



# Reconnoitering Local Community Perceptions of the Socio-Cultural Benefits of Alternative Tourism Development in the Hills – Case Study Beas Circuit Of Himachal Pradesh

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## Abstract

This study looks at how the local population of Beas Circuit in Himachal Pradesh views the socio-cultural advantages of developing alternative tourism. Based on primary data gathered from local community, of district Kullu and district Mandi the study indicates a high acknowledgement by them of the significant socio-cultural benefits that alternative tourism provides. Key studies show that alternative tourism strengthens societal cohesiveness, builds inclusive and resilient communities, and encourages respect and understanding amongst varied groups. These advantages underline alternative tourism's revolutionary potential and its ability to foster a more peaceful and cohesive society. Present study adds to the increasing corpus of research supporting community-centred, sustainable tourism approaches that give socio-cultural enrichment top priority.

Key Words : Alternative Tourism, Socio Cultural Benefits, Local Community

## Introduction:

This has been globally accepted that tourism leads to economic development and is attracted by the destinations where natural resources are predominant. But at the same time, the classic model of mass tourism is often linked to several problems, including socioeconomic inequality, environmental deterioration, and cultural commercialization. These challenges have led to the development of a sustainable and communities'-oriented model of tourism, a model that was directing the income and new jobs to targeted goals of economic benefits for tourism and the conservation of the environment and culture.

Tourism activities that occur in a specific and restricted geographic area, such as hills or mountains with unique features and attributes that are inherent to a particular landscape, topography, climate, biodiversity (flora and fauna), and local community" are classified as mountain tourism. It includes a wide variety of outdoor recreational and physical pursuits. (UNWTO). To help communities realize the potential of tourism to spur economic recovery and promote inclusive, sustainable growth, UNWTO is providing support as local communities get ready to welcome back visitors.

Due to its complementarity with other economic activities, GDP contribution, job creation, and ability to promote demand dispersal over time (fight seasonality) and a wider territory, mountain tourism has a high potential to stimulate social change and local economic growth.

The focus of alternative tourism, which includes a range of activities like ecotourism, cultural tourism, and adventure tourism, is on meaningful interactions and deep connections between travellers and the local people. This tourist concept is especially relevant in areas that are delicate and ecologically sensitive, such as the Himalayan highlands. The Beas Circuit is a prime example for investigating the possibilities of alternative tourism because of its stunning natural settings and diverse cultural heritage.

Himachal Pradesh is a state situated in the northern part of India, in the Himalayas which is famous for its stunning views, lush forests and species of wild life and vigorous aboriginal population. The Beas Circuit referring to the Beas River is one of the circuits of the state and covers several districts as an example of the micro-regional social and cultural and environmental differences. A regular stream of tourists has been visiting the area, which has led to a move toward alternative tourism strategies meant to lessen the negative effects of mass tourism. This study explores the local community's perspectives on the socio-cultural advantages of alternative tourist growth in Kullu, Manali and Mandi regions under Beas Circuit. The study intends to demonstrate the transformative potential of alternative tourism in promoting reciprocal appreciation, societal cohesiveness, and community resilience by comprehending the perspectives of 188 local community members. The results support approaches that give local communities' well-being and the preservation of cultural assets top priority, which adds to the conversation on sustainable tourism.

The study's findings, the methods used, and the effects of alternative tourism on the Beas Circuit's sociocultural fabric are all covered in the parts that follow. The research emphasizes the vital role that local community involvement plays in establishing sustainable tourism practices that enhance the social and cultural aspects of the area while also benefiting the economy through this case study.

