ECOTOURISM EVALUATION OF CONCEPTS AND IMPACT ON GERMANY

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ABSTRACT

Ecotourism as a concept has been analyzed with divergent views and theories. On one hand, there is criticism that ecotourism still consists of cosmetic changes as it involves elements of mass tourism. This school of thought considers ecotourism to be a misleading statement since travelers still uses conventional means of travelling which can increase the problems related to environment deterioration and climate change. In contrast, an opposing viewpoint is that the concept continues to evolve and develop with different organizations and countries striving to respond to challenges efficiently and effectively. Germany is one of the most advanced and developed countries in the world. It is an economic powerhouse that has a rapid industrial base and export oriented economy. Moreover, tourism is an important part of the services industry. The German government has promoted tourism as a means of enhancing and developing local communities. The demand for ecotourism has increased because of concerns that conventional tourism poses on the ecosystem and local communities. The study seeks to analyze the evaluation of ecotourism as a concept and its impact on Germany. Furthermore, the study seeks to identify the ways that the government is promoting sustainable and ecotourism as an alternative to mainstream tourism.

Keywords: Ecotourism, Natural Environment Protection, Cultural Diversity and Promotion, Germany

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the world. It was estimated that one billion tourists travelled globally for the first time in 2012 (Glaesser et al., 2017; Fletcher, 2018). Emerging source markets like China, Russia, and Brazil have increased their spending on tourism. However, there have been concerns that conventional tourism is causing extensive problems to the local environment (Meyer & Grosse, 2018). Global tourism accounted for 8% of the world's greenhouse gas emissions (Esposito et al., 2020). Tourists use air, motor vehicles, and rail to travel to new destinations. As the number of tourists' increases yearly, this also increases the quantity of greenhouse gases produced by the tourism industry. For instance, a seven hour flight on a Boeing 747 produces 220 tons of carbon dioxide (Fletcher, 2018). Tourists cause noise pollution and garbage in tourist areas posing a threat to the local environment. They might disturb the local ecosystem and disrespect the local communities (Gyamfi et al., 2022). Although tourism is often considered to be a panacea for empowering poor communities, it can increase risks of crime, pollution, substance abuse, and social instability. Local communities are introduced to foreign cultures while consumerism can be created that is contrary to their values and principles. Consequently, there have been calls for responsible and sustainable tourism. The emergence of ecotourism as a theme in tourism and hospitality research has occurred as a result of the problems caused by conventional tourism (Long & Bui, 2020). Broadly speaking,

ecotourism has been promoted as an alternative and sustainable approach that caters to holiday makers in the natural environment without damaging or disturbing natural habitats (Yafi et al., 2021). The aim of ecotourism has been to promote fragile, pristine, and undisturbed natural areas (Bhardwaj, 2022). It seeks to function as an alternative to standard commercial mass tourism by being a small scale alternative (Das & Chatterjee, 2015). Moreover, ecotourism has come to be understood as responsible travel to natural areas, protecting the environment, and providing funds for ecological preservation (Oliinyk et al., 2020).The purpose of the endeavor is to create awareness in travelers and provide funds for ecological protection. It also helps to enhance the social, political, and economic development of local communities. Ecotourism has also been considered to be necessary for promoting human rights and developing respect for diverse cultures (Sohail et al., 2020).

Since the 1980s, ecotourism has been promoted by environmentalists because of the need for providing future generations with the experience of destinations that are relatively untouched by human intervention. Ecotourism also deals with interaction with biotic components of the natural environment. It involves personal growth, socially responsible travel, and environment sustainability (Stronza et al, 2019). Furthermore, it seeks to involve travel to destinations that have natural animals and plants and cultural heritage as the primary attractions. Additionally, the aim is to provide insights into the impact of humans in the environment and to cultivate a sense of appreciation of natural habitats. An integral element of ecotourism has been promotion of recycling, energy efficiency, water conservation, and promotion of economic opportunities for local communities (Kim & Park, 2017). Nevertheless, ecotourism as a concept has been analyzed with divergent views and theories. On one hand, there is criticism that ecotourism still consists of cosmetic changes as it involves elements of mass tourism (Gale & Hill, 2016). This school of thought considers ecotourism to be a misleading statement since travelers still uses conventional means of travelling which can increase the problems related to environment deterioration and climate change. In contrast, an opposing viewpoint is that the concept continues to evolve and develop with different organizations and countries striving to respond to challenges efficiently and effectively. Germany is one of the most advanced and developed countries in the world. It is an economic powerhouse that has a rapid industrial base and export oriented economy. Moreover, tourism is an important part of the services industry. The German government has promoted tourism as a means of enhancing and developing local communities. The demand for ecotourism has increased because of concerns that conventional tourism poses on the ecosystem and local communities. The study seeks to analyze the evaluation of ecotourism as a concept and its impact on Germany. Furthermore, the study seeks to identify the ways that the government is promoting sustainable and ecotourism as an alternative to mainstream tourism.

