

EMERGING ISSUES AND POLICY OPTIONS

Introduction

In the proceeding chapters, we have essentially reviewed three aspects of mountain tourism, viz:

- the nature of mountain tourism,
- the structure of mountain tourism, and
- the impact of mountain tourism.

The Nature of Mountain Tourism

The main issues that have emerged in the study of this aspect of tourism relate to

- the types of tourism, and
- the two related characteristics of seasonality and concentration in a few areas and in a few activities.

Resort, sport, and adventure tourism are all highly seasonal. This characteristic of mountain tourism has a bearing both on the area of tourism concentration as well as on the local communities in a variety of ways. In the first place, it implies a high degree of use intensity over a short span of time. This seriously strains the carrying capacity of the area and is almost always fraught with adverse environmental consequences. Secondly, it generates income and employment only in a given period, and creates a vacuum in gainful occupation when the tourist season is over. More often than not, it creates a 'festival mentality' in the tourist catering sector, the idea of making a quick buck with the least possible investment - rather than a properly planned effort concentrating on the quality of output and service. In any case, the accommodation capacity remains unutilised during the off-season. A considerable number of those employed in the tourist industry migrate from the area in search of employment. Those staying behind are left with little in the way of gainful activities, and the catering industry grinds to a halt.

Environmentally, however, this seasonality may be a blessing. In the absence of any particular and adequate efforts for the preservation and protection of the environment, nature provides the environment with a breathing spell for self-renewal and revival. But, for the local community, it creates a break in income generation and employment.

The other related characteristic, viz., that of concentration in a few areas and activities, together with the seasonality characteristic serves to restrict the base of tourism, catering, as it does, and which it can only, to a limited variety of tourists. It also works against making Pakistan a single-country destination.

How many of these issues can be tackled? What are the options for action in these areas? These options lie, first, in breaking the seasonality of tourism by making/keeping the areas of tourist attraction accessible all the year round; by diversifying the base and range of attractions (the 1992 Tourism Convention, for example, noted that there was almost a complete void of entertainment facilities, health resorts, and sports); by variegating the product quality and opening up other areas with other attractions, where tourists can spend some more time while pursuing their main line of interest; by inducting fresh initiatives including linking Pakistan to attractive 'tourist circuits' encompassing two or more countries, etc. Breaking this seasonality of the tourist trade in the NWFP, extending and diversifying the tourism base of the province, improving the product quality, and inducting private initiative through public-private partnership are now been listed among the principal objectives of the newly established Sarhad Tourism Corporation (STC). As regards nature's respite for self-renewal and revival, it will have to be aided by deliberate efforts, although the use intensity will be more evenly staggered over time and other activities. However, there is no escaping the limits of nature, and the consequences if these limits are crossed beyond a certain point. We shall return to this theme later.

The Structure of Mountain Tourism

Under the structure of mountain tourism, this study has reviewed

- the organisation of mountain tourism activities
- linkages and leakages, and
- the participation of the local community.

The Organisation of Mountain Tourism Activities

As regards the organisation of tourist activities, it is both *spontaneous* as well as *promoted*. While spontaneous tourists are mostly holiday, resort, and cultural tourists, promoted tours centre around sightseeing (including cultural tourism), sports, and adventure tourism.

Tourism promotion has involved both public action and private initiatives. The main issue here relates to the international marketing of tourism, viz, selling the tourist product abroad. Why have PTDC and other such organisations, public as well as private, not been able to sell tourism in Pakistan as a product to target markets abroad? Why is there no/not enough projection of Pakistan as a tourism destination? While there is a strong linkage between tourism marketing and growth in tourism, marketing in Pakistan has, in fact, been the weakest link in the chain of activities around tourism. The options in this case include, among others, strong marketing efforts, especially in the target markets, both by the public and the private sector agencies. Conventions of tourist agencies, both foreign and domestic, is another promotional method. Such conventions held in the past have come up with many suggestions/recommendations. However, recommendations alone are not enough. They have to take the shape of policies, programmes, and products before they can become meaningful. Holding special film shows abroad or arranging a few subsidised visits and spreading the word about tourist attractions and facilities may be explored. Joining the travel and tour operators of other countries in "tourist circuits," linking visits to Pakistan in a two-or-three-country itinerary is yet another possible way. Such efforts will, however, succeed only if combined with other facilitation and support measures.

