



Identifying Barriers To Community Participation In Tourism Development: A Study Of The Kinnaur And Spiti Regions Of Himachal Pradesh

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Abstract: Community participation has been identified as a fundamental requirement for the promotion and attainment of sustainable tourism development. However, the involvement of local communities, especially those in remote and tribal areas, in the planning, governance, and decision-making processes related to tourism is generally limited, despite the increasing importance of tourism as a source of income. The present study aims at identifying the major economic, sociocultural, institutional, infrastructural, and skill-related barriers to community participation in tourism development in the tribal regions of Kinnaur and Spiti of Himachal Pradesh, India. A mixed-method research approach was adopted in the present study, and primary data were collected from 250 local community members through structured questionnaires. The results indicate that the five most important obstacles to community participation in tourism development in the study area are the lack of professional skills and training in tourism, lack of financial support, seasonality of tourism income, exclusion of local communities from tourism planning and decision-making, and the domination of the tourism sector by elites. The study recommends the need for authorities to undertake appropriate tourism policymaking to reduce these barriers.

Keywords: Community Participation, Sustainable Tourism Development, Tourism Barriers, Tourism Planning, Tribal Communities

1. Introduction

Tourism has evidently become a major part of the global economy today. The tourism sector has a significant impact on the economy of many countries around the globe. Every nation around the world wants an efficient tourism sector. The tourism sector is also an important part of the economy for India. The tourism industry contributed about 5.22% to the Indian GDP and generated about 13.34% of jobs in 2025. While the tourism sector generates economic wealth, it also has many negative impacts. Therefore, it is important to mitigate the negative impacts of the tourism sector to promote sustainable development.

Himachal Pradesh is a mountainous state of India that has many beautiful river valleys and has stunning landscapes. The state has also become popular among visitors as a hill station. Though tourism is growing faster in the state, the growth is not inclusive at all, and it is important that the growth from tourism

be sustainable and all-inclusive. Community participation has emerged as a founding stone of sustainable tourism development at any destination, which represents a shift from the top-down approach of development to a bottom-up, community-driven approach to development. Many professionals agreed that local community participation can improve decision-making, leading to more efficient use of target resources. Community participation is also important in educating the local community to be alert to their surroundings and be more responsive to the rights that they possess. Therefore, integrating locals into the tourism development process is essential for inclusive tourism growth and a greater impact on the local community.

This study tries to find out the major barriers that are limiting local community participation in tourism development by conducting systematic research among 250 local community members in the tribal regions of Kinnaur and Spiti. Overall, the theoretical implications of this study extend existing knowledge by validating established theories of community participation while providing a context-specific understanding of the multidimensional barriers affecting tourism development in the study area.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Concept of Community Participation in Tourism Development

Community participation has emerged as a founding stone of sustainable tourism development at any destination, which represents a shift from the top-down approach of development to a bottom-up, community-driven approach to development. Community participation is a form of grassroots democracy, in which individuals have the right to participate in decision-making on matters that directly affect their lives. Community participation in tourism development means placing local residents at the center of planning, owning, managing, and benefiting from tourism activities. The World Bank (1996) defines participation as "a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources that affect them" (p. xi). Similarly, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) regards participation as a cornerstone of democratic governance and sustainable development.

The concept of community participation in tourism emerged during the 1970s as scholars and international agencies began questioning the effectiveness of the traditional top-down development model of tourism. During this period international agencies realized that massive infrastructure projects mostly failed because local populations were excluded from planning and execution of these projects. Tourism developed at a destination is not carried out by the businessmen only; the inclusion of the local community is also an important part of it (Murphy, 1985). The sustainable tourism development at a destination can be achieved only by the involvement of local communities (Stylidis et al., 2014; Bello et al., 2016). The local population of a destination is the one that directly or indirectly experiences both the negative and positive outcomes of tourism; therefore, their participation is essential so that the tourism activities can be managed better and negative impacts can be reduced (Cole, 2006).