Need for Study

Although ecotourism as a concept has been studied extensively, there is the need to understand the evolution of the concept. This helps to identify the challenges and issues facing ecotourism. Moreover, ecotourism is a concept that needs to be properly understood so that a proper framework can be created to help countries in implementation (Oliinyk et al., 2020). Understanding the evolving concept of ecotourism might assist in responding to future challenges and creating an effective and consistent ecotourism policy (Kim & Park; 2017). The literature on ecotourism in Germany is extensive, but there is the need for clear and precise policy framework that can help the country to utilize ecotourism as a niche market. This means there is the need to study Germany because it is a large country and a relatively prosperous and affluent one where tourism is one of the contributors towards the economy.

Significance of Study

This study will evaluate and analyze the ways that the concept of ecotourism has evolved since the 1980s. It studies the broad factors like economic, social, and political which have helped to redefine the concepts. Many definitions of ecotourism have been proposed, but they also create a level of ambiguity and vagueness for stakeholders. Specifically, the interpretation of ecotourism by different stakeholders creates ad hoc strategies and cosmetic approaches that might be unworkable and unrealistic (Chiutsi et al, 2011; Bhardwaj, 2022). Understanding the concepts might assist policy makers to formulate an effective and efficient ecotourism strategy. Moreover, it analyzes the impact of ecotourism in Germany. The study also seeks to develop a framework that would help policy makers in Germany and even other countries to strengthen the concept of ecotourism.

Research Aims and Objectives

- To investigate the evolution of ecotourism as a concept through in-depth study and analysis.
- To determine the ways that ecotourism concept has been defined and implemented by policy makers.
- To evaluate the successes and challenges of ecotourism policies in Germany.
- To identify the impact of ecotourism on Germany

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ecotourism emerged as a term when there were concerns that conventional tourism is causing environmental damage and losses to local communities. There was an awareness that tourism can contribute towards economic development and reduce social problems, but it was must be done in a way that the positive aspects outweigh the negative ones. Hector Cabellos-Lascurian provided the first definition of ecotourism in 1980s (Jurkus et al., 2022). He defined the term as travelling to peaceful or unadulterated environments with the intention to learn, respect, and get pleasure from the natural environment (Pegas & Castley, 2014). The International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN) accepted the above definition and modified it as environmentally responsible and informative journeys that are undertaken to comparatively undisturbed natural areas for enjoyment and admiration of the natural environment (Cetin & Sevik, 2016). Additionally, ecotourism seeks to promote conservation and awareness of environmental issues.

Another definition states that ecotourism is about learning and analyzing the natural environment while promoting sustainable tourism practices (Mbaiwa, 2015; Bapoo et al., 2022). The definition also recognizes that ecotourism has a cultural component and that it must involve the local community. The common theme from the above definitions is that ecotourism is linked with environment protection, empowering local communities, and promoting economic development at the same time. However, the concept of ecotourism has been expanded with the passage of time. A broad definition considers ecotourism as responsible activities that have a positive impact on the entire ecological system of an area (Lee et al., 2013). Specifically, the cultural, historical, and natural resources are visited by tourists so that awareness among all stakeholders can be attained to protect and conserve the above resources. Finally, ecotourism involves community participation and joint learning experiences for all stakeholders (Buckley, 2013). The analysis of various definitions also suggests that ecotourism needs to be implemented at multiple levels with the involvement of key stakeholders. It is about protecting the ecosystem, safeguarding wildlife, and enabling wildlife to live harmoniously with people. Furthermore, it

also seeks to maintain quality of fresh water and prevent contamination of the environment. Culture and history need to be safeguarded while infrastructure and facilities should be sustainable for the benefit of the tourist area.

Elements of Ecotourism

There are many elements of ecotourism that have been identified by various publications and studies. These elements have been added as definitions of ecotourism have rapidly changed and developed by different stakeholders.

Remote and Natural Areas

A common element found among definitions of ecotourism is that the destinations are undisturbed and undeveloped. They are located in remote areas which makes them attractive for ecotourism. Cobbinah (2015) finds that ecotourism spots include the ones in developing countries that are occupied or used by local or indigenous people. The implications of the above research are that people are already living in such places and using it for their sustenance and maintenance. Locals might be involved in the management since their culture or way of life has become part of tourism (Cobbinah, 2015). Fletcher (2014) agrees by stating that ecotourism includes local communities as an important stakeholder because they can find employment or small businesses through tourism activities. The implications of the above research are that indigenous community rights can be recognized and managed. Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that ecotourism is a comprehensive and robust strategy that must be implemented at multiple levels. It is not a standalone approach because it should provide significant benefits and must be able to develop a collaborative strategy to achieve success. Nevertheless, the above researches fail to account for the potentially destructive outcomes of ecotourism such as the indigenous communities being reduced to as objects of tourism. The research framework that has modified or evolved the definition of ecotourism finds that education and sustainability are the major components of ecotourism.

