

Ecotourism in Bagalkot District, Karnataka, India: An assessment of the inhabitants' awareness level and attitudes

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to explore the scope to which the local residents of the Bagalkot district have positive attitudes and awareness towards ecotourism impact of sustainable development. The investigation was based on three primary factors, namely social and cultural impacts, level of awareness towards ecotourism and empowerment of the local community. The study revealed that the residents showed a high degree of awareness and sensitivity regarding the socio-cultural issues. They are in need of training and education related to ecotourism in order to improve their lifestyles, economy and resource management. Their involvement in ecotourism programs would be a potential strategy to promote and support sustainable development in the area.

Keywords: Ecotourism, socio-cultural impacts, awareness, sustainable development, Bagalkot, local residents' attitudes.

1. Introduction

Tourism is widely considered to be one of the fastest growing industries in the world, and ecotourism is believed to be its fastest growing subsector, though the definition of the term ecotourism has not been clear to date (Buckley, 1994). Ecotourism is becoming more attractive because it is believed that it makes it possible to improve income generation without harming the environment. Tourism growth provides significant economic benefits such as creating employment and additional income in both host countries and tourists' home countries (Delibasic et al., 2008). According to (Constanta, 2009) tourism can increase quality of life, which is carried out in various forms: rest, relaxation, recreation, maintenance of tone, knowledge development and sense of taste for beauty, aesthetic feelings, cultivate, etc. New jobs emerge, old towns, facilities and places are revitalized and social life significantly improves. Local residents see new business opportunities in tourism and are motivated to explore them. On the social level, it is reported that after tourism enters a community, there is often increased unification of the local residents as they work together toward a common cause (Fennel, 2003).

1.1 Ecotourism

Ecotourism can be characterized as a resident-centric issue. As such it can make a substantial contribution to conserving the features of environmentally and culturally sensitive areas and can serve as a guide for sustainable social and economic development, provided that local communities are willing to support it. Seen in this light, evaluation of the relevant attitudes and perceptions of members of local communities is a basic prerequisite for the successful

implementation of ecotourism impacts. The significance of ecotourism also lies in its potential to increase environmental consciousness, and foster healthy attitudes and behaviors among both local residents and tourists (Weaver, 2001). Although to date, there are few studies about the effect of tourism on the quality of life of residents in communities (Kim, 2002).

Tourism can develop and grow when local residents have a positive attitude towards it and when they see their role in the process of the tourism development. When a tourism destination is born, the quality of life of the local residents goes through radical changes, which are not necessarily negative. It is true that there can be more people around, traffic can become difficult, crime rates can increase, and the pollution of all environmental resources is possible. Additionally, tourism brings changes that affect the traditional way of life, family relations, the nature of the local structures functioning and many not predictable problems (Puczko and Ratz, 2005). Choi and Sirakaya, 2006 indicated that host community attitudes towards tourism are one of the important indicators for sustainable tourism development. Local communities are increasingly being drawn into tourism not only from the demand side, as tourists actively seek out new destinations and communities to experience, but also from the supply side, as communities are becoming aware of the potential of the products they can offer to tourists and the economic gains that can be made (Telfer and Sharpley, 2008). Numerous studies have examined local residents' perceptions of the economic, social, cultural and environmental impacts of tourism (Aref, 2010). The present investigation was undertaken to assess the attitude, awareness level and empowerment of the local community towards ecotourism in tourist places of Badami, Pattadakal and Aihole of the Bagalkot district and also the social cultural impacts.

2. Methodology

2.1 Study area

The study was carried out in Badami, Pattadakal and Aihole, as indicated by Figure 1, which are the ecotourism places of Bagalkot district, which is located at 16.18°N 75.7°E in Karnataka at an altitude of 533 meters (1,749 ft.). Of these, Badami lies on the bank of the river Ghataprabha, Pattadakal is on the bank of the river Malaprabha and Aihole is situated on the banks of river Krishna. All the three areas have a fascination because of centuries old magnificent temples and their architecture.

2.1.1 Badami

Badami is known for its beautifully carved cave temples belonging to 6th and 7th centuries. Wedged between two rocky hills at the mouth of a ravine, the four rock-cut cave temples display the full range of religious sects that evolved in India. Overlooking the sandstone caves is an artificial lake lined with four temples on its shores. While three of the temples belong to Vedic faith, the fourth and natural cave is the only Jain temple at Badami.

