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Fundamentals of Ecotourism: Explicit Concept, Characteristics and Elements

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Abstract

Tourism grew rapidly during the 1960s and 1970s as a private sector multifaceted industry and was considered as one of the main catalyst industry for economic growth and regional development. This industry provide potential growth to economy by generating employment to local community with renewed job opportunities, created livelihood potential for local communities and society, and enhanced cultural heritage and scope for infrastructure development. Although tourism benefited in terms of economies, income and tax revenue yet it is being criticized for its ability to harm host society, culture, resources and physical and natural environment. The reason is that it is a predominantly a profit maximization and consumptive industry which sometimes compete for scarce locally available resources and thus over utilize them. The major focus is on importing clients rather than exporting its products (Bob Mckerchar) for cost, profitability and benefit. To convert tourist to greenies and for the conservation and sustainable development of biodiversity, wildlife, local landscape, communities and heritage, socio-culture environment, ecotourism concept was introduced in 1980s. It is considered as a non-consumptive, controlled, beneficial, responsible and scaled approach for sustainable development with minimum environmental impact and maximum respect of host culture, resources, and environmental ethics. It provides diversified livelihood, building local stewardship, alleviate poverty by alternative income hypothesis (Amanda L.Stronza et. al). The present paper deals with the analysis of the essence of the concept of Ecotourism by emphasizing the role of tourism in economy and by defining the different aspects of ecotourism with overlaps, its nature, dichotomy of demand and supply and varied elements of ecotourism are studied. The study is based on descriptive reviews of available literature and also identified trends on ecotourism's conservation and development goals, practices and participatory role of different agencies.

Keywords: Ecotourism, Alternative Tourism, Responsible Tourism, Wild Life and Biodiversity, Non-Consumptive, Sustainable Development.

Introduction

Tourism is a human activity of travelling to and staying in places outside one's own habitat for leisure, business, education, adventure, conservation etc and involve in wide range of activities such as recreation, relaxation, wild life conservation, sustainable practices, biophilic activity etc. The To and fro travel generates external economies with linkages which further impact the global economy significantly. Over the years tourism has become one of the major sectors of economy. The tourism industry is a value added industry as it leads to regional development by contribution to economic growth, revenue generation, employment and foreign exchange earnings (Casiano Manrique-de-Lara-Penate et,al) The world's economic forum report, 2015: "The travel and tourism", has shown significant resilience globally (Robert Crotti, Tiffany Misrahi). The number of international arrivals shows an evolution from mere 25 million in 1950 to 208 million in 2005 corresponding to an average annual growth rate of 6.5%, which further increased to 1208.9 million in 2015. The share of total exports from tourism has risen from 6.2% in 2010 to 7% in 2019. Similarly the share of service exports from tourism has remained significant, accounting for 30% in 2010, 29% in 2015, and 28% in 2019 (Casiano Manrique-de-Lara-Penate et.al 2023). The number of international tourist arrivals worldwide increased significantly in 2024 over the previous year, nearly catching up with the prepandemic levels. After declining with the onset of the covid-19 pandemic to roughly 406 million, the lowest figure recorded since 1989, global inbound tourist arrivals exceeded 1.4 billion in 2024, being just 1.3% lower than in 2019. In the period January-July 2024 arrivals had reached 96% of 2019 levels with over 790 million tourists travelling internationally during those seven months. Market's revenue amounted to nearly 880 billion dollars in 2023, recovering from the impact of covid -19 (Statista research department, July 15-2024, "Travel and Tourism": co-statista.com). In 2023, the total contribution of travel and tourism to be global gross domestic product (GDP) was roughly 4% lower than 2019, the year before pandemic. Overall GDP amounted to 9.9 trillion U.S dollar in 2023. This figure was reached to 11.1 trillion USD in 2024. In 2023 international tourism receipts (visitors spending in destination) reached usd 1.5 trillion, 98% recovery in real terms, adjusting for inflation and currency fluctuation(-2% from 2019). total export revenue from tourism, which includes usd 1.5 trillion in receipt and usd 270 billion in passenger transport fare, reached usd 1.8 trillion in 2023. Revenues from international tourism accounted for 6%, of all exports of goods and services and 23% of trade services in 2023. Tourism was the world's fifth largest export category in 2022, behind automobile product(4th), food(3rd), chemical(2nd) and fuels(1st), in 2019. It generates employments and opportunities for women and young people. Women made up 54% of the tourism workforce before pandemic and about 80% of tourism business are micro, small and medium sized enterprises (MSMEs). In 2023, France was the country with the highest numbers of international tourist arrivals world, welcoming 100 million international

visitors. Spain and the United States followed in the ranking. International tourist arrivals are expected to grow 3% to 5% in 2025 (World Tourism Organization, 2024)(World Tourism Organization, 2024) (International tourism highlights, 2024 edition, https://www.e-unwto.org/doi/epdf/10.18111/97892844_25808).