2.2 Concept of barriers to community participation in tourism development

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2.2 Concept of barriers to community participation in tourism development

The concept of barriers to community participation in tourism emerged in the late 1990s. The emergence of this concept shifted the focus from why local communities should be included in tourism development to why they are unable to participate. The foundational framework regarding this concept was established by tourism scholar **Cevat Tosun** in his seminal 1999 and 2000 studies. He categorized the different obstacles that the local community of a destination witnesses into three primary groups, which are **operational barriers, structural barriers & cultural barriers** (Tosun, 2000).

Timothy (1999), in his study, found that inadequate institutional arrangements and centralized planning systems frequently prevent communities from participating effectively. Scheyvens (1999) argued that communities frequently participate as low-paid employees while external businesses capture the majority of tourism revenues. Local communities of a tourist destination often receive insufficient information regarding tourism projects, government policies, investment opportunities, and development plans (Cole, 2006).

Okazaki (2008) highlighted that to diminish the barriers to community participation, it is important to have collaborative governance, stakeholder trust, and institutional partnerships. Aref and Redzuan (2009) focused on enhancing technical & leadership skills and reducing financial limitations, whereas Rasoolimanesh et al. (2016) demonstrate that governance quality, procedural fairness, transparency, and stakeholder trust significantly influence local populations' willingness to participate. Together these studies suggest that meaningful community participation can only be achieved through integrated strategies that address governance, institutional capacity, education, empowerment, social inclusion, equitable benefit-sharing, and collaborative decision-making.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The present study adopts the mixed-method research approach. The mixed-method research approach involves qualitative and quantitative methods to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. This research design helps identify and understand the different barriers to community participation in tourism development. The quantitative dimension of the research design enables the collection of structured data through questionnaires that support the statistical analysis of the barriers to community participation. The qualitative part of the research approach provides in-depth insights into

perceptions, experiences, and attitudes of local communities and stakeholders through interviews and discussions.