2.1.2 Pattadakal

The town lies 22 km from Badami and about 10 km from Aihole. Pattadakal has many UNESCO World Heritage temples built by Vikramaditya II. Mallikarjuna temple in Dravidian style and Kashi Vishwanatha temple in nature style at Pattadakal, built 740 CE.

2.1.3 Aihole

This is an important temple town with over 140 temples belonging to both the early and later Chalukya times. Early inscriptions call this town "Ayyavole" and "Aryapura". Aihole has its own historical significance and is called as the cradle of Hindu rock architecture. Many temples and caves of historical importance can be found here.



Figure 1: Map of Bagalkot showing study area

The main research tool was a questionnaire drawn up especially for this study, where the dichotomous closed-ended questions were conducted in English as well as Kannada, the native language. The questionnaires were addressed to people aged 18 and above, and the data were gathered from 541 local resident questionnaires (N=541) in the district.

3. Results and discussion

The survey respondents consisted of an almost equal number of males (51.8 %) and females (48.2 %). About half 41.2 % of the participants were in the age range of 18-41. About 36 % of the local population was employed. All of the respondents had at least a high school education and 75.8 % had either an undergraduate or graduate degree. The majority of the respondent (81.4%) mostly young people (77%) favored ecotourism activity and development in the area. The main reason for their support was due to the creation of job opportunities (81%) and increased income (70.5%) as seen in table 1.

Table 1: Demographic profile of local residents of Bagalkot

Description		Percent
Gender	Male	52
	Female	48
	Total	100.0
Age	18-25	41
	26-33	23
	34-41	10
	42-49	8
	50-57	16
	58-65	3
	66-73	0
	74+	0
	Total	100.0
Occupation	Student	34
	Professional	36
	Self-employed	23
	Homemaker	2
	Unemployed	0
	Other	4
	Total	100.0
Education	Primary	3
	High School	7
	Pre-University	6
	University	45
	Postgraduate Degree	31
	Vocational/trade qualification	8
	Other	0
	Total	100.0

3.1 Social Impacts of ecotourism

Appreciation of the natural and cultural environment of the area is encouraging the local people for the promotion of improved interaction and education. Social cohesion is strengthened as local people cooperate for the success of the venture. There is up gradation of infrastructure, better quality of life in addition to the promotion of active citizenship. Within the framework of a community oriented and community based sustainable development plan, ecotourism can be enriched with the consent and support of the local population (Epler Wood, 2002; Niesenbaum and Gorka 2001). Socio-cultural impacts of tourism can be defined as 'the ways in which tourism is contributing to changes in the value systems, individual behaviour, family relationships, collective lifestyles, safety levels, moral conduct, creative expression, traditional ceremonies and community organizations (Fox, 1977). The data collected (Figure 1) revealed information about the socio-cultural changes resulting from ecotourism. There is a great influence on the host society which can be both a source of international amity, peace and understanding and it could destroy and alter cultures, a source of ecological destruction, and an assault of the local peoples' privacy, dignity, and authenticity.

Figure 2: Response of the local residents to promote socio-cultural ideas for sustainable ecotourism in Bagalkot



3.1.1 Positive Social Impacts that take place in the Bagalkot district

1. A majority of the local residents (62.5%) agreed that ecotourism has played a significant role in helping to build up the local residents' unity and harmony.
2. Friendships, improvement in communication and encouragement in learning of new languages and skills are gained by the local people.
3. In the local community as a whole, pride, appreciation, understanding, respect, and tolerance for their culture is increased.
4. The local people (75%) are encouraged to foster and maintain the celebration of local festivals and cultural events.

The social contacts between tourists and local people results in mutual appreciation, understanding, acceptance, awareness, and family bonding respect. Residents are educated about the outside world without leaving their homes, while the visitors significantly learn about the unique local culture in the community. Ecotourists are found to appreciate the local traditions such as conservation of plants and animals, traditional practices, customs and the cuisine. The tourists gain experience and understanding of the local residents about their culture and way of life, and they enjoy the nature and obtain knowledge by helping to protect the local natural resources. The local communities use the natural resources but they also protect them because they sustain economic growth and their livelihoods.