According to Davis Fennel, there are five key components of tourism which forms an open tourism system with mutually interacting phenomenon (Leiper's, 1981, Mathierson and wales, 1982), these elements are:- i). Dynamic human elements, the one who travels to a selected destination and back for leisure, recreation experiences/activities that can be for general or specific goals. The travel could be at small regions with concrete uniqueness of a site i.e ideographic or it can be over political borders with in a site to entire countries and continents (Pearce-1982, Gunn-1988, and Leiper-1990), Davis Fennel-2008. ii). Generating Regions, which generate tourist or where demand is generated i.e need for leisure time, travel motivation, demographics, preferences etc. iii). Transit Regions, which provides transport hubs, stopover facilities and logistic supports. iv). Destination regions or static elements, which involves a stay at the destination and generate supply side market. v). The Tourist Industry as a consequential element, resulting from the other four elements and have effect on the economic, social and physical subsystem within which tourist is directly or indirectly in contact. Tourist industries includes the supply of accommodation, facilities, transportation and attraction for tourist interaction and experiences (Goeldner et al-2000 such as cultural attraction (e.g historical sites, museum etc), natural attraction(e.g parks,flora and fauna), attraction of events(e.g festivals, religious events),attraction of recreational activities(e.g Golf, Hiking, Skiing) and entertainment(e.g Theme parks, Cinemas etc) . The three major factors affecting the attraction, as compiled by Davis fennel (Lews 1987), are ; Unique site with small regions i.e ideographic; Spatial capacity and temporal nature which in terms determine the scale; and a place that stimulates emotional responses or elicit feeling i.e cognitive.

Mass movement of people as a tourist leads to stimulate the demand site market segment and supply side market which has further catalyzed the sectoral growth of economy such as agriculture, manufacturing, construction, hospitality, transportation, infrastructure etc thus representing complex integration of economic linkages and has galvanized advance economic development and regional transformation. Although mass tourism provides ample opportunity to region to develop but it has simultaneously created negative impact on ecology, physical and socio cultural environment. Global demand for the tourism has commercialized the use of materials and products which has stressed the site's natural resources, materials, market and local food products and traditional goods and services by excluding demand of it's consumption in hotels, resorts, mega resorts etc. moreover the seasonality in tourism has made the involvement of local people and products

more dependent on flow direction and density of tourist. The negative implication of mass tourism has raised the demand of sustainable form of tourism with immersive nature experience and its philosophical heritage i.e innate love for nature and indigenous perspective, is embraced by conservationist and environmentalist alike. As a result other form of tourisms, such as, Alternative tourism, ecotourism, nature base tourism, low impact tourism, are emerged rooted in a form of environmental experiences as both a philosophy and a experiences(john neil, n.d.)(David Fennel,2008).

Alternate Tourism

Alternate tourism is a form of tourism which is more nature base, softer in approach to nature's exploration, people to people, controlled, small scale, cottage and green tourism ().The alternative tourism is community-based tourism in which endeavor is made to preserve the uniqueness of the site in terms of its socio culture and natural environment. In alternative tourism services like accommodation, facilities, hospitality are provided to the guests by the host, in or at home or by local community The aim of alternative tourism/ community-based tourism is to establish direct personal/cultural interconnection and mutual understanding, solidarity and equality amongst participants (Derno1988:253, Holden,1984:15). The concept is a holistic approach which focuses on economically viability, on one hand by generating jobs, employments, revenue within the community and on the other hand integration, wellbeing, welfare of community, education and conservation of environment, local market and culture of destination site (Holden,1984:15), Alternative tourism includes leisure activities like adventure holidays, hiking, fishing, or a solitary journey undertaken by globe trotters. It is associated with small scale, low density, dispersed in rural areas or non urban areas, and caters special interest group of people. The other forms of Alternate tourism is cultural, educational, scientific, ranch and farm subsets(Mieczkowski,1995), (Fennel, 2014) David Fennel,2008 .

