t Employ /	tourist /	Foreigner.
Main s	ource of income: Ag	griculture, fishing, wood	l carving, resta	urants, othe	er
1. Do you	hear about ecotouris	sm?	1:	yes,	2:No

2.	Do you like that tourist visit your community?	1:yes,	2:No
3.	Tourist are friendly and not friendly for local people	1:yes,	2:No
4.	Should the potential sites be restricted from the visitors?	1:yes,	2:No
5.	Do you like the CPEC development in your region?	1:yes,	2:No

<u>PerceptionofResidentsResponsetoEconomicImpactofTourism</u> Strongly Agree: (A) Agree: (B) Undecided: (C) Disagree: (D)

1.	Contributesto income andstandard ofliving
2.	Demandforfemalelabour
3.	Increasedcostoflandandhousing
4.	Increaseingeneralpricesofgoodsandservices
5.	Increasesemploymentopportunities
6.	Increasestaxrevenues
7.	Localpeopleearnmoneyfromsellinglocalproducts

Perceived Negative EconomicImpacts:

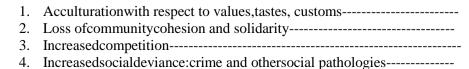
1.	Uneven distribution of benefits across the population
	Seasonalityofemployment
	Scarcityofessentialgoodsduringseason
	Increasespriceofland, goods and services
5.	Costforadditionalinfrastructure(water,sewer,power,fuel,medical)

Socio-culturalImpactsofecotourism:

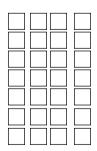


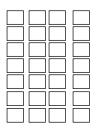
- 4. Changeinoccupationalstructure-----
- 5. Awarenesstowardsthepreservationofculturalheritage traditions.-
- 6. Enhanced understandingofotherpeoplesand cultures-----
- 7. Enhancedsocialidentity------

Perceived Negative Socio-culturalImpacts:



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Н	Н	
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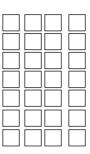




Language loss----- Interpersonaland class conflict------

Environmental and PhysicalImpactIndicatorsofecotourismDevelopment

1.	Overcrowdingandcongestion
2.	Noiseandairpollution
3.	Qualityofsewageandgarbagedisposal
4.	Roadconditions/ ferryservices
5.	Availabilityofpureandadequatewatersupply
6.	Strain on public service and recreational facilities



Other Detail (if any)