



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

Environmental Impacts Of Tourism In Dharamshala: A Sociological Study

Ashish Kumar

Ph.D. Research Scholar

Department of Sociology and Social Work

Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla, India

Abstract: Tourism has multi-dimensional impacts, influencing the social, cultural, economic, political, environmental, and other aspects of society. Among these, environmental impact has emerged as a significant concern, as the rapid growth of tourism over the years has brought both opportunities and challenges for tourism and society. The objectives of this study are to assess both the positive and negative impacts of tourism on the environment and to analyse the community's awareness of, and response to, these changes. The research design was descriptive, and the study was conducted in the key areas of Dharamshala. Purposive sampling was used to select 50 respondents. Data collection involved the semi-structured interview schedule method. The present study findings highlight that tourism in Dharamshala has led to both positive and negative environmental impacts. Consequently, local communities, authorities, and tourism-related commercial establishments are actively working towards sustainable tourism practices.

Index Terms - Dharamshala, Tourism, Environmental Impacts, Sustainable Tourism, Society.

I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a continues growing service industry with significant growth potential. According to Harssel (1994), an industry of this size has a tremendous impact on the lives of individuals and the economies of nations. Therefore, it is necessary to analyse tourism from both economic and societal perspectives. Tourism has both positive and negative impacts on various spheres of society, including economic, social, cultural, environmental, political, educational and others. These impacts can be observed at both the societal and individual levels. Furthermore, the initial phase of tourism development is often viewed as positive because it immediately provides economic opportunities for local people and communities.

Tourism has significant impacts on the environment. It has positive consequences, including environmental protection, new parks, pleasant landscapes, clean roads and public spaces, more trees, and increased open spaces. The development of host regions can also promote the conservation and preservation of these areas for

tourism, which in turn supports environmental protection and tourism sustainability. Nelson (2013) identifies three methods for improving environmental standards and preserving natural resources for better tourism: improvement, maintenance, and preservation. However, the long-term consequences of tourism can be dangerous and latent, as interactions between tourists and local environments are more likely to have negative outcomes.

According to Gursoy et al. (2018), traffic, congestion, crowding, crime, and other stressful factors are the negative effects of tourism. Other highlighted issues are resource consumption, pollution, and possibly even landscape destruction (Nelson, 2013). Initially, the negative impacts can be observed as the deforestation, privileging of certain species and loss of species diversity, depletion of natural resources for firewood and timber, soil and coastal erosion, land degradation, water pollution and garbage, impact of the construction of roads and settlements and changes in land use, migration of the small and poor peasant population and influx of outside agencies, urbanisation and the associated challenges of providing water, electricity and infrastructure, development of shanties and slums, and problems related to social cohesion in the poorest or remotest regions of the country (Sharma, 2006).

Surprisingly, environmental issues affecting current tourism trends are hardly recognised. The global impact from the loss of biological diversity, ozone layer depletion, natural disasters and climate change, which further leads to reduced snowfall, damage to vulnerable ecosystems, rising sea levels, and increased extreme weather events, can be seen as a changing factor of society. It can be argued that the concept of sustainable tourism emerged from the recognition of the negative impacts of mass tourism and the subsequent development of green tourism (Lal, 2012). Now, travel has become more responsible, emphasising the conservation of the environment and natural resources while improving the well-being of the local community (The International Ecotourism Society, 2022).

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Butler (2015) in his article, detailed the evolution of tourism and how tourism existed in the old times and how it is influencing the modern time. With the change of activities according to time, tourism introduced new ways to look around. As tourism itself struggles, from the writer's opinion, it becomes difficult for the researcher to research in the field of tourism. Another problem with the research in tourism is that it is not considered as a fully developed discipline but as suitable study material by other disciplines. So, he sees that tourism is not yet explored as much as it is considered to be.

Holden (2016) in his book, states that though the tourism sector is moving from a brown to a green economy, it still has negative environmental impacts. The environmental-friendly products are not regularly introduced. Even the developments of mass tourism do not make it as sustainable as possible. However, the assumption is that mass tourism has nothing to do with sustainable development. There are roles of the government and other authorities for protected areas, environmental planning, environmental audits and management systems, the role of the private sector in the environmental management of tourism and codes of conduct in tourism.

