

Chapter 2.10

Community Based Eco Cultural Heritage Tourism for Sustainable Development in the Asian Region: A Conceptual Framework

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ABSTRACT

Tourism has emerged as one of the world's largest industries and a fast growing economic sector. The Asian region attracts a growing number of quality-conscious tourists as it is endowed with a rich bio-cultural/heritage diversity. However, the diversity and integrity of many Asian tourist destinations have been severely eroded or irreversibly damaged due to ill-conceived, poorly planned, and under-regulated mass tourism and other human activities, increasing the conflicts between conservation and local livelihoods. Fortunately, the newly emerging community-based eco-cultural heritage tourism (CBECHT) can be effectively used in the region for achieving the objectives of sustainable development by integrating pro-poor tourism approaches. Such approaches are strongly promoted and supported by several international organizations as well as Local Agenda 21. This article provides a broad conceptual framework for this approach and evaluates the potentials and constraints for evolving and implementing such strategies in the region with their policy/planning implications.

1. INTRODUCTION

The global tourism industry generated about US\$5.7 trillion of value added in 2010 (over 9% of global GDP) and employs around 235 million

people directly or indirectly. It will help create an additional 66 million jobs by 2020 – 50 million of which in Asia –acting as a key driver of poverty reduction. Tourism is a key export for 83% of developing countries: for the world's 40 poorest countries, it is the second most important source

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of foreign exchange after oil. Many tourism businesses are fully or partially dependent on local cultural heritage, bio diversity and ecosystem services, that are predominantly found in Asian countries (http://www.wttc.org/bin/pdf/original_pdf_file/viewpoint_winter_2010_v6.pdf). However, due to the predominant, ill-conceived and largely unregulated mass tourism activities, the diversity, integrity and productivity of many pristine habitats and key ecosystems in Asia/South Asia have been severely degraded (Hing, 1997; Poyya Moli, 2007). Though it is well known that environment with all its splendour-biodiversity, culture and heritage are the travel industry's base products and represent a competitive advantage, they are rarely respected/understood/protected by the tourism promoters and are seldom discussed in the literature. Many of these decisions are irreversible/interconnected because once habitats/Ecosystems/communities along with their rich/diverse culture and heritage lose the character that make them distinctive and attractive to non residents, they would lose their ability to vie for tourist-based income in an increasingly global and competitive marketplace (Laws & Pan, 2004; Poyya Moli, 2007). The common property resources on which the poor depend more for their subsistence and livelihoods often receive most of the negative impacts of mass tourism (TEEB, 2010). This not only reduces the availability of goods and services to the local resource dependent communities, especially the poor, but also limits the opportunities for sustainable economic growth. To overcome such "commons dilemma", several workers have suggested community based sustainable management of the commons through pro-poor ecotourism (Hoole, 2010; Stronza 2010). Thus, conservation-development inter-phase in South Asia (SA) is confronting with three types of serious conflicts - man-land/water, poverty-environment and stakeholder and all three of them are ingrained in tourism-environment conflicts (Babu & Poyya Moli, 2007).

Owing both to a accumulating concern about the negative cumulative and often irreversible impacts of mass tourism, and an increasing demand among tourists for authentic sustainable tourism experiences worldwide, there has been a paradigm shift of the global tourism industry, culminating in the emergence of several alternative tourism strategies (Blank, 1989; Brundtland, 1987; Conway & Timms, 2010; Corson, 1994; Farrell, 1992; Flint et al., 2002; Hall & Richards, 2000; Hunter, 1995; Mowforth & Munt, 1998; Murphy, 1985; O'Hare, 2001; Pearce et al., 1996; Pigram, 1990; Romeril, 1989; Simpson, 2001; Spiller & Lake, 2003; Stettner, 1993; Wight, 1993b). Among them, community based eco-cultural heritage tourism (CBECHT) hold greater promise for ensuring long term sustainability, especially for remote locations in Asia, endowed with rich bio-cultural diversity, ancient heritage and pristine habitats (Global Heritage Fund, 2010; Keitumetse, 2009; Poyya Moli, 2007, 2008).

2. BACKGROUND

Ecotourism (ET) is the tourism industry's fastest growing sub-sector, with an estimated worldwide annual growth of 10-30%. Some estimates suggest that 20% of all international tourists are in some way involved in 'ET'. According to the World Wildlife Fund for Nature 20% of revenue generated from tourism in developing countries is due to ET (www.greentourism.sitekit.net/HG%20Presentation.ppt).

Ecotourism (ET) developed 'within the womb of environmental movement' in the 1970s and 1980s. Growing Environmental concern coupled with an emerging dissatisfaction with ill-planned mass tourism led to increased demand for more authentic nature based experiences of an alternative nature. By mid 1980s, ET was identified as a means of achieving the twin goals of biodiversity conservation and sustainable development in a number of countries.

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