Natural Environment Protection

Stone (2015) finds that natural environment protection is important goal of ecotourism because it promotes ecological and cultural sustainability. Moreover, education and interpretation helps to promote responsible and sustainable behaviors in tourists. Nevertheless, the study is limited because it only uses secondary research as the information is based on earlier sources. The use of primary research would have helped to provide first hand insights into the issue. Walker & Moscardo (2014) adds by stating that tourist satisfaction can be guaranteed only when sustainability and education are part of ecotourism initiatives because they must be viewed as desirable among tourists. Kim & Park (2017) finds that environmental awareness leads to positive views about the local environments and cultures. Moreover, ecotourism entails environmental management of tourist areas so that resources can be conserved and used efficiently for the benefit of everyone. However, the above studies fail to take into account the difficulties that policy makers endure when implementing ecotourism. This is because there are many interest groups that in some cases fail to agree on common goals related to ecotourism.

Cultural Diversity and Promotion

A few studies have identified the importance of cultural sustainability and diversity as being important for ecotourism. Eshun & Tagoe (2015) finds that cultural and historical resources must be safeguarded and preserved while allowing limited flows of tourists so that the latter can gain recognition of cultural diversity and respect the rights of indigenous communities. However, another study claims that cultural diversity is not an important aspect of ecotourism because the aim is to study and appreciate the natural resources and ecosystem of the area (Xue, 2013). The findings also criticize the notion that cultural diversity and sustainability should be part of ecotourism because culture is viewed as a dynamic and flexible process (Picard, 2015) In other words, communities change and adapt their culture according to changing circumstances. Based on the analysis, it can be concluded that ecotourism is a broad strategy that must identify various dimensions. It should be practical and realistic while being adaptable so that it can respond to different types of problems. Such an approach will bring dividends and benefits for the success of ecotourism (Chien, 2016). Eshetu (2014) illustrates the positioning of ecotourism with other variants of tourism like adventure and community tourism. For instance, adventure tourism involves resource based attractions with physical challenges, education, and awareness about nature. Ecotourism can also be interlinked with the above concepts as it involves protecting environments and raising awareness about local communities and their rights.

Independent and Unique

Nevertheless, another perspective is that ecotourism is an independent and unique form of tourism. Walker & Moscardo (2014) finds that ecotourism involves nature, culture, farm, wildlife, and adventure tourism. It is practiced on farms or in wildlife and has an element of adventure for tourists. Another study provides broad reasons for the difference by saying that ecotourism are multidimensional as ecotourists visit areas that are natural and beautiful (Iakovoglou et al., 2015). Their visits provide environmental, culture, and economic benefits to the local region or area. The findings suggest that ecotourism involves having an interest in nature and desire to contribute towards conservation. It can be concluded that ecotourism is low impact, non-consumptive, and uses responsibility management to guide tourism policies (Kim et al., 2017). Furthermore, ecotourism can be sustainable and appreciate culture which makes it unique in contrast to other forms of tourism. Part of ecotourism's uniqueness is that it gives information to tourists about the knowledge of the ecological system that they are visiting. It also provides overt educational experiences in field of ecosystem management (Walker et al., 2014). The conclusion is that there are multiple elements of ecotourism. There have been multiple dimensions and aspects so that the concept can be understood and implemented. Moreover, ecotourism consists of multiple dimensions that must be done in an efficient and consistent way in order to achieve success.

Criticism of Ecotourism

The evolution of the term ecotourism has sparked an intense debate with a large number of studies criticizing the concept. A key criticism has been that there is no clear and precise definition of the term. White et al (2013) finds that ecotourism is a contradiction in terms because it originates from ecology and tourism. In contrast, sustainability defines environment and economy as crucial for growth in any sector. Linsheng & Limin (2017) concludes that environmental organizations define ecotourism as sustainably managed and supporting conservation. The findings state that the tourist industry and governments concentrate on product aspects by equating any form of nature-based tourism to be ecotourism. From the above researches, it can be concluded that the definition of ecotourism is vague and contradictory.

Many stakeholders and interest groups have divergent concepts regarding ecotourism which makes it difficult for implementation.

Another concern is that ecotourism is a form of green washing which means a trend towards commercialization of tourism schemes that are marketed as sustainable and environmentally friendly. Cobbinah et al., (2013) finds that such schemes tend to be manipulative and economically exploitative because they misguide the tourists. The findings also suggest that these schemes can be morally disconcerting because they manipulate tourists' genuine concerns for their commercial objectives. Lin et al., (2017) states that the commercialization of ecotourism by tourist operators is a reason the essence of tourism might fade away. These operators are disguised as nature-loving, ecosystem friendly, and sustainable ecotourism that leads to the deterioration of the concept. Researchers have claimed that these schemes are damaging the environment, exploiting people for money, and are the worst level of cultural exploitation (Lin et al., 2017). They are operating on wide scales but are leading toward an unsustainable environment. They mislead tourists who really want to contribute towards nature and manipulate them to earn the profit. Ecotourism industry is rising by 10-15% worldwide each year and is one of the fastest-growing industries around the world. Arlym & Hermon (2019) argues that ecotourism is not an effective way to preserve nature and provide social and environmental benefits because of the involvement of commercial entities in exploitation of local communities and tourist areas (Boley & Green, 2016).

