

Environmental Impact Assessment and Sustainability Approach in Pushkar Valley: An Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is an ongoing process and one of the fastest growing economic sectors in the world, which has expanded dramatically over the last 50 years and has become a global industry. Tourism has long been a central component of the economic, social and cultural shift that has left its imprint on the world system of cities in the past few decades. The importance of tourism is understood by all the stakeholders in Rajasthan as well. Yet it is felt that travel and sojourn at Pushkar should be at a level that tourism does not disturb natural balance of that region. Research indicates Pushkar stands out as a case in point of environmentally destructive tourism development resulting in such problems as the despoliation of scenic vistas, destruction of natural habitat, and pollution of holy Pushkar lake, erosion of soils, air pollution and to a certain extent-cultural pollution. Sustainable tourism is a concept that involves social responsibility, a strong commitment to nature and the integration of local people in any tourist operation or development and the only solution for sustainable development and growth after considering various parameters of environmental impacts.

KEYWORDS : *Environment Impact, Sustainability, Pushkar Valley.*

Introduction

Tourism, whether is sustainable or not, produces both positive and negative impacts, which are evolving since the tourist activity is also changing throughout time (number of visitors, composition, etc). Dumont, Ruelle and Teller (2005) made an interesting discussion about tourism being 'volatile, unstable by nature, fashion driven and plagued by political conflict, natural disaster or still perceptions of security'. Moreover, they are seeing tourism as a consumer of natural environments, historic buildings, urban spaces and local culture, which are facing the danger of being abandoned if the destinations become overcrowded and overdeveloped.

The impacts of all types of tourism are largely dependent on the physical and cultural capacity of a place to absorb tourists without them becoming an obstruction to daily life.. Pressures on environment are much greater and impacts are immediately felt (Orbasli 2000). As a result, there is a risk of losing destinations' values that tourists are looking for, so they are being replaced by the new and fresh destinations. Since Ajmer Pushkar are small communities largely influenced by tourism, and consequently threatened by becoming overcrowded present research

we will try to examine whether the threat of those potential problems is justified or not.

Impacts of tourism depend on visitors and type of tourism. Notably, mass tourism in Pushkar have different impacts on a place and the environment.. All this leads us to define the various research questions.

- i. What are the environmental and social impacts of tourism in Puskar Rajasthan?
- ii. What is the Action plan and methodology for attaining sustainability in the region?

Although there are many negative impacts of tourism which leads to various economic, social and environmental problems, tourism still has a significant positive influence on the community and contributes to its development. As tourism has grown very rapidly, its further development is usually considered as a win-win strategy. It enhances the urban growth while supporting a renaissance of housing, while new 'cultural and leisure activities may serve both tourists and local residents in search of a richer and denser life'

Methodology

A number of articles and official websites of the various known organizations, such as UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme), WTO (World Tourism Organization), UNESCO and WTTC (World Trade and Tourism Council including Pushkar Development Plan were studied. Consultations with various stakeholders of Pushkar were held to address various environmental issues in this area.

Tourism and Sustainable Development Linkages:

There are three major linkages between tourism and sustainable development: economic, social and environmental. A typology of the impacts of tourism projects and the impacts on sustainable development.. State projects have focused on a number of sectors, including transport, health and cultural heritage while developing tourism while not much attention on tourism and environmental linkages.. These sectors have impacts on, and are likewise affected by tourism development presents the impacts as positive (+) or negative (-) . The linkages between tourism and environmental damage have been reviewed in a number of publications (Davies and Cahill, 2000)

The main linkages include:

- Congestion – impacts of tourist numbers on both enjoyment of tourism destination and on environmental quality, with services such as wastewater being potential overloaded in peak season;
- Increased pollution loads in both water and air;
- Use of resources – particularly fresh water and energy resources;

- Solid Waste generation;
- Degradation of cultural heritage;
- Ecological impacts;
- Impacts of induced settlement;

Pushkar Action Plan for Sustainable Development

A well thought-out eco-development plan, based on agro forestry system, social forestry programmes, animal husbandry, diversified economic tourism centered activities with eco friendly technologies, non-conventional energy generation (solar, wind) will all have to be integrated into a comprehensive Pushkar Valley Development Plan. Without such an approach the local population is gradually increasing pressure on natural resources (beyond its carrying capacity) to meet their ends. This is harming Pushkar valley the most. It would be fair to expect that the economic benefits arising out of tourism development should first percolate to the immediate surroundings, in the valley itself. Such an approach would contribute to the people's participation in environmental protection and management in the valley. How much income from the tourist traffic to the valley as now ploughed back for development of local communities - for their education, their health and hygiene - is a big question.

