

**ANALYSIS OF LOCAL PERCEPTIONS ABOUT TOURISM ACTIVITY: A CASE OF
KANGRA DISTRICT IN HIMACHAL PRADESH**

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Abstract:

Tourism is one of the most vital industries in the global economy. It is a tool for development in countries where there are fewer resources available. One of the significant aspects of tourism is its impact on the stakeholders. One of the important stakeholders in tourism is the host communities at tourist destinations. Local communities are involved in the tourism industry directly or indirectly. The tourism industry has a significant impact on the lives and livelihood of the local populations. The locals living near tourist destinations always have a different viewpoint towards tourists and tourism. Understanding of the local perception towards tourism activity is considerably important as it can help in the careful understanding of tourism in that destination.

In Himachal Pradesh, Kangra is the most populous and well-known district for tourism. A perspective survey was conducted to understand how tourism activity impacts the local communities in the two tourist centres of the Kangra district. Dharamshala and Palampur were the two tourist centres where the survey of 200 local populations was carried out. A total of 32 indicators or outlook statements were considered here covering the aspects of the environmental, economic, infrastructure, and socio-cultural impact of tourism. These impacts were categorized as positive and negative impacts. The purpose of this research was to examine how tourism influences the way of life of host communities in Kangra district, Himachal Pradesh as a case study and thereby give suggestions for sustainable tourism development in the region.

Key Words: *Perceptions, Local Communities, Sustainable Tourism.*

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Introduction:

Tourism is an essential industry since it has an impact on a country's economic development. It opens up a slew of possibilities for both the host country and its population. The host population of a tourist destination plays an important part in the progress of tourism. They are important tourist stakeholders since tourism has a direct or indirect impact on their life. Tourism itself can have both a positive and negative impact on local residents. (Sheldon & Abenoja, 2001). It can improve their way of life and the standard of living of local communities by offering work opportunities for residents and increasing infrastructural facilities and services. Tourism, on the other hand, has the potential to negatively impact the economy, culture, society, and environment, as well as the host community. According to Diaz and Gutierrez (2010), given that several of the impacts converge in the dimensions or categories, it is possible to observe the most important impacts-dimensions by groups or segments. Depending on how each

group of residents is affected by different dimensions, their attitudes towards tourism will differ. Moreover, each group or segment of residents shares common interests which will affect their attitude toward tourists. Thus, positive and negative political, socio-cultural and economic impacts are closely linked with each other.

Need for the Study:

Tourists have an impact on the lives and livelihoods of local communities when they visit a tourist attraction. As a result, local communities are seen as important stakeholders in tourism. It is critical to comprehend local perceptions of tourism activity in tourist sites. It will aid in the investigation of how tourism affects the way of life of host communities. This type of research will help in a thorough understanding of tourism and its long-term viability at the tourist location.

This research will help in gaining a better understanding of local residents' attitudes about tourism. It will also aid in determining whether tourism activity in a certain location has a positive or negative influence on local residents. Such a study will help in the sustainable tourism development in the study area.

Objectives

- To study the perceptions of local communities about tourism activity in the study area
- To find the impact on local communities due to tourism activity in the study area
- To give suggestions for sustainable tourism development in the region

Database and Methodology:

For present research, the data was collected from primary and secondary sources. Primary data are collected through observation and questionnaire surveys. A perspective survey method for local people i.e. (Local shopkeepers, restaurant owners, tourist guides, taxi drivers, tour operators, hotel owners, locals providing homestays, etc.). Statistical techniques are used for analyzing the collected information and data using Microsoft Excel. The sample size for the questionnaire survey was 100 respondents from each tourist center. A total of 200 local people as respondents were surveyed by convenient random sample from two tourist centres i.e., Dharamshala, and Palampur. Secondary information sources were retrieved from reports released by the Department of Tourism and Civil Aviation of Himachal Pradesh, etc. Reference books, research journals, e-journals, e-news were also referred. For analyzing the collected information Microsoft Excel was used.

