

SWOT ANALYSIS AND STRATEGIC SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF ECOTOURISM IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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There are positive and negative effects of ecotourism development which none of these two sides can be underestimated. This paper uses a strategic planning method, SWOT analysis, to evaluate the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats involved in ecotourism. It involves specifying the objective of sustainable development of ecotourism in two different developing countries, Iran with a focus of Zayandeh Rud River and India, Mulshi Lake and identifying the internal and external impacts that are favorable and unfavorable to achieve that objective. Setting the objective is done after the SWOT analysis has been performed. This would allow achievable goals to be set for government and private sectors in developing countries in order to make a balance through ecotourism development in local areas. This paper is based on 2-year research work and this SWOT is used as a basis for the analysis of ecotourism development along with social and cultural impacts.

The researchers of this following SWOT analysis ask and answer questions that generate meaningful information for per category (strengths, opportunities, weaknesses, and threats) in order to maximize the benefits of this evaluation and find their competitive advantage for sustainable development of ecotourism in mentioned study areas and minimize the negative consequences. In conclusion, this analysis is used in creating a recommendation during a viability study.

Keywords: Ecotourism, Developing countries, Sustainable development, SWOT.

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INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND:

Increasingly advocates of ecotourism argue that tourism growth offers a means for developing countries to escape the confines of 'underdevelopment' and those new forms of tourism in particular allow this transition to be achieved sustainably and equitably. (Armstrong, 2006) In the 1960's and 70's, Albert Humphrey is said to have developed this strategic planning tool using data from the top companies in America at the time. A SWOT Analysis looks at the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that are relevant to an organization in a new venture. A SWOT Analysis is a tool which allows users to look at the direction an organization may wish to move towards in the future. A SWOT Analysis is a useful tool, which in conjunction with others can help make informed decisions.

By specifying clear objectives and identifying internal and external factors that are either helpful or not, a short and simple SWOT analysis is a useful resource which may be incorporated into an organization's strategic planning model. (Brendan Kitts et al., 2000)

Strengths- Internal attributes those are helpful to achieving its objective

Weaknesses – Internal attributes that are harmful to achieving its objective

Opportunities – External factors that help achieve its objective

Threats - External factors that are harmful to achieving its objective

After identifying the SWOT's, identification of the factors and their interdependence helps clarify the steps needed to achieve the ending objectives.

- Internal factors – The strengths and weaknesses internal to the organization.
- External factors – The opportunities and threats presented by the external environment.

A SWOT Analysis in this paper is used for problem solving, evaluation, and strategic planning involved in ecotourism.

Discussion:

The SWOT which is used in present study is as a basis for the analysis of ecotourism development along with social and cultural impacts in following ways:

- Setting objectives:

It should be defined what a developing country can do

- Environmental scanning:

An assessment of the present situation as well as a portfolio of services and an analysis of the service life cycle, analysis of current strategies, this should determine relevance from the results of an internal/external appraisal. This might include gap analysis which will look at social and cultural factors)

- Strategic issues defined:

Key factors in the development of a plan which needs to be addressed by the developing countries

- Developing new and revised strategies:

Revised analysis of strategic issues might mean the objectives need to change

- Establishing critical success factors in social and cultural impacts of ecotourism development in developing countries for achieving objectives and strategy implementation

- Preparing operational, resource, projects plans for strategy implementation

- Monitoring results

Mapping against plans, taking corrective action which might mean amending objectives and strategies in ecotourism development in mentioned developing countries

After 2-year careful study of two mentioned study areas (Zayandeh Rud and Mulshi Lake) in mentioned developing countries (Iran and India),the following SWOT is presented:

Strengths:

- Existing various natural, cultural, man-made resources in the region for attracting tourist all time of year even in rainy season in India and fall in Iran

- Attraction ability variety of tourist markets

- having appropriate location in the countries

- good transportation availability

- Average service structure in Mulshi Lake and good variety of service structure in Zayandeh Rud
- Existing hostel and restaurant in Mulshi Lake plus suitable tourist services in Zayandeh Rud
- locating Zayandeh Rud between two important cities (Esfahan & Shiraz) in Iran and locating Mulshi between two important cities (Mumbai and Pune) in India
- Easy to reach market in Zayandeh Rud
- Existing some Educational centers in Mulshi and good academic centers in Zayandeh Rud
- Existing cultural attractions for domestic and international tourists in two study areas especially in Zayandeh Rud River
- Having potentials for establishing recreational centers in Mulshi Lake and holding conference and occasion in Zayandeh Rud River