## Review of Literature :

Every aspect of human life is affected by tourism which is not only an economic phenomenon but also has socio culture and environmental aspects to it, Gubaye Assaye Alamineh, Jeylan Wolyie Hussein, et al (2023) . For mountainous regions, the tourist industry serves as a social, economic, and cultural development instrument that improves the quality of life for the local populace. The severe weather, frequent natural disasters, and accessibility of mountainous regions present several difficulties that have an immediate impact on industrial production, infrastructural growth, and the local economy. In this situation, tourism might be a good substitute for promoting development in mountainous regions and raising the standard of living for nearby residents. Mountainous locations are becoming more and more alluring on a global scale because of the abundance of resources available for tourism development, including snow, a diversity of customs and cultures, mineral and hot springs, and a broad variety of wildlife and vegetation. Support for tourism's growth and long-term sustainability is directly impacted by local people' views and perceptions of its effects . Communities' attachment to and support for tourist growth may be shown in the analysis of perceived benefits , which also provides crucial information for future strategies aimed at maximizing the positive effects of tourism while minimizing any potential negative effects. Muresan IC, Harun R, Arion FH, Fatah AO, Dumitras DE. (2021) Sustainable tourism development can be achieved by considering local perspectives and encouraging community interaction. This will ensure a balance between economic gains and socio-cultural preservation. Furthermore, encouraging regional celebrations and fairs, as in Himachal Pradesh , Thakur, Aman (2022). Socioculturally, tourism can encourage intercultural dialogue and a feeling of pride and identity among the local populace. It can, however, also bring about societal injustices, cause havoc with conventional ways of life, and question cultural standards. To balance these forces, careful planning and community involvement are needed. Policymakers, stakeholders, and researchers must collaborate to strike a balance between economic growth, socio-cultural preservation, and environmental conservation in the quest of sustainable tourist development,

Agarwal, Sarika & Isha, Tejee & Lrappa, et al (2023). Although there is no correlation between quality of life and responsible tourism, there is a strong one between responsible tourism and local communities' quality of life when destination sustainability serves as a full mediator. Aikal, Liyani, Mohd, Rasdi (2022)

**Objective :** Exploring local community perceptions for the socio-cultural benefits of Alternative Tourism Development

## **Research Methodology :**

### **Study Area**

The study is based on the Kullu-Manali-Mandi district of the Beas Circuit. This area is a popular tourist destination in Beas Circuit. This area is geographically, culturally, and economically distinct from others, which create a suitable background for the study.

### **Research Design**

Descriptive research method was used to conduct a study aimed at collecting, organising and disseminating information on the perceptions and experiences of the local people. Due to this, the approach enabled the analysis of the specific phenomena under consideration in a most comprehensive manner to the researchers.

### **Sampling Method**

The type of random sampling was employed to make sure that the particular sample had reflected the larger population of Kullu-Manali-Mandi region. The strength about this method is that it minimizes the bias and increases the reliability of the outcome.

### **Sample Size**

Of the target study sample, a total of 188 local people participated in the study. Such sample size was used to get enough variations in the data but still being capable of deeper analysis.

### **Data Collection**

To gather the primary data the following technique was employed

Personal interview and structured questionnaire. The questions were carefully chosen in a way to obtain multiple details and responses pertinent to the overall goals of the study, regarding the affected individuals' demographics, experiences, and beliefs concerning several issues.

### **Instrument Development**

Before using the questionnaire, it was designed with concern to its clarity and relevance to the study. It was administered to a pilot sample of respondents from the study area in order to adjust the questions and enhance the merits of the instrument.

### **Data Analysis**

To present the research data, Descriptive statistics techniques were used in the study. The following steps were taken in the data analysis process.

The following steps were taken in the data analysis process:

**Data Cleaning:** This data collected was later cleaned for any missing or inconsistent outputs. It was ensured that any response that had not been fully or consistently answered was explained.

Descriptive Statistics: Summary measures including the measures of variability like frequency and percentage distributions were computed.

Visualization: Bar graphs, used in presenting the data in a more understandable form.

## Key Findings

**Table 1 Demographic Profile of sample population**

District		Gender		Age		
Mandi	Kullu	Male	Female	Less than 25	Between 26-50	Above 50
89 (47.30%)	99 (52.70%)	71(37.8%)	117 (62.20%)	77 (41%)	101 (53.7%)	10 (5.3%)

The age group of 26 to 50 accounts for the bulk of participants (53.7%), suggesting that middle-aged people are the most engaged group in this study.

