

Towards Sustainable Tourism? Analysis of stakeholder perspectives in Baltistan, Pakistan.

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<p>Abstract</p> <p>The importance of the tourism industry is explicitly highlighted in United Nation's SDGs. Sustainable tourism development is recognized as a useful tool for poverty reduction, social justice, environmental protection, and gender equality. Tourism is also one of the fastest-growing industries, providing employment opportunities to a large number of the world population, especially to the local people; women; and youth. The tourism industry has shown tremendous growth during the last six years in Baltistan. Therefore, to receive long-term benefits, detailed research was needed to study the impacts of tourism growth on the sustainability of the industry. Despite the immense tourism potential, the tourism industry of Baltistan has remained neglected by the Government of Pakistan, due to the disputed status it has. The tourism sector can bring revolutionary changes to the life of local inhabitants by formulating effective tourism policies. The scientific analysis based on actual market knowledge is essential to take right decisions. For this purpose, to generate local tourism knowledge, this study identifies the key stakeholders of the Baltistan tourism industry, the importance of tourism for the local population, the nature of current practices, and the problems preventing sustainable tourism growth from the perspectives of important stakeholders. Furthermore, this paper also provides detailed and relevant tourism knowledge from the literature, which include the evolutionary stages of tourism; the concept of sustainable tourism; and how tourism contributes to sustainable development. Qualitative methods were employed to conduct this research. For data collection, structured and unstructured interviews; and fieldwork methods were used. This paper concluded that increased tourism activities are generating several problems posing threat to the sustainability of the industry. Lack of research in this field was found the biggest hurdle in the formulation of effective policies. Lastly, this study recommends that constant monitoring of impacts is needed, and necessary remedial interventions are essential to reap the full benefits of tourism for a maximum period.</p>	
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ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Description
AKCSP	Agha Khan Cultural Support Program
AKDN	Agha Khan Development Network
AKRSP	Agha Khan Rural Support Program
BATO	Baltistan Association of Adventure Tour Operators
BCDF	Baltistan Cultural Development Foundation
CPEC	China Pakistan Economic Corridor
FCR	The Frontier Crimes Regulations
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
PIA	Pakistan International Air
PTDC	Pakistan Tourism and Development Corporation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
WW2	World War 2

FIGURES

FIGURE 1	Stakeholder Identification using power-interest matrix.....	32
FIGURE 2	Multiplier effects of tourism in Baltistan	36
FIGURE 3	GB Photographers Association cleaning awareness campaigns	40
FIGURE 4	Pictures of two newly discovered tourist sites near Skardu, without road access.....	41
FIGURE 5	A waste dumping site in Skardu, adjacent to the River Indus.....	45

TABLES

TABLE 1	Representation of sampling for semi-structured interviews.....	22
TABLE 2	Problem identification in tourism industry of Baltistan.....	43

CONTENT

1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Research Objectives.....	3
1.3 Research Questions	3
2 CONTEXT.....	4
2.1 Introduction to Baltistan.....	4
2.2 Potential of Tourism in Baltistan	4
3 LITERATURE REVIEW	6
3.1 Evolution of tourism	6
3.2 Evolutionary Stages of modern tourism.....	7
3.3 Defining tourism	8
3.4 Defining sustainability.....	9
3.5 Sustainable tourism.....	9
3.6 Tourism: a resource-based industry.....	10
3.7 Multiplier effects of tourism.....	11
3.8 Tourism and SDGs	12
3.9 Restoration of Shigar Fort: a successful local example of sustainable tourism	13
4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	14
4.1 Stakeholder Theory.....	14
4.1.1 Stakeholder identification in tourism	15
4.1.2 Stakeholder Collaboration	17
4.1.3 Stakeholder participation in decision making.....	18
5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	20
5.1 Sampling	21
5.2 Interviews	22

5.3 Types of interviews	23
5.3.1 Structured interviews.....	23
5.3.2 Unstructured interviews	24
5.3.3 Semi-structured interviews	24
5.4 Field work	25
5.4.1 Types of field roles.....	25
5.4.2 Field notes.....	26
5.5 Data analysis and coding.....	27
5.6 Ethics of the research.....	29
5.7 Data collection challenges	29
5.8 Positioning/Reflexivity	30
6 FINDINGS	31
6.1.1 Primary stakeholder identification.....	32
6.1.2 Secondary Stakeholder identification.....	32
6.2 Importance of tourism industry.....	33
6.2.1 Strategic location and CPEC.....	33
6.2.1.1 Personal reflection.....	33
6.2.2 Competitive advantage.....	34
6.2.3 Multiplier effects of tourism.....	35
6.2.4 Dependency	36
6.3 Perceptions on socio-economic and environmental impacts	37
6.3.1 Environmental changes	37
6.3.2 Socio-cultural changes	37
6.3.3 Socio-economic changes.....	38
6.3.4 Current practices accelerating or protecting sustainable tourism growth	39

6.3.4.1 Beneficial practices.....	39
6.3.4.2 Damaging practices	42
6.4 Problems.....	43
6.4.1 Limited understanding of the concept “sustainable tourism”	43
6.4.2 Environmental degradation.....	44
6.4.3 Cultural destruction	46
6.4.4 Policy issues	46
6.4.4.1 Lack of stakeholder participation in decision making.....	47
6.4.4.2 Issues related to policy implementation	47
6.4.4.3 Lack of inter-departmental cooperation.....	47
6.4.4.4 Unavailability of tourism statistics	48
6.4.5 Lack of financial resources.....	48
6.4.6 Law and order.....	49
6.4.6.1 Internal factors.....	49
6.4.6.2 External factors.....	49
6.4.7 Infrastructural Problems.....	50
6.4.7.1 Poor transport infrastructure	50
6.4.7.2 Unplanned constructions.....	51
6.4.7.3 Poor communication system	51
6.4.7.4 Poor service infrastructure	52
6.4.7.5 Electricity issue.....	52
6.4.8 Inadequate human resource development	53
6.4.8.1 Lack of training opportunities	53
6.4.8.2 Lack of trained staff.....	54
6.4.8.3 Owners’ unprofessional attitudes	54
6.4.8.4 Missing role of women.....	55