Ministry of Tourism, Government of India (2019-20) consistently promotes ecotourism. Ecotourism is also new to the industry and new to its consumers. This report focuses on the introduction of ecotourism to the market. The government is developing a model for ecotourism so the local community can be involved.

Furthermore, have policies for the betterment of the environment concerning tourism. This report focuses on growing ecotourism and a new opportunity for people, the economy, and the environment.

Ministry of Tourism, Government of India (2020-21) focuses on sustainable tourism as one of the niche tourism products. The Ministry is considering informing and educating all the stakeholders about the importance of sustainable and responsible tourism. Moreover, even ecotourism development based on the local community's environment and socio-cultural characteristics works together, where 'Swachhta' is considered one of the pillars of tourism, which will promote it extensively.

Gupta et al. (2024) noted that sustainable tourism creates a stability between economic development and environmental protection. To reduce the impacts of tourism on nature, steps such as eco-friendly infrastructure, biodiversity protection, and responsible wildlife tourism can be taken. Collaboration among stakeholders, likely from local communities, businesses, and tourists, is crucial to implement sustainable policies and control over-tourism. Additionally, promoting education, raising awareness, and integrating sustainable practices into tourism are essential for encouraging responsible behaviour.

Dolnicar and Greene (2025) argue that despite decades of research, sustainable tourism has largely emphasised problem identification over practical solutions, resulting in limited progress amid growing environmental crises. The shift from talk to action is essential. This involves taking a shift towards two key strategies: developing behaviour change interventions targeting tourists, businesses, and policymakers and systemic transformation towards environment-Led or neotenus tourism models. These approaches aim to reduce tourism's environmental footprint and support climate change mitigation efforts.

III. RESEARCH GAP

While sustainable tourism is often discussed in literature, there is still a noticeable gap between discussion and actual implementation. Environmental reforms in tourism tend to move slowly, and mass tourism often clashes with the principles of sustainability. Government reports may promote ecotourism and sustainable tourism initiatives, but they often fall short of explaining how these initiatives are carried out or how effective they are on the ground. There is more focus on getting local communities involved and getting stakeholders to work together, there is still limited real-world evidence showing the effectiveness of these strategies in specific places. For example, Dharamshala, a popular hill station that is dealing with overcrowding and environmental stress, does not have any evidential research on how green infrastructure, local participation, or changing tourist behaviour are working. There is also very little knowledge about how local people view sustainability policies or how involved they are in making them work. This highlights the urgent need for research that is rooted in the local context, research that not only looks at the challenges of sustainable tourism in Dharamshala but also measures the real impact of existing practices and community efforts.

IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following objectives are prepared for conducting the research:

- To understand the positive and negative impacts of tourism.
- To examine the steps taken to minimise the negative environmental impact of tourism.

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The descriptive research design was used in this research. Essentially important areas of Dharamshala for the presented study are McLeod Ganj, Naddi, Dharamshala, Bhagsu Nag and the sample comprised of 50 local respondents who are somehow engage with the tourism sector of Dharamshala. Due to the nature of data and investigation, the researcher must use non-probability sampling. Data were collected using a purposive sampling technique. Keeping in view the objectives of the study, a semi-structured interview schedule is preferable. The questions prepared are open-ended because of the descriptive nature of the study. The data for this study were collected from two sources: namely primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include interview schedules, and the secondary sources comprise books, journals, articles, etc. In the present study, firstly, data were organised, and then data were codified, and then the data were made ready for analysis, and then interpretations were carried out accordingly. The following interpretations are based on the data gathered from the field.

VI. FINDING AND ANALYSIS

6.1 Positive Environmental Impacts

The data indicate that **regular waste collection and management** is reported as the most significant improvement in Dharamshala. The **beautification of Dharamshala**, is also commonly mentioned along with **plantation initiatives** and the **installation of dustbins**. Furthermore, there has been a rise in **awareness of cleanliness** among locals. Overall, the findings suggest that tourism has contributed to certain positive environmental impacts in Dharamshala.

