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Socioeconomic Impacts of Tourism on the Azad Kashmir

Mubashra Khan^{1*}

¹Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi. E-mail: mubashrak583@gmail.com

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Abstract

Tourism is one of the fastest growing concerns across the globe. It contributes a lot to the economy of the state and provides better chances of employment and in bringing development. It also contributes to bring a change in social values. This research aims to investigate the Socioeconomic Impacts of Tourism on the life of the people of Rawalakot. The researcher used a qualitative method to get data, and respondents were interviewed. The research showed that tourism has a significant socioeconomic impact on the people of the studied village. It created work opportunities and helped in the development of infrastructure. On the other hand, it also brought negative impacts like increased land prices, home rent, and other necessities. It also created social effects like change in relationships, dressing, etc. The government should work to create more opportunities in such areas where tourism can take its peak.

Keywords: *Tourism, Social impact, Economic impact, Tourism, Local community, Rawalakot*

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1. Introduction

Tourism is considered as one of the largest economic sector. There is a general perception that Tourism might be a powerful tool. According to the World Tourism and Travel Council 2006 report, Tourism contributed 6.3% to GDP and 5.1% to Pakistan's job generation.

"If there is heaven on earth it is here... it is here.... It is here..." (Jhanger)

The state of Azad Kashmir, which is under the control of Pakistan, has potential. In Kashmir, Muzaffarabad, Rawalakot, Nelum Valley, and Banjosa are the most visited places by tourists. For the development of the Azad tourism industry, Kashmir's budget is increased up to 200 million. Inhabitants of Rawalakot have various means of livelihoods, including overseas employment, business, farming, etc. Seasonal migration for a career is widespread. Usually, people move to Pakistan to improve their income. It has a severe impact on the social life of people there. In a sense, to get a job opportunity to increase revenue in Rawalakot and not move to Pakistan and other places, tourism is an alternative for locals.

"The thing about tourism is just that it's compelling. It's like a gun, and it's elementary to be irresponsible with it. And the speed of the impact that tourism can have on a place can be quite breathtaking. It doesn't take years, and it takes months. That's how quickly it works. And it can be an unfortunate thing to witness." (Alex Garland).

* Corresponding author: Mubashra Khan, Bachelor's Student at Fatima Jinnah Women University, Rawalpindi. E-mail: mubashrak583@gmail.com

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The term economic growth is a multifaceted term that we can explain in many ways. According to the *west*, the development was accomplished through capital investment and mass production. The extra output helped bring the economy to rise. The increased income would trickle down to the entire population. But this consideration has never been considered, as the upper section enjoys the advantage of the growth. The president of World Bank, Mr. McNamara, described that “regardless of a decade of unparalleled growth in the GNP of the developing nations, the poorest parts of their inhabitants have gained minimal advantages.”

In the 1970s, a new conception of development emerged, and development was considered a Condition of human well-being. Todaro viewed that development is a multi-dimensional procedure linking the upgrading outcomes and revenue and essential changes in social, institutional, administrative structures, customs, beliefs, and attitudes. Thus, it is not described in terms of GDP and GNP. It is viewed as a social development, which focuses on fair distribution. Tourism is a source of economic growth, mainly in the developing world. Tourism raises employment, attracts domestic and foreign private capitals for development, and enhances economic freedom. This sector is not free from criticism. More than two-thirds of global tourism income never reaches the local financial system because of high foreign exchange leakage—the leakage points towards the amount that leaves an economy to bring economic growth services. The tourism industry relies on tourism demand, the pattern of the economy, and the tourism industry structure.

Since the 1970s, many tourism impact studies have been conducted. The main focus was on economic impacts, while little work has been done to analyze environmental and social effects. The tourism industry has pros and cons too. The researcher has mainly focused on economic and sociocultural impacts. A detailed review of literature about the economic, social, and cultural effects of tourism provides comfort to the readers.

Research proved that tourism results in income generation and improved living standards (Chernukha, 2016) and claims that it generates work opportunities. The significant economic effects of tourism are employment and income generation. Some researchers (Richard, 2020) viewed that tourism’s economic impact brings some negative consequences too. According to Torres and Momsen (2005), “tourism development usually results in increased reliance on imports that is, in turn, compete with or cut the growth of a local small industry and agriculture, while also draining the valuable foreign exchange assets.”

To check the social and cultural impacts of tourism growth on the local population, very little research has been done—employment generation through tourism results in an increase in income which ultimately raises their life standards. For instance, in Nelum Valley (AJK, et al. 2018), tourism is the donor to GDP. One of the critical social impacts of tourism is on the family structure and social values, in the view of (j. Qian et al 2014), the tourism industry seems to prefer using female employment in the tourism industry. In developing countries, women make more money than their male counterparts as they are doing work in the conventional type of jobs. This situation enables women to act independently, which leads to a change in family structure, power shifting, etc.