Ecotourism as a concept has been criticized for supporting Western values, notions, and beliefs. The dominant ideology behind ecotourism might not be supported in non-Western societies. For instance, the concepts of guardianship and protection in indigenous societies might be at odds with the principles of ecotourism. Research finds that conservation perceives environment in terms of scarcity or threats to scarcity (Cater, 2006). Such concepts might be alien for communities that have always lived in an ecologically sustainable manner. Other cultures like Chinese might favor human manipulation of nature to enhance its appeal. They might not have the objectives of creating pristine natural spaces (Cater, 2006). This is because Chinese culture emphasizes human interaction with natural objects and environment as they are continuously referred in literature, arts, and music. Still other cultures have different views and perceptions about visiting natural areas and resorts. For instance, Nigerians consider nature tourism to be part of recreation and leisure while Western tourists might visit such areas for education and information (Huang & Xu, 2018). The diverse definitions of nature by various groups might create divergent views regarding ecotourism. This might be at odds with the concept of Western based definitions of ecotourism. Research recommends that specific models of ecotourism need to be developed for different countries. Principles and methodologies should be in accordance with local preferences and practices to achieve success. The conclusion is that there are multiple elements of ecotourism. There have been multiple dimensions and aspects so that the concept can be understood and implemented. Moreover, ecotourism consists of multiple dimensions that must be done in an efficient and consistent way in order to achieve success.

Ecotourism in Germany

Germany is one of the largest and prosperous countries in Europe with several natural resorts, tourist areas, urban centers, cultural activities, and other tourist related activities. Historically, tourism has been given priority by governments because it showcases German achievements, heritage, culture, and economic advancement (Strasdas, 2019). Tourism is an important contributor to the economy as it provides revenues for local regions and the central government. Governments have placed emphasis on tourism by promoting infrastructure and facilitating private and public sector so that they can enhance service quality to visitors. It is the

eight most visited countries in the world with over 200 million people visiting it in 2019 (Strasdas, 2019). Additionally, 30% of Germans visit their own country (Strasdas, 2019). Consequently, tourism is a large sector that contributes to the economic development of local areas and provides revenues for the government. According to research, Germany was ranked at third position out of 136 countries in terms of attractive and developed tourist destinations (Strasdas, 2019). Domestic and international travel and tourism contributed to EUR43 billion to the German GDP in 2019. The industry contributes towards 4.5% of the GDP and provides 2 million jobs (Wachowiak, 2020). Tourism is a highly developed sector in Germany as shown from the above statistics. The German government has created incentives for the hospitality sector so that they can provide services according to the needs of customer segments. Furthermore, the government has encouraged private-public cooperation so that tourism services can provide excellent services to customers (Haider & Kayani, 2020). The concept of ecotourism has been widespread in Germany because of the need to act responsibility and sustainably towards the local environment and cultural system. According to research, some 15% of Germans visit tourist areas because of the natural environment and beauty (Tatar et al., 2017). For instance, many tourists visit German farms that are guesthouses with local charm and services.

Another study finds that ecotourism is being promoted with innovative services. For instance, Willing Workers on Organic Farms (WWOOF) provides room and boarding facilities at a variety of organic farms (Liu & Huang, 2017). However, tourists have to participate in working and preparing food as part of the experience. The implications are that such innovative concepts help to promote ecotourism in the country. Another study states that the German Alps have some ecotourism spots and destinations (Aversa et al., 2017). The findings concluded that the mountain region offers a balanced and concentrated offer that combines nature, culture, sport, tradition, and good infrastructure to provide unique travel experiences. Additionally, the study concludes that authentic regional products and tradition can combine to foster ecotourism in the region (Aversa et al., 2017). The analysis suggests that ecotourism has received considerable attention in Germany because of its natural environment and spots. Furthermore, ecotourism is also considered a niche market that can be used to target specific kinds of tourists. Germany has tremendous potential to implement ecotourism due to its unique geography, infrastructure, developed tourism sector, technology, and awareness. It needs to combine all the elements to have a consistent and effective ecotourism strategy that can help to solve problems and maximize benefits at the national and local levels. Such a strategy will help to pay dividends as it would be based on achieving strategic success.

