

# SUSTAINABLE PARADIGMS: OPENING FRONTIERS VIA ECO- TOURISM

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**ABSTRACT:** *The struggle for devising sustainable solutions in the panache and paradigm of tourism has been relentless in recent times. This has paved way to the concept of eco- tourism which serves as a means of quenching the urge of corporate environmental citizenship as an off-shoot of corporate social responsibility. This conceptual paper based on exploratory research aims at devising sustainable solutions on the lines of corporate environmental citizenship propelled by the prescripts of eco- tourism that sets a paradigm for the concept to flourish. The paper employs qualitative analysis of data derived from rich secondary source repositories by engaging systematic search methodology. Inductive approach has been applied after subjecting the literature review to (i) content analysis and (ii) conceptual framework analysis. The inferences so drawn in the ambit of this research paper hold implications not just for social advocates of corporate citizenship, policy makers and environmentalists but also for eco- tourists, tourism destination planning agencies and the aborigines of the tourism spots.*

**Keywords:** *Eco- tourism, Corporate environmental citizenship, Corporate social responsibility, Sustainable.*

## 1.0 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

To observe how a paradigm drift has buttressed eco- tourism with sustainability on the lines of corporate environmental stewardship.

## 2.0 INTRODUCTION

Sustainability is the demand of contemporary times because the human race has started struggling for survival within the given environmental limits. This paves way to a sense of corporate environmental stewardship that instills a feeling of conservation of natural habitat and resources. This paper encapsulates the prescripts of eco-tourism which defends the thought of sustainability on the lines of corporate environmental stewardship. Eco- tourism emphasizes sustainability in all its forms and supports an environment friendly form of tourism which little or zero impact on the ecology. Concept of reduction of carbon footprints has percolated in the realms of eco- tourism and is receiving applauds from the community which has begun to feel for protection and optimum utilization of natural resources. Positive influence on the economy of the local community has opened up frontiers for eco- tourism and its direct impact on the sustainability quotient is impeccable. Also, a recreational satisfaction brought about by eco-tourism is slowly gaining eminence. Long run empowerment of the indigenous population is greatly affected if eco-tourism and corporate environmental stewardship observe a neat alignment. This paper attempts to unfold this buttressing.

## 3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 3.1 PARADIGM SHIFT ON THE HORIZON OF ECO- TOURISM

In 1960's, a paradigm drift was noticed in the way humans and society conceptualized about tourism. The word 'paradigm' refers to the entire constellation of values, beliefs and techniques shared among community members (Kuhn, 1970, p. 175). Life cycle of contradictions leads to the genesis of paradigms. Paradigm persists until evidence contradicts its core beliefs. There has been a notion about tourists craving for environment based excursion in context with (a) surroundings (b) the impulse to positively influence the economy in a local region (c) the potential for ecological degradation (d) the bearings on community due to anthropogenic activities (iv) destruction and pollution of the environment. This paved way to the evolution of responsible tourism. In the direction, Hetzer, an academician, identified four vital 'pillars' or principles of 'responsible tourism' in line with eco-based tourism (Blamey, 2001, p. 5). He subsequently pointed out certain canons of 'responsible tourism'. These canons are follows:

- i. Minimum ecological impact
- ii. Maximum monetary benefits to host countries 'grassroots'
- iii. Least impact on – and extreme respect for, host cultures
- iv. Supreme 'recreational satisfaction' to the participating tourists (1965, p. n.a)

### 3.2 DECODING ECO-TOURISM & ITS CHARACTERISTICS

An established definition of eco-tourism by The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) reads as, 'Responsible travelling to natural expanses that conserve the ecological environment and at the same time mend the well- being of local people' (1990). Romeril first mentioned ecotourism in the academic literature of English-language. The tourism industry comprehended the profit potential of ecotourism in the 1990s, and subsequently the suffix 'eco' was cast-off by travel agents for the sake of marketing. In the definition stated by Buckley in 1994, an educational component appeared which stated that 'tourism which is sustainably-managed, nature-based, conservation-supporting, and environmentally-educated should be designated as ecotourism' (Buckley R. A., 1994, p. 661). As per the prescripts of Honey, actual ecotourism possess the following seven characteristics:

1. Minimizes ecological impact
2. Involves travel to natural destinations
3. Shapes environmental awareness
4. Develops respect for local cultures
5. Provides financial benefits and empowerment for local people
6. Delivers direct monetary benefits for conservation
7. Wires human rights and democratic movements through a common thread (2008, pp. 30-31)