3.2 Study Area

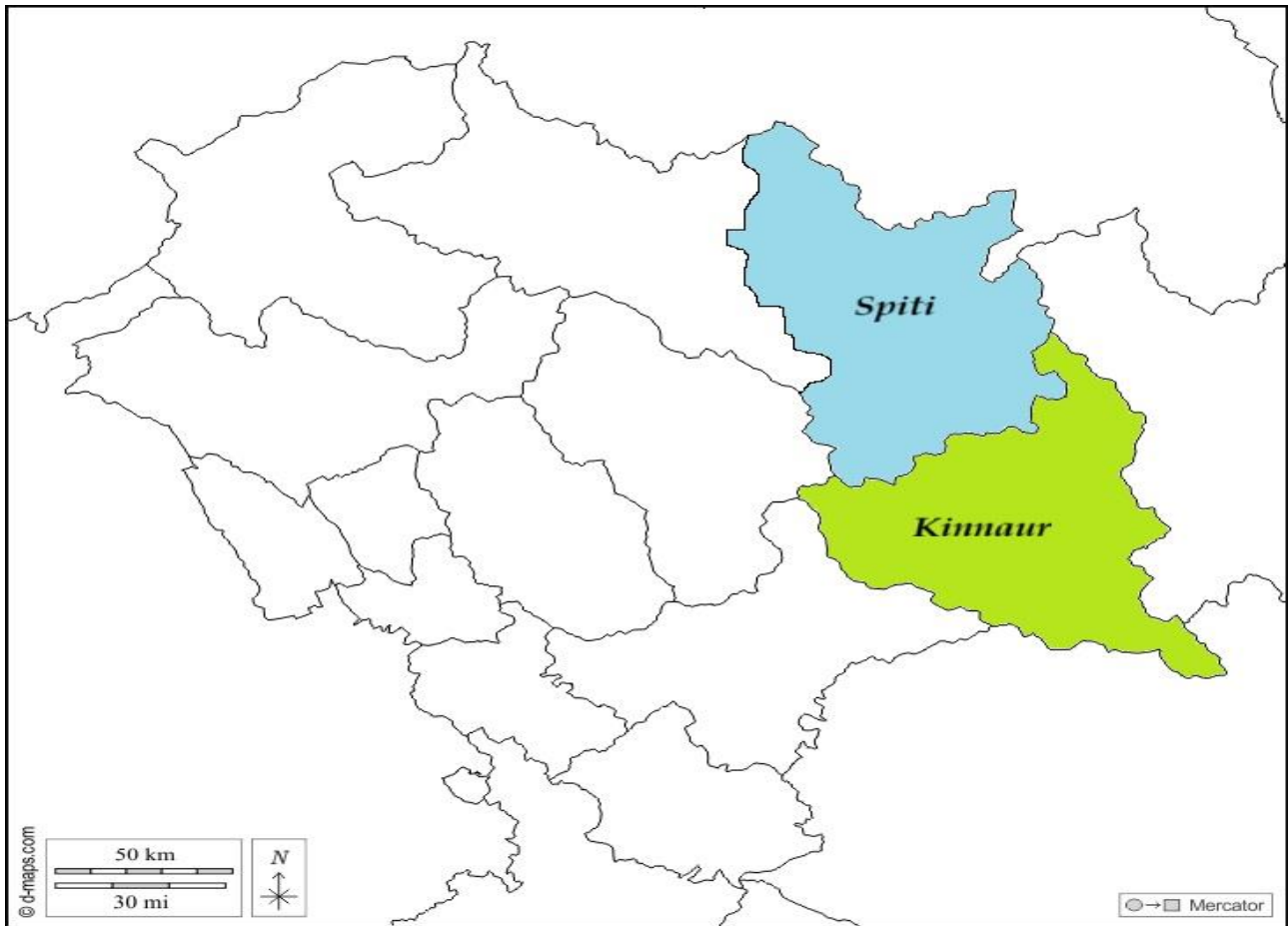


Figure 1: Map of study area

The reorganization of the state of Jammu and Kashmir in 2019 into the two union territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh made Himachal Pradesh the northernmost state in India. Himachal Pradesh lies in the western Himalayas, with an elevation ranging from about 350 meters in the lower Shivalik range to about 7000 meters in the Greater Himalayas. The state is rich in natural biodiversity and has climatic conditions ranging from subtropical to alpine.

The Kinnaur and Spiti region is part of the tribal belt of the state and is one of the most fascinating and picturesque parts of Himachal Pradesh. This tribal belt of the state is attracting many tourists and nature and adventure lovers from all over the world due to its scenic beauty, high mountain ranges, deep valleys, ancient monasteries, and cultural heritage.

3.5 Data Collection

Data were collected from June 2025 to December 2025 in different stages, strategically covering both peak and off-peak tourist seasons to capture a wide range of experiences. A questionnaire was prepared for the community members according to the theme of the current study. The structured portion of the questionnaire, which had a 5-point Likert scale, was used. The range of this 5-point scale varies from "strongly disagree=1" to "strongly agree=5. These questionnaires were mostly filled out by the researcher himself through informal interviews with the community members. Before conducting an interview, participants were informed about the goal of the study. The data was collected from the places like Kalpa,

Sangla, Rakcham, Chitkul, and Nako in the Kinnaur region and Tabo, Kaza, Dhankar, Key, Langza, Hikkim, Komic, Kibber, and Chicham in the Spiti Valley. Non-random sampling methods like convenience and judgmental sampling methods were used to select the respondents for the study.

3.6 Data Analysis

Various analyses, including demographic analysis, reliability analysis, and descriptive statistics, were performed using Microsoft Excel and IBM SPSS software for identifying the major barriers hindering community participation in the regions of Kinnaur and Spiti.

4. Data Analysis Results

4.1 Demographic Information of Community Members

Table 1 presents the demographic information of the respondents who participated in the study. Out of the total respondents, 63.20% are male and 36.80% are female. This means an acceptable number of female respondents are present in the study. The respondents between the ages of 30 and 45 years present the dominant group that participated in the current study. Also, above 70% of the respondents have at least a secondary level of education, which means the majority of the respondents are quite educated. Data also shows that 53.60% of the respondents have no experience in the tourism sector and 46.40% have some level of experience in the tourism sector.