This research focuses on the impact of tourism on the local community and how tourism impacts investment and financial status. It further focuses on issues of social effects like change in cultural values and lifestyles. Changes often occur in community structure, family relationships, traditional collective lifestyles, ceremonies, and morality.

To get the economic benefit, one must know the impact of tourism on the local community. Research is done in the Rawalakot region, where a flux of tourists has been seen, but the problem is that it’s still in the first stages despite worth seeing areas. This research focuses on the impact of tourism on the local community on how tourism impacts investment and financial status. It further focuses on issues of social effects like change in cultural values and lifestyle.

2. Research Methodology

The research methodology is a process of collecting data and then gives it a final look. In social sciences, researchers have viewpoints of respondents which can’t be figured out. The researcher primarily uses the Inductive research method, selected area of the study, the researcher took the sample (interviews), and the researcher drew analysis to give last look forecasting.

The researcher used the inductive research method to get samples and avoided random selection. The Snowball method is used to get the correct information. Only closed and relevant people were selected that could give more accurate data. The researcher decided on people related to the tourism industry and the locals of a particular area. Information gathered is translated into the English language, and then observations are done. The researcher concluded a database on the viewpoints of respondents. The sample size for any research study is always according to the goals of the research. In qualitative research, data should be correct. Sample size depends on available resources and time. A total of one hundred members were selected from Rawalakot, having relation with the tourism industry.

In the first phase, 99 respondents were taken having relation with restaurants, grocery stores, Tuck shops, etc. In the second phase, the researcher interviewed one official from the Tourism Department.

Phase	Total No. of Respondents	Male	Female
Phase 1	99	80	19
Phase 2	1	0	1

3. Findings and Discussion

Through a case study, the researcher found the contributing factors. Positive impacts of tourism on locals are identified by respondents of the study village. Income for the locals helps the poor. Tourists mainly see the scenery and wildlife, so there is pressure to conserve habitats and wildlife

4. Positive Impacts of Tourism

The most critical impact found by researcher was that tourism provides working opportunities (Frederick, 1993; Wang and Goodbye, 1994). It helps locals to increase their income. In the case study, tourism has contributed much to increasing the income of locals. In the Rawalakot region, most jobs are provided by hotels, transportation, tea shops, tour operations, small shop owners, shop workers, etc. (Faisal Khan). Apart from these, new jobs are created for structure development which is indirectly somehow related to tourism. A hotel owner said that his income has increased to 75,000 per month, and the living standard has increased. Another respondent said that during tour season, he earns about 3 lakh per month. The tourism development area helped a lot in raising income and in improving living standards. All 99 respondents from the first phase viewed that the tourism industry provided them with working opportunities. The tourism industry generates jobs for females too.

The tourism industry around the globe generally creates job opportunities for a larger quantity of women and not many other businesses in the economy's organized segment (2017). In Rawalakot, women don't like women's jobs in such areas, but still, some are working in such sectors. Many of them are producing handicrafts. Kashmiri sweaters are very famous. During the interview, a woman confirmed that with time the demand for sweaters increased due to an increase in the number of tourists. Now she is earning about 40000 PKR per month. She was providing service as a driver to the tourists from main roads to points. At the same time, have a shop. Income from both is about 80000 PKR per month in the seasons when tourism is at the peak. Out of 19 women, 14 viewed that tourism provided them with a better chance of employment. In Rawalakot, there has been a significant investment in the development of infrastructure like roads, hotels. Mainly, hotels and rest houses are established by the private sector. The owner of Ravi restaurant said that his restaurant is profitable. There is always an influx of tourists in income in the season is more than 1lakh per month. The private sector is also spending on the construction of buildings, plazas. The demand for residential apartments is increasing day-by-day. The owner of Swiss cottage guesthouse told that in summer, tourists from Punjab move towards Rawalakot. A guesthouse is in the heart of Rawalakot, and it provides them with the best residence. Families usually try to book rooms before their arrival. Tourism doubles your amount. All 99 respondents from the first phase agreed with the author's viewpoint that the tourism industry had brought a change in infrastructure development.

5. Negative Impacts of Tourism

The expansion of tourism in Rawalakot has undoubtedly played an essential role in many sectors, but on the other side, there are negative impacts too. Several communities had negative attitudes towards tourism due to the economic costs of tourism. One of such economic costs is high consumer prices. The booming tourism industry places significant pressure on limited resources such as one of the negative impacts of tourism growth is an increase in the land price. With the rise in demand, land price is also increasing and was also reflected in several research studies (2016; 2013), as tourism in this area is at the peak, a landowner said he was trying to buy land for a house but not find suitable land. Prices are on the rise, and it became difficult for the poor to buy a piece of land. 81 out of 100 viewed that the tourism industry has affected land prices. Now land prices in the city are not affordable for everyone.