Weakness:

- existing economic imbalance and inequality
- Weak facilities in health centers
- Low quality & quantity of hostels & restaurant and inappropriate tourist service
- Lack of trained personnel in tourism sector
- Limited capacity or lack of training center for qualified tourism personnel
- Traffic jam and lack of traffic control management especially on holidays
- construction projects and temporary and unsustainable development
- weakness in describing natural and cultural values of two mentioned study areas and lack of proper definition in these values
- Mismanagement in ecotourism in planning, sustainable development and marketing

Opportunities

- existing original natural and cultural attractions for responding new demands of tourists
- Creating new ecotourism markets via present potentials in sport and adventures

- Making variety in tourism products and markets in order to have tourist all time of the year
- Having regular tours
- Increasing the quality and quality of tourism services and facilities
- Establishing high quality majors of tourism in the academic centers there
- Improving the situation of roads and modes of transportation in all seasons of the year
- Developing management abilities in tourism industry
- Planning for new projects and getting good budget for performing them
- Strategic coordination between central government and local organizations

Threats:

- Lack of water and possibility of drought
- Natural disaster like flood, earthquake, etc.
- Unpredictable disagreement from locals or government
- Weakness in governmental organization in using sustainable methods in ecotourism management
- Unrest and struggle in the regions
- Unclear government policy

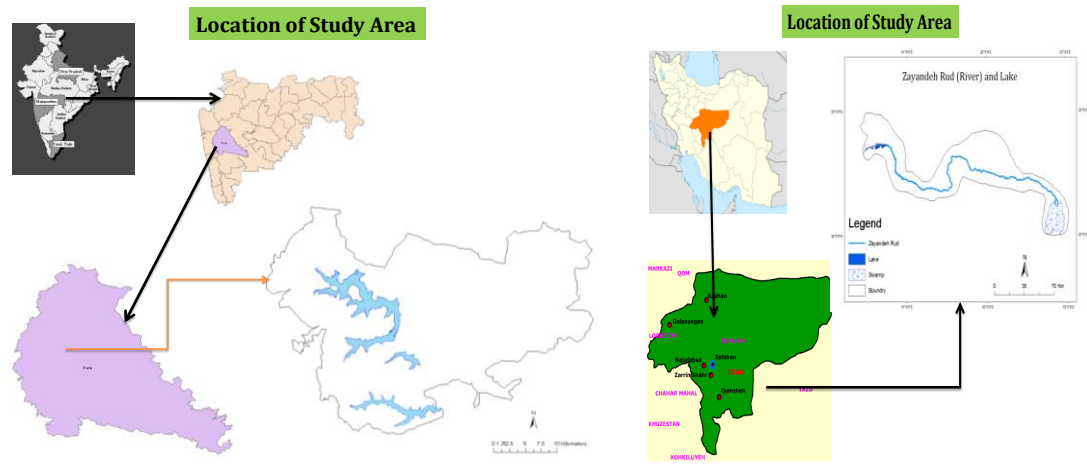
Materials and Methods:

The methods which are used in this research are combination of librarians and documental, descriptive and observation methods. The information was gathered through primary and secondary data, doing interviews with tourism related people and authorizes in Iran and India.

Site selection

Site selection was done keeping in mind the importance of research which should be implemented for promoting sustainable development in the rapidly increasing tourism pressure

in Mulshi lake of Pune District, Maharashtra and Zayandeh Rud river of Isfahan, Iran which are different in comparisons to other common ecotourism ventures like a National Park. Sites are selected by consultation with Research supervisor and after proper inspection of the areas. These sites were selected on the basis of being diverse ecosystems with predominantly indigenous populations, which are the selling propositions of ecotourism.



Data Collection

The primary instrument for the fieldwork data collection and analysis in this research is the researcher. The researcher's past experience in the tourism field also helped him to improve research reliability and minimize the gaps between respondents and the researcher.