It is high time holistic strategy be developed for the Pushkar valley that includes people as a part of valley ecosystem and addresses their development concerns.

Major issues facing Pushkar

Issue I: Silting of Pushkar Lake

Due to silting, the water level in the lake has been receding over the years. This problem needs to be addressed immediately, as ignoring it would lead to the death of the main intrinsic attraction for the circuit which would reduce tourist/ pilgrim inflow into the region. Initiative has been undertaken by district administration in the form of a three year integrated development plan aimed at tackling the environmental problems facing the Pushkar lake.

Issue II: Contamination of Lake

Sewerage water empties into the lake due to flow from the drainage lines into the lake. This must also be immediately rectified by reorganizing the sewerage and drainage system of Pushkar otherwise the sanctity of the lake will be eroded leading again to a fall in the tourist/ pilgrim inflow. A Sewerage scheme is currently under implementation. Phase I has been completed. 50 % of the work in Phase II has been completed and the rest of the work will be over by next year. A waste treatment plant must also to be constructed.

Issue III : To ensure controlled development of Tourism in the Pushkar Fair

Extensive publicity of this fair has put the negative effect of commercialization which has started becoming visible. These should be controlled at this stage itself

before they go completely out of hand. These are detailed below:

A number of temporary shops and commercial establishments spring up every year at the time of Pushkar fair right in front of the fair ground, restricting the view of the cattle and camels. These establishments are also gradually restricting the area available for the breeders to tie their cattle. The options available to the government for restricting this are as follows:

- There should be a restriction on the auction of this land by the owners, and separate land should be identified for establishing these shops.
- The government can buy this land from the private owners . this can be done by the either the animal husbandry department or by RTDC.

Issue IV :Degradation of Landscape, Temples and Ghats.

- i. The installation of modern facilities and infrastructure has led to the aesthetic degradation of the landscape and sites in the valley. The style and architecture of these new constructions are nowhere in harmony and on scale with the traditional structures in this holy city. Further, the development of tourist facilities is extremely disorderly and scattered lending a moth-eaten look.
- ii. An excessive number of visitors to the historical and holy sites have degraded these monuments by graffiti, pilfering and like.

During Pushkar fair and other festivities, there are often major traffic congestions leading to high fuel consumption, heavier air and noise pollution.

Socio-Cultural Pollution

1. The level of environmental literacy is low and thus there is a gross undervaluation of the economic and ecological aspects of biological diversity. Also, extensive damage is being done to basic life support systems, mote than caused by development activities.
2. The policies of government have not incorporated environmental accounting principles with the result that tourism has been oriented for short term gains, overlooking long term ecological and social impact.
3. General failure to elicit co-operation of local population at Pushkar in relating environmental degradation with economic development.

Requirements for Eco-tourism in the Pushkar Valley

If a tourism activity is to qualify as eco tourism, it must demonstrate the following characteristics:

1. To promote positive environment ethics, must foster “preferred behaviour in its participants.
2. Should not degrade the resources. In other words, it should not involve consumptive erosion of the natural environment.

3. Must concentrate on intrinsic rather than extrinsic values. Facilities and services must facilitate the encounter with intrinsic resource.
4. Must be oriented around the environment - eco-tourist must accept the environment as it is, neither expect it to change or to be modified for any one's convenience.
5. Must benefit the wild life and environment. Wild life and environment must attain a net benefit contributing to this sustainability and eco
6. Must actively involve the local communities in the tourism process so that they may benefit from it, thereby contributing to a better valuation of the natural resources in that locality.
7. Must considerably involve preparation and demand in-depth knowledge on the part of both leaders and participants. The satisfaction derived from the experience must be felt and expressed strongly in emotional and inspirational ways.