Study Area:

The Kangra District of Himachal Pradesh is situated in the Western Himalayas between 31°2' to 32°5' North latitude and 75° to 77°45' East longitude, with 5,739 square kilometers to constitute 10.31% of the geographical area of the State. (Figure1.). Kangra is Himachal Pradesh's most populous district. 'Dharamshala' is the district's administrative headquarters. Apart from agriculture, tourism is a significant contributor to the district's economy. Many temples dedicated to Gods and Goddesses can be found in Kangra district. Apart from religious tourism, tourists can participate in and enjoy trekking and camping, adventure tourism, eco-tourism, visiting sanctuaries, boating on lakes, and attending local fairs and festivals. Dharamshala, Palampur, Baijnath, Kangra, and Jwalaji are all popular tourist destinations.

Location of Study Area:

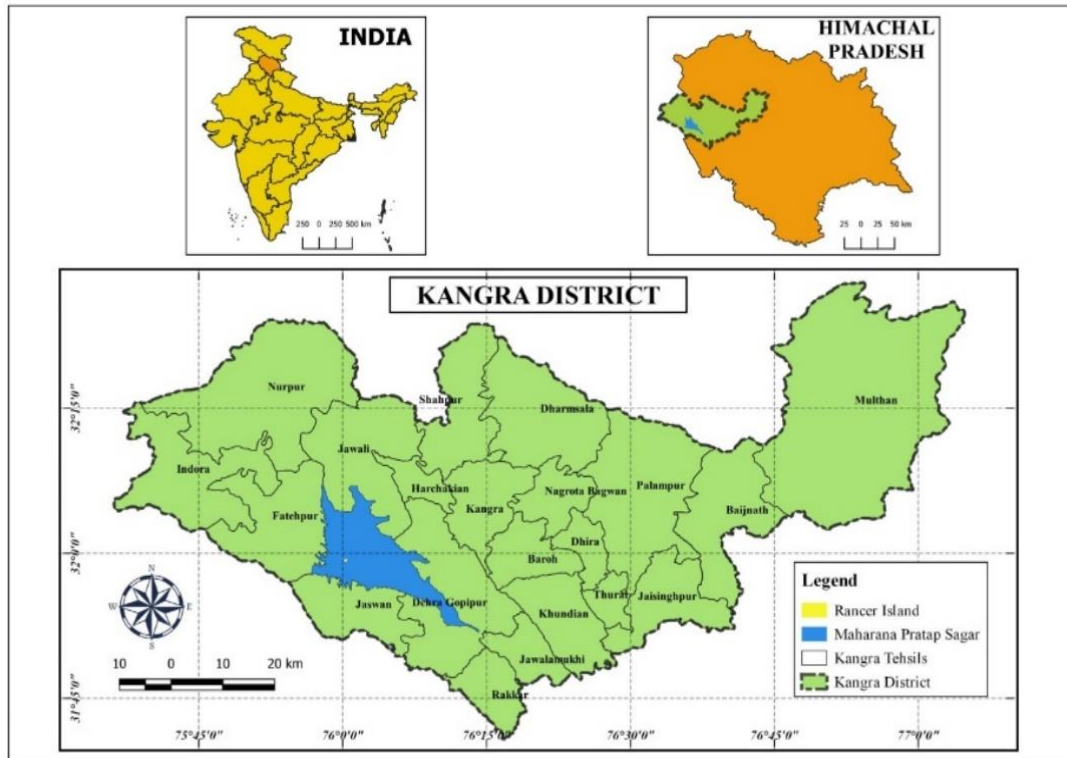


Figure-1

Case study of local perceptions about tourism activity in Kangra District

An attempt has been made to analyse the perspective of residents living nearby tourist centres is important to study. The perception of the host community about tourists was measured through various indicators with the help of five-point Likert Scale. A total of 32 indicators or outlook statements were considered here covering the aspects of the environmental, economic, infrastructure, and socio-cultural impact of tourism. There were five response alternatives for every perspective statement i.e. (i) strongly agree, (ii) agree, (iii) neither agree nor disagree, (iv) disagree, and (v) strongly disagree. The statements helped to understand the perception of tourists about the impacts of tourism in the study area. These impacts were categorized as positive and negative impacts. Out of the 32 indicators taken into consideration, 19 indicators were associated with the positive impact of tourism and 13 indicators indicated negative impacts of tourism.

