



# A Paradigm Shifts of Tourism Industry Toward Sustainability: A Study with Special Reference to Ladakh

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## Abstract

Union Territory of Ladakh lies in the foothills of Himalayas known by tourists for its pristine landscape, remote mountain beauty and unique culture including Tibetan Buddhism. The region remains disconnected by road for almost five months due to heavy snowfall at Zojila pass on Srinagar Leh national highway and Rothangla pass on Manali Leh National Highway. Due to its extreme weather the tourist season is short and restricted to 5 to 6 months on an average. In the last one-decade overtourism in Ladakh has put pressure on the fragile and sensitive ecology by exploitation of natural resources. Sustainable tourism is an alternate approach to mass tourism which reduces negative externalities and collateral damages. This paper explains the challenges and the impact of mass tourism on environment and society in Ladakh, and the need to shift towards sustainable tourism for the larger interest of Industry and stakeholders including tourist, locals, government.

**Keywords:** Sustainable tourism, Environment, Negative externalities, Mass Tourism

## Introduction

The late 20<sup>th</sup> Century saw the rise of the concept of sustainable development. Today more than One billion people are still living under extreme poverty and income inequality has been rising, at the same time continuous unsustainable production and consumption have totally ignored the environmental and socio-cultural aspect. The sustainability concept has continuously evolved and is still evolving. The evolution of sustainable marketing approach trace back to paradigm shift from production, sales and consumer centric approaches towards societal, environmentalism, green, and relationship marketing.

Tourism can become more sustainable when it takes full account of its current and future economic, social, and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment, and host communities. The future of marketing seems to be Sustainable Marketing, especially in case of products and services which are very sensitive towards socio-economic, cultural, and environment changes. This study focuses on the tourism industry in general and particularly in Ladakh. Union territory of Ladakh (the land of high and many passes) is a beautiful tourist destination well known for its beautiful landscape, unique culture and different adventure activities. Being a natural tourist destination the tourism industry of Ladakh is very sensitive and fragile and any changes in the eco-system can have a direct negative impact on the growth of the industry at the beginning and later the survival of the entire tourism industry is at stake.

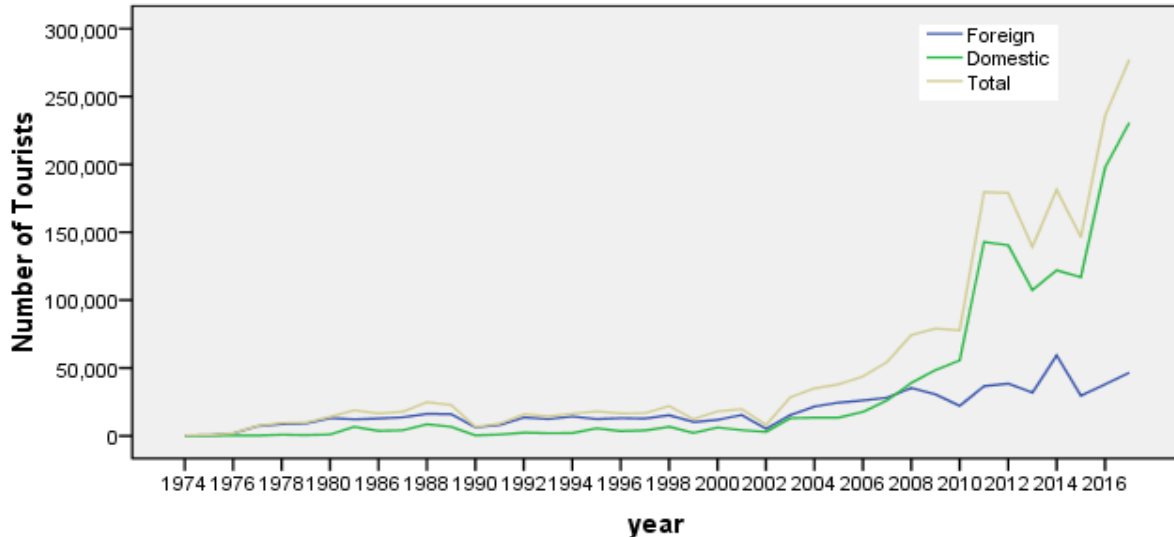
Ladakh was first opened for tourism in the year 1974 and it recorded 527 tourists, out of which 27 were domestic and 500 were foreign tourists. The growth of tourism industry of Ladakh took a boom a decade ago when few of the Bollywood films were shot in Ladakh. As a result, in 2010 the number of domestic tourists (55,685) outnumbered the foreign tourists (22,155). But as of August 2011, the number stood at 1,48,588 with 1,18,732 domestic tourists and 29,856 foreigners. In 2017 the total number of tourists **2,77,000** outnumbered the local population of **2,74,000**. The number of domestic tourists grew by 43% and foreign