The desirability of a tourist destination is largely a function of the unique attractions available for tourist consumption. One of the principal focusses of tourism marketing abroad, therefore, has to be the creation of an image of 'individuality' in the minds of potential tourists. Mountains, snows, valleys, lakes, and rivers can be common elements between alternative (and on that count, competing) destinations. Tourists' choices will, therefore, be conditioned by how well the various products are projected as sharply distinct from those anywhere else. That is the job of an effective and professional marketing exercise.

While thinking of marketing the tourist product, it is well worth remembering that tourism is a highly price-sensitive product. The costs of accommodation, travel, and meals can make all the difference to budget-conscious tourists.

This is true both of foreign and domestic tourists. The popular notion of a tourist being someone with a lot of money to throw around needs to be changed. More often than not, tourists have a given budget for products and services, if they are within their means and to their liking. It is, therefore, advisable to keep under review the costs and prices of comparable tourist products in other destinations close by. Tourists and tour managers, particularly, complain about the highly arbitrary charges for transport vehicles rented by tourists for mountain destinations. Perhaps public sector competition or partnership in organised transport provision would improve matters a great deal.

Linkages and Leakages

Mountain tourism, as seen Chapter Two, has many linkages with the economy, both national and regional, because it is a foreign exchange earner, an income and employment generator, and because it gives important signals to the accommodation, recreation, and transport sectors.

However, most of the economic benefits of mountain tourism accrue at the national level rather than at the local level. Heavy in its use of local resources, it is attended by few benefits for the local areas and the local communities. Most of the income generated goes either to the national exchequer or to the tour promoters and the non-resident owners of the various services used by the tourists. Even in terms of employment, the locals have a marginal share. Again, the wages and salaries earned in the area mostly flow out.

Since the production base of the local areas is small and elementary, the expenditure incurred by tourists on food, beverages, and other articles of daily use also flows out of the mountain areas to the more developed areas of the country. As such, there is no or little feedback from tourism to the production base of the local economy. Thus, the linkages with the local economy are weak and the leakages strong. That being so, it renders the role of tourism in the development of local communities insignificant. In fact, the *role* that tourism can play in developing the local communities is greatly conditioned by the *structure* of the tourism industry. By the same token, if tourism is to play this role, the structure of the tourism industry will first have to be targetted for basic and far reaching changes so that income earned in the mountain areas can be largely retained by the local community; so that the work-force absorbed in tourism and related activities, for the most part, can be comprised of members of the local community; and so that the production base of the community can respond effectively to tourist needs. How can a transformation of this nature be brought about? How can the linkages be

made stronger? the pace of the integration of the local mountain economy with the tourism enterprise quickened? and the leakages of benefits be reduced if not eliminated? These are the real challenges for the planners of the nation.

Participation of the Local Community

The local community participates in the tourism sector in three ways --- by being involved in rendering services and producing and processing goods required for tourists and tourist-related activities; by being involved in the day-to-day local governance and decision-making process; and/or by being involved in the planning for tourism and development of tourist facilities. In all of these fields, the participation of the local community is either minimal or non-existent.

This is an important issue in that, whereas the first kind of participation is necessary for the direct benefit/economic well-being of the community, the second kind of participation is necessary for social and political development and an involvement amounting to their approval of tourist activities, and the third kind is essential to design the structure of the tourism industry with the development of the local mountain communities in mind. How this participation is secured and increased where it exists are important challenges to the ingenuity of planners and administrators.

The Impact of Mountain Tourism

The impact of mountain tourism has been studied from three aspects:

- cultural impact,
- economic impact, and
- environmental impact.

Cultural Impact

As has been seen, there has neither been any particular cultural conflict nor any particularly pronounced cultural impact to create an issue. Whatever impact there is has so far been assimilated by the mountain communities. Nevertheless, tolerance of the curiosity and behaviour patterns of tourists within the socio-cultural ethos of the local mountain communities can be secured through the participation and active involvement of these communities.

Economic Impact

As far as the economic impact is concerned, it has already been addressed earlier under *Linkages and Leakages*. It may, however, be mentioned that no pronounced positive impacts are to be expected from any level of tourism activity in mountain areas, unless such impacts have been built into the structure of the tourism industry and until the design of the tourism activity has/or has been evolved with local participation as an integral component. The integration of the local economy has to be secured both vertically and horizontally into the regional and national orbits for homing the benefits while hosting the tourists.