7 CONCLUSION..... 56

 7.1 Recommendations 60

8 REFERENCES62

1 INTRODUCTION

A remarkable growth in the tourism industry of Baltistan has been observed in the last five years, 2015 onwards. The number of tourist arrivals increased from 50,304 in 2014 (Najam et al. 2019, p.28) to 1.72 million in 2019 (Express Tribune, 2019). Based on these statistics as well as the tremendous tourism potential in the area, it is highly expected that the number of tourist arrivals is going to multiply every passing year in the future. In addition, the overall increase in Pakistan's domestic tourism, CPEC, upgradation of tourism infrastructure, and the emergence of online tourism platforms are also important factors resulting in tourism expansion in the region.

Tourism is considered one of the fastest-growing industries after fuel and chemicals with 10% of the world GDP share (UNWTO, 2019). In addition, the sector provided 235 million jobs in 2010 and was expected to generate 295 million employments by 2019 (ILO, 2010). World tourist arrivals are projected to reach 1.8 billion by 2030 with a 43 million arrival increase every year (UNWTO, 2017). Despite the decrease in the global unemployment rate, the number of unemployed workers is expected to increase by one million per year; reaching 174 million by 2020 due to the increase in the global workforce (ILO, 2019). Interestingly, the number of employments tourism industry provide is higher than the total number of global unemployment which is 225 million and the demand is likely to rise in future.

Tourism is also regarded as a useful tool in poverty reduction and economic growth due to the multiplier effects it has on other industries. It is mainly operated by small and medium-sized local firms and enterprises (Jansen, 2017, p.14) hence create jobs and income opportunities for the local population. Although tourism has a significant role to play in achieving sustainable economic growth, it also has severe negative socio-economic and environmental impacts (Byrd, 2006, p.6) which demand scientifically analysed research-based tourism policies (Kimbu, 2010) and stakeholder's cooperation. According to Mc Cool (2012, p.124), the social, environmental, and economic aspects are important for the long-term survival of an industry.

I have a personal motivation to explore tourism, as my family also have a tourism company and I want to contribute to the improvement of the industry. My initial idea was to investigate the role of tourism in poverty reduction from the region. But after a thorough discussion with my thesis supervisor, I realized the importance of 'sustainability' in tourism industry. The idea motivated me to switch my research topic from poverty reduction to the environmental and sustainability aspects of tourism which are, relatively, more important and beneficial to achieve long-term

economic gains from the industry. The negative impacts of increased tourism activities are also evidently visible in Baltistan region in the form of environmental degradation, natural resource depletion, and socio-cultural changes occurring in the local society. The tourism industry in Baltistan is highly dependent on the unique and abundant natural resources it has bestowed upon. Depleting these resources is posing a serious threat to the future of tourism in the region which is considered a backbone for the local economy.

The importance of tourism sector is also explicitly highlighted in United Nations Sustainable Goals emphasizing countries to develop policies promoting sustainable tourism to bring peace, prosperity, and equality in the world. The 17 SDGs were agreed by all United Nations member countries in 2015 committing to end poverty, fight inequality and injustice, and environmental degradation by the end of 2030. Tourism creates millions of jobs globally, boosts the revenue of the economy, develop infrastructure, brings equality, and demands environmental protection for continuous growth. In this regard, the role of tourism industry is considered important in achieving all SDGs targets directly or indirectly. For example, the number and income of female workers in tourism industry are higher than males. Hence, provides work opportunities to women, especially in developing countries (ILO, 2010 and UNWTO, 2019). Moreover, tourism is one of the largest contributors of greenhouse gas emissions i.e., 8% of total emissions (Sustainable Travel International), thus, sustainable tourism development helps to protect the environment and reducing global warming. Also, the industry has a significant contribution in achieving SDG 13, 14, and 15 due to the deep relation it has with the natural environment. Furthermore, “goals 8, 12 and 14 highlights the sector’s potential to contribute to economic growth, social inclusion and environmental preservation” (Jansen, 2017, p.14).

Sustainable tourism is an activity in which communities can achieve social and economic benefits for a maximum period of time, without causing harm to their natural resources. The industry can only be sustained by paying attention to all aspects of sustainable tourism i.e., environmental, economic, and social. How to sustain and what needs to be sustained for the development of Baltistan’s tourism industry are the basic questions this research will try to answer. In this regard, the role of stakeholders in decision making and effective planning, is important. Stakeholder participation is often effective in solving multiple issues (Byrd, 2006, p.6). Decisions taken without stakeholder involvement does not reflect the real issues of the community (Ibid). However, Jules (1995, p.1255) emphasised the importance of selecting suitable stakeholders and choosing the right participatory methods to achieve the goal of sustainable development.

Due to the disputed status of Baltistan, it has remained neglected by the government of Pakistan in the past. No serious research has been conducted to make effective tourism policies for the development of the local tourism industry. Therefore, due to the lack of comprehensive tourism planning, there is a huge gap between the actual potential and the growth of tourism in Baltistan. Moreover, the negative impacts of mass tourism activities are likely to pose a serious threat to the sustainability of the industry. The expected growth of the tourism industry in the region demands effective policies to achieve long-term socio-economic gains. The sole purpose of this research is to produce local knowledge regarding stakeholder identification, importance of the industry for the local community, challenges to achieve sustainable tourism goals, and suggesting recommendations to help policymakers in making effective policies for sustainable tourism development in the area.

1.1 Research Objectives

To investigate the stakeholder perspectives and problems related to the growth of sustainable tourism in Baltistan.