There were several fieldwork trips according to the variation of seasons in both the areas made during the course of this research. The main objective of the field trips was to collect all the necessary primary data, which requires the researcher to spend many days interviewing respondents in both urban and rural areas (i.e. study sites).

Data collection for this research is gathered from various sources of evidence. Evidence includes documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant-observations, and physical artifacts. It is a useful overview of the six major sources, taking into consideration their comparative strengths and weaknesses. No single source has a complete advantage over any of the others. Various sources are highly complementary and it is better to use as many sources as possible. The researchers gathered its data from documentation, archival

records, interviews and direct observation. The documentation and archival records were gathered from a variety of sources in Isfahan, Iran and Pune district, India. Fieldwork notes were made during and immediately after each interview and observation session. Observation in this context includes listening as well as looking, everyday face-to-face interaction, and group meetings (with the local community) that depend heavily on both verbal and visual behaviors. In naturalistic observation, observers neither manipulate nor stimulate the behavior of those whom they are observing and this is known as pure or direct and non-participant observation. Observations are made and recorded during fieldwork. The observations are useful in clarifying data especially during visits after interviewing the respondents. Secondary sources include published and unpublished sources. Published sources are newspapers, reports of WTO, ITDC, and official publications of national and international tourism bodies including Central and State Governments. Unpublished sources viz., the records maintained by the Government and private hotels, studies undertaken by research institutions, scholars, executives and economists have served the purpose. The research design and methodology with respect to the sample size, its composition and susceptibility for the selected statistical tools and procedures have been strongly influenced by the inherent characteristics of the respondents in study areas. Different techniques were used for gathering data from different respondents. The study includes the rural community, local institutions and government officials (Iran and India). The study also consists of both illiterate and literate people.

The criteria selected are universal and can and do cut across specific cultural and geographical parameters. Additionally, although several criteria lend themselves to fitting under more than one categorical impact (environmental, cultural or social) a subjective selection was made to fit each criterion under only one impact. It should be again noted that the tourism research literature explored in this study generally suffers from a lack of analytical interest or rigor. Few research studies encompass all impacts identified to be components of ecotourism. As might be expected, not every case study has sufficient data to address every criterion, even if numerous sources are used. The approaches for collecting data in this research are both secondary data and primary data through both observation and communications.

Primary Data Collection

The primary data were from the semi-structured interview and field survey for catch tourist and know the waste generation, floral and faunal biodiversity.

Field Survey

Field observation has been another important instrument for collecting qualitative data, especially for socio-cultural and environmental impacts of tourism activity. At each field site, a considerable amount of time was spent at different locations to observe tourist behavior, interaction of tourists with local people and the impacts of such interaction. Data recorded through field observation was immediately documented.

Lastly, observations were used to gather information by inspection of the local surroundings for example, the soil conservation measures which are in place, people's behavior and their activities with regard to tourism. Again the researcher used the observation method to identify potential natural features such as water falls, and other attractions which could be of interest to tourists. The observation technique was the best method to review the natural setting of the area for the suitability of ecotourism. The researcher also used photographs to supplement observation in the study area. In this study photographs are used as part of personal observation not only to help the reader to imagine the area but also to provide evidence of some of the issues uncovered.

Interviews

Interviews are one of the main data collection tools in this research. It is a very good way of accessing people's perceptions, meanings, and definitions of situations and constructions of reality. In the interviews, respondents were asked a series of pre-established open-ended questions. For this research, the interview was standardized where all respondents receive the same questions in the same order and delivered in a standardized manner. Flexibility and variation are minimized. The interview respondents were from three groups: 1) Local community; 2) Government and their related agencies; and 3) Business. The selected respondents were asked the questions sequentially in a logical order and following a predetermined schedule, in effect the interviewer reads out the question. Pre-testing and piloting of a survey was done during the site reconnaissance. This helps to maintain a broad framework for the enquiry and queries to be an orderly exercise as the semi-structured interview, structured

interview questionnaire are first prepared keeping in mind local concerns and data required for sustainable development. Semi- structured interview exercises were carried out for target groups like farmers, hotels, tourist, local people, forest department and other concerned people.