Table 1: Perception of Local population at Dharamshala tourist centre for Positive indicators

S.N.	Attitude Statement	Perception Level of Respondents					Total Respondents
		1	2	3	4	5	
1	Created more Jobs for local	45	47	6	2	0	100
2	Increased the income of Residents	39	47	3	6	5	100
3	Increased the business of local traders	29	34	10	15	12	100
4	Improved the Marketing Facilities	39	45	4	7	5	100
5	Improved the road conditions in the Area	30	35	7	18	10	100
6	Increased the transport facilities	42	47	5	3	3	100
7	Increased the mode of communication in the area	38	40	9	9	4	100
8	Increased the number of hotels/resorts	53	43	4	0	0	100

9	Improvement in electricity	28	35	13	16	8	100
10	Improvement in water supply	31	41	10	11	7	100
11	Improved Banking facility	33	35	12	11	9	100
12	Increased the quality of police protection	25	34	9	17	15	100
13	Increased the Availability of Recreational Facilities	39	43	7	6	5	100
14	Increased the Literacy Rate	29	38	12	11	10	100
15	Helped in Renovation and Maintenance of Historical Sites	20	30	17	18	15	100
16	Improved the knowledge about religion	37	39	9	10	5	100
17	Preservation of local culture and values	31	33	11	10	15	100
18	Lead to conservation of natural beauty	19	25	18	22	16	100
19	Lead to conservation of wildlife	21	27	20	19	13	100
Total		628	718	186	211	157	1900

Index: 1: Strongly Agree, 2: Agree, 3: Neither Agree/ Disagree, 4: Disagree, 5: Strongly Disagree

Table 1 depicts the perception of the local population at Dharamshala tourist centre for positive indicators. Dharamshala is a well-developed tourist Centre in Kangra district. Tourists visit here in large numbers, as most of the popular tourist spots are located here.

It is observed that tourism activity positively impacts the people living in the Dharamshala tourist centre. As the locals agree that tourism activity has benefitted them by creating jobs and improving their income i.e., 92% and 86% respectively. It is observed that about 53% of locals strongly agreed that there is an increase in accommodation in the region. Locals were of the view that other facilities like markets, communication, electricity, water supply, banking, recreational, have improved in the region. More than 50% of locals agreed that tourism activity has improved literacy rate, knowledge of religion, and preservation of local culture and values. Locals believed that tourism activity to some extent has led to environmental protection by conserving the natural beauty and wildlife protection. However, 22% and 16% of locals disagree and strongly disagree respectively that tourism activity has led to the conservation of natural beauty. They believed that tourism has led to extreme development in the Dharamshala tourist centre, where there is haphazard construction of accommodation facilities. Overall, it is observed that in the Dharamshala tourist centre, locals believe that tourism has created a positive impact by creating economic opportunities and improving the number of facilities. These facilities are not only utilised by tourists alone but are also used by the local population.

Table 2: Perception of Local population at Dharamshala tourist Centre for Negative indicators

S.N.	Attitude Statement	Perception Level of Respondents					Total Respondents
		1	2	3	4	5	
1	Increase in general Prices of goods & services	41	46	10	3	0	100
2	Scarcity of essential goods during tourist season	32	35	10	13	10	100
3	Increase cost of Land for Housing	44	48	5	3	0	100
4	Changed the local values, norms and customs	29	40	14	12	5	100
5	Disturbed the peace of the Area	20	32	17	20	11	100
6	Increased the Social Evils like Alcoholism and Gambling in the Area	37	42	11	5	5	100
7	Affected the Religious Activities in the Area	22	35	15	19	9	100
8	Affected the natural Beauty adversely	35	50	8	4	3	100

9	Decreased the area under forest coverage	39	41	9	7	4	100
10	Increased the air pollution	41	40	4	8	7	100
11	Increased the noise pollution	37	40	11	6	6	100
12	Increased the water pollution	39	42	9	5	5	100
13	Increased Sewage and Garbage disposal	43	46	4	5	2	100
Total		459	537	127	110	67	1300