1.3 Research Questions

1. How do different stakeholders perceive the importance and main characteristics of tourism in Baltistan?
2. How do different stakeholders perceive the socio-economic and environmental impacts of tourism in the area of Baltistan?
3. What are the main problems hindering sustainable tourism growth in Baltistan?

2 CONTEXT

2.1 Introduction to Baltistan

Baltistan is located in the north of Pakistan sharing borders with China, India, Afghanistan, and the Pakistani province Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. According to the census 2017, it has a population of 1.4 million and an area of approximately 7300 square kilometres. Historically, it was declared a part of Jammu and Kashmir by the British government under the treaty of Amritsar, in 1848 (Sökefeld, 2014, p.12). After the decolonization of the British empire, Baltistan got independence by defeating Dogra armies in 1947 and decided to become a part of the newly formed state, Pakistan. Since its independence, the region of Gilgit and Baltistan was not paid any attention and poorly neglected by the Government of Pakistan. The British law, FCR, was enforced and a political agent was nominated in the region leaving people without any constitutional and civil rights. The region, including Gilgit and Baltistan, was called Northern Areas of Pakistan till 2009 when the government of the Peoples Party brought reforms in the constitutional status of the region through the presidential order. The Government of Pakistan introduced Gilgit-Baltistan Empowerment and Self-Governance Order, 2009 on August 28, in which the region was given the name Gilgit-Baltistan (Altaf, 2012). Due to the unavailability of road linkages with other parts of Pakistan local population was dependent on limited farming and live stocks for their livelihood. The first road, connecting Baltistan to other parts of Pakistan, was constructed by the Pakistan army and Chinese engineers in 1982 (Pamir Times, 2017). The distance between Islamabad (the capital of Pakistan and the nearest big city to the region) and Baltistan is around 900 km and used to take a month time to reach Islamabad before the construction of the road. The development process in the region was gradually started after the construction of the road with the inclusion of local people through their participation in social, economic, and political activities in the country.

2.2 Potential of Tourism in Baltistan

Due to the unique geographical features, Baltistan is considered a hidden paradise for nature and adventure lovers. The rich cultural heritage, clean environment, highest mountains and plateaus, longest non-polar glaciers, wildlife, stunning lakes, rivers, and the cold desert are the main features of the local tourism industry. Shah (2019, May, 12) mentioned in a newspaper, that according to the PTDC statistics, in 2017, there were recorded 1.7 million visitors' arrivals in Gilgit-Baltistan which was more than triple the number the previous year (Dawn, 2018). Moreover, the number of tourist arrivals in the region were expected to increase to 2.5 million

visitors in 2018 contributing more than Rs. 450 million to the economy. Whereas in 2014 the number of tourists in Gilgit-Baltistan was only 54000 recorded, Saqib et al, (2019). Besides the dramatic increase in the number of tourists in recent years, many other factors support the assumption that tourism and hospitality sector hold all the potential to become a major source of income for the people of Gilgit-Baltistan. These factors include the up-gradation and widening of the Gilgit-Skardu Road, better security situation in the country, tourism growth worldwide (International tourist arrivals worldwide grew 4% in 2019 to reach 1.5 billion, UNWTO, 2019), increase in domestic tourism, and the initiation of the mega-project CPEC. Baltistan possesses tremendous attraction for foreign and local tourists. Various types and diverse ranges of natural beauty can be found in this small region. Five out of 14 highest peaks above 8000 meters, including the second-highest peak "K-2" and 101 other peaks above 7000 meters are also located in the region. Baltistan is known as a climber paradise receiving a large number of adventure tourists and climbers from all over the world. The region is also an interjection point of the three world famous mountain ranges The Himalaya, Karakorum, and Hindukush.

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, I will present literature review on the evolutionary stages of modern tourism, the importance of the concept “sustainability” in tourism, the importance of tourism in achieving sustainable development goals, and the role of tourism in bringing sustainable development. These are relevant for my study to identify the main problems related to the sustainable growth of the industry in Baltistan, the role of tourism industry in expediting development process in the region, and the significance of tourism industry for the overall development of the area.

3.1 Evolution of tourism

Ever since the creation of mankind travelling has remained a necessary part of human lives, although the purpose of travelling has been changing over the periods according to the time, needs and available resources of the specific societies and the individuals. For example, in earlier societies the travel motivations were only limited to the fulfilment of basic survival needs like food (hunting), water and safety. Later, in agricultural societies, many other factors formed the basis for short and long-distance travelling such as trade, wars, migration, education, medical treatment, religion etc. Rome and Jerusalem were visited by a large number of travelers every year for both pleasure and religious purposes and Romans used to move to the hills in summer to escape hot weather (Butler, 2015, p.17). Pausanias, a Greek traveler, wrote one of the first travel guides in ten volumes between 150 to 180 A.D, in which he described the culture, religious art, and the geography of the places he visited in Greek (Elsner, 1992, p.4). In short, travel was mostly limited to fulfil only essential duties because it was considered an extremely hard and unsafe activity.

The emergence of mass tourism is rooted in the industrial revolution. The advancement and expansion in rail infrastructure with the invention of the steam engine, made travelling easy and accessible for all age and sex, and, at least for the wealthy people; the newly formed bourgeoisie class because they had time and money to spend on exploration and relaxation tours (Gierczak, 2011, p. 276). Modern tourism became an organized commercial activity in the seventeenth century in Europe fueled by the emergence of middle classes and urban societies alongside the growth in the agricultural sector (Walton, 2009, p.786). In the beginning, tourism was limited to only a few people who were able to afford travelling but with the passage of time, as travelling became easy, affordable, and accessible to the general public, tourism industry started to grow very fast and became one of the fastest-growing economic sectors in the world (UNWTO). Walton (2009, p.784) mentioned that according to Pattullo’s book, *History and Power* (1996), the nineteenth century’s tourism is rooted in

the advent of air services, tourism enterprises, and resort developers recognizing tourism as an important indicator of economic development. Smith (1989, p.1) held the opinion that reason tourism increased after World War 2 was the availability of free time for the people in the Western world and U.S, as the number of working hours decreased from sixty to forty-eight hours and the number of paid holidays increased from two weeks to more than three or four weeks.