Environmental Impact

The study has brought to light the environmental impact of mountain tourism on the area. This impact is menacing enough to merit inclusion in the list of issues. Tourism cannot be allowed to mature at the cost of the environment.

The challenges here are many and varied. Must tourism be accompanied by erosion of the local environment in the first place? If not, what is the way to go about it? While it is accompanied by environmental hazards and degradation, what can be done about it? Options here range from the creation of awareness both in the local communities and among tourists to public action. These include regulations, legislations, and penalties to control pollution, deforestation, dumping of waste, and the endangering of the fragile environment; which include the use of mountain slopes and river banks for unregulated construction, crowding of structures around places of tourist interest, and endangering of the wildlife and flora of the region receiving tourists. In fact, no plan or master plan for tourism in the mountain regions can be conducive to sustainability unless it is at the same time environmentally sensitive.

Looking to the Future

The Overriding Concerns

In our vision of the future for mountain tourism, we recognise two overriding concerns:

1. viewing the *role* of tourism in the context of mountain development, and

2. analysing the *structure* of the tourism industry with the development of local mountain communities in view.

The role element can be best envisaged if mountain development is viewed as a dynamic process with tourism as one of the variables. This variable is both a *determining variable* and a *determined variable*. It is a determining variable by virtue of the role which it plays/can play in mountain development; and it is a determined variable by virtue of that role being constrained by the structure of the tourism industry. The relationship between these two has already been discussed in some detail earlier.

Any search for a viable outcome must take three further concerns into consideration, viz., combining the objective of alleviating the poverty of the local people while safeguarding their physical environment and their cultural values. As earlier remarked, tourism demands that you protect the product while marketing it. Where the cultural values of the local people are concerned, it must be ensured that there is harmony between these values and tourist interventions. Only development achieved in this manner can be sustainable.

Other Issues in Sustainable Development

There is yet another set of issues related to sustainable development through tourism. These issues lie in the domain of infrastructural development in the areas of tourist concentration; skills and human capital formation in the local communities, promoting organisations such as suppliers' cooperatives and other institutional development measures; greater incentives for local participation in the related trades; and helping local communities respond effectively to tourists' needs by developing their agricultural, livestock and horticultural base. This may involve changes in the choice of products; adopting better strains and varieties of fruits, vegetables, and livestock; changes in the saving and investment patterns of local communities; and adopting ways and means of becoming more vibrant communities to receive tourists and sustain 'tourism without tears.'

Where local costs are involved, these must be shared with the federal government out of fees and other charges levied on tourists, as well as through various local taxes which are directly spent in the area. Similarly, the participation of local communities may be secured through training programmes, financial assistance, and requiring the inclusion of a local partner or partners as an essential condition for outsiders to set up hotels, restaurants, or other businesses in the area.

Land transfers to outsiders may also contain a local fee to be evenly shared between infrastructural development and environmental protection and preservation. The local works' programme, funded out of the MPAs', MNAs' (Members of the provincial and national assemblies), and Senators' quotas, may also be linked to training the people and developing facilities for sustainable tourism.

All these measures and policies will have to be woven into a fabric with policies and programmes aimed at poverty alleviation in these areas. Poverty has its own pressures to exert on the fragile environment of the mountain regions. It also acts as a fashioner of the quality of the tourism product. Thus, while poverty alleviation for mountain communities is an end in itself, it can also serve as a means of ensuring sustainable tourism.

Other Linkages

There are important linkages between tourism and public policies. Autonomous growth of the tourism sector would essentially serve the objectives of the sponsors -- maximising business profits and minimising business losses--unless it is circumscribed by public interventions of one kind or another. Policy interventions are among of such measures.

Policy interventions are principally of three types --- *facilitative*, such as those relating to tourist visas, permits, etc, those bearing on the tourists' security, and those ensuring a free and more relaxed atmosphere to enjoy one's visit; *supportive*, such as those ensuring the availability of trained and reliable guides, route maps, and other tourist-related information, infrastructure and incentives to the tourist industry, etc; and *regulative*, such as those ensuring standards, keeping to a clearly indicated course, and observing well-laid out rules and regulations. To ensure that these policies are responsive to tourists' needs and remain consistent with one another, i.e., do not frustrate pro-tourism factors in any manner, it may be necessary to periodically review such policies and to see if these need any mending or amending.