Young people (those under 25) account for 41% of the respondents, a significant percentage that indicates a high level of interest or involvement among younger people.

With just 5.3% of individuals over 50, this age group is the least represented. This could imply that older people are less engaged in alternative tourism, less interested in its socioeconomic advantages, or even less able to take part in these kinds of studies.

Women may be more impacted by or interested in the socio-economic effects of tourism, based on the higher involvement rate of women in survey. A focus on developing more gender-inclusive policies and programs in the tourism development sector may result from this.

Given that most participants are between the ages of 26 and 50, programs and initiatives may be more suited to address the needs and preferences of this group. The youth's substantial presence also suggests that younger generations' goals and perspectives should be taken into account in future tourist policy, including by introducing more creative and environmentally friendly tourism practices.

**Table 2 Social Culture Benefits of Alternative Tourism**

Socio Cultural Benefits	Count	%
Preserve Local Culture and heritage	114	60.6%
Increased understanding and tolerance	133	70.7%
Increased awareness of environmental issues	112	59.6%
Strengthening communities	115	61.2%
Providing social services such as Education, Healthcare etc.	151	80.3%
Promoting intercultural understanding	125	66.5%
Revitalizing cultural practices	138	73.4%
Alternative Tourism gets Skills Set in youth	137	72.9%

Source : Data collected by Primary Survey

The substantial socio-cultural advantages of alternative tourism are valued by the local population. The following are the main ideas that emerged from the opinions of the community:

### **Preserve Local Culture and Heritage:**

According to 60.6% of respondents, alternative tourism contributes to the preservation of regional traditions and historical sites, hence safeguarding the community's distinct cultural legacy. The unique identity of the community is strengthened by this preservation.

### **Respect for One Another and Social Unity:**

As per 70.7% of respondents, alternative tourism implies the mutual understanding between people of different cultures and a change for the better of the prejudiced attitude of tourists towards the locals and vice versa. This exchange enhances the togetherness of the society; in turn boosting inclusiveness.

### **Environmental Awareness and Responsibility:**

A total of 59.6% agree that awareness of the environment is very important for responsible tourism. It inspires tourists and residents alike to assume accountability for conservation efforts.

**Encouraging Social Cohesion and Collective Identity:** According to 61.2% of respondents, promoting social cohesiveness and a shared identity inspires residents to take pride in their history and work together to accomplish common goals.

### **Delivery of Social Services:**

Eighty-three percent emphasize that by supporting the provision of fundamental social services like healthcare and education, alternative tourism improves community well-being.

**Cross-cultural Comprehension:** Most respondents (66.5%) agree that promoting cross-cultural understanding through alternative tourism facilitates the bridging of cultural divides by fostering empathy and tolerance for divergent opinions.

### **Restoration of Customary Knowledge:**

According to 73.4% of respondents, alternative tourism ensures the survival of traditional arts, crafts, and performances for coming generations by reviving them.