Table 1: Demographic Information

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	158	63.20%
	Female	92	36.80%
Age Group	18-30	64	26%
	30-45	102	41%
	45-60	48	19%
Education Level	No formal education	18	7.20%
	Primary	47	18.80%
	Secondary	82	32.80%
	Graduate	61	24.40%
	Postgraduate and above	42	16.80%
Experience in Tourism	Less than 5 years	68	27.20%
	5-10 years	29	11.60%
	More than 10 years	19	7.60%
	No Experience	134	53.60%

4.2 Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's alpha has been used to test the reliability of the present study. Table 2 shows the score of Cronbach's alpha for the construct "barriers to community participation in tourism development." The value of Cronbach's alpha is **0.917**, which indicates that there is **excellent** internal consistency among the 23 questionnaire items of the present study.

Table 2: Reliability Analysis Result (Cronbach's Alpha)

Construct	No of Items	Value	Reliability Level
Barriers to Community Participation	23	0.917	EXCELLENT

4.3 Descriptive Statistics: Barriers to Community Participation in Tourism Development

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics of the 23 variables used to study the barriers to community participation in tourism development in Himachal Pradesh. The mean scores indicate the extent to which respondents perceived each factor as a barrier, while the standard deviation reflects the level of agreement among respondents. The barriers, which have mean values above the neutral value of 3.00, can be considered major barriers that limit local community participation in tourism-related activities. Also, the standard deviation value between 0.80 and 1.25 is considered acceptable for a 5-point Likert scale database.

Among all the barriers, "Lack of Professional Skills and Training in Tourism" under **Knowledge and Skills Barriers** is identified as the most recognized barrier by the members of the local community, with the highest mean score (M) of 4.244 and a standard deviation (SD) of 0.883, which is followed by "Lack of Awareness of Govt. Incentive Schemes" with a mean score (M) of 4.244 and a standard deviation (SD) of 0.883. After this occurs, "lack of sustainable business management skills." The statement "Lack of Awareness About Tourism Benefits" has the lowest mean score of 2.468, which means that it cannot be considered a barrier and there is a sense of awareness about the benefits of tourism among the community members.

Under the category of **economic barriers**, the statement "Lack of financial backup" is identified as the most recognized barrier by the local community members, with a mean score (M) of 4.088 & a standard deviation (SD) of 0.905. In second place is "Seasonality of tourism income" with a mean score (M) of 4.072 & a standard deviation (SD) of 0.861. In third place occurs "Lack of Financial Support Schemes from Govt" with a mean score (M) of 3.916 & a standard deviation (SD) of 1.024. "Concerns over unequal income distribution" comes in last place with a mean score (M) of 3.912 & a standard deviation (SD) of 1.002.

Under the **Institutional Barriers** category, the statement "Non-inclusion of the local community in tourism planning" has the highest mean score (M) of 4.064 & standard deviation (SD) of 0.903. "Elite domination in the tourism sector" is at the second position with a mean score (M) of 3.992 and a standard deviation (SD) of 0.859. In third place is "Lack of tourism skills training programs initiated by the government" with a mean score (M) of 3.96 & standard deviation (SD) of 0.985. At the last place is "Lack of marketing and promotion of destination" with a mean score (M) of 3.94 & standard deviation (SD) of 0.878.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics

Types	Statements	M	SD
Economic Barriers	Lack of financial backup	4.088	0.905
	Seasonality of tourism income	4.072	0.861
	Lack of financial support schemes from govt	3.916	1.024
	Concerns over unequal income distribution	3.912	1.002
Institutional Barriers	Non-inclusion of the local community in tourism planning	4.064	0.903
	Elite domination in the tourism sector	3.992	0.859
	Lack of tourism skills training programs initiated by govt	3.96	0.985
	Lack of marketing & promotion of destination	3.94	0.878
Knowledge and Skills Barriers	Lack of professional skills and training in tourism	4.244	0.883
	Lack of awareness of govt incentive schemes	3.824	1.041
	Lack of sustainable business management skills	3.328	1.055
	Lack of awareness about tourism benefits	2.468	1.072
Infrastructure Barriers	Underdeveloped road transport network	3.88	0.978
	Poor waste management system	3.764	1.024
	Lack of parking facilities	3.756	0.883
	Insufficient health facilities	3.608	0.985
	Lack of public toilet and restroom facilities for tourists	3.588	1.065
	Weak telecommunication network	3.364	1.215
Socio-cultural Barriers	Lack of encouragement to women	3.792	1.012
	Fear of cultural & environmental degradation	3.732	0.963
	Fear of confrontation with visitors	2.316	1.155
	Strict social norms	2.212	1.097
	Lack of unity within the community	2.04	0.961