3.2 Evolutionary Stages of modern tourism

Jafar Jafari is considered a pioneer in tourism studies, he has made a significant contribution in this field of knowledge. He has provided a comprehensive view on the factors influencing the perception and evolution of tourism after the second world war which he termed as advocacy, cautionary, adaptancy, and knowledge-based platforms (Xiao, 2013, p.2). After WW2, tourism emerged as a highly profitable industry making an important contribution to countries' economies worldwide. The first perspective, advocacy platform, refers to the period of 1950s and 60s when tourism started to be recognized as an important sector for economic growth because of its labour-intensive characteristic and the multiplier effect it has on other sectors (Jafari et al, 1990. pp. 470). Key tourism sectors identified in Finland's Tourism Strategy (2020), include accommodation, transport, travel agencies, food, recreational services, and cultural services. Furthermore, it has a multiplier effect on several other industries such as real estate, security, construction, ICT services, food production and processing, waste management, accounting and auditing firms. Tourism received strong support from the advocacy platform recognizing it as an important industry for economic growth.

The view was highly criticized by scholars during the 1970s. Advocators of cautionary perspective noted that the benefits are mostly limited to the big parties, leads to short-term unskilled jobs, and observed negative impacts on the environment, heritage, and local culture. They identified the negative impacts of tourism on the economy, society, and the environment hence discouraged tourism-led development. The third perspective, adaptancy platform, was an optimistic attitude towards tourism industry. Its supporters accepted the criticism made by cautionary platform supporters but emphasized finding solutions for the problems identified by the cautionary platform. It provides alternatives to tourists that encourage utilization of local resources, environmental protection, and enhance communication between the hosts and the guests (Fuchs et al., 2013, p.123). Finally, the knowledge-based platform started gaining importance in 1990, suggesting knowledge as the most important foundation for tourism development (Fuchs et al., 2013). According to this platform scientific analysis, based on actual knowledge,

is needed for the formulation and implementation of planning and strategies for tourism development (Kimbu, 2010, p.35).

Knowledge became a vital element for tourism planning as Jafari realized that no effective policies and strategies can be made without factual knowledge. In this context, we can argue that each tourist destination needs different policies and strategies according to the needs and demands of a specific destination. It requires governments to invest in tourism research to produce local knowledge for scientific analysis.

3.3 Defining tourism

Earlier definitions of tourism neglected many aspects of tourism, limiting tourism to only recreational activities and pleasure. Such as Smith (1989, p.1) defines a tourist as “a temporarily leisured person who voluntarily visits a place away from home for the purpose of experiencing a change.” Franklin (2003, p.5) quotes, Buckart and Medlik definition, that tourism involves a temporary movement of people from their home (where they normally live) to other places. Franklin (2003, p.24), recognized tourism as a positive aspect of modern life, “tourism is certainly a particular type of extension of modern life, but it is a celebration of it rather than an escape”. Wall & Mathieson (2005, p.1) included the service receivers and service providers both in the definition, according to them tourism includes short-term travelling away from home and workplace as well as the services and the facilities they receive to fulfil their needs during their stay. World Tourist Organization provided a comprehensive definition:

“a social, cultural and economic phenomenon which entails the movement of people to countries or places outside their usual environment for personal or business/professional purposes. These people are called visitors (which may be either tourists or excursionists; residents or non-residents) and tourism has to do with their activities, some of which involve tourism expenditure”,

International Labour Organization’s definition is almost similar to the WTO definition, the only addition is the duration of stay of travelers to other destination outside their usual environment for maximum one consecutive year. A holistic definition of tourism is provided by Goeldner and Charles (2012, p.6) that covers all the important aspects including all important stakeholders involved in tourism. They defined tourism as “the processes, activities, and outcomes arising from the relationships and the interactions among tourists, tourism suppliers, host governments, host communities, and surrounding environments that are involved in the attracting and hosting of visitors”.

The earlier definitions of tourism were restricted to travel and leisure. Tourism was considered a movement of people for the sake of fun and pleasure only. Other important aspects of travelling (health, business, education, etc.) were not considered a part of tourism activities. Later, all kind of travel people undertakes to other destination were included in the tourism definition. It was also realized that not only tourists the service providers, the host communities, the local governments, and the local environment are also an important part of the tourism industry, who are affected by tourism activities, directly or indirectly.

3.4 Defining sustainability

Cambridge Dictionary defines sustainability as “the quality of being able to continue over of a period of time”. Similarly, in Oxford Dictionary sustainability is defined as “the ability to be maintained at a certain rate or level”. A literal meaning of sustainability according to Becker (2012, p.9) is the ability to keep going, to keep up, to maintain. Becker further linked sustainability to the ability of a system, entity, or a process for its continuation, or “the ability of humans to maintain a certain system, entity, or process”. The unsustainable development has caused extreme damage to the human and the environment in the past, for example, climate warming, natural resource depletion, poverty, hunger, etc. Therefore, today, sustainability has become an integral component of the development process, whether it is economy, environment, or any other sector of life. Development and environmental protection are the most important features of the process of sustainability. It requires the continuation of the development process by protecting natural resources and the environment for future generations. UN defines sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. Sustainability is considered highly important for the continuous growth of the industries as well as for the protection of the environment and socio-cultural heritage of the society. Sustainability involves long-term industrial conservation and its links with social, economic, and environmental issues in a larger context (McCool, et al. 2001, p.130).

