

## ENVIRONMENTAL, ECONOMIC & SOCIAL IMPACTS OF SUSTAINABLE ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN IRAN & INDIA

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### **Abstract:**

This article focuses on Sustainable Ecotourism Development. It discussed on three shafts of SED including principles, potential and practices involves specifying the objective of sustainable development of ecotourism in Iran (Zayandeh Rud River) and India (Mulshi Lake) and identifying environmental, economic and social impacts that are favorable and unfavorable to achieve that objective. In conclusion, all tourism-related activities should be well planned, located, designed, and managed in an environmentally friendly manner so that the environment is not congested, polluted or degraded and there no social tension.

**Keywords: Ecotourism, potentials, Sustainable development**

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## Introduction

Tourism is one of the world's fastest growing industries and is a major source of income for many countries. Being a people-oriented industry, tourism also provides many jobs which have helped revitalize local economies. However, like other forms of development, tourism can also cause its share of problems, such as social dislocation, loss of cultural heritage, economic dependence and ecological degradation. Learning about the impacts of tourism has led many people to seek more responsible holidays. These include various forms of alternative or sustainable tourism such as: 'nature-based tourism', 'ecotourism' and 'cultural tourism'. Sustainable tourism is becoming so popular that some say that what we presently call 'alternative' will be the 'mainstream' in a decade. All tourism activities of whatever motivation – holidays, business travel, conferences, adventure travel and ecotourism – need to be sustainable. Sustainable tourism is defined as "tourism that respects both local people and the traveller, cultural heritage and the environment". It seeks to provide people with an exciting and educational holiday that is also of benefit to the people of the host country. This paper explores the characteristics and objectives of sustainable tourism through a series of case studies in India and India. It also helps identify ways in sustainable tourism.

## Method and Material

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 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.

Fig (1) Location of study Area (Mulshi Lake)

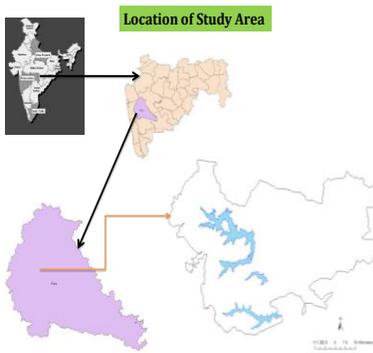
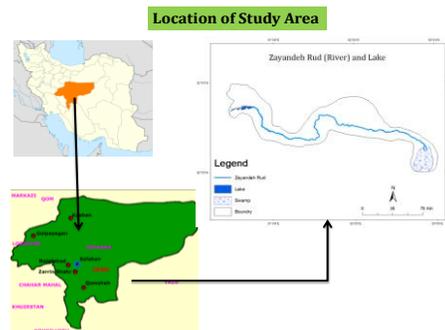


Fig (2) Location of study Area (Zayandeh Rud River )



The researcher gathers the required 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.

It has been the endeavor of the author to make an empirical study, by analyzing and critically examining the relevant statistics, collected from primary as well as secondary sources. Primary data have been collected by using structured questionnaire, personal interviews, discussions and observations. Secondary sources include published and unpublished sources. Published sources are newspapers, reports of WTO, ITDC (Indian Tourism Development Corporation), 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 primary data were from the semi-structured interview and field survey for catch tourist and know the waste generation, floral and faunal biodiversity. Interviews and Questionnaire were two important methods for gathering data in present study. GIS was another essential tool for this research.

## Results and Discussion

Eco-tourism often causes conflict and changes in land-use rights, fails to deliver promises of community-level benefits, damages environments, and has plenty of other social impacts. Indeed many argue repeatedly that eco-tourism is neither ecologically nor socially beneficial, yet it persists as a strategy for conservation and development (West, 2006).