### 3.3 BUTTRESSING SUSTAINABILITY WITH ECO-TOURISM

The idea of 'sustainable tourism' has, launched itself as one of the most impeccable element having a bearing on of tourism studies and scholarship (Bramwell & Lane, 2011). In drawing inferences from the analysis of the relationship between natural resources and sustainable tourism development, Briassoulis has devoted considerable space to landscape. He has also mentioned Jafari's definition of landscape as an effective provider of 'background tourism elements'. This was famously referred as the Brundtland report and its release fostered multilateral support for enhancing (i) awareness (ii) cooperation and (iii) balanced approach to development (Dowling, 1993). It read as "..... that meets the essentials of the present without compromising the capability of forthcoming generations to substantiate their own needs" (WCED, 1987, p.43). This took no time in resonating in the context of tourism. 'Sustainable tourism' began to get space in the (a) vernacular of governments (b) tourism related industries (c) tourism research reports to represent the cascade effect negative impacts of tourism that has piled over the past decades (Bramwell & Lane, 2012; Saarien, 2006). Sustainable tourism got its genesis alongside, but next to its parent paradigm of sustainable development. As the concept of sustainable tourism started gaining traction in the literature, some researchers have vehemently opposed the prescriptions of 'tourism-ification' (Hunter, 1995). Some researchers claimed that it ignored the broader facets of sustainable development while others simply claimed that the conceptualization of sustainable tourism was synonymous with environmentally responsible tourism (Lu & Nepal, 2009; Weaver, 2014).

### 3.4 FUSING ECO-TOURISM WITH CORPORATE ENVIRONMENTAL CITIZENSHIP (CEC)

Previous researches reveal that myriad of recreational interventions can lead to ecological imbalance and even low level environmental hazards and pollution causing factors have profound effect on the quality of visitor experiences. Measurement indices of sustainable tourism, relationship nexus among tourism elements form a more morally acceptable form of eco- tourism. Remedy for conservation of natural environment emphasizes on education as a means to improve upon environmental behavior and a tool to solve environmental concerns. Therefore, at this juncture it can be said that examining the nexus between education and responsible behavioral change becomes obligation rather than a choice to establish the link between environmental education & environmental behavior (Seth, 2017). Sustainable tourism can no longer be viewed as a building block for producing a specific kind of tourism product or an instrument for reducing carbon footprints. However, it deserved to be observed an overarching goal or paradigm that can be applied to a plethora of contexts (Lu & Nepal, 2009). When cognizance was taken of the fact that sustainable tourism was a broader term than niche or eco- tourism; cognitive minds began to critically examine mass tourism within the purview of sustainable tourism (Weaver, 2012). In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the concept of social responsibility & ethics began to be considered within the realms of sustainable tourism paradigm. Also, research into the genre of pro- poor tourism also began to gain eminence (Berke, 2002; Bramwell, 2007). Also, there was an alarmingly noticeable acceptance of the Environment Management System (EMS) by both corporate & industrial sectors (González-Benito and González-Benito, 2006). Modern business organizations are hunting for new age tools & techniques for management of ecological environment to improve upon organizational sustainability & impart a much needed competitive edge (Hart 1997; Lin et al., 2001). In order to create such a framework, it is imperative to put into practice pragmatic human resource management practices that comprise (a) inclusion of stringent recruitment strategies (Grolleau et al., 2012), (b) performance appraisal and unbiased reward systems (Jabbar et al., 2012) and (c) empowerment via training programs on green issues (Unnikrishnan and Hedge 2007).

### 3.5 JUSTIFYING ECO-TOURISM WITH SUSTAINABILITY

Since eco-tourism leads to conservation of natural habitat & natural resources, it is, therefore, considered as a kind of responsible tourism (Blangy and Wood, 1993, p.32). It has been an empirical observation that environmental attitudes are positively correlated with knowledge about ecology (Bradley, et al., 1999). Sustainable tourism (more precisely eco- tourism) ensures in meeting a bi-fold objective:

- (i) Minimizing the harmful impact of anthropogenic activities on natural environment
- (ii) Enhancing the economic viability of the tourism industry

Additionally, it also serves the purpose of conservation of natural resources & culture of the tourism destination so that the upcoming generations may draw mileage out of it. Kals et al. (1999) has been instrumental in providing evidence that the rational basis for an environment friendly behavior is non- existent. He has also enlisted certain nature predictive for the same. These include:

- a) Present & past touch points (experiences) with nature
- b) Degree of cognitive interest in nature
- c) Retaliation to non- stringent environment regulation norms
- d) Degree of emotional affinity

Carrus et al. (2005) justified the role of regional identity in shaping environment behavior by emphasizing the research on environmental psychology, behavior & tourism. The concept of tourism & sustainability work in orchestration to:

- (i) Generate a higher degree of environmental awareness
- (ii) Reinforce the pro- conservation values & catapult it in a positive direction
- (iii) Satisfy the individual's inherent curiosity about nature conservation regimes

Short- sightedness of government policies on reaping instant benefits without taking cognizance of the long term social & ecological implications is the prime reason for a disgruntled environment regulation (Marsden, 2000 & Ozen & Ozen, 2004). In a study by Inglehart (1995), it has been revealed, from a list of 43 countries, that developed nations attach priority to pecuniary concerns over environmental issues thereby

leading to a speedy impairment of natural environment. In the same research, it has also been pointed out that countries with statistically upper value of Gross National Productivity (GNP) per capita illustrated a better environmental stewardship.