3.5 Sustainable tourism

Tourism is closely connected to the natural environment, economy, and culture of the society hence demands adopting principles of sustainability for its continuous growth. Defining sustainability, nowadays, is a prerequisite for policymakers while formulating tourism policies. According to various definitions, tourism involves travelling; natural resource consumption; and leisure, cultural, and business activities. Whereas sustainability refers to the ability of humans to maintain and protect resources for the continuation of a system and a process for a long period of

time. In this regard, the definition of sustainable tourism seeks to explain the relationship between sustainability principles and tourism activities. The term sustainable tourism gained importance as the environmental and social impacts of tourism activities were noticed in many popular tourist destinations. Tourism leaves both positive and negative impacts on the community, economy, and environment (Byrd, 2006, p.6). According to Kamara (2016, p.16), the impacts of environmental degradation on the economy were identified by many researchers which formed a basis for the concept of sustainable tourism. Mc Cool, (2012. p.124) argued about the legitimacy of the industry for using it as an economic development tool; due to the rapid growth in the size of the industry, the impact is high on the environment

According to the World Tourist Organization, sustainable tourism is defined 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”. In the context of SDG8, decent work, International Labour organization added the aspect of social justice in the definition. According to ILO (2011, p.17) “Sustainable tourism is composed of three pillars: social justice, economic development, and environmental integrity.” Ensuring decent work, income generation, environmental protection, and providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders are the key elements of sustainable tourism.

“Sustainable development is a process that allows development to be achieved without degradation or depletion of those resources on which it is based” (Najdeska & Rakicevik, 2012. p. 211). In this regard, Richards & Hall (2000, p.7), wrote that sustainability is important because communities are dependent on the available resources they have, to support themselves. The authors also mentioned that sustainable tourism should enable members of the community living in a tourist destination to participate in decision-making about tourism which affects their lives (Richards & Hall, 2000, p.17).

3.6 Tourism: a resource-based industry

Tourism is highly dependent on the available resources in the region, especially natural resources in underdeveloped and economically weak tourist destinations. Resources are precious, unique and non-replaceable assets of an organization “due to their cultural and historical significance, and are sustainable to enable organizations to use these resources for competitive advantage to generate revenue/profit” (Rashid, 2020, p.3). Barney (1991. P.101) stated, firms utilize all their resources to create and implement suitable strategies to improve their performance. He identified three categories of resources i.e., physical, human, and

organizational resources. The efficient utilization of these three categories of resources provides a competitive advantage to the organizations. Horng et al., (2012, p.797) mentioned that unique utilization of the available resources is needed to boost the profit. Also stressed to assess government policies for making suitable marketing strategies to achieve competitive advantage.

It highlights the importance of Jafari's knowledge-based platform, as discussed earlier, that actual knowledge is needed for scientific analysis which is important to implement and formulate better strategies. Especially in poverty-stricken areas, where tourism industry is the only source of income for the local population and highly dependent on the local natural resources, the importance of preservation and utilization of the resources is much higher. A study from Pingbin et al. (2012, p.504) found that the exploitation of tourism resources is an effective strategy for poverty reduction. The effective utilization of resources is essential for a firm or an organization or a region to gain a competitive advantage for long-term growth. Resources are unique, valuable, and sometimes non-replaceable; therefore protection of resources is important for sustainable development. In order to effectively utilize resources, it is important to make proper strategies at government level for their protection which came with the necessity of stakeholder's cooperation. It also highlights the importance of proper research for resource identification.

3.7 Multiplier effects of tourism

Key tourism sectors include accommodation, transport, travel agencies, food, recreational services, and cultural services (Finland tourism policy, 2020). In addition, it has a multiplier effect on several other industries such as real estate, security, construction, ICT services, food production and processing, waste management, accounting and auditing firms (Ibid). Tourism development has an overall positive impact on the economy and is considered a useful tool for poverty alleviation.

Furthermore, tourism has emerged as an important industry to promote gender equality which is important in bringing peace, prosperity, and sustainable development to a country. A large segment of the women population is left out of the national workforce in many developing countries resulting in increased poverty and inequalities. Tourism is recognized as a useful tool in reducing gender discrimination and women empowerment. The global unemployment rate of women is higher than the male population with a gap of 26% labour force participation in 2018 (ILO, 2018). In contrast, women's representation in the tourism sector is higher than men which is 54% and the women earnings in tourism industry

are 2.1% higher than men (UNWTO, 2019). So, the growth in tourism industry is an important indicator to measure women empowerment and gender equality.

World Tourist Organization's Ethics, Culture, and Social Responsibility Department and UN Women are working together in collaboration with World Bank, the German Development Agency GIZ, World Bank Group, and Amadeus to promote gender equality, women empowerment and encouraging member countries to enhance cooperation to end gender discrimination (UNWTO, 2019).

Climate warming is considered one of the challenging problems the world is facing today which can be reduced by promoting sustainable tourism. Tourism is one of the largest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions counting for roughly 8% of the world emissions, and travel with 49% of the total tourism emissions (Sustainable Travel International, 2018). Barua et al, (2013, p.274) found that water shortage due to changes in rainfall patrons in rural areas severely affects the agriculture and the farming professions in rural areas. Climate warming is resulting in natural resource depletion, rising sea levels, water shortage etc., which demands sustainable tourism development and promotion.

3.8 Tourism and SDGs

United Nations has recognised tourism as an important sector in achieving the 2030 agenda known as Sustainable Development Goals. Tourism has a great potential in reducing poverty, accelerating economic growth, and providing new job opportunities due to its rapid and continuous, expected, growth in future. The increasing population, better transport facilities, rise in global upper-and-middle-class population, and growing old-age population are the main factors contributing tourism growth. One of the important characteristics of tourism industry was mentioned by Jansen (2017, p.1) that the main beneficiaries of this sector are the local population; and small and medium-sized enterprises which lead to the development of the underdeveloped tourist destinations. For this purpose, the preservation and promotion of local culture and products are among the key features of sustainable tourism development. Also mentioned in the target 12.b of the SDGs aiming to “develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for sustainable tourism which creates jobs, promotes local culture and products”.