The impact of tourism in both the study sites is studied in three headings which are discussed below:

- Environmental Impact
- Economic Impact
- Social Impact

### Environmental Impact

With the help of questionnaire and survey the local people when asked about waste generation and management by tourists in Mulshi Lake and Zayandeh Rud River. The local residents in both the study areas are facing problems regarding degradation of local environment. The local people were complaining about tourist are throwing waste in the lake in Mulshi and in the tourist destinations along Zayandeh Rud River, and over the roads and in the green areas including agricultural fields. When asked about the tourists collecting waste (mostly food wrappers, tin cans and plastic bottles) generated by them in case of Zayandeh Rud river, 21% of tourists are collecting and carrying with them to dispose it properly in the dust bins available at all tourist places around the river and lake. While as 79% tourists are throwing on the ground only (Fig.3), thus degrading the river and surrounding environment of the Zayandeh Rud River.

Some tourists are cutting the flowers and fruits and destroying saplings also which forced the locals to convert their agricultural fields into cultivation of wood trees. Construction of hotels and houses along river has degraded the banks of river, hence increasing the chances of erosion (Plate 1).

While as in Mulshi lake, when asked about the waste managed by tourists, 28% said tourists are collecting their waste generated by them and dispose in their houses properly, as there is no dust bin facility around the lake and 72% said that tourists are throwing waste on the ground and in the lake directly (Fig. 4), thus making the locals unhappy with the tourism. Forests are being cut to make houses, hotels or lodges, villas (Plate 2) and temporary shops on the road to sell seasonal snacks and fruits (Plate 3). The water was also found getting polluted due to unplanned eco-tourism which is shown in the Plate 4.

Fig. 3: Waste generated by tourists in Zayandeh Rud River

Fig. 4: Waste generated by tourists in Mulshi Lake

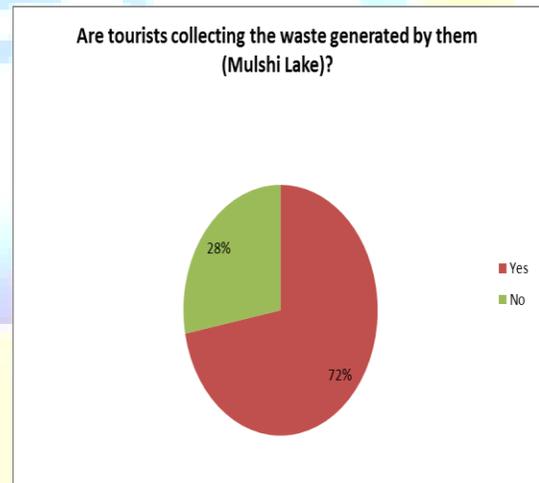
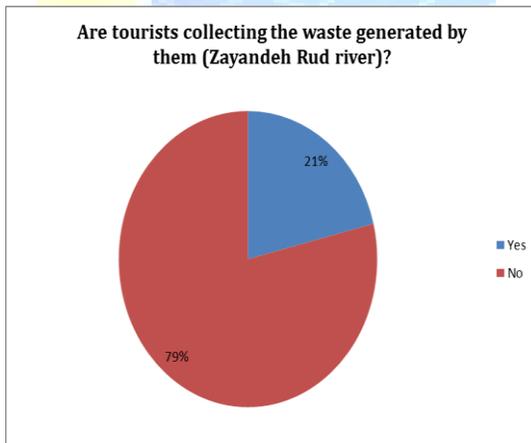
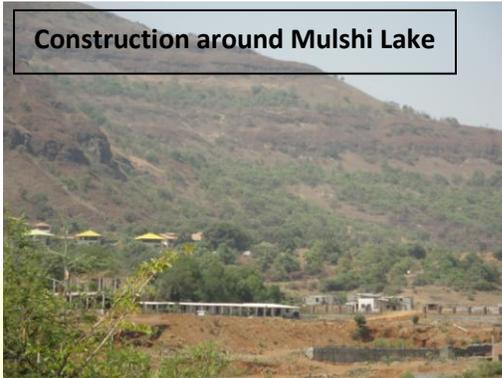