Table 1
distribution of respondents' views on positive environmental impacts

Responses	Number of Respondents N = 50	Percentage
Waste Collection and Management	50	100
Beautification of Dharamshala	44	88
Plantation Initiative	27	54
Installation of Dustbins	25	50
Awareness of Cleanliness	19	38

Note: Number of respondents exceeds due to multiple responses.

6.2 Negative Environmental Impacts

The data reveal that the **conversion of agricultural land to commercial use** is the most reported concern. This is followed by **overcrowding during peak seasons** and an **Increase in litter and solid waste** as reported by the respondents. **Pressure on water resources** and **deforestation for infrastructure development** are also noted. Overall, these results emphasise the major negative environmental effects of tourism in Dharamshala.

Table 2

distribution of respondents' views on negative environmental impacts

Responses	Number of Respondents N = 50	Percentage
Conversion of Agricultural Land into Commercial Use	29	58
Overcrowding	25	50
Litter and Solid Waste	22	44
Pressure on Water Resources	16	32
Deforestation	8	16

Note: Number of respondents exceeds due to multiple responses.

6.3 Challenges in Addressing Environmental Problems

The data highlight various challenges and barriers to mitigating the environment-related problems. A **high number of tourists** is reported as a major concern. **Low awareness among stakeholders** is also noticeable challenging factor. **Lack of coordination and collaboration between stakeholders** is further reported. **Inadequate infrastructure** and **negligence by authorities** can also be seen as challenges for mitigating these negative environmental impacts. Overall, these findings indicating that these are the major challenges observed to mitigate environmental problems.

Table 3

distribution of respondents' views on challenges in addressing environmental problems

Responses	Number of Respondents N = 50	Percentage
High Number of Tourists	45	90
Low Awareness Among Stakeholders	34	68
Lack of Coordination and Collaboration	28	56
Inadequate Infrastructure	16	32
Negligence by Authorities	13	26

Note: Number of respondents exceeds due to multiple responses.

6.4 Roles of Authorities in Environmental Protection and Maintenance

The data indicate the roles of local authorities, government bodies, and NGOs in protecting and maintaining the Dharamshala. **Waste management and cleanliness drives** is the most recognised efforts played by authorities. Furthermore, the role of authorities in **sustainable infrastructure development and regulation** and in **promoting eco-friendly tourism practices** are also mentioned by respondents. Additionally, **environmental protection initiatives** are reported by a few. Overall, the data suggest that these organisations are playing a proactive role in ensuring that tourism growth in Dharamshala is balanced with environmental sustainability.

Table 4
distribution of respondents' views on the roles of authorities

Responses	Number of Respondents N = 50	Percentage
Waste Management and Cleanliness Drives	50	100
Sustainable Infrastructure Development and Regulation	29	58
Promoting Eco-Friendly Tourism Practices	20	40
Environmental Protection Initiatives	8	16

Note: Number of respondents exceeds due to multiple responses.

6.5 Roles of Local Communities

The data show that **volunteering with NGOs or women and youth groups** is reported by the respondents as the most common activity performed by locals. Local people also play important roles in participating in **village cleanliness drives**, and **tree plantation and forest protection**. These results show that the local communities in Dharamshala are actively working together to protect the environment and keep it clean.

Table 5
distribution of respondents' views on the roles of local communities

Responses	Number of Respondents N = 50	Percentage
Volunteering	31	62
Village Cleanliness Drives	27	54
Tree Plantation and Forest Protection	24	48

Note: Number of respondents exceeds due to multiple responses.

6.6 Roles of Commercial Establishments in Environmental Protection and Maintenance

The data show that **waste management and responsible disposal** is the most significant role played by the commercial establishments. **Participation in clean-up drives** is the common activity performed by these businesses. The **use of solar energy and energy-saving appliances** and **avoidance of single-use plastic** are also reported. **Collaboration with NGOs, women, and youth groups, use of local and sustainable materials in construction** and **spreading awareness among tourists** are further mentioned by the respondents, indicating the eco-friendly practices. Overall, these findings show that many local businesses in Dharamshala are actively helping to protect and maintain the area through a variety of sustainable practices.