Although tourism is explicitly mentioned in SDG 8.9 and 12.b, the sector has an overall impact on all goals. For example, sustainable tourism demands environmental protection which helps to achieve goal 6.6 (protect and restore water-related ecosystems), goal 13 (climate action), goal 12 (responsible consumption and production), goal 14 (life below water), and goal 5 (life on land).

Similarly, tourism development leads to economic growth and employment opportunities which also leads to fulfilling the goals: poverty alleviation (goal 1), zero hunger (goal 2), decent work and economic growth (goal 8), and gender equality (goal 5). Finally, the availability of sufficient economic resources is the key element in achieving all SDGs hence tourism, as one of the fastest-growing industries, is a useful tool for revenue generation and economic growth especially for developing countries. This revenue can be further invested in health (goal 3), education (goal 4), infrastructure (goal 9), and institutional development (goal 16) to achieve the UN agenda 2030 for sustainable development.

3.9 Restoration of Shigar Fort: a successful local example of sustainable tourism

The project “restoration of Shigar Fort” is a good example to understand the importance of sustainable tourism. 400 years old, Shigar Fort, is located 30 kilometers from Skardu, the capital city of Baltistan. The project was initiated by AKCSP, in 2004. According to the organization “the project is meant to bring cultural and economic objectives together in a way that sustains the operations and maintenance of the Fort while providing a catalyst for economic improvement in the area and is also part of the infrastructure for a new form of cultural tourism” (AKDN, 2005). The dilapidated fort was converted into a five-star hotel after the initiation of the sensitive conservation program by AKCSP. The project has also received a UNESCO Asia Pacific Award of Merit for Cultural Heritage Conservation in 2006 (AKDN, 2006). The fort was used as a residence of the “Raja (the ruler) of Shigar”, and was in extremely bad condition before it was taken by the AKCSP for this project. The site has now become one of the top tourist destinations in Pakistan and attracting a large number of tourists to the area. The local community is also one of the shareholders of the project, hence receive their share from the profit. Also, hiring local staff creates employment opportunities for the people of the village.

4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Developing a theoretical framework for my thesis topic was a challenging task due to my limited knowledge of tourism studies. A detailed study on tourism literature was conducted to select an appropriate theory for my research. It was found that many of the researchers (e.g., Pan et al. 2018, Kimbu 2010, Riengchantr 2016, Rasheed 2020, He et al. 2018, Sajjad et al. 2018, Zolfani et al. 2015) have used and identified the importance of stakeholders and their collaboration for the development of sustainable tourism. A study conducted by Tahmina Rasheed (2020) is quite similar to my research topic. She has excellently combined the theories of natural resources, stakeholders, and collaboration in her research. Many authors stress the importance of stakeholder participation in the conceptualization and production of knowledge. The local people best know their problems. Hence utilization of stakeholders' observations and experience in a systematic manner can produce useful local knowledge that a community has acquired over generations of living in a specific environment. After a detailed review of the literature, I found stakeholder theory relevant for my study. It provided a conceptual lens to my research and, furthermore, established a guideline for the whole process of data collection and data analysis. Lack of tourism research in Baltistan is the main hurdle in formulating effective strategies for tourism development. From tourists to tourism companies and from government to NGOs, many stakeholders are involved in the tourism industry and cooperation is needed for long-lasting results. A comprehensive introduction of this theory is provided next in this chapter.

4.1 Stakeholder Theory

Freeman et al (2010, p.9) defined a stakeholder as, people who are affected by or who can affect others by their actions. Organizations only survive if they serve the interest of multiple parties rather than shareholders only (Eden & Ackermann, 1998, p.115). According to Donaldson and Preston (1995, p. 68), all groups and individuals who have a legitimate interest in the function of an organization can be considered their stakeholders. They provided three aspects of stakeholder theory: descriptive, instrumental, and normative.

The descriptive use of stakeholder theory explains "the past, present, and future aspects of corporations and their stakeholders" which is important in explaining and discovering new areas. It can describe various aspects of tourism like history of tourism in the area, tourism policies in the area, tourist attractions, size of the economy, impacts on the local economy, and the connections between the stakeholders (Byrd 2006, p.7). The instrumental aspect of stakeholder theory discusses the connections between the stakeholder behaviours and the shared objective like profit. It mainly finds out the cause and effect relation between

management and performance of the corporation (Donaldson and Preston 1995, p.71). Finally, the third aspect of stakeholder theory, normative, is used “to interpret the function of the corporation, including the identification of moral or philosophical guidelines for the operation and management of corporations” (Ibid, p.71). According to Byrd (2006, p.7), the normative aspect is the central element of stakeholder theory. For example, according to him, the involvement of an organization in an activity is justified because it has a right to participate. He also argued that the nature of stakeholders’ participation will determine the direction of their interested organization.

Harrison and Jaffrey (2011, p.7) argued the misconception about this theory in past when it was taken purely from an ethical point of view rather than strategic where all stakeholders were given equal importance in strategic decisions. The ethical version of stakeholders did not gain popularity as Mitchel et al (1997, p.854) convincingly argues that all stakeholders cannot be equal, the importance of all stakeholders is determined according to three different attributes: “(1) the stakeholder's power to influence the firm, (2) the legitimacy of the stakeholder's relationship with the firm, and (3) the urgency of the stakeholder's claim on the firm”.