### 3.6 WEAVING ECO-TOURISM AND CORPORATE ENVIRONMENTALCITIZENSHIP VIA CHORDS OF SUSTAINABILITY

Pro-conservation values get a momentum when it gets a boost from environmental education. It imprints the tourists with a positive element of caution in order to conserve ecological resources for future conservation & subsequently to treat tourism destination spots with a feeling of respect, care and caution (Orams and Hill, 1998). Kimmel, (1999 p. 40) has been instrumental in pointing out that 'Ecotourism holds immense potential to enhance environmental learning' and has also been suggestive explicitly stating that, 'magnified impetus on environmental learning as a part and parcel of ecotourism can possibly help prevent or reduce its adverse impacts'. When triumphed by contrary conditions like (i) deficits in budget (ii) foreign debt or (iii) a dipping GNP, it has been observed that there exists shameful compromise on the ecological standards maintained by governments of the developing nations. The momentum of enforcement of ecological standards often play a mute spectator in the light of foreign investment and an impeccable urge for enhancing the national productivity creeps in (Marsden, 2000). Within the pretext of CEC practices, business firms often began fretting over the financial survival (especially with reference to developing nations) and land up forgetting CEC practices and subsequently sidelining the principles of sustainability. At this intervening point, financial priority often takes a lead over environmental concerns and subsequently, at the societal level, its legitimacy loses its charm. With his research, Franzen (2003) furthered these excerpts by suggesting that a lower percentage of respondents of developing nations had exhibited better level of CEC in comparison to their developing counterparts. The respondents had clearly listed economic progress over environment conservation. Specific research on tourism studies conducted by Lee and Moscardo (2005) are indicative that tourists who are only exposed to environment friendly practices at tourist destination spots have lesser level of exhibited CEC (or pro- environmental behavior) in comparison to those tourists who were exposed to eco-education priorly. This has led to a vital inference that concerning supply side measures, it is the demand driven approaches that substantiate a key dimension of eco-tourism via CEC based on sustainability (Seth, 2017).

### 4.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- Type of Research Paper: Conceptual
- Research Design: Exploratory
- Applied Research Technique: Qualitative research technique applying a mixed approach of content analysis & conceptual framework analysis
- Research Deduction Mechanism: Inductive
- Data Mining Technique: Systemic search methodology employing specific key words
- Sources of data: Journals (both online & print), articles, magazines

### 5.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The paper suggests that eco-tourism and sustainability are interwoven to yield multitude of dimensional and pragmatic prescripts like:

- Opening frontiers for environmental awareness
- Reinforcement of pro-conservation values pertaining to nature
- Broadening government policies by inclusion of ecological and social implications due to increased carbon footprints
- Possible dependence of Gross National Productivity (GNP) on environmental stewardship
- Minimal compromise on environmental stewardship norms by reinforcing the ecological standards of nature maintenance
- Promotion of economic survival of the indigenous population by instilling a sense of corporate environmental citizenship & making it a part of eco-tourism
- Substantiating eco-tourism by legitimization of environmental standards at all levels of societal and government policy frameworks

### 6.0 CONCLUSION

Interjection of pro- conservation values in close association with environmental knowledge offers a two- way benefit. Firstly, it warns the tourists about adherence to environmental norms for sustainable future. Secondly, the eco- tourism site gets a cautious treatment as an offshoot of sustainability norms vying to develop a sense of corporate environmental stewardship. Community empowerment and a room for local indigenous population is automatically opened. The level of recreational satisfaction experienced by tourists that balances eco- tourism on the lines of sustainability is impeccable. Reduction of carbon footprints on the ecology develops a respect for nature and infuses positive feelings towards ecological conservation in all its realms. Sustainable tourism resonates with the local population to attract the policy makers, governments, social advocates of ecology, nature conservationists and tourism enthusiasts. Such a form of eco- tourism not only quenches the thirst for ecological protection but also buttresses corporate environmental stewardship in its full bloom. Cognitive interest in conservation strategies and an emotional affinity for Mother Nature would impart momentum to the concept of corporate environmental stewardship and a much needed impulse to maintain ecological balance and enjoy environment based tourism simultaneously.

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