Plate.1



Plate .2

Construction around Mulshi Lake



Construction work going around Zayandeh Rud River

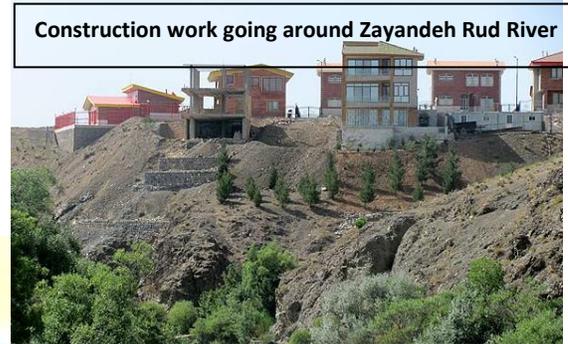


Plate.3

Local villager selling snacks in Mulshi Lake



Road vendors selling local food around Zayandeh Rud

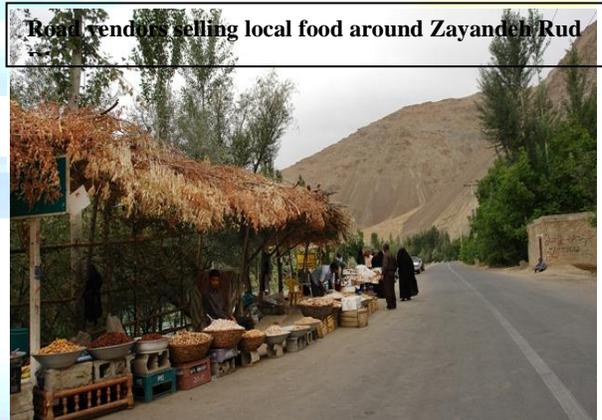


Plate. 4

Water pollution in Zayandeh Rud river



Water pollution in Mulshi Lake



Economic Impact

Very few regulations or laws stand in place as boundaries for the investors in ecotourism. Ecotourism operations occasionally fail to live up to conservation ideals. It is sometimes

overlooked that ecotourism is a highly consumer-centered activity, and that environmental conservation is a means to further economic growth. Although ecotourism is intended for small groups, even a modest increase in population, however temporary, puts extra pressure on the local environment and necessitates the development of additional infrastructure and amenities. The construction of water treatment plants, sanitation facilities, and lodges (Plate 4.5) come with the exploitation of non-renewable energy sources and the utilization of already limited local resources.

In Mulshi Lake when asked about the facilities provided by local people based on the economy of that area, 46% of eco-tourists found lacking such facilities, 30% said there is no proper space provided by locals for tourists (Fig.5 ), which would have been as a good source of income for locals to provide their homes or the land they owned as a stay to tourists for temporary basis and with that they can serve their traditional food and fruits to tourists which will raise the overall economy of the whole Mulshi area. If more and more local people will involve in eco-tourism to start a good money earning business, which in turn will decrease the rate of migration of young youth to nearby cities like Pune and Mumbai for their earnings. 46% of the local people were unaware about the eco-tourism, 24% wanted to involve in tourism but due to lack of money they cannot invest in this business while as 22% of locals feel that there is lack of support from government (Fig. 6) to help and encourage local people to engage in tourism business which will help the economy of Mulshi taluka. In case of restaurant owners it was found that 90% (Fig.7) of them have this only source of income which if promoted will employ more and more locals in their hotels.