Index: 1: Strongly Agree, 2: Agree, 3: Neither Agree/ Disagree, 4: Disagree, 5: Strongly Disagree

Table 2 depicts the perception of the local population at Dharamshala tourist centre for negative indicators. Locals agreed that tourism activity has increased the prices of goods and services and even the scarcity of goods during the peak season. They feel that public transport facilities are overcrowded especially during peak season, which creates problems in their movement. Also, 44% and 48% of locals strongly agree and agree respectively that tourism has increased the cost of living and land for housing. It was observed that locals who do not have their land in the region find it very difficult for buying land for housing. About 79% of locals believed that tourism has increased social evils like alcoholism in the area. This is mainly due to the attitude of the tourists, as they visit Dharamshala mainly for enjoyment. This enjoyment is associated with alcoholism which leads to a negative socio-cultural impact on the host population, in the form of cultural shock. With respect to tourists disturbing the peace of the area 31% of the locals disagree, as they were of the view that tourism has created more economic opportunities. About 85% of locals were of the view that tourism has adversely affected the beauty of the area, due to several construction activities. Therefore, locals were also of the view that there is a decrease in forest cover. Also, locals agreed to tourism activity causing air, water, and noise pollution, especially during the peak season. During peak season tourists mostly visit Dharamshala as compared to other centers because of its popularity. Tourists coming for weekend gateways from neighboring districts and states travel in their car, thereby causing problems of traffic congestion, air and noise pollution. About 43% and 46% locals strongly agreed and agreed respectively that tourism activity cause's increase sewage and garbage disposal. This is true for popular tourist spots where littering is a common problem. Locals also believe that many tourists have a careless attitude and litter around. Overall, for negative indicators, locals perceive that tourism is causing negative economic, socio-cultural, and environmental impacts to a greater extent.

Table 3. Perception of Local population at Palampur tourist center for Positive indicators

S.N.	Attitude Statement	Perception Level of Respondents					Total Respondents
		1	2	3	4	5	
1	Created more Jobs for local	30	40	10	12	8	100
2	Increased the income of Residents	28	37	13	12	10	100
3	Increased the business of local traders	26	36	15	13	10	100
4	Improved the Marketing Facilities	29	38	10	11	12	100
5	Improved the road conditions in the Area	30	39	10	11	10	100
6	Increased the transport facilities	31	40	9	10	10	100
7	Increased the mode of communication in the area	29	36	11	14	10	100
8	Increased the number of hotels/resorts	37	42	8	7	6	100
9	Improvement in electricity	24	34	16	14	12	100
10	Improvement in water supply	24	33	15	15	13	100
11	Improved Banking facility	27	38	12	13	10	100
12	Increased the quality of police protection	24	34	19	12	11	100
13	Increased the Availability of Recreational Facilities in the Area	32	42	9	9	8	100
14	Increased the Literacy Rate	29	39	9	12	11	100

15	Helped in Renovation and Maintenance of Historical Sites	23	35	15	14	13	100
16	Improved the knowledge about religion	22	34	13	16	15	100
17	Preservation of local culture and values	26	38	14	12	10	100
18	Lead to conservation of natural beauty	20	30	18	17	15	100
19	Lead to conservation of wildlife	22	34	14	14	16	100
Total		513	699	240	238	210	1900

Index: 1: Strongly Agree, 2: Agree, 3: Neither Agree/ Disagree, 4: Disagree, 5: Strongly Disagree

Table 3 depicts the perception of the local population at Palampur tourist centre for positive indicators. As compared to Dharamshala tourism activity is not very high in this region. However, locals have been affected by tourism development in this area to some extent. It can be observed that 70% of the locals agreed that tourism activity has created jobs in the area and 65% agreed that tourism has increased the income of the residents in Palampur. About 37% and 42% of local respondents strongly agree and agree that there is a rise in the number of hotels and resorts due to tourism development in the region. 74% of local respondents believed that tourism has increased the recreational activities in the area. Locals were also of the view that tourism has led to the improvement of the infrastructure in the region like transport, communication, banking, marketing, etc. Tourism activity has also positively impacted the society and culture according to the perceptions of residents of Palampur. About 17% and 15% of local respondents disagree and strongly disagree respectively that tourism has led to the conservation of natural beauty. 30% of locals disagree that tourism activity has any association with conservation wildlife. Overall, it is observed that in Palampur tourist centre locals believe that tourism has created a positive impact by creating economic opportunities and improving several facilities similar to Dharamshala. The development of tourism infrastructure also helps to improve the living of local people living near tourist centres.