Theoretical Framework

The conceptual framework for this study has been developed by using existing models and approaches. The knowledge based approach is a theoretical framework that considers ecotourism from an objective and holistic approach (Chiutsi et al., 2011). It identifies the strengths and weaknesses of all types of tourism and uses scientific knowledge to identify the best tourism modes for each destination. Additionally, it uses the main features of ecotourism with the sustainable development paradigm to create a measured growth approach for applying concepts to any destination. In other words, the destination's environmental and socio-cultural capacity is identified and evaluated by the framework. Sustainable development is also part of the framework because it focuses on the triple bottom line model which is financial, social, and environmental performance. Ecotourism is a form of tourism in which people visit undisturbed and untouched natural areas. Basically, we can say it focuses on socially responsible tourism to minimize the hazards and impacts of commercial mass tourism. However, the prime purpose of

ecotourism is environmental sustainability through the management of resources with the help of local people, tourism operators, and even policymakers. It focuses on three important aspects (Shu, 2002). First is to aggravate the significance of numerous ecosystems existing in an area and to preserve cultural and biological diversity. Secondly, to increase the ecosystem productivity believing that every person and species have a key role to play in environmental sustainability. This concept is known as biodiversity and it promotes the sustainable use of biodiversity by creating jobs and providing business opportunities (Shu, 2002). It contributes towards the greater good of all forms of life in an environment. Thirdly, ecotourism believes in providing and sharing benefits from ecotourism development with the local people. It seeks to ensure that the locals are given the opportunity of involvement in the planning and management of ecotourism benefits (Shu, 2002). Consequently, the above model can be used to understand the evolution of the concept of ecotourism. It helps to identify and distinguish between various definitions of ecotourism and the challenges or criticism associated with such definitions. The framework can be used to create an objective and holistic definition of ecotourism that would be beneficial for stakeholders in any destination. Scheyvens empowerment framework can also be used to study and define the dimensions of ecotourism. According to this model, there are economic, psychological, social, and political aspects of any industry (Fennell, 2014). Ecotourism must be used to provide consistent and equitable economic benefits for local communities. Moreover, there is a psychological aspect which means that ecotourism must provide optimism and hope for residents living in any community. The community feels that its traditions and culture must be respected and appreciated by visitors (Fennell, 2014). Such positive attitudes foster collaboration and cooperation that can be utilized for the growth and benefit of any destination. The social dimension suggests that community experiences must be cohesive and united. Ecotourism funds should focus on development projects that increase community harmony and relations (Fennell, 2014). Finally, there is a political aspect which provides diverse social groups with the proper representation so that they can participate in all aspects of ecotourism development and implementation (Fennell, 2014). The concept of the ecosystem revolves around respect and appreciation for the natural environment and cultural traditions. The concept may seem to have a small impact but it focuses on improving the global environment and preserving ecosystems as a whole. Its contribution is for the larger cause (Shu, 2002). Ecotourism is an ideal concept that focuses on both economic and biological well-being. It focuses on returning a good amount of revenue to the local communities for their greater good. It should also focus on improving the local practices of the communities through building environmental and cultural awareness for the biological preservation of nature (Shu, 2002). The concept goes way beyond preserving the nature-based environment; instead, its philosophy is to encourage active participation of local communities. In simpler words, it can be said that it is a rational approach to cultivate suitable attitudes and behavior towards the natural environment to preserve it.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research has been described as creative and scientific work that is done with the intention of improving knowledge in any discipline. In other words, research uses scientific inquiry and analysis to find solutions to problems, reaffirm prior research, and gain fresh insights on various topics (Walliman, 2017). The knowledge gained from research can help to improve human lives and ensure the betterment of society. Research is generally done through a sequential stage that involves developing a precise question. It is followed by collecting data to answer the question and providing an answer to the question. Research is like solving problems by developing a question and finding answers (Esterberg, 2002). The importance of research is that it allows researchers to improve existing knowledge and find new evidence that can be used

for improvement. It also plays a leading role in enhancing practice by suggesting room for future research. Policy makers and other stakeholders have the knowledge to become effective and professional through the use of research (Esterberg, 2002).

Research Approach

There are two types of research approaches which are quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative approach focuses on numerical and statistical data. It can be used for generalization of results among a population sample (Hennink et al., 2020). Quantitative approach provides numerical data about any phenomenon. In contrast, qualitative data provides insights, opinions, assumptions, and views about any topic (Hennink et al., 2020). It is concerned with non-numerical data which could be used for analysis and interpretation of any research topic. The qualitative approach has been selected because the aim is to understand the concept of ecotourism. This approach is beneficial because it will also provide answers to the definitions and frameworks related to ecotourism by gathering data from primary and secondary sources. The research approach should be practical and realistic as it must be able to provide the results in reliable and consistent way. It should develop the questions and answer it through appropriate data collection methods. Moreover, the method should be according to the resources and circumstances of the researcher. All of the above concerns need to be taken into account while developing the research approach as it would help to achieve high levels of efficiency and effectiveness.