3.1.2 Negative social impacts observed

1. There is destruction of local resources to make room for expansion of ecotourism e.g. grazing land is destroyed for hotels and resort development, significantly damaging the ability of local communities to maintain their traditional lifestyles.

2. The increased influx of tourists has resulted in the shortage of drinking water for the local people as there is depletion of ground water resources.
3. There is the loss of traditional values and culture through imitation of visitors' behaviour and cultural diffusion resulting from normal, everyday interaction.

Mathieson and Wall, 1982 maintained that socio-cultural impacts are the 'outcome of particular kinds of social relationships that occur between tourists and host as a result of their coming into contact'. The tourist-host encounter occurs in three main contexts: (1) where the tourist is purchasing some good or service from the local people, (2) where the tourist and local people find themselves side by side and (3) where the two parties come face to face with the objective of exchanging information or ideas (DeKadt, 1979).

3.2 Cultural impacts of ecotourism

The unique cultures of the community are typically one of the original attractions that draw tourists to that particular destination. Over time, many aspects of the culture such as traditional dress, religious practices, rituals and festivals are changed to meet the expectations of tourists. A ritual that was traditionally performed only once a year may be performed on a daily basis for tourists. By maintaining proper tourism capacity levels it is less likely that large groups of tourists will exert their influence over local cultures causing them to change or lose their traditional identity, beliefs and practices.

3.2.1 Positive cultural impacts

Ecotourism has cultural impacts on the local communities. To enhance cultural promotions such as festivals and ceremonies e.g. Holi Habba (Festival of Colours), Virupaksha temple Car Festival in Pattadakal in March and Mallikarjuna Temple Festival in Pattadakal in March-April, the local residents are encouraged to maintain their cultural and traditional practices in order to preserve them and to support the maintenance of temples and cultural attractions. The local people realize that their authentic ceremonies and festivals are unique and so the tourists are coming in increased numbers (2005- 2010, the total number of tourists respectively 16000 – 34000) to witness such attractive and beautiful events. They take pleasure in the fact that the tourists are interested in their livelihoods. The local residents take pride in their natural surroundings, heritage and art and crafts. Ecotourism can cause the indigenous people to revive old traditions and preserve customs that may otherwise soon be lost to globalization.

1. The ecotourists are motivated by the chance to experience the local culture, which can have a positive and affirming effect on the residents to encourage their traditions and customs.
2. Another positive change is that the UNESCO World Heritage Society and the Archaeological Society of India has sponsored and maintained the mesmerizing and captivating temple and cave structures, attracting tourists in large numbers to the area to visit them.
3. The United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) may declare Badami and Aihole, known as the cradle of Chalukyan architecture, as new World Heritage Sites in the State, when officials of UNESCO meet in Spain, 2013 and announce the new World Heritage Sites. (Deccan Herald, 2012).

3.2.2 Negative cultural impacts

1. There is the loss of culture in many forms. One major change is seen in the production of souvenirs. Once tourists arrive in an area, the local people realise that money can be made by selling their crafts to visitors. After a while, though, crafts which once had a spiritual or cultural significance suddenly are just goods. Some designs may be changed to meet the tourists' demands and lose all cultural value. There is transformation of traditional cultural symbols into commodities to sell to visitors.
2. The younger residents alter their behaviours in an attempt to copy the styles of the tourists such as in the way they dress, their speech and mannerisms.
3. It is also caused by the way tourists interact with locals. Many tourists take pictures of local people, without subtlety or permission, and then move on without purchasing any of their crafts.

Community members imitate the tourists' behaviour by adopting new clothing styles, eating and drinking the imported food and beverages favoured by the tourists or aspiring to obtain radios, cameras and other material goods (Murphy, 1988). Murphy, 1988 claimed that the members of the community who are most susceptible to the pressures of the demonstration effect are the young people, who may feel dissatisfied with local opportunities and are prepared to imitate the lifestyle of visiting tourists as a way of seeking something better.