It may also be necessary to review the efficacy of tourism-oriented plans and projects to see how far they go towards achieving their targets and objectives and, if deemed necessary, to bring about changes in their content and/or strategy and in the institutional framework designed for their implementation. While careful planning is necessary anyway to make successful use of tourism development (at least, to increase the odds of such a success), "*tourism planning calls for special sensitivity to a broad range of social issues of which economic feasibility is only one*" (Richter 1984).

But, while governments and public organisations continue to be expected to intervene in the general public interest, the private sector should not be assumed to be altogether impervious to harmonising private interests with the interests of the local communities. In fact, the private sector will have to brace itself for such initiatives in the interest of long-term sustainability.

The public sector must remain, and even more actively so, an enabling partner in the total effort, a monitor of the effects of individual actions, and a regulator of public interest. Aside from that, the public sector is seriously limited in the development of tourism in general, and especially so in the development of tourism targetted to create a sustainable base for generating income and employment for the people of the mountain regions.

While the initiative passes on to the private sector, the local government of the area must come forward to play a role, first, by enabling the private sector to *sustain the initiatives*, and, second, by enabling the local communities to respond by expanding its production base, acquiring skills, and outfitting themselves to participate effectively. Men and women will both have to make their contributions and share its benefits. In fact, the formation of local Women's Organisations to take up the new challenges may help in this respect.

Tourism Carrying Capacity

While discussing the environmental impact, we referred to the limits of nature, use intensity, and carrying capacity of tourist resources. We also talked about sustainable tourism and sustainable development. The carrying capacity of the tourist resources is a central concern in sustainable tourism.

Carrying capacity refers to the maximum population density of a species in an environment. It also refers to the upper limit of the use intensity of its various components that can be supported without the degradation of that environment. A carrying capacity analysis studies the effects of use on the natural environment in order to *identify critical thresholds* beyond which environmental problems will pose serious threats to the resource base, unless changes are made in

- public investment,
- government regulations, or
- human behaviour.

The concept of carrying capacity underlines the fact that environmental systems may have limited tolerance for density or use intensity. In terms of tourism, it emphasises that the growth of tourism (both growth in tourism traffic and the use made of the resource base by those catering to this traffic) has also to respect the functioning of the natural processes of the environment. "*Carrying capacity with respect to tourism is essentially an attempt to define the level of tolerance or compatibility between tourist activities and demands and the ecological, social, cultural and economic support systems to meet those demands*" (Sharma 1994).

A carrying capacity analysis assumes that:

- there are limits to the ability of the natural environment to withstand growth or use intensity;
- critical thresholds or use intensities (crossing which will trigger the determination of important natural resources) can be identified; and
- the natural capacity of a resource to absorb or withstand use intensity is not fixed but can be altered by human intervention.

It has, however, come to be recognised that the *determination of what is the limit of carrying capacity is a judgemental fact*. However, regardless of the degree of precision of estimates and predictions, the carrying capacity analysis can help

- in pointing to the tourism potential of the area,
- in indicating the limits to growth or use,
- in acting as an early warning system, and, as importantly,
- in identifying spheres of public intervention.

A carrying capacity analysis involves three things:

- a natural resource inventory of the area,
- interpreting the results, and
- developing thresholds.

From the 1970s on, guidelines have been developed regarding the carrying capacity of various tourism destinations and types of activities. The World Tourism Organisation has even quantified for special zones the number of visitors per day, per unit of area by type of tourism product/activity.

Such guidelines and standards, and for that matter, the results of a carrying capacity analysis, are of little practical use unless they can be operationalised

and lead to the development of *action plans* and *institutional frameworks* for implementing these standards and monitoring impacts.

For its full import, the carrying capacity concern has to be internalised at the various stages of tourism and tourism resource planning. In Pakistan, although the National Tourism Plan (NTP) is ready, and the sectoral programme of the 8th Plan for tourism has been finalised, carrying capacity considerations will be of enormous use in the review of such plans, in the formulation of projects, in firming up regional and local programmes, and in evaluating and monitoring development projects.

Tourism Carrying Capacity

Carrying capacity refers to the maximum number of individuals of a species in an environment. It also refers to the upper limit of the use intensity of its various components that can be supported without the degradation of that environment. A carrying capacity is a threshold value for the effects of use on the environment. In order to identify critical thresholds, which are the upper limits of carrying capacity of various tourism destinations and types of activities, the World Tourism Organisation has even published for special zones the number of visitors per unit of area by type of tourism productively.

Such guidelines and standards, and for that matter, the feature of a carrying capacity analysis, are of little practical use unless they can be operationalised human behaviour.