Data Collection

Data collection for the study has been done by using secondary research methods. There are advantages of secondary research such as allowing access to large number of scholarly sources. The researchers can save time and money because of secondary research. It is relatively easy to collect and analyze the data because common themes or findings can be used to answer the research questions (Walliman, 2017). The disadvantages of secondary research are that many sources might be outdated or irrelevant. There is no way to determine the accuracy and reliability of the research and its results. Furthermore, researchers do not participate in the process while objectivity and neutrality of the sources might be compromised (Walliman, 2017). Primary research was not selected by the researcher because of the ongoing COVID19 pandemic which has led to people isolating themselves and using social distancing. Moreover, large areas are currently in a lockdown and it is difficult to meet people for interviews. Furthermore, primary research is a hectic and tedious effort that requires significant resources and time which were not available for the researcher. The secondary data has been collected from databases like EBSCO, ProQuest, and Emerald. Since the number of scholarly sources on the topic is very extensive, only few studies were selected. The selection criteria were based on recent and relevant studies. Additionally, the credentials of the researchers played a decision in selecting the best sources. Another criterion was to study specifically the studies on ecotourism in Germany. These studies were used to answer a specific part of the research topic.

Research Ethics

Ethics is an integral element of research since it contributes towards transparency and accountability. Although the study utilizes a secondary research methodology, the credibility and reliability of each study was done by performing analysis of researchers and their credentials.

Their background, qualifications, skills, and affiliations with academic institutions was undertaken to ensure high levels of reliability and validity.

Ecotourism Concept Evolution

The analysis suggests that there is a broad definition of ecotourism. Although there were slight variations in definitions, the common theme that emerged was that ecotourism is about environmental conservation, educating tourists about social responsibility and sustainable living, appreciating cultural and natural heritage, and respecting the rights of the local communities. This is consistent with findings from the literature that consider ecotourism to involve visiting natural environments and the conservation of natural habitat and wildlife (Sucipto, 2020). Additionally, ecotourism is an effective tool to be used for conservation strategy and economic development. For this reason, many countries are embracing it for sustainable development. It includes environment-friendly activities to experience the true essence of nature. The concept enables the socio-economic development of the local community by providing them with an alternate and sustainable source of living (Sambou et al., 2019). So the two main focus of ecotourism is the preservation of the natural environment and welfare of local communities. According to the research, the concept of ecotourism gained popularity after the 1992 Rio summit where the idea of sustainable development and soft tourism was advocated to protect the earth (Sambou et al., 2019). Moreover, the literature suggests that increased environmental awareness in society in recent decades has also played a part in promoting the concept of ecotourism. This is consistent with the findings from the literature that state ecotourism involves environmentally responsible travel and targets Eco tourists that can enjoy and appreciate nature.

The literature also states that conceptual basis is important because it would allow planning and development to be done efficiently (Oliinyk et al., 2020). Focused data, reporting, and information dissemination can help in product development and create links to the demand side of tourism through marketing and promotional avenues. This is consistent with the findings from the literature that identify the criticism of ecotourism as a concept. Specifically, the definitions appear to be vague and ambiguous while different stakeholders have unique perceptions and descriptions of ecotourism (Singgalen et al., 2019). According to the knowledge based framework, a holistic and flexible definition of ecotourism would help all stakeholders by identifying the ways that products can be positioned and catered to meet the needs of ecotourists.

Implementing Ecotourism

The successful implementation of ecotourism can only occur after there has been a clear understanding of the theoretical concepts. Based on the analysis from the literature, it is concluded that community participation is a critical component of success. The communities must exercise control over growth and development (Singgalen et al., 2019). They also need technical assistance to make appropriated decisions and should be given adequate information and training in advance. Scheyvens empowerment framework states that ecotourism should be implemented by analyzing the social dimensions. In other words, it is important to study the ways that ecotourism can potentially bring social change and enhance the socioeconomic status of the local communities (Robbins et al, 2019). Allocation of time, funds, and experienced personnel to work with communities can help to achieve sound outcomes. Participation is a process that means going beyond community participation by empowering them to make decisions (Haider, & Tehseen, 2022). Participation in decision making processes related to ecotourism can help to accomplish change and growth (Robbins et al., 2019). Additionally, local

leaders, organizations, key priorities, ideas, expectations, and concerns must be addressed in the beginning to achieve project success. Based on the conceptual framework and scholarly sources, ecotourism can be implemented when regional planning is integrated with national planning frameworks (Robbins et al., 2019). Scheyvens empowerment framework states that political and economic variables need to be identified and evaluated when creating a plan for ecotourism. This is beneficial because it helps policy makers to develop workable solutions that can meet the needs of every stakeholder. The framework states that ecotourism comprises large number of potential activities like snorkeling, bird watching, horse riding, trekking, and others. The planning should be based on the needs of the market segments and it should be positioned appropriately (Aryal et al., 2019).

Ecotourism in Germany

According to the literature, Germany has emerged as a popular tourist resort among international and local tourists. Natural parks and biosphere reserves are now attractive destinations while Germans have an enthusiasm for Alps, coasts, lakes, nature reserves, and river valleys. They also have a passion for diversity of the countryside. Sport and relaxation options are also increasingly being popular as Eco tourist spots in the country. The statistics show that 459 million people stayed overnight in the country in 2017 (Wachowiak, 2020). Guests from abroad accounted for 18% of the overnights (Wachowiak, 2020). Ecotourism is rapidly popular as there are 104 nature parks and 17 biosphere reserves in the country. These are important for sustainable development and biodiversity. Germany has also launched numerous initiatives to support local and international tourists in ecotourism. Germany's mountainous region known as the Alps offers potential for ecotourism. The country has launched initiatives that allow mountain communities to participate in social, cultural, and economic aspects of ecotourism (Haider et al., 2022). Strict regulation and visitor use limits have been imposed with the intention of achieving strategic success.

