



Tourist Profiling for Analysing Socio-cultural Impacts of Tourism: A Case Study of Kushinagar, Uttar Pradesh

Anupama Srivastava¹

This paper is the result of a research conducted in the fields of both (sustainable) tourism and anthropology. A reflection on cultural changes and possible impacts that influence and accelerate these changes is carried out. Many of the theory of anthropology is used in order to study the possible impacts of tourism on host communities. The two research fields were then combined to identify those characteristics of tourists that may cause various levels of impact on the destination. The parameters on which these characteristics are classified include the demographic, geographic, economic, socio-cultural, behavioural and life style based profiles. A variety of articles dedicated to tourism impacts on local communities were examined to identify the socio-cultural aspects of tourism. The study is an outcome of extensive research done at Kushinagar, Uttar Pradesh. This Buddhist site is located in the vicinity of a small town of Uttar Pradesh, but is extremely rich in attracting Buddhist pilgrims and spiritualists from all over the world.

Introduction

Tourism is an activity that has major impacts on the well being and culture of the host population. As an economic benefactor it has become the way to a better future. Since tourism can significantly contribute to sustainable development the United Nation Economic Programme (UNEP) and United Nations World tourism Organization (UNWTO) promotes and encourages member countries to adapt while developing tourism the principles of sustainability.

The Earth Summit in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro has promoted sustainable development to a primary concern during the last few years, with more and more international NGO/NPOs devoting resources to sustainable development projects and discussions. United Nations Division for Sustainable Development defines sustainable development as "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs".

Tourism holds a special place as a contributor to sustainable development and its challenges. Its economic significance on the destinations is just one aspect of its ability to support sustainability. Another major benefit is that as an activity it bonds a relation between the visitors, industry and the local communities.

The nature and objectives of sustainable tourism

¹ Asst. Professor, Institute of Tourism Studies, University of Lucknow.

Tourism has an immense power to positively contribute to destination development. As given by the UNWTO (Sustainable Development of Tourism: Conceptual 2004) the various objectives of sustainable tourism is as follows:

Sustainable tourism development guidelines and management practices are applicable to all forms of tourism in all types of destinations, including mass tourism and the various niche tourism segments. Sustainability principles refer to the environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, and a suitable balance must be established between these three dimensions to guarantee its long-term sustainability.

Thus, sustainable tourism should:

- 1) Make optimal use of environmental resources that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological processes and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity.
- 2) Respect the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserve their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values, and contribute to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance.
- 3) Ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation.

Sustainable tourism development requires the informed participation of all relevant stakeholders, as well as strong political leadership to ensure wide participation and consensus building. Achieving sustainable tourism is a continuous process and it requires constant monitoring of impacts, introducing the necessary preventive and/or corrective measures whenever necessary.

Sustainable tourism should also maintain a high level of tourist satisfaction and ensure a meaningful experience to the tourists, raising their awareness about sustainability issues and promoting sustainable tourism practices amongst them.

The concept of sustainable tourism was first addressed in 1980, in Manila Declaration on World Tourism, but became a central issue in the late 1990's and in 1999 a Global Code of Ethics in Tourism (CGET) was published by the UNWTO. Its main goal is to define "...a comprehensive set of principles whose purpose is to guide stakeholders in tourism development: central and local governments, local communities, the tourism industry and its professionals, as well as visitors, both international and domestic." The CGET comprises of ten articles, and is the first of this kind which also have a mechanism for enforcement.

Another relevant programme is the joint initiative of the UNWTO and UNCTAD called Sustainable Tourism - Eliminating Poverty (ST-EP). ST-EP is aimed at "...longstanding work to encourage sustainable tourism - social, economic and ecological - which specifically alleviates poverty, bringing development and jobs to people living on less than a dollar a day.

Possible socio-cultural impacts on a local community

The most famous definition of culture by Tylor from his 1958 book (orig. 1871):

“Culture... is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”

Ap and Compton (1998) did a review on the existing literature on the impact tourism could have in order to create a ‘Tourism Impact Scale’. They finish their interpretation on their findings with a closing remark: “The extent to which these effects can be attributed to either tourism or modernization is largely unknown.” (Ap and Compton, 1998: 123). Acculturation further is largely catalyzed by the phenomenon of globalization. For an illustration of this phenomenon a citation of the book called Anthropology: The Exploration of Human Diversity (Kottak, 2002) is given:

“The term globalization encompasses a series of processes, including diffusion and acculturation, working to promote change in a world in which nations and people are increasingly interlinked and mutually dependent. Promoting such linkages are economic and political forces, along with the modern systems of transportation and communication. The forces of globalization include international commerce, travel and tourism, transnational migration, the media, and various high-tech information flows.”