### **Youth Skill Development:**

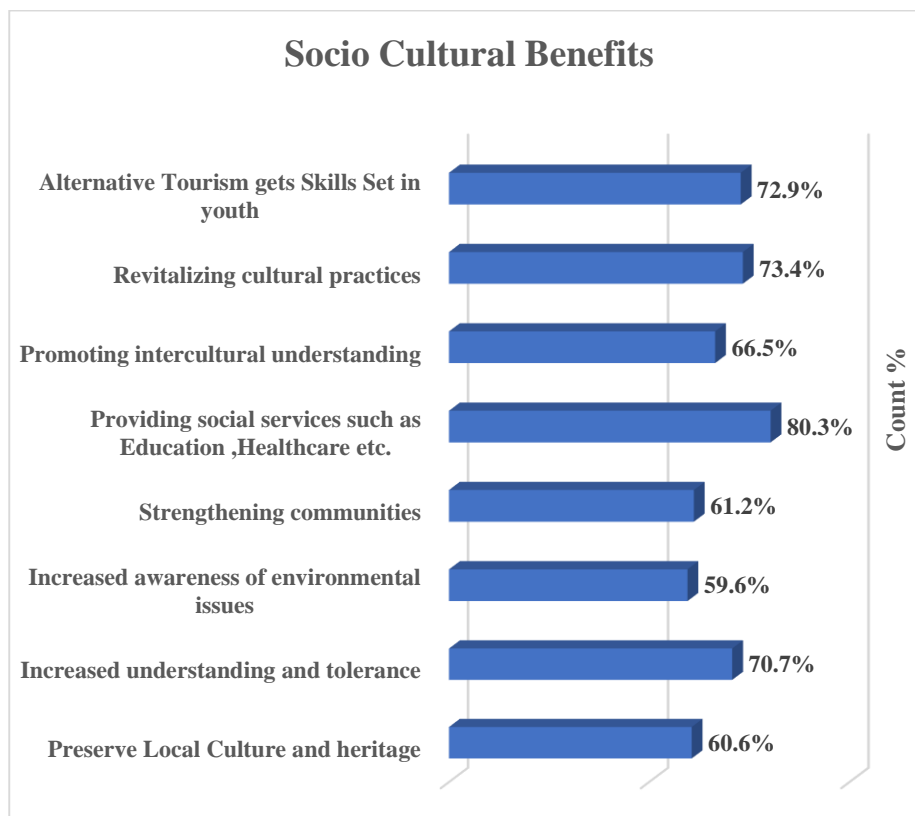
Alternative tourism, according to 72.9% of respondents, provides young people with chances for professional and personal growth while preserving local knowledge and skills.

## **Discussion**

The local community recognises that alternative tourism offers substantial socio-cultural advantages, including the promotion of mutual appreciation and understanding the enhancement of societal cohesion. The conservation of regional customs and historical landmarks, recognised by 60.6% of the population, guarantees the protection of local culture and heritage, thereby preserving the community's distinct identity. Furthermore, alternative tourism is acknowledged by 70.7% for fostering greater tolerance and comprehension through the facilitation of cultural exchange and interaction between tourists and residents. This promotes an atmosphere of inclusivity and tolerance, thereby enhancing societal unity. Furthermore, alternative tourism not only raises consciousness regarding environmental concerns (59.6%), but also fosters a sense of accountability for preservation among local inhabitants and tourists. As reported by 61.2% local communities are strengthened when social cohesion and collective identity are fostered, enabling residents to be proud of their heritage and

collaborate in pursuit of shared objectives. As emphasised by 80.3% of respondents, alternative tourism is also instrumental in delivering social services such as healthcare and education, thereby enhancing the community's well-being as a whole. Recognised by 66.5%, promoting intercultural understanding bridges cultural divides by fostering empathy and respect for diverse perspectives. Furthermore, 73.4% of respondents agree that revitalising cultural practices ensures the continuity of traditional arts, crafts, and performances for the benefit of future generations. In conclusion, alternative tourism promotes the enhancement of skills among young individuals, as reported by 72.9% of respondents. This is achieved through the provision of opportunities for both personal and professional development, all the while safeguarding local knowledge and expertise. The socio-cultural advantages of alternative tourism highlight its capacity to foster inclusive and resilient communities, thereby exerting a transformative influence.

**Figure 1 Social Culture Benefits of Alternative Tourism**



Source: Compiled by primary data

In Conclusion, the socio-cultural benefits of alternative tourism highlight its ability to build strong, inclusive communities, which has a transforming effect. As a potent instrument for sustainable and community-centered development in the Beas Circuit of Himachal Pradesh, alternative tourism fosters understanding amongst people, preserves cultural heritage, strengthens social solidarity, and offers chances for growth. The study's conclusions highlight the significant sociocultural advantages of alternative tourism as seen by the locals in Himachal Pradesh's Beas Circuit. The vast majority of people in the community acknowledge that alternative tourism promotes respect and understanding amongst people, strengthens social cohesiveness, and is essential to the preservation of local traditions and historical sites.

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