The level of reliance of the organizations on stakeholders determines the value of stakeholders. Goals fulfilment, value creation, survival, and resource provision are the reasons for organizations’ dependency on the stakeholders (Miles, 2017, p.448). Thus, every stakeholder has different roles and rights in the functioning of organizations, but they share a combined interest in the creation of value (Freeman, 2010). He further elaborated that value is created by the effects of the actions of stakeholders on each other. So, value-creation is the central driver for the organization according to this theory. Value is shared by all stakeholders which include shareholders, managers, and all actors in society who are interested in the operations of the organization (Theodoulidis et al, 2017, p.175). Moreover, profit is an important element of the organization, but it is also one of the results of value creation, i.e., the higher the value, the higher the profit.

4.1.1 Stakeholder identification in tourism

Byrd (2007, p.7) emphasised, to make stakeholders involvement effective it is important to identify the important stakeholders. Eden & Ackermann (1998, p.6) used the power and interest of stakeholders as the basis of prioritizing; the power they have to affect the performance of the organization and the interest they have in the strategic future of the organization. Stakeholder interest implies the willingness to influence the organization and power refers to the stakeholder’s ability to influence the organization. Stakeholders with high power and high

interest have a high influence on the organization. Whereas the influence is low when the power and interest are low. Furthermore, attention must be given to all actors and each stakeholder must be listened to, whether the response is supportive, destructive, or simply observation (Ibid, p8). The decision on how to treat the stakeholder should be strategic, not right-based, i.e., not on the basis of power and interest (Ibid, p.5). It shows, having more power or interest does not determine the importance of stakeholders. The specific circumstances, situations, and roles will decide how to treat the stakeholder.

There are mainly two categories of stakeholders, primary and secondary. Primary stakeholders are “individuals, groups or local communities that may be affected by the project, positively or negatively, and directly or indirectly” and secondary stakeholders are those “who may be able to influence the outcome of the Project” but have no direct effect (World Bank, 2020). Each stakeholder expects to receive a value from the firm which can be called their ‘stake’ in the firm (Carroll et.al, 2018, p. 65) Stake can be further divided into categories of low and high stake. The stake of primary stakeholders is high because of the direct effect of the activities and performance of the industry on them, which can be positive or negative. Whereas for the secondary stakeholders, the stake is low. However, it is important to clarify that “low stake” does not, necessarily, decrease the importance of secondary stakeholders. For example, although, the government is often considered a secondary stakeholder but possess high importance. Secondly, there are no fixed secondary and primary stakeholders; it highly depends on the local conditions, i.e., the local social and political structure, financial interests, and roles and responsibilities of stakeholders.

Several actors are involved, the ones who can affect and be affected, in the operations of tourism industry. Leiper (1979, p.400-401) identified firms, organizations, and facilities as the key areas of tourism industry to fulfil the needs and demands of tourists. Each concentrate to provide different tourist services and each is linked with different elements of the system. He identified six different segments of tourism-related industries which were further elaborated by (Theodoulidis, 2017, p.174). The six segments include tourist carriers (e.g. airlines), tourist attractions (e.g. casinos), tourist accommodations (e.g. hotels), tourist services (e.g. restaurants), tourism marketing (e.g. national tourism bodies), and tourism regulators (e.g. governmental organizations) (Leiper, 1979, p.400). Value creation by all these sectors varies according to the conditions where they operate. The first four sectors are mostly a part of the private tourism industry whereas the last two sectors represent the public sector. The actions of one sector significantly affect the performance of the other due to the mutual interests and interdependency of the sectors on each other. Adopting Stakeholder theory leads to a win-win

situation, enhancing cooperation between the stakeholders (Freeman et al. 2010, p.215).

As discussed above that all the stakeholders in the tourism industry are closely connected due to the similar interests and objectives they have in the process of value creation. In order to achieve these objectives, the importance of stakeholder collaboration is often highlighted by the scholars which will be discussed in detail below.

4.1.2 Stakeholder Collaboration

The term collaboration in the Oxford Dictionary means “the act of working with another person or group to create or produce something”. Collaboration and cooperation are not the same, there is a small difference between them. Cooperation means “the act of working together with someone or doing what they ask you” (Cambridge Dictionary). So, collaboration occurs when people or groups have shared interests and trying to achieve similar objectives. Collaboration can take place at any level; personal, intraorganizational, or interorganizational (Colbry, p.64). Bishop and Starkey (2006, p.33) perceive collaboration as an advanced form of knowledge where two good minds working together can produce better knowledge and do better analysis in less time. Ljungholm (2014, p.106-107) highlighted the importance of collaboration in good governance where cooperation between stakeholders is constantly needed in order to achieve specific targets, however, the role of the stakeholders to participate in collaborative governance can be different.

Although collaboration is important in achieving the required goals, it is a challenging task as there are several stakeholders involved in the governance process. The organizational structure, available resources, capabilities, needs, and authority of each stakeholder is different. Therefore, Jamal and Getz (1995, p.187) stressed the need to incorporate different components of the system by developing new procedures and methods to overcome these challenges. They underlined the importance of collaboration between the key stakeholders of local organizations in planning and development of tourism industry (Ibid, p. 188). Kamara (2016, p.1) argued that the goals and objectives of government and private enterprises are not the same hence coordination is needed between stakeholders for sustainable tourism development. Ljungholm (2014, p.106) emphasized that legal contracts and ground regulations are important to make the collaboration process effective and acceptable for all. Leiper (1979, p.391) held the view that the government approach towards tourism is different than the private tourist organizations because the latter are more concerned with economic gains from the industry, whereas government role is to maintain balance between economic gains and environmental protection.

Collaboration occurs between more than one individual or group, at any level, who have similar interests and shared objectives. The role and level of collaboration of each stakeholder is determined according to the value it has in the collaboration process. The importance of collaboration is recognised by many scholars, but it is also a challenging task to achieve as several stakeholders are involved in this process. The needs, power, and resources of each stakeholder are different hence requires effective strategies to ensure smooth and productive collaboration.