As mentioned earlier Ap and Compton (1998) tried to establish a ‘Tourism Impact Scale’. They divided the possible tourism impacts in different classes, which one of them focused on the positive and negative social and cultural impacts. Their study on these specific impacts had the following results:

Socio-cultural impacts of tourism Positive Social Impacts

- Improves quality of life
- Increases availability of recreation facilities/opportunities
- Improves quality of fire protection
- Improves quality of police protection

Positive Culture Impacts

- Improves understanding and image of different communities or cultures
- Promotes cultural exchange
- Facilitates meeting visitors (an educational experience)
- Preserves cultural identity of host population
- Increases demand for historical and cultural exhibits

Negative Social and Cultural Impacts

- Increased prostitution
- Increased alcoholism
- Increased smuggling
- Heightened tension
- Increasingly hectic community and personal life
- Creation of a phony folk culture

Cuellar, (1995) specified the possible (individual) cultural changes by giving three levels of functioning, these are:

“Affective: Emotions that have cultural connections: The way a person feels about important aspects of identity, the symbols one loves or hates, and the meaning one attaches to itself

Cognitive: Beliefs about male/female roles, ideas about illness, attitudes towards illness, fundamental values

Behavioural: Language (verbal behaviour), customs, foods preference, music preference”

Importance of creating Tourists Profiles

While studying the various socio- cultural impacts of tourism on host communities it is also pertinent to understand the profile of the visiting tourists. The socio economic background and the psychological behaviour of the tourists will hugely define the level of impact on the visited (host) community. The tourism industry is dependent on tourist willingness to visit a destination.

This motivation is mainly driven by their own personal wants and needs. To analyse the level of impact it is most crucial to better understand who is visiting the destination and why. The important information’s collected from the visitors that will build their portfolio should include:

- Demographic Profiles: the age range, gender, education level, country of origin, and nationality of the visitors
- Purpose of Trips: Have the visitors come for leisure, religion, pilgrimage, business or are they visiting friends and family? Have they come for educational or volunteer purposes? Why are they traveling to the focus area?
- Travel Motivations: What psychological, physical, emotional, and professional needs are visitors seeking to fulfill while on their vacation? What sites are they visiting during their stay and why?
- Experiences and Knowledge Being Sought: Are they interested in gaining a deeper understanding of the wildlife, the local culture, or local history? What attractions are they coming to experience? What are they planning to do during their visit?
- Services Purchased: What kind of tours and packages are they buying and from whom? Do they purchase their tickets internationally or locally? What other services are they using? Are they satisfied with the services they are purchasing? Who is benefiting most from the revenue of these purchases? How much do they generally spend? How many tourists are staying in the focus area as opposed to those just stopping?
- Travel Behavior: What are the travel party sizes? Have the visitors been to the destination before? How much money have they spent at the destination? What information/reservation method did they use? What types of transportation did they use to get to the destination and once at the destination? How many are “touring?” How many are just going to the destination?

An exhaustive information about the tourists will not only help the stakeholders to improve and augment their services to the tourists but this information shall provide the base to assess the level of influences they have on the local communities.

Study at Kushinagar

To understand the above theory of tourist impacts on the destination an exhaustive study was carried out at Kushinagar. Kushinagar is a major centre of Buddhism. It is the place where Lord Buddha attained Nirvana near the Hiranyavati River and was cremated at the Ramabhar stupa. It was once a prosperous center of the Malla kingdom. Many of its stupas and viharas date back to 230 BC-AD 413. In ancient times, the town was also known as Kushinara and Kasia.

Location

Kushinagar is situated at a distance of 53 km west of Gorakhpur, in Uttar Pradesh, in the northern part of India.

Attractions

Nirvana Stupa and temple - This stupa made of bricks, excavated by Carlleyl in 1867, stands at a height of 2.74 meter. The excavations leading to the finding of the copper vessel and the Brahmi inscription on it proving the matter that Buddhas ashes were buried in the pace, made this place a suddenly important destination for all Buddhists devotees. Besides, the huge reclining statue of Buddha in the temple is also very attractive.

Mahaparinirvana temple - This is more than 6 meters long statue of reclining Buddha. The image was unearthed during the excavations of 1876. Carved from Chunar sandstone, the statue represents the dying Buddha reclining on his right side.

Wat Thai temple - The unique temple, built to celebrate the victory of King Bhumibol's great accession of the throne, and the subsequent Golden Jubilee, is worth a watch, especially because of the innumerable trees that were planted here. Besides, there's the Chinese temple, the Meditation Park and an International Buddha trust, and the Birla temple to add charm to roaming around in the city.

Ramabhar Stupa - About 1.5 km away from Mahaparinirvana Temple, this large Stupa rises to a height of 49 ft. It marks the site where the Lord Buddha was cremated. In ancient Buddhist texts, this Stupa has been referred to as 'Mukut-Bandhan Vihar'.

- Japanese temple - A beautiful eight metals statue of the Buddha, which was brought from from Japan, can be visited here.
- Profile of International Tourists Visiting Kushinagar
 - Demographic Profiles- Most of the tourists from the Buddhist countries belong to the age category of 50 and above. They travel in groups and keep confined to themselves. There is very less intermingling with hosts.
- The tourists from Western countries usually travel as FIT's and are usually above the age of 35.
- Purpose of Trips: The tourists from the Buddhist countries mainly visit this sire for pilgrimage. They light candles and offer prayers at the sleeping statue of Buddha. Many tourists also visit to pay homage to the place where the Lord attained Mahaparinirvana-escape from the cycle of rebirth forever. On the other hand the westerners visit for spiritual reasons. They mostly do not consider Buddhism as a religion but view it more as a philosophy and a way of life.
- Travel Motivations: For Buddhists the main motivation is religion. The travel time as mentioned earlier is during winters which suit the tourists who prefer avoiding Indian summers. Travel to Kushinagar is also convenient as the place is well connected by a

four lane national highway.