3.3 Level of awareness towards ecotourism

The study showed that the local people have an informed and positive attitude to conserve their natural and cultural environment. Their awareness level is shown in (Table 2). From the results it is evident that the majority of the respondents explicitly and strongly declare that the current level of tourism has significantly improved the standard of living in the three ecotourism areas (with a Mean of 0.73 and Standard Deviation of 0.43). However, less than half the respondents (Mean 0.40) had been consulted on ecotourism development plans in the community. Many of the local residents (Mean 0.73) responded that there is better infrastructure and development due to ecotourism growth and expansion. Only about of the local residents (Mean 0.52 and 0.49) agreed that they are satisfied with the manner in which ecotourism planning and development is in progress and that tourism development in the area benefits visitors more than the locals respectively.

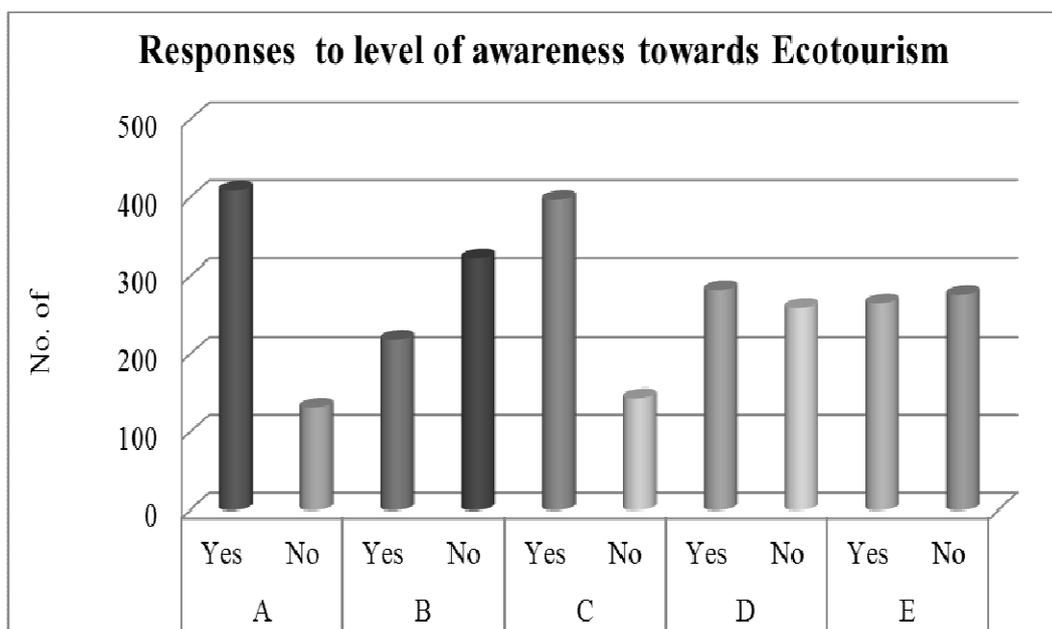
The local residents, however, feel that more initiatives should be carried out to improve the visitors' awareness, to sensitize them concerning environmental issues, and that the tourists should be responsible in their attitudes to the ecotourism places they visit. Ecotourism education is addressed to tourists and local residents as well as tour operators, travel agents and guides, with the emphasis on awakening their moral obligations (Sirakaya 1997). Environmental learning, which is an intrinsic part of the ecotourism experience, helps to reduce or prevent the negative repercussions of a person's visit, although there are ecotourism destinations in which such claims fall a long way short of being realized (Mu"hlha"usler and Peace 2001). Tour guides and operators are the obvious and direct medium to communicate awareness but there is a lack of sufficient numbers of personnel to carry out the said task. The guides and operators having extensive information, knowledge and awareness of the environment, actively discuss conservation and management issues. They also seek the tourists' opinions on the lacunae of the environment and suggestions for their improvements.