Ecotourism

Ecotourism is ananother paradigm in tourism. Ecotourism is an ecological niche segment of tourism where attraction is predominantly natural surrounding and physical environment. The eco tourists with their responsible behavior contribute towards sustainability of ecology, biodiversity, socio-cultural and economic aspect of the destination site. It is ethically managed to be low impact, controlled and sustainable tourism with less or no intrusion in the natural habitat which is non consumptive as based primarily on natural resources and captive exclusion thus benefits the community by maintaining authenticity and uniqueness of the attraction which in turn also benefits the locals from the existences of the attraction if tourist are not present and oriented locally at small/low scale as accommodation and facilities are provided by individual or families or local community. It also economically benefits the locals by generating jobs, employments, revenues, local market etc. The

major dimensions of ecotourism are nature base, conservation, ethics, sustainability, learning, awareness, education, preservation etc, at local level thus defining the ecotourism as an activity of control, benefit and scale (Mohonk agreement, 2000, proposal report for international certification of sustainable tourism and ecotourism). The prefix “eco” in ecotourism, derives from the word “ecology” which itself is derived from the Greek word “Oikos” meaning house or habitat. The environment that we human habitat is, at its most fundamental level, our home, our dwelling or our own life support. Travel made to a habitat, dwelling in/at individual or families or local community with specific goal of learning, education and environmental experiences, is called ecotourism. Hector Ceballos Lascurian coined the term “ecotourism” in 1983 which was derived from the Spanish word “Turismo ecologico” In his paper titled the “Future of Ecotourism” ecotourism is defined as a travel to a natural environmental site with the focus goal of understanding the surrounding through learning and experiences. According to him the ecotourism study the ecological and biodiversity site and can directly contribute to rehabilitate the degraded flora, fauna and endangered species and in general, benefits the local cultural heritage and community.

Alternative Tourism	Ecotourism
Anything other than mass tourism is classify as alternative tourism. Its various forms are cultural, education, scientific, adventure and agri tourism with rural, ranch and farm subsets. All forms are interrelated and provide more comprehensive understanding of the travel phenomenon with inclusion of principle implicit to all form (Mieczkowski) e.g cultural tourism overlaps with education, scientific, adventure and agri Tourism form It is similar to Community base tourism but can be distinguish in scale and characteristics	Ecotourism is mainly aligned to nature and physical environment with minimum human interface and express the explicit motivation to conserve the environment, social and cultural education and awareness and it has minimal impact, small scale and sustainable practices with community participation It does not coincide directly with cultural tourism but overlaps with education, scientific, adventure and agriculture tourism

The natural environment as a core of Ecotourism can be explain as a travel to unspoilt natural environment predominantly for experiencing the natural environment which further aimed to conserve and preserve the ecology and biodiversity

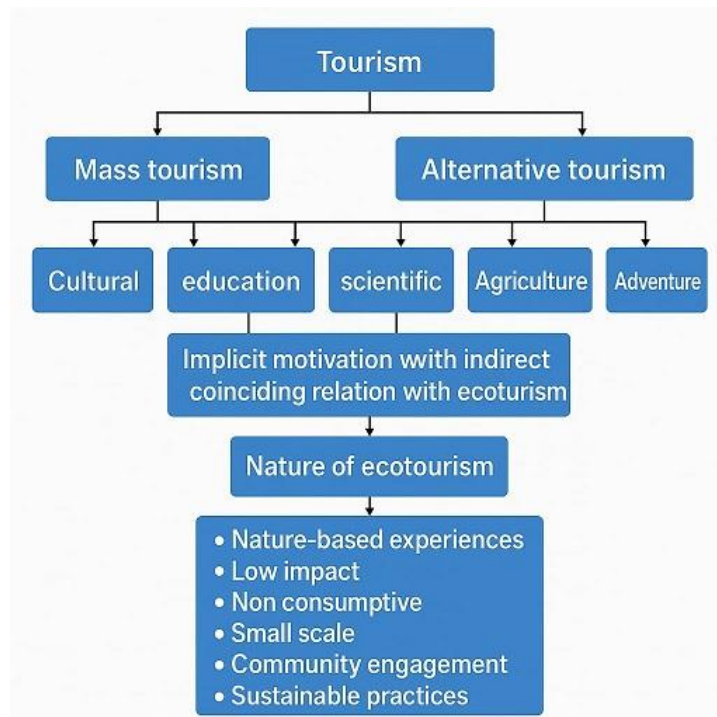
(Stephen Wearing and John Neil, 2009)

Nature Base Tourism and Ecotourism

Nature base tourism includes activities/experiences that are dependent on nature, enhanced by nature and natural setting is incidental for the activities/experiences. Activities like birds watching and camping, offers enriching and pleasure experiences that are mainly confined to the natural environment. While not

always the primary motivation, nature remains essential parts of these experiences. The main focus in nature base tourism is to experience the nature and nature based activities as a part of improving the quality of life, leisure time in a different surrounding and interacting with nature to ease the daily life routine.

Ecotourism, with its focus on sustainability, low environmental impact and community involvement, stand as a refined form of nature tourism. It emphasized responsible management, conservation and the enhancement of visitor's understanding and appreciation of nature. However all forms of nature based tourism qualify as ecotourism unless they align with its core values of ecological integrity and sustainability(Wearing, 2009).