The Governmental Role in Promoting Stainable Tourism in Rajasthan vis-a-vis (Pushkar)

The following is the list of actions that government should carry out for promoting and implementing eco-tourism development programmes in Pushkar valley.

1. Ensure that all agencies involved in tourism are briefed on the concept of sustainable development.
2. Ensure that national and local tourism development agreements stress a policy of sustainable tourism development.
3. Include tourism in Land planning.
4. Undertake area and sector-specific research into the environmental, cultural and economic effects of tourism.
5. Support the development of economic models for tourism to help define appropriate levels and types of tourism for natural and urban areas.
6. Develop standards and regulations for environmental and cultural impact assessment. Monitoring of existing and proposed tourism developments and ensuring that carrying capacities defined for tourism destinations reflect sustainable levels of development and are monitored and adjusted appropriately.
7. Apply sectoral and/or regional environmental accounting systems to the tourism industry.
8. Create tourism advisory board that involve all stakeholders (the public, industry NGOs etc.) and design and implement process to involve all stakeholders. in tourism related decisions.

9. Design and implement educational and awareness programmes to sensitize people to sustainable tourism development issues.
10. Regulate and control tourism in environmentally and culturally sensitive areas.

Recommendations

- Environmental impact assessments should be undertaken for all tourism developments till now at Pushkar, to evaluate the potential damage to the environment in the light of present tourism activities and forecaster tourism growth and peak demands. Alternative sites in near vicinity of Pushkar for development should be considered, taking into account local constraints and the limits of environmental carrying capacity. This capacity includes physical, ecological, social, cultural and psychological factors
- There should be a vision, firm commitment from Government and a policy for sustainable development of Pushkar valley.
- Tourism development plans should be fully integrated with regional land- use and development plans; they should pay particular attention to environmental considerations, especially with respect to the quality of air, water (for human consumption, ritual and for recreation), soil conservation, the protection of natural and cultural, heritage in this valley of Rajasthan and the quality of life in its human settlements. This would mean an integrated systemic management of tourism that is ecologically and socially unattainable, that will limit tourism to the natural carrying capacity of valley and with an insistence on certain minimum eco development requisites as a part of the tourism activities to be take
- Planning authorities should seek out and take into account the views of the local communities in the Pushkar valley on the environmental and social impact of tourism projects and should take advice from the departments on Environmental Studies of the University and colleges in the area. They should also keep in touch with the local NGOs and should gain from their experience.

Adequate environmental measures at all levels of planning should be defined and implemented. Particular attention should be paid to peak demand during the international Pushkar fair and its ramifications for sewerage, solid waste disposal, noise pollution, and to building and traffic density control. Developments should be as energy efficient as possible, minimizing their contribution to energy consumption through appropriate choice of equipment

- The principle that “pollution preventive pays” is applicable to tourism, as is the “polluter pays principle”. Investment on corrective measures like waste collection, garbage disposal, etc. should be raised. However it should be remembered that payment does not help if the polluter has destroyed the resource.

- Major incentive actions should be taken in both the public and the private sectors to spread tourism demand over time and space in order to use accommodation and other tourism facilities efficient.
- All components of the tourism at Pushkar-host communities, tourists, travel agents, tourism operators, developers, owners and local planning authorities-need to educate themselves on the mechanisms and benefits of an environmental perspective. Government agencies and local University should share the responsibility for developing and providing the necessary information through structured and semi-structured programmes.
- Decisions should be based on the fullest available information concerning the environmental implications of development proposals. Where essentials information is lacking, decisions should be deferred until it becomes available.

Conclusion

A sustainable development plan for Pushkar valley will have to have people's involvement. People's participation in turn will need an additional channel of communication - a micro communication system, where a two-way interaction between the communicator and the receiver is to be nurtured and developed through non-governmental groups and the scientific community. The sooner these gaps are bridged, the better it will be to relate the developmental activities at Pushkar to the local people and, thereby, ensure their participation. Environmental considerations at Pushkar cannot be divorced from socio-economic and socio-political realities and development of tourism, development of tourist activity at Pushkar needs a differently flavoured ecology based link between nature, social activity and economic aspirations.

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