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tourist by 28% in 2015-2017. In 2018 the number touches 327,366 out of which only 49,477 were foreign tourist and the rest were domestic tourist.

The recent unsustainable growth of tourism industry has put continuous pressure on the sensitive and fragile ecology of Ladakh causing both environmental and socio-cultural impact.



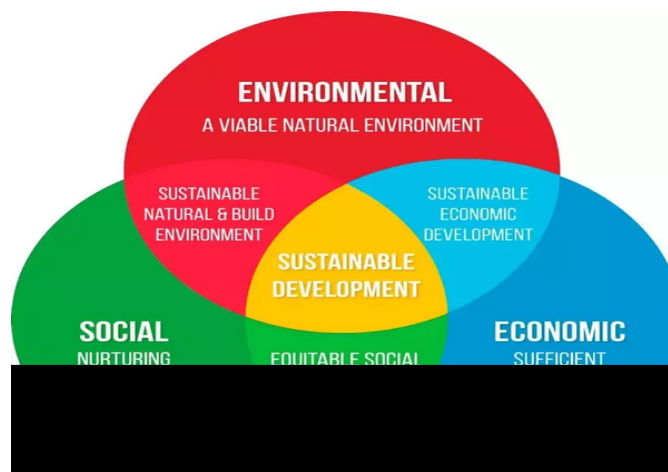
Source: Department of Tourism, Ladakh

### Research Methodology

The paper is a conceptual analysis based on reviews. Firstly, theoretical background of the sustainability is discussed in general and from tourism perspective. Cases of tourism industry destroying the ecological balance of places due to lack of planning, mismanagement, poor implementation and lack of protective measures are discussed to gauge what the possible impact of the unsustainable growth of tourism on the Ladakh. Articles from journals accessed through Jstor, Google Scholar and Social Sciences Citation Index were analysed to seek clarity on the recent developmental impacts on society and the environment.

### Organizing Framework

The concept of sustainability has evolved since 1987, especially through Agenda 21, the plan of action which emerged from the UN Conference on Environment and Development (Rio, 1992), and the plan of implementation from the World Summit on Sustainable Development (Johannesburg, 2002). Pritam (2012) Three dimensions of sustainable development are now recognized and underlined. These are:



1. Economic sustainability, which means generating prosperity at different levels of society and addressing the cost effectiveness of all economic activity. Crucially, it is about the viability of enterprises and activities and their ability to be maintained in the long term.
2. Social sustainability, which means respecting human rights and equal opportunities for all in society. It requires an equitable distribution of benefits, with a focus on alleviating poverty. There is an emphasis on local communities, maintaining and strengthening their life support systems, recognizing and respecting different cultures and avoiding any form of exploitation.
3. Environmental sustainability, which means conserving and managing resources, especially those that are not renewable or are precious in terms of life support. It requires action to minimize pollution of air, land and water, and to conserve biological diversity and natural heritage.

Thus, sustainable development means striking a balance between these three dimensions of economic, social and environmental aspects. It can take place only when all the stakeholders cooperate and contribute towards sustainable activities taking every stakeholder needs into consideration.

UNDP (2019) defined sustainable tourism as “tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities”. Within this principle, the sector features as targets in three of the 17 SDGs, namely SDG 8 on ‘Decent Work and Economic Growth’, SDG 12 on ‘Responsible Consumption and Production’ and SDG 14 on ‘Life below Water’. Yet, with its wide reach and impact, the sector can and must contribute – directly and indirectly – to the achievement of all 17 SDGs, from generating inclusive growth and eradicating extreme poverty to combating climate change, from fostering gender equality to conserving marine and terrestrial ecosystems, and from promoting dialogue among diverse cultures to enhancing mutual understanding and peace.