The government has also sought to promote linkages between tourism and other economic sectors like agriculture, livestock, transport, small and medium sized enterprises, and others (Maroto et al., 2020). The Federal Ministry for Environment, Nature Conservation, and Nuclear Safety (BMU) has an annual sustainable tourism destination in Germany competition. The BMU seeks to recognize the areas that have contributed to ecotourism. The ministry provides incentives for regional areas that promote ecotourism. For instance, Schwäbische Alb biosphere reserve was the winner for ecotourism efforts and including local communities in 2016 (Faganel et al., 2020). The private sector has also contributed towards ecotourism because it is a rapidly growing market in Germany. For instance, an initiative "Green Travel Transformation" (GTT) was launched to provide transparency in ecotourism activities for German tourists and it also sought to provide comprehensive information to encourage more bookings (Anselmi, 2020). These initiatives show that there is a high level of understanding among key stakeholders about promoting ecotourism in the region. The analysis suggests that Germany has potential for ecotourism because of the quality infrastructure, multiple destinations, and access for tourists. There have been initiatives like Fahrtziel Natur that seek to enhance infrastructure in large protected areas and remote regions (Anselmi, 2020). Specific projects in Germany have been launched such as sustainable city tours, organic hotels, and others. By concentrating on environment and responsible travelling, Germany has made significant strides in developing an effective ecotourism policy (Maroto et al, 2020).

DISCUSSION

The prime focus of ecotourism is to learn about nature, its landscape, species and their habitat, as well as cultural heritage of that locality. A small village for example, if chosen for ecotourism, will engage participation from the local community, to direct their energy towards those activities that exploit the natural and cultural resources. Combination of nature and tourism is very confusing but the philosophy can be decoded if there are proper planning and tactics to ensure ecological, social and economic growth (Chiutsi et al., 2011). All the key stakeholders such as local communities, eco-tourists, tour operators and policymakers should participate in planning, execution and monitoring phases of ecotourism. If tourism is not giving benefit to the local community by preserving environmental resources and providing an opportunity for their well-being, it cannot be termed as ecotourism (Holloway & Humphreys, 2019). It should focus more on the rural lifestyle and communities by helping them in economic development and maintaining their ecological integrity. The visitors must be nature-lover; they should have a personal and deep connection with nature. This will help them in having fun, cherishing and being considerate to the natural environment.

Although there are differences between sustainable and ecotourism, they have some common elements that lead to conservation and sustainable use of resources especially biological diversity. It is important that ecotourism should focus on quality, continuity and balance. Quality focuses on the life-quality of the local communities. Continuity means reducing the exploitation of resources to the least. Balance refers to the equilibrium between all stakeholders and between economical and tourism needs of a country along with its environmental protection (Chiutsi et al, 2011). Ecotourism is a practice of enhancing, conserving and maintaining natural systems with the help of tourism. Tourists should exhibit the finest practices for sustainable tourism. First, they must contribute to the conservation of resources and the environment. Second, be sensitive towards the culture of the area and deliver something to the people that will have a positive impact on them in the long run. Ecotourist operators have some responsibilities towards nature. They should meet their customer requirements and while marketing the tour, they must promote the area truthfully and precisely so the eco-tourists form realistic expectations from the tour (Huang & Xu, 2018). This is known as responsible marketing. It is a substitute for conventional tourism and it maintains biodiversity of protected area. Ecotourism is trending and is getting the attention of tourists worldwide. To reduce the strain on the biodiversity of the natural environment, there must be some institutions of policies in place. It could be visitor centers or responsible ecotourism businesses. Efforts can be made on small scale as well by increasing staff, providing awareness and education regarding the concept, and a monitoring/controller department which ensure the ecotourism rules and regulations are followed. This will help manage the negative impacts of tourists on the environment (Huang & Xu, 2018).

Ecotourism focuses on the economic well-being of locals so if a tourist comes and does not spend in the local economy than it is indeed a lost opportunity. Tourists usually have a budget of thousands of dollars to spend on goods and services. But if the resort is not providing them with the right opportunity, it leads to the loss of economic benefit of the local communities. Ecotourism emphasizes on the complicated relationship of tribal/local people and the administration of the area (Bapoo et al., 2022). It develops communication between the two parties and helps them bond on the basis of mutual benefit. Ecotourism prefers to improve the economic activities and benefits for the natural area. It helps to compete for land issues and guard them against economic and other threats. While ecotourism has many benefits socially, environmentally and economically, the economical aspect takes lead for the local communities. However, the income from ecotourism is very unsteady. There are numerous factors that cannot be controlled and lead to decreased tourist visits (Eshetu, 2014). No matter how one prepare, plan and develop ecotourism strategies, there will always be some outside factors that are beyond

control. For example, civil war, political clashes, terrorism or its rumors, natural disasters (volcano, hurricanes, earthquake, and floods), tribal enmity etc. deteriorates the infrastructure of tourism (Linsheng & Limin, 2017).