Nature of Ecotourism and Overlaps (Mieczkowski, 1995)

Low Impact Tourism and Ecotourism

Low impact tourism overlaps with the forms of alternative tourism with main concern is socio economic development and natural management of supplier country and destination sites (Lilly White and Lilly White-1990). The main factor influencing the resource management is the private sector investment in rural economy to enhance the indigenous resources and product development. Local dwellers or villagers are trained to serve the tourist industry with their tradition skills and indigenous resources thus maintaining the integrity of nature, its materials and

products. While managing the local resources and people mass tourists are restricted according to the carrying capacity of the region and sensitivity in the development of infrastructure based on uniqueness and physical base of the natural region. (Brunal et al,2001). The main features of low impact tourism is that it does not necessarily take place in undisturbed natural areas rather it has no specific location i.e it can be at industrial site, forest areas, plantation areas, etc. its major focus is on the impact on the location of travel experiences, fostering indigenous involvement to improve life of people of rural areas located in destination site, It is, therefore an integration of development and conservation.

Ecotourism is two way interaction between conservation as well as the enjoyment of nature with minimal impact on biodiversity, cultural heritage, and physical appearance of the natural environment. It should be economically viable by providing stability in employment and income

Ecotourism is considered as experiences/ activities that contributes positively to environment, rejuvenate nature and rehabilitating degraded areas. Two main Paradigms /dichotomy of ecotourism has emerged (Weaver & Lawton, 2007). These are:

- Demand driven-concept limited to nature based tourism
- Supply sided view i.e sustainable tourism

Demand

Fundamental concern of ecotourism includes environmental degradation, impact on local communities, need for high quality tourism management for achievable sustainability. Ecotourism opportunities generates demand of geographical segments, alternative form of tourism, protected areas with minimal environmental degradation. Demand focuses on ecotourist as a market segment because it generates demand or motivation for movement and market segmentation that may be geographical, demographic and behavioural. Geographical segmentation creates nontraditional ecotourist market such as demand for travel to protected areas, attraction to vegetation and geology e.g attraction of North East Asia is known for blossom and waterfall region and as an aesthetic and philosophical relation to these attractions. Demographic ecotourist includes statistical information of a given population such as age, gender, race ethnicity, location, occupation, income level, education etc. it shows trends towards middle aged, higher educated and higher income individuals. Behavioural ecotourist focuses on environmental impact by choosing eco-friendly accommodations and participating in activities that promotes environmental awareness, supports conservation efforts and benefitting local communities and economies. Ecotourism behavior enhances travel experiences and aid in preserving the habitat for future generations. demand marking is influenced and enhanced by institutional policies, planning, specialized and non specialized organizations, education/Trainings.

Supply side explains the nature of ecotourism which includes criteria or definitions, types or overlapping of the forms of ecotourism or alternate tourism e.g bird watching activity that is a natural base travel with the aim to enhance the biodiversity through education, training and awareness programmes by organizational involvements. Market segment interpretation includes type of travelers i.e solo/group and age group with high disposable income (Mieczkowski 1995). The destination is provided with the attraction sites and primarily focuses on the protected areas that can be either owned publically or private e.g beaches and private beach resorts respectively. The market of supply sided is segmented by sale channels including travel agents and direct booking across the regions and the type of tourism i.e alternate tourism/sustainable tourism/community tourism/ nature base tourism, etc which overlaps with explicit motivation of ecotourism as specialized goal, influences industrial sector that provides ecolodges, ecotour operators and mediating attraction. Non specialized sectors i.e conventional hotels, cruise lines travel agencies etc also emerged in industrial sector that incidently serves ecotourists and provide ecotourist products or services.

Demand and supply dichotomy together has ecological, socio cultural, economic, quality control and ethical implications on the external environment. Since the prime focus in ecotourism is the sustainability and conservation of the physical and biological environment, sustainable resource management is essential for planning, development and management of ecotourism with the principles and practices of sustainability.

Conclusion

Ecotourism involves eco-tour that enhances the knowledge and awareness of nature. There are four major elements of ecotourism. These are:

- Travel to a undisturbed, protected, low key and unobtrusive tourism with minimal impact on nature or external environment
- It is a nature base with the major focus on rejuvenation, rehabilitation and protection of degraded areas
- Ecotourism is conservation led which aim to take small group of people to natural or protected areas with minimum impact on the physical, social and cultural environment thus contribute to sustainable future
- Ecotourism has two major paradigm, that is, demand side and supply side segments thus interpreting marketing as a industrial aspect and ecotourist experiences as a interpretation of external environment

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