With time, everything changes. Rents of rooms and apartments are so high at this time that an average person can't afford them. During the research, respondents said that in 2010 rent of a single room was Rs. 250/- and today, the rent of the same space in 2020 is Rs. 1200/-. You can guess the increase in rents. Many families plan to visit, but they cannot do so due to these high rents. Ninety-nine respondents of the first phase claimed increased rent due to tourism.

One of the significant adverse impacts of tourism is an increase in prices. The local people seemed very concerned about the costs. The local people think that prices are high due to tourists. The researcher interviewed women and told them that everything is out of reach of the poor. She is from a low-income family and facing difficulty in meeting her needs. All the respondents were in favor of the increment of prices. They all said that, after 2000, tourism revolution took place there and they have not noticed that it resulted in high prices.

During the research, it has been observed that fares are higher than usual. The interviewer claimed that tourists are being targeted. They are willing to pay high prices for their comfort. According to the researcher, tourism is not the only reason behind increased costs. It may be due to fuel prices and other expenditures. Seasons affect the income of locals very severely. In the case of Rawalakot, mainly tourists visit during summer and winter to see snow caps. According to the interviewer, it affects their salaries. As one respondent told that, during peak season, his salary is high. It is about 35000, but in seasons when tourism is not peak, he is awarded 15000-20000 PKR. Due to a decrease in tourists in a season like a winter, the owner closes the hotel. 35 out of 99 viewed that season affects their income which means that it impacts a limit.

It has been observed during research that people have views that tourism is affecting family structure badly. People now prefer lives to combine family system. A respondent said that, by tradition, they choose a joint family system. All the family members are dependent on each other. Before tourism development, there were fewer working opportunities, and they were dependent on each other. But with time, as chances are there, people are getting jobs. They try to settle themselves according to their choice. But on the other side, some have the viewpoint that it is strengthening their family structure. As there were no facilities, people prefer to migrate to other areas. But due to tourism development, they like to stay in their place. A respondent said that before tourism, he moved to Rawalpindi for a job where his income was 15000 PKR. He thought he had lost his precious time without family. But now he is working in his area, living a happy life with his family. There was a mixed response about family structure as 51 out of 100 viewed that tourism affects family structure.

During the research, we observed that tourism, on the other hand, is helping in building social relations among members of the community. Still, on the other side, views found was that commercial considerations are dominating social ties. The researcher observed that it had increased conflicts among groups. The main reason behind us that competition for job opportunities, especially for youngsters. During the interview, a respondent said that before tourism, they were living to gather. But after the development of tourism, competition for jobs increased. Suppose if two members from the same place applied for a job, equally skilled, get a job, and others don't, it can cause conflict. 75 respondents out of 100 had views that tourism is affecting relationships. The nuclear family system is promoted by tourism.

Respondents have reported that tourism development has brought no change in language. People still use their mother language, named, Polari. But on the other side researcher found mixed views that it has an impact on language. The respondent said that she never heard a shopkeeper speaking Urdu with customers. But now, with the development of tourism, there is a bit of change. As shopkeepers have to deal with tourists, they use other languages like Urdu and English too.

It has been observed that tourism has brought changes in the lifestyles of the people of Rawalakot. The dressing code is somehow influenced by western culture. Local people try to adopt the style of tourists. The young prefer pants/jeans over traditional dresses. The class also attracts young women. A respondent gave his example of how tourists had marked points on his dressing style. But on the side, 23 out of 100 said that tourism has a marked impact on dressing style. Other respondents responded that they do not think, so it is impacting their cultural dressing style.

Music depends upon taste. It's not like that the people of Rawalakot don't like pop music. Respondent during the interview said that it depends on the interest of the tourists and the local community. Still, he doesn't think so there is a significant impact of tourists on music.

6. Conclusion

At the start, significant positive impacts are stated. The main adverse effects identified in the case study show that tourism increased the land price, rent, and increase in prices of other necessities of life, making the life of locals uneasy. It also shows how tourism impacts relations, social values, family structures, dressing style, and language.

The case study shows that tourism has negative and positive impacts. It creates job opportunities and provides a lot in infrastructure building. It is also observed that seasonal change matters much because it affects the income of locals. It also shows that tourism development brought changes in the social structure. Before it, people searching for jobs try to migrate to other cities, which results in a difference in families' construction. Still, due to job opportunities, they try to

stay with their families in their areas. They support families, and they look after their children properly. On the other hand, some respondents said that it resulted in economic interdependence, forcing the young nations to live isolated. On greeting jobs, people try to isolate their families.

In the case of dressing style music and food items, it is observed that tourism has brought a minor change, not noticeable. The researcher found mixed views about dressing style, which depends upon personal choice. Music was the point where all the respondents have that same view.

7. Recommendations

- The government of AJK should go for revision of policies. They must develop policies to give a comfortable environment to tourists.
- The government should track the prices of products in such areas to attract visitors.
- Small cottages and government restaurants should be there to make residence reasonable as compared to private hotels.

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