Today the need for sustainable tourism is on rise as the traditional tourism is focused only on economic benefit by neglecting socio-cultural and environmental aspect. It had been seen in past if not well managed, tourism can also contribute to destroy our unique cultural identity, environment and social structure. Therefore, in order to maximize tourism’s positive impact and mitigate its potential risks, the entire stakeholder including policymakers, companies, tourists and other tourism stakeholders, as well as locals need to work together to promote responsible and sustainable tourism across the world.

### **Review Discussion**

The growth of tourism Industry have always put the environment and society at the risk, but in the last two decade lots of work is been done towards ensuring a sustainable future. The third pole, Himalayan region is also facing the problem of climate change. In case of Ladakh, the rising temperature is backed by observations like fruits that do not mature in the past in some parts are now maturing, insects like mosquitoes which were not there can be seen. According to studies the temperature in Ladakh increased by three Degree Celsius between 1974 and 2008, while in the rest of India it increased by only one Degree Celsius as confirmed by Jayaraman Srinivasan of the Indian Institute of Science Bangalore. The region in recent past had faced and continuously facing environmental related problems such as cloud bust, frequent floods, less snowfall in winter, water shortages during summer season, contamination of ground water, drainage and waste management problems. Almost 90% of farmer who are dependent on glacier water for irrigation purpose were directly affected by climate change. Besides climate change the recent boom in the tourism industry has also put pressure on water resources. A study by Ladakh Ecological Development Group (Ledeg) found that the average Ladakhi uses 21 litres of water per day, while a tourist needs as much as 75 litres. One of the major reasons is the use of dry (compost) toilets by local which requires zero consumption of water. Traditionally people of Ladakh used to recycle everything which results into zero waste. Even the human waste is used as manure for agriculture purposes and the farming used to be 100% organic.

The tourism also had a negative impact on socio-cultural lifestyle of locals, where the region is losing its culture identity through commercialisation. The gap between have and have-nots is on rise as only few individual livings in cities are making all the profit. Research papers on the social impact of tourism, the

change in the name of modernity where the locals start losing interest in their traditional culture and try to adapt to the western and Indian culture through continuous interaction with tourists as discussed by the Norberg Hodge H (1991). Tashi (2013) in its study titled “Contemporary Ladakh: Culture, commodification and tourism” has studied how the tourism industry is affecting the lifestyle of local people. He has discussed about the commoditisation of culture in Ladakh. Over the period because of tourism industry Ladakh has lost the meaning and the significance of the local events and the festivals as almost all the festival in different parts of Ladakh which used to celebrate in winter are now moved to tourist summer season. All monasteries see their festival as a source of income as they charge tickets from tourist for sitting in the front section of the monastery during the festival. The study highlighted the problem on inauthentic culture and the commodification.

Only few scholars and academicians studied the socio-culture and environmental impact of tourism in Ladakh. Eppler (1983), Erdmann F (1983), Singh J P (1984) discussed about the impact of tourism on society in terms of economic changes and cultural changes. Joldan E (1985) wrote essays about Ladakh, which includes an essay on tourism and its impact. The study of Page J (1986) discusses about the traditional Ladakhi society which has much to offer to the rest of the world. But things have changed drastically over the last two decades in Ladakh and it is high time industry moves towards sustainability.

### **Corrective Policy and Measures:**

Ladakh needs to restrict the number of visitors by issuing limited number of permits and totally prohibiting tourism activities in the sensitive areas. Scattering the demand from peak season to others non-season would reduce the pressure on natural resources like water. These should be supported by promoting other activities and events and festivals during non-seasons such as Ladakhi New Year “Losar”. De-marketing of mass tourism and marketing of alternative tourism like home stay reduces the pressure on natural resources. Introduce a code of conduct for visitors with the aim of promoting respect for local culture, places and people. Coordination and implementation of sustainable polices by different tourism stakeholders and awareness programs for local as well as tourists are required.

### **Conclusion**

Collaborations and cooperation among different stakeholders in designing and implementing sustainable policies could be a vehicle to achieve a balance development of social, economic and ecological domains (Poudel et al, 2013). The overtourism in the recent past had been a challenge for the locals and it will continue to be if actions are not taken to manage the flow of tourism in the region. Traditional mass tourism has short term goals of earning maximum revenue with maximum number of tourist but only sustainable tourism will ensure that the revenue and industry will survive in long run.

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