This was the main method of data collection administered to the government and to local community representatives. An interview guideline was prepared containing a detailed list of questions and checklist for every person related to tourism being interviewed. Data collected from interviews was documented through notes taken by the interviewers rather than through tape or video recordings as the latter would not have been appropriate with several government officials. There are different types of interviews such as open-ended interview, focused interview, and survey. Open-ended interview were performed in a conversational manner. The respondents may provide facts, opinions about events, and own insights about occurrences. The interview lasts for a short period of time about an hour and the questions were derived from a protocol. In this research, structured question interviews and open-ended interviews in a conversational manner were used. Some interviews were made directly with authorities in Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism organization, Local people of study areas, Tourists arrivals in both study areas, and Restaurants Owner in study areas etc. In this research face-to-face in-depth interview provided valuable insights of what the people from both study areas thought with regard to tourism. Interviews were useful in this research because they allowed the researcher to be able to observe the physical reactions of the community members and determine perceptions with regard to their previous experiences as far as tourism is concerned.

During the interviews the researcher was able to observe the physical reactions and emotions of the individual respondent when responding to certain questions. Where the respondents struggled to answer because of not being familiar with certain concepts probing was easily done. Again the researcher had to probe where clarity was needed for the answers given by the respondent. Interviews were helpful in this research because as mentioned above, that the local people from Mulshi Lake have little knowledge about ecotourism therefore it was easier for the researcher to fully explain what is needed by a particular question or the meaning of certain concepts. Interviews also allowed the interviewer to repeat the questions wherever the respondent needed clarity with different words (Valentine, 2005). However, since an interview is a kind of conversation with purpose, it required quiet and private places in order to allow the

respondents to respond freely. Interviews with the community members were conducted in their homes.

Questionnaire Survey

The questionnaire survey is an important tool when primary data are required about people, their behavior, attitudes, opinions and their awareness about specific issues (Flowerdew and Martin 2002; Flick, 2002). The perceptions on ecotourism as an economic development strategy and a tool for conservation formed some of the major issues of the questionnaire. The survey data from the tourists were collected from self-administered questionnaires. The questionnaires guaranteed confidentiality (with a confidentiality clause in the beginning of the questionnaire) for the respondent so it removes any doubt from the mind of the respondent. Both open and closed ended questions were used in the questionnaires.

The method of analysis is qualitative method. This method is applied in the most of the scientific researches. Also, it is a sort of library, field survey and theoretical method. The researcher evaluates and studies differences, distinctions, and a comparison of data through gathering documents and taking notes as data will help parable, simile, finding marks, personification, and finally unknown thing is discovered. GIS in ecotourism planning is also applied.

Conclusion:

Ecotourism is increasing in popularity across the world, but has significant practical value especially in developing tourist destinations such as Zayandeh Rud (Iran) and Mulshi Lake (India) where the needs of impoverished communities may conflict directly with the need to capitalize on the growing tourism industry. In many cases developers move in and designate certain areas as tourism hotspots without giving much thought to the impact that this will have on local communities. These communities may depend on the area for food and shelter, but their concerns are buried beneath the potential for financial revenue. Although Isfahan and Pune are commercial and industrial poles, but there have always been the problem of unemployment, and also eco-tourism problems have been ignored as well. In development plans for increasing income all the potentials including tourism and ecotourism should be considered and essential studies for recognizing potentials and challenges and opportunities for one principal planning for

eco-tourism to be performed. Considering above problems is a determined reason for importance and value of this research and makes necessary for its performance definitely.

After SWOT analysis, a developing country will be able to discover New Opportunities and Manage and Eliminate Threats. Presented SWOT Analysis in this research work is a useful technique for understanding Strengths and Weaknesses of the mentioned study sites, and for identifying both the Opportunities open to a developing country and the Threats a developing country face. Used in a tourism business context, a SWOT Analysis helps a developing country carve a sustainable niche in market sustainably. The SWOT analysis is a valuable step in situational analysis of a developing country. Assessing a developing country's strengths, weaknesses, market opportunities, and threats through a SWOT analysis is a very simple process that can offer powerful insight into the potential and critical issues affecting a venture.

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