Table 2: Level of awareness of the local residents towards Ecotourism in Bagalkot

Questions		Level of awareness		
		No. of respondents	Mean	Standard deviation
A	Has the level of tourism significantly improved the standard of living in your area?	409	0.76	0.430
B	Have you been consulted or made aware of the ecotourism development plans in your area?	219	0.40	0.491
C	Are you satisfied with the manner in which ecotourism planning and development is currently taking place?	397	0.73	0.442
D	Do you think ecotourism has any effects on the environment?	282	0.52	0.500
E	Do you think ecotourism have any effects on biodiversity? E.g. (flora, Fauna)	265	0.49	0.500

The local residents' knowledge and experience is extensive, and includes awareness of the importance of natural, cultural and social resources and knowledge and understanding of the ways and means by which environmental degradation may be minimized. In some cases, the residents acquire knowledge such as foreign languages through which they communicate with the tourists, sharing opinions and encouraging their participation. Such an observation was also made in Indonesia by (Walpole and Goodwin, 2000). The response of the local people was obtained to know the level of awareness among them by the following questions. The degree of their responses indicates their awareness level for various parameters (Figure 3). The responses obtained for these parameters are detailed below:

Figure 3: Responses of the local residents to the level of awareness towards Ecotourism in Bagalkot



3.3.1 Has the level of tourism significantly improved the standard of living in your area?

The study found that there were many improvements in the living standards of the local residents' livelihoods which brings money to the ecotourism areas and also forces improvement of local facilities like roads and water supplies. These two things together easily help to develop the infrastructure of an area. Ecotourism has created new recreational and entertainment facilities, health systems, restaurants and craft shops. In the authors' opinion the longer that ecotourism thrives in the area, the more improvements will be made. However, if the money being made in the community is staying there, it can pay for construction of new schools and community centers.

3.3.2 Have you been consulted or made aware of the ecotourism development plans in your area?

According to the local residents, they were not made aware of the development plans that concern the growth and continued expansion of ecotourism but they were satisfied with the planning, development, and the progress with which ecotourism was taking place. Many of the local residents had taken advantage of the tourism industry by opening various profitable businesses.

3.3.3 Are you satisfied with the manner in which ecotourism planning and development is currently taking place?

The participants were very much willing to provide information concerning ecotourism planning and development. 52% of the local residents were happy with the current rate at which ecotourism was developing and expanding. For the local people, this meant a boost to their income and social upliftment in their lives.

3.3.4 Do you think ecotourism has any effects on the environment?

Only 59% of the local community thought that ecotourism has some effects on the environment. The local people have taken it to task look after their environment. They have taken it into their hands to see that the place is kept clean and free of garbage by placing trash cans outside their businesses. Yet the influx of ecotourists is degrading the natural environment. By letting tourists loose in a delicate ecosystem leads to pollution and impact on the environment in unforeseen ways. The conversion of natural land to such tourist infrastructure is implicated in deforestation and habitat deterioration of butterflies and monkeys. It is demonstrated that, positive communication and harmony among the local residents and ecotourists helps to build up the symbiotic relationship between natural resources and tourism and is thus an important part of the service they provide by the local residents (Littlefair, 2004). Its basic objective is to avoid degradation and over-exploitation of natural resources and to preserve the environment in its broadest sense by keeping development within certain limits.

Ecotourism minimises environmental pressures from tourism by introducing environmentally friendly practices (such as water and energy saving) and implementing sustainable actions such as visitor number management, strict rules and regulations for land use, and specific spatial or time zoning (Fennell 1999; Lim and McAleer, 2005). It also generates financial

means that can be used to cover the maintenance and operating costs of conservation areas, through various tariffs, charges for admission and use of tourist attractions, voluntary contributions and donations. These actions boost the preservation of biodiversity and secure the long-term operation of ecosystems (Buckley, 2004; Hearne and Santos, 2005). Ecotourism activities are, in and of themselves, issues in environmental impact because they may disturb fauna and flora. Ecotourists believe that because they are only taking pictures and leaving footprints, they keep ecotourism sites pristine, but even harmless sounding activities such as nature hikes can be ecologically destructive. Where the ecotourism activity involves wildlife viewing, it can scare away animals, disrupt their feeding and nesting sites, or acclimate them to the presence of people (Tuohino and Hynonen 2001).

3.3.5 Do you think ecotourism have any effects on biodiversity? E.g. (flora, fauna)

The study has shown that only 49% of the people consider that ecotourism has any effects on biodiversity. The lack of adequate sanitation facilities results in the disposal of sewage in rivers, contaminating the wildlife, livestock, and people who draw drinking water from it. Wild monkeys turned into garbage feeders, becoming familiar with the presence of ecotourists and eating the food and rubbish left behind. When the local populations act as stewards of natural resources and biodiversity, the natural environment offers them in return a sustainable supply of resources and other benefits at many levels.