Managers of the protected areas should have complete data and knowledge about the biodiversity of their region. As per ecotourism guidelines, they should have a monitoring system in place to analyze the level of resources degradation because of tourist's intervention and controlling the degradation. According to the latest developments in the field, it has shifted focus on nature-based tourism to bonding between tourism and nature (Lin et al., 2017). Ecotourism leads to environmental understanding. It provides a guide to the procedure and tools that are required to resolve environmental issues. These issues affect human well-being, natural habitats and resources, and the environment itself. The concept has shifted the focus of tourism from reductionist to holistic human-focused approach (Oliinyk et al., 2020). Human relationships are the essences of this concept so there should be an emphasis on developing a spiritual, intellectual, and emotional connection with local communities to improve ecotourism practice. This then leads to creating a link between people and places and provides tourists a purpose and relationship to the places they are visiting. An important aspect to consider while practicing ecotourism is natural resource management (Shu, 2002). It is a practice of preserving natural resources as land, water, soil, plants, and animals. The natural resource management vital objective is to preserve resources to improve the quality of life of our present and future generations. There are some places in the world that consist of abundant resources but human intrusion and greed are leading to the depletion of these resources.

Natural resource management is a specialized tool to reduce human intrusion and maintain ecosystem integrity by practicing ethical, economical, and scientific standards. Rationalizing natural resources is the need for time to stop the extinction of attractive natural landscapes and wildlife habitats. The underdeveloped countries solely rely on their natural resources to make their living such as forests, minerals, and agricultural land. There are a lot of non-profit companies and scientists working in this field to preserve the untouched natural habitat and resources. Several programs are introduced by them to prepare people for the conservation of nature. South-East Asian Tourism Organization (SEATO) is a newly formed coalition that focuses on resource management by incorporating active and diverse players of the country. When discussing ecotourism there is always a debate that what level of natural resource preservation, biodiversity protection, socio-economic welfare, and environmental impact is needed to transform tourism into ecotourism. Every important player of ecotourism for example environmentalists, the tourist industry, academic researchers, government, and non-profit organizations, defines it differently (Boley & Green, 2016).

CONCLUSION

A common element found among definitions of ecotourism is that the destinations are undisturbed and undeveloped. They are located in remote areas which makes them attractive for ecotourism. Research finds that ecotourism spots include the ones in developing countries that are occupied or used by local or indigenous people. The implications of the above research are that people are already living in such places and using it for their sustenance and maintenance. Locals might be involved in the management since their culture or way of life has become part of tourism. It includes local communities as an important stakeholder because they can find employment or small businesses through tourism activities. The implications of the above research are that indigenous community rights can be recognized and managed. Nevertheless, the above researches fail to account for the potentially destructive outcomes of ecotourism such as

the indigenous communities being reduced to as objects of tourism. The research framework that has modified or evolved the definition of ecotourism finds that education and sustainability are the major components of ecotourism. Research finds that natural environment protection is important goal of ecotourism because it promotes ecological and cultural sustainability. Moreover, education and interpretation helps to promote responsible and sustainable behaviors in tourists. According to the literature, Germany has emerged as a popular tourist resort among international and local tourists. Natural parks and biosphere reserves are now attractive destinations while Germans have an enthusiasm for Alps, coasts, lakes, nature reserves, and river valleys. They also have a passion for diversity of the countryside. Sport and relaxation options are also increasingly being popular as ecotourist spots in the country. Ecotourism has become important in Germany because tourists are seeking to look after their wellbeing and interest. For instance, there are over 350 spa resorts that provide recuperative facilities and services to meet the needs of tourists. Ecotourism is rapidly popular as there are 104 nature parks and 17 biosphere reserves in the country. The successful implementation of ecotourism can only occur after there has been a clear understanding of the theoretical concepts. Based on the analysis from the literature, it is concluded that community participation is a critical component of success. The communities must exercise control over growth and development. They also need technical assistance to make appropriated decisions and should be given adequate information and training in advance. Scheyvens empowerment framework states that ecotourism should be implemented by analyzing the social dimensions. In other words, it is important to study the ways that ecotourism can potentially bring social change and enhance the socioeconomic status of the local communities. Allocation of time, funds, and experienced personnel to work with communities can help to achieve sound outcomes. Participation is a process that means going beyond community participation by empowering them to make decisions. Participation in decision making processes related to ecotourism can help to accomplish change and growth. Additionally, local leaders, organizations, key priorities, ideas, expectations, and concerns must be addressed in the beginning to achieve project success. Based on the conceptual framework and scholarly sources, ecotourism can be implemented when regional planning is integrated with national planning frameworks.

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