Fig. 5: Tourists facing problem during stay in Mulshi

Fig. 6: Local villagers involved in ecotourism in Mulshi lake

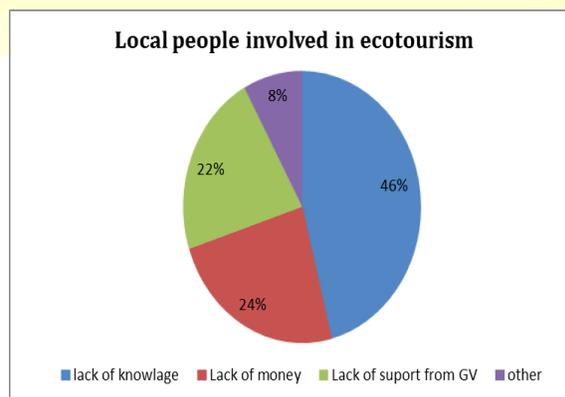
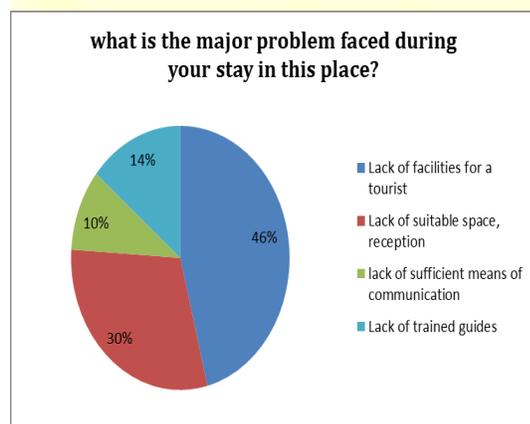
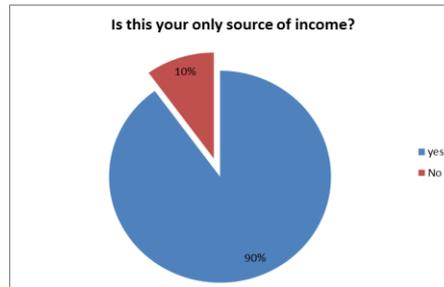


Fig. 7: Source of income of restaurant owners in Mulshi Lake



While as in case of Zayandeh Rud River, Fig. 8 showed that 64% eco-tourists were disinterested to visit again the area because of lack of facilities, 24% tourists were complaining about lack of proper space to sit and enjoy the nature's beauty. When asked to local people about their involvement in eco-tourism business, 46% people said due to lack of money we cannot start any business related to tourism and earn through it. While as 22% were found unaware about eco-tourism concept and 20% local want support from the government in promotion of eco-tourism (Fig. 9). For 82% of restaurant owners (Fig. 10), eco-tourism was the only source of income for them and the labors working in their restaurants are wholly dependent on eco-tourism industry.

Fig. 8: Tourists facing problem during stay in Zayandeh Rud River Fig. 9: Local villagers involved in ecotourism in Zayandeh Rud river

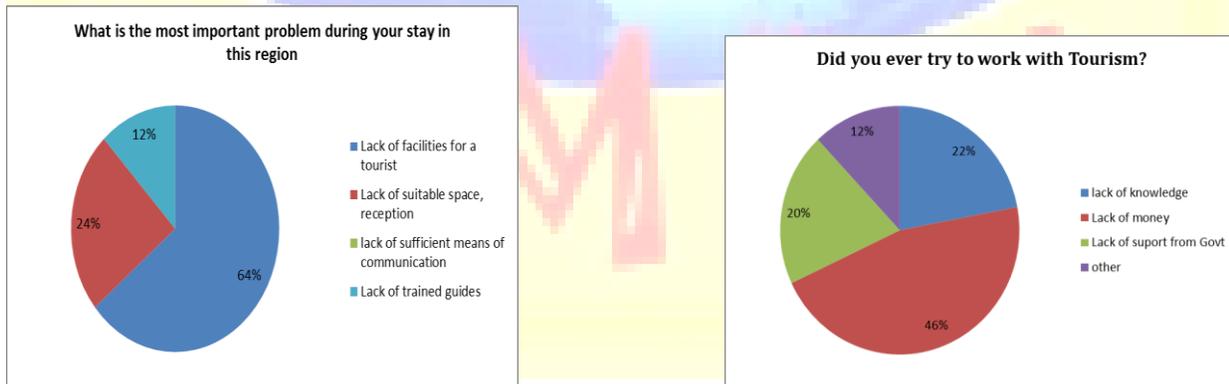


Fig. 10: Source of income of restaurant owners in Zayandeh Rud River

Is this your only source of income?