3.4 Empowerment of the local community

The local residents believe ecotourism offers good prospects for increasing the prosperity of their area. About 67.9% of the residents stated that they favored the development with respect to their environment. 50.9% of the local people said the tourist facilities provided are appropriate to the character and scale of the area, enabling visitors to enjoy the special features and come into contact with its culture and its people. 75.2% of the local residents were aware that there were three principal reasons why tourists visit the area, first to enjoy the peace and quiet it offers, and appreciate the close relationship with nature, second, to communicate with local people and to experience its cultural traditions and practices and third, to see the wonderful architecture and arts that is an integral part of the landscape. The local people (60.6%) expressed that they would prefer not to be employed exclusively in tourism but to derive a supplementary income from tourist activities. However, in contrast to ecotourism development, 54.3% believed that such a development in their area would not, in fact, benefit the whole population but mainly those actually engaged in tourist activities. Lindberg et al., 1996 observe that ecotourism increases the willingness of local residents to conserve the environment, since they understand that the financial benefits they derive are highly dependent on it. In addition, in an ideal ecotourism development, when local populations act as stewards of natural resources and biodiversity, the natural environment offers them in return a sustainable supply of resources and other benefits at many levels.

It is observed that if local people do not participate actively and do not derive benefits from the ecotourism enterprise, then they become negatively predisposed, may even undermine the operation of ecotourism and possibly seek for other, less sustainable development patterns (Ross and Wall, 1999). Ecotourism development brings money to the community and also forces improvement of local facilities like roads and water supplies. These two things together can easily help to develop the infrastructure of an area. Tourism has created new recreational and entertainment facilities, health systems, restaurants and public recreational parks. The longer that tourism thrives in the area, the more improvements that will be made.

If the money being made in the community is staying there, it can decrease emigration from the area. It can bring the community together to create tourist facilities such as a local restaurant and visitors' centers. They can also work together to manage tourism in the area and the profits will go directly to the community. It is generally accepted that environmental education and interpretation of the natural and cultural heritage enhance the visitors' knowledge of the area and increase their awareness regarding the natural environment and the characteristics of the local way of life. As a result, tourists become more sensitive towards such issues and subsequently act in a way that promotes the conservation of local lifestyles, natural features and habitats, contributing indirectly in the empowerment of the local society (Lim and McAleer 2005). This empowerment is supplemented and becomes more essential through environmental education actions addressed to local residents which help them to develop influential opinions, to strengthen their self esteem and to introduce new ways of thinking and managing their resources.

4. Conclusion

Ecotourism is often perceived as an excellent tool for promoting sustainable development in developing countries. It provides significant economic benefits, employment opportunities and additional income to the local people. The present study carried out in Bagalkot district on ecotourism impacts, have revealed that the implementation of ecotourism towards greater sustainable development is yet to manage (a) protecting natural resources and cultural manifestations, (b) educate visitors and residents of the local community and (c) involve local residents in sustainability issues. The result showed that respondents strongly agree that ecotourism has many effects on the quality of life. The local residents believe that benefits from ecotourism outweigh the consequences, and they are taking certain steps in an effort to control and manage these negative impacts. Long term planning and continuous monitoring are helping to improve the social, cultural and awareness level of the residents to protect and conserve the magnificent and splendid attractions that makes these ecotourism places to be recorded as World Heritage Sites. Planning and local involvement are essential for sustainable ecotourism development. The government and NGOs (Non- Governmental Organisations) have to take more open and interactive positions in the decision - making process with the involvement of the local community. Ecotourism in Bagalkot should be integrated with other aspects of development in order to be sustainable. A part of the revenue generated should be invested to train the local community for better conservation and management of the resources. Adequate and frequent access to public transportation between the ecotourism areas are not available. Attention should be given to such problems to promote ecotourism. Ecotourism in Bagalkot district has fostered personal interactions between the ecotourists and the local residents. Ecotourism offers at least the potential to forge more complex, cross-cultural and social advocacy networks centered upon common values and ethics.

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