4.1.3 Stakeholder participation in decision making

The root of participatory development lies in the concept of democracy where people reserve all the rights to make their own decisions. The local population is the best to understand their problems hence the most suitable to identify their problems. Clarkson 1995 stated, failure to identify the interest of even a single primary stakeholder group may result in the failure of the entire process (quoted in Byrd, 2007, p.10). Byrd provided three different examples from real cases where different projects were started with the involvement of relevant stakeholders. In all the three examples stakeholder involvement in decision making was occurred in multiple forms, i.e., both formally and informally. The initial plans were developed and implemented with the inclusion of all important stakeholders. All three projects were successful in achieving their objectives. It was also found that each form of stakeholder involvement has its pros and cons. This shows that there are many different methods of stakeholder participation, although, the planners should consider the local conditions before deciding the form of participation. "The form as well as the actual participants is dependent on the specific community and stakeholders within that community" (Byrd, p.10. 2007). What was similar in all the cases was the involvement of all stakeholders in the decision-making process and the positive results of their collaboration.

However, Jules (1995, p.1253) argue that groups participation is important but not necessarily effective all the time. It is necessary to develop effective strategies to avoid conflicts and to make their participation fruitful and result oriented. According to Jules (1995, p.1255) "Rigorous sampling is, therefore, an essential part of these participatory approaches, and a range of field methods is available." Sometimes people are forced to participate in activities in which they have no interest, thus, the type of participation determines the success of the policies (Ibid, p.1253). Hence, it is important to identify the right and valuable stakeholders, and to ensure the participation of all including the marginalized and vulnerable groups (local communities in the case of Baltistan) in the process of decision-making.

Based on the above discussions, stakeholder theory is highly relevant to this research. Using descriptive, instrumental, and normative aspects of this theory

provide us a strong platform to identify the key tourism stakeholders in Baltistan, key tourism resources, the nature of collaboration between stakeholders, and the emerging problems hindering sustainable tourism growth.

5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter will describe the methods undertaken for data collection, the hurdles in data collection, and the analysis of the data. "Data is a word which describes valid information that can help a researcher answer his/her question(s)" (Gibson, 2003, p.64). Data collection is the very first step in research which can come from different sources. Once the necessary data is collected, the next phase is to organize, interpret, analyse, and finally communicate the findings. Due to the lack of research activities in Baltistan, tourism data is almost non-existent, and the available data is inaccessible. Therefore, quantitative method was not suitable for this research as it requires a large amount of numerical data. Qualitative analysis provides meaning to the collected data whereas quantitative analysis is more concerned with numerical answers (Gibson, 2003, p.64). Sogunro quoted Gall and Brog in his article that "quantitative research rely heavily on numerical data and statistical analysis in contrast qualitative research make little use of numbers or statistics but instead rely heavily on verbal data and subjective analysis" (Sogunro, 2002, p.4). Thus, qualitative methods were employed in this research to generate local knowledge. The data was collected using semi-structured interviews, unstructured interviews, field observations, and observing social media activities.

The aim was not only limited to the collection of data but also to spread awareness among the stakeholders regarding the importance of sustainability in tourism. Hence, interview questions were designed in a way that gives stakeholders an invitation to think deeply about the consequences of human activities on the environment, culture, and economy. Many of the interviewees appreciated the effort and admitted that they had never thought in this way. For example, when a question regarding the construction of a new road to the tourist destination was asked from an interviewee. He said "it is true we only demand a road but had never thought about other problems generating due to the construction of the road. Thank you for informing me, we will now include other facilities like waste-management and electricity facilities in our demands as well" (participant 4). Almost all of the interviewees requested to share the findings of the research which was also the plan of the original research objectives i.e., awareness building.

As Tracy (2013, p.3) mentioned, self-reflexivity (the experience, point of view, and roles of the researcher) significantly affects the quality of research process. My local knowledge and cultural similarities along with the intensive literature review guided me in choosing suitable interviewees and formulating the right questions for the research. Nevertheless, the research was purely based on scientifically acquired and validated information and special attention was given to avoid personal bias.

The role and responsibility of each stakeholder are different, according to the influential power and the legitimacy of their relationship with the firm (Mitchel et

al. 1997, p.854). Therefore, the most important stakeholders, after careful selection according to the roles and responsibilities, were approached for the interviews. The main stakeholders of Baltistan tourism industry selected for this research include local tourism companies, tourists, hotel owners, the tourism department, the local business community, the tourism ministry, the local community, and the relevant NGOs already working on similar projects. The original plan was to conduct interviews with the representatives of each stakeholder to acquire maximum and reliable data for the study. But unfortunately, it was not possible due to some reasons which will be discussed later in this chapter. In addition, field visits and personal observations were also employed to validate the interview data as well as to produce maximum first-hand knowledge. A detailed discussion on each data collection method is provided next in this chapter.

5.1 Sampling

It is important for a qualitative researcher to decide what kind of sample they are going to use by designing a sample plan before conducting the interviews. The research questions will guide the selection of sampling that what focused group and people can provide the best information for the research (Tracy, 2013, p. 138). Similarly, Byrne (2001, p.494) stated, the selection of qualitative samples must be decided according to the purpose of the research. Another common question is regarding the number of interviews that need to be conducted in qualitative research. The researcher needs to plan limited interviews because too many interviews may be time-consuming and difficult to analyse. However, in general, interviews' maximum limit is reached when findings start repeating or when additional interviews are producing nothing new. Other factors according to Byrne (2001, p.497) are the breadth and depth of the studied phenomenon and the time, budget, and location. For example, when time is short or resources are limited, it may be not possible to include a large number of participants. In qualitative research, the quality of the interviews is more important than the quantity. "The answer to "how many" depends on the richness of data gathered from other sources, on budget, and on timeline, as well as on your access to software or research help in transcribing and analysing the data" (Tracy, 2013, p.138).

TABLE 1 Representation of sampling for semi