Source: Survey data analysis M=Mean SD=Standard Deviation

“Underdeveloped road transport network” under **Infrastructure Barriers** is identified as the most recognized barrier by the local community, with a mean score (M) of 3.88 & standard deviation (SD) of 0.978, which is followed by “Poor waste management system” with a mean score (M) of 3.732 & standard deviation (SD) of 0.963. After this comes “Insufficient health facilities” with a mean score (M) of 3.608 & a standard deviation (SD) of 0.985. “Lack of public toilet and restroom facilities for tourists” comes at the second-to-last place with a mean score (M) of 3.588 & a standard deviation (SD) of 1.065. The statement “Weak telecommunication network” has the lowest mean score (M) of 3.364 & standard deviation (SD) of 1.215.

Under the category of **sociocultural barriers**, the statement “Lack of encouragement for women” has the highest mean score (M) of 3.792 and a standard deviation (SD) of 1.012. In second place is the statement “Fear of cultural & environmental degradation” with a mean score (M) of 3.992 & standard deviation (SD) of 0.859. The statement “Fear of confrontation with visitors” has a mean score (M) of 2.316 & standard deviation (SD) of 1.155, which means that it is not considered a major barrier by the community members. The statement “Strict social norms” also has a low mean score (M) of 3.96. In third place is “Lack of tourism skills training programs initiated by govt” with a mean score (M) of 2.212, which means it is not considered a major barrier by the community members. The statement having the lowest mean score (M) of 2.04 is “Lack of unity within community,” which implies it also cannot be considered as a barrier to community participation in the lack of unity within the Kinnaur and Spiti regions of Himachal Pradesh.

5. Discussion

Economic barriers emerged as one of the most influential dimensions negatively affecting local community participation in tourism development. Local community members identified the lack of financial resources, limited access to government financial support, concerns over unequal distribution of tourism income, and the seasonal nature of tourism earnings as major constraints limiting their ability to participate in tourism-related activities.

Institutional and governance-related barriers also emerged as major obstacles affecting community participation. The results showed that the respondents believed that important obstacles were the limited involvement of local communities in tourism planning and decision-making, lack of government support schemes, poor marketing and promotion of destinations, and the dominance of influential people in the tourism sector.

Another important dimension influencing community participation was knowledge and capacity-building barriers. According to respondents, major challenges included lack of awareness of tourism opportunities, lack of professional skills, lack of entrepreneurship and business management capacity, and lack of regular tourism training programs.

Infrastructure barriers were also considered a major barrier for community participation. Insufficient transport networks, parking facilities, public sanitation, telecommunication services, and health care infrastructure are factors that reduce tourism competitiveness and the willingness of local residents to engage in the tourism sector.

6. Conclusion

The findings of the study indicate that local communities are willing to contribute to tourism development; however, their participation is restricted by a combination of structural, institutional, economic, infrastructural, and socio-cultural barriers. The top 5 barriers identified by the community members during the study are *"lack of professional skills and training in tourism," "lack of financial backup," "seasonality of tourism income," "non-inclusion of local community in tourism planning," and "elite domination in the tourism sector."*

The findings indicate that awareness of the benefits of tourism does not necessarily lead to active participation. Although awareness about the economic and social benefits of tourism is relatively high among the respondents, they still reported moderate levels of participation because of the existence of multiple barriers. This finding adds to the empowerment theory in showing that **knowledge is a necessary but insufficient condition for community participation**. At the end it can be concluded that for effective participation, it is necessary to have financial capital, institutional support, better infrastructure, technical skills, and equal opportunities for participation in tourism-related activities. Tourism policies that favor local

participation in decision-making, capacity building, and equitable distribution of tourism benefits are more likely to achieve economic, social, cultural, and environmental sustainability in a region.

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