- **Experiences and Knowledge Being Sought:** It offers a rustic rural atmosphere and is extremely peaceful and rejuvenating. The visitors enjoy the palpable silence of the surroundings. They experience a peace that is almost non-existent in city life.
- **Services Purchased:** While the Buddhists prefer staying in monasteries of their own countries the Europeans stay in a variety of hotels located close to the site. The economic significance on the hosts is not noticeable as the tourists are not dependent on the produce of the hosts. The tourists carry their own eatables and do not utilise the facilities of local restaurants. Even souviner vendors or shops are limited in number owing to the fact that most of the tourists buy souviners from shops located in the vicinity of the temple and monastery of their respective country.
- **Travel Behavior:** the Buddhist tourists from the East and South- East Asian countries travel in large groups along with family members. They generally interact amongst themselves and remain confined with no interactions with the local population. The Westerners mostly are FIT travellers. They do not travel in large groups. They are keener to interact with local population in comparison showing very few inhibitions.

Impact of Tourists on host communities:

- Since there are very little interactions between tourists and hosts the level of impact is limited. The local population though happy about the visits by foreigners is unsatisfied mainly due to the fact that the tourists get all facilities in the monasteries of their respective countries and thereby do not contribute to local economy.

The local population also is comparatively from an economically weaker background and therefore apes at the tourists. The level of local involvement in tourism is insignificant with almost no community participations.

The temples built by different countries are almost completely managed by their own people employment to the locals is confined to menial tasks like cleaning, gate-keeping and low profile jobs. This further enhances the gap between tourists and hosts.

From time to time the temples do conduct health camps and other social services to the local residents which contribute in promoting social causes. Some temple communities like the Myanmar temple also conducts gender upliftment programmes by training local women in skills like stitching etc.

Minimisation of negative impacts

- The tours can be marketed as specialised tours for spiritual progress of an individual.
- Enhance the environmental-friendly image of the site.
- Take active participation in activities directed to preservation of cultural heritage, for example sponsor workshop or similar activities on local crafts, cuisine or rituals. This will help handling the changes in customs;
- Use the cooperation of the stakeholders to create a forum on societal problems and build cooperation between all stakeholders involved. This way rules will be created if they are missing or enforced with the support of local residents. Depending on the participation of local or national government, rules can evolve into laws.

Conclusion

Gaining an in-depth understanding of who is visiting gives an idea about which tourist market(s) would typically like to visit the area, which areas/countries they originate from, and most importantly, what additional services and activities that the destination could provide. Keeping in mind the size of the potential tourism markets will influence the number of attractions, facilities and services that can be developed in a destination.

Such profiles, apart from contributing to the improvement of the destination have a dual and a more prominent role in understanding impacts. This is most relevant since planning for sustainable tourism requires incorporating the typology of tourist visiting the destination. The research findings stresses once again on the importance of tourist profile creation for a more structured and planned growth and development of tourism at a destination.

REFERENCES

1. Ap, J. and J.L. Compton (1998) 'Developing and testing a tourism impact scale', *Journal of Travel Research* 37, 2: 120-130.
2. Burns, P. 1999. *An Introduction to Tourism and Anthropology*. London: Routledge.
3. Crick, Malcom. 1995. "The Anthropologist as Tourist: An Identity in Question." *International Tourism: Identity and Change*. London: Sage. Pp. 205-223
4. Kottak, C.P. (2002) *Anthropology: The Exploration of Human Diversity*, Ninth edition, McGraw-Hill.
5. Mahony, K. and Zyl, J. van (2002) 'The impacts of tourism investment on rural communities: three case studies in South Africa', *Development Southern Africa* 19, 1: 83-103.
6. Pimbure Samitha Thero, 1977. "Kushinagar – The Holy City of Lord Buddha's MahaParinibbana"
7. Redfield, R., Lenton, R. and Herskovits, M. (1936) 'Memorandum for the study of acculturation', *American Anthropologist* 38: 149-152.
8. Sayagyi U Chit Tin. 1988. "The Significance of the Places of Pilgrimage", First published in the *Dhammadana Series 10 – The First International Conference and Pilgrimage in the Tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin*. Sayagyi U Ba Khin Memorial Trust, U.K., 1988.
9. Smith, Valene, ed. 1989. *Hosts and guests: The anthropology of tourism*. Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press.
10. Stone, M. and Wall, G. (2004) 'Ecotourism and Community Development: Case Studies from Hainan, China', *Environmental Management* 33, 1: 12-24.
11. Tylor, E.B. (1958 (orig. 1871)) *Primitive Culture*, New York: Harper Touchbooks. Vincent, V. and Thompson, W. (2002) 'Assessing community support and sustainability for ecotourism development', *Journal of Travel Research* 41, 2: 153-160.