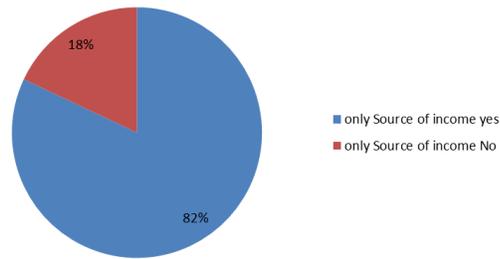
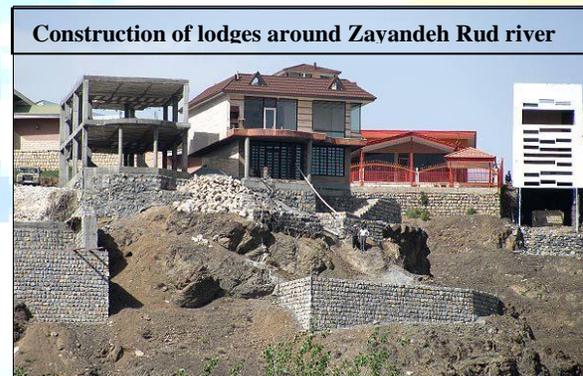


Plate. 5



### Social Impact

Social impacts refer mostly to the effects from the direct contact of hosts with tourists. Tourism is an interface for cultural exchange, facilitating the interaction between communities and visitors (domestic and international). Economic benefits aside, outside contact draws attention to the host community. People want to interact with other cultures, learn about traditions and even confront themselves with new perspectives on life and society. It has been said that travel is a means to “discover those things unknown or forgotten within ourselves.” Tourism is largely an experience driven industry, and local culture is a unique experience – more so local personality, hospitality and food than “built attractions.” The more one knows and learns about a destination, the more fulfilling the experience will be.

Socially tourism has a great influence on the host societies. Tourism can be both a source of international amity, peace and understanding and a destroyer and corrupter of indigenous

cultures, a source of ecological destruction, an assault of people's privacy, dignity and authenticity. While presenting a culture to tourists may help preserve the culture, it can also dilute or even destroy it. The point is to promote tourism in the region so that it would both give incomes and create respect for the local tradition and culture. In case of Zayandeh Rud River the people complaint about that too many lodges have been built, too much firewood is being used and no limits are being placed on tourism vehicles. The tourists regularly drive off-track and harass the wildlife in the forest areas around Zayandeh Rud River and lake.

While as in Mulshi Lake the local people said that they are unable to meet the infrastructure demands of ecotourism because of Intrusion on daily life, loss of privacy, and a sense of crowding contribute to ill feelings towards eco-tourism practices in the area and the locals are hindered towards its development. However, the residents of Mulshi area do not fully understand the potential environmental, economic and social impacts of ecotourism and thus may not support ecotourism development.

In the study area, Zayandeh Rud river, Iran and Mulshi lake, India Often the protection of land for ecotourism results in a reduced ability of locals to use natural resources and thus a loss of traditional income generation. In both the areas at the local level ecotourism has become a source of conflict over control of land, resources, and tourism profits. Local communities use the natural resources but they also protect them. The local people of both the areas complaint about that tourists come to enjoy the nature and get knowledge about it, but they also pollute and destroy it.

Degradation of the environment, crime, alcoholism, drug use, increase of cost of living, and changes on value systems have been ranked at the top of the negative impacts in both the study areas.

### **Conclusion**

Ecotourism can clearly create opportunities for spreading the economic, cultural, social and local benefits of tourism to villages, remote areas and national parks, many other high potential ecotourism areas as long as the government policy aims to have more tourism in these areas and the local people have participated in the process. Along these lines, policy-makers should be aware that smaller-scale business operators are more appropriate for activities related to

ecotourism and government policies need to support this level of tourism services. Ecotourism directs many opportunities and benefits to local people and some efforts should be made to maximize benefits for the host country, local business and communities specially people living in and adjacent to natural and protected areas.

In fact, sustainable development intended to reduce the tension and friction created by the interaction between the various sector of tourism industry, the tourists, the host population, ecotourism and the environment and reach the above mentioned benefits. In conclusion, all tourism-related activities should be well planned, located, designed, and managed in an environmentally friendly and culturally sensitive manner so that the environment is not congested, polluted or degraded and there no social tension. Local communities are involved in tourism and ecotourism planning in the area from the inception of the project in developing countries and they participate and benefits from tourism and ecotourism. Sustainable tourism development embraces a community involvement and participation.

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