Table 6
distribution of respondents' views on the roles of commercial establishments

Responses	Number of Respondents N = 50	Percentage
Waste Management and Responsible Disposal	50	100
Clean-Up Drives	21	42
Use of Solar Energy and Energy-Saving Appliances	19	38
Avoidance of Single-Use Plastic	18	36
Collaboration with NGOs, Women, and Youth groups	15	30
Use of Local and Sustainable Materials in Construction	14	28
Spreading Awareness among Tourists	10	20

Note: Number of respondents exceeds due to multiple Responses.

VII. CONCLUSION

This study shows that tourism in Dharamshala has brought both positive and negative environmental impacts. Tourism reshapes interactions between locals, tourists, and tourism-related businesses influences community values regarding cleanliness and sustainability and alters land-use practices. Tourism has had some positive environmental impacts. Positive initiatives like waste management, plantation drives, and beautification demonstrate how community involvement and collective action can encourage people to care for the environment. These initiatives also include useful steps to enhance these positive impacts and raise environmental awareness. On the other hand, challenges such as overcrowding, land conversion, and inadequate infrastructure show that there are problems with governance, social awareness, and coordination among stakeholders. Challenges like high numbers of tourists, low awareness among stakeholders, lack of collaboration and coordination, inadequate infrastructure, and negligence by authorities hinder effective mitigation. Even with these problems, local authorities, NGOs, community members, and businesses are actively engaged in addressing these issues. Their efforts, which includes waste management, clean-up drives, sustainable practices, volunteering, collaboration and spreading awareness about responsible practices among locals reflect a shared commitment to environmental protection. To make sure that tourism development aligns with ecological conservation and sustainable planning, then the long-term, coordinated, and ground-level strategies are required. The findings indicate that to solve environmental problems in Dharamshala, a multi-pronged approach is needed. This includes raising awareness, improving infrastructure, enhancing governance, and implementing stricter regulations on tourist activities. The environmental aspect of tourism is linked to social dynamics, requiring sustainable solutions that incorporate ecological sensitivity and sociological insight into community participation, cooperation, and shared responsibility. To keep Dharamshala's environment in good condition, local community will need to be active. Which not only helps the tourism in Dharamshala but also to the local and society. Ensuring Dharamshala's environmental integrity is therefore not only an ecological necessity but also a societal one, shaping the well-being, identity, and quality of life of the local population.

References

- [1] Butler, R. (2015). The evolution of tourism and tourism research. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 40(1), 16–27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2015.1007632>
- [2] Dolnicar, S., & Greene, D. (2025). Research for environmentally sustainable tourism – All talk, no action? *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 62, 28–33. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhtm.2024.12.002>
- [3] Gupta, R., Mondal, M. E. A., Janardhan, M., Kumawat, H., & Shekhar, C. (2024). Sustainable tourism development: Balancing economic growth and environmental conservation. *Migration Letters*, 21(S7), 1240–1253. <https://migrationletters.com/index.php/ml/article/view/8967>
- [4] Gursoy, D., Ouyang, Z., Nunkoo, R., & Wei, W. (2018). Residents' Impact Perceptions of and attitudes towards tourism development: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 28(3), 306–333. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19368623.2018.1516589>
- [5] Harssel, J. V. (1994). *Tourism: An exploration* (5th ed.). Pearson.
- [6] Holden, A. (2016). *Environment and tourism* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
- [7] Lal, P. (2012). *Tourism policy of Jammu and Kashmir 1995 and sustainable tourism: A study of rural residents attitude towards tourism* [Doctoral Dissertation, University of Jammu]. Shodhganga. <http://hdl.handle.net/10603/78238>
- [8] Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. (2020). *Annual report 2019–20*. <https://tourism.gov.in/annual-reports/annual-report-2019-20>
- [9] Ministry of Tourism, Government of India. (2021). *Annual report 2020–21*. <https://tourism.gov.in/annual-reports/annual-report-2020-21>
- [10] Nelson, V. (2013). *An introduction to the geography of tourism*. Rawat Publications.
- [11] Sharma, S. P. (2006). *Tourism and environment: Concepts, principles and approaches*. Kanishka Publishers, Distributors.
- [12] The International Ecotourism Society. (n.d.). *TIES overview*. The International Ecotourism Society. <https://ecotourism.org/ties-overview/#:~:text=Ecotourism%20is%20defined%20as%20%E2%80%9Cresponsible,information%20and%20resources%20on%20ecotourism>