Table 4: Perception of Local population at Palampur tourist Centre for Negative indicators

S.N.	Attitude Statement	Perception Level of Respondents					Total Respondents
		1	2	3	4	5	
1	Increase in general Prices of goods & services	29	38	12	11	10	100
2	Scarcity of essential goods during tourist season	28	35	13	12	12	100
3	Increase cost of Land for Housing	32	40	12	8	8	100
4	Changed the local values, norms and customs	22	32	15	16	15	100
5	Disturbed the peace of the Area	22	32	16	16	14	100
6	Increased the Social Evils like Alcoholism and Gambling in the Area	19	27	16	20	18	100
7	Affected the Religious Activities in the Area	19	22	18	21	20	100
8	Affected the natural Beauty adversely	28	35	14	12	11	100
9	Decreased the area under forest coverage	29	30	13	16	12	100
10	Increased the air pollution	31	39	10	11	9	100
11	Increased the noise pollution	31	39	12	10	8	100
12	Increased the water pollution	28	36	14	11	11	100
13	Increased Sewage and Garbage disposal	33	40	11	9	7	100
Total		351	445	176	173	155	1300

Index: 1: Strongly Agree, 2: Agree, 3: Neither Agree/ Disagree, 4: Disagree, 5: Strongly Disagree

Table 4 depicts the perception of the local population at Palampur tourist centre for negative indicators. Locals

believe that tourism activity has increased the prices of goods and services (67%) and scarcity of essential goods (63%). Most locals agreed that tourism has increased the cost of land for housing in the area i.e. (72%). To some extent, the locals perceive that tourism activity is changing the values and disturbing the peace of the area. But 38% of locals disagree that tourism has led to many social evils. Also, locals believe that tourism has not affected the religious activities in the area i.e., 41%. Locals believe that tourism has not affected the culture of the area, but has affected the environment. Especially during the peak season, there is crowding of tourists, which causes air and noise pollution due to the use of vehicles. The problem of garbage is most common in tourist centres. Even in Palampur, 73% of local respondents agreed that tourism activity causes increased sewage and garbage disposal problems. Some were of the view that this is not only due to the careless attitude of the tourist but also due to the insensitive attitude of some local people.

Suggestions:

- During peak season when traffic is a major problem, private vehicles can be restricted from entering McLeod Ganj, there can be parking provided in the Dharamshala area and electric buses and taxis can be made available for the tourists to reach McLeod Ganj.
- Instead of building additional hotels to accommodate the demand of tourists for accommodations during the peak season, the government should promote homestays.
- Standardization of prices for all local commodities and services should be considered to address the problem of overpricing especially in popular tourist places.
- The principle of carrying capacity needs to be taken into consideration during tourism planning to reduce the environmental negative impacts of tourism.
- Waste pollution and littering need to be checked and to be fined so that tourist places remain clean and litter-free.
- The participatory approach can include all the stakeholders in the planning of tourism.

Conclusion:

Tourism has given a boost to the local economy in the district. It has also improved the livelihood of people by creating employment prospects. It has improved the socio-cultural values in certain tourist centers but deteriorated in other centers. Furthermore, the negative environmental impacts are noticeable in the result, which must be addressed. Understanding local perceptions can contribute in reducing the negative effects of tourism and focusing on sustainable tourism development. This could help in the region's careful tourism planning in the future. Since residents are important stakeholders in tourism, a participatory approach to tourism planning is possible. Also, Natural beauty and scenery is a vital tourism product for a region like Kangra and if this deteriorates then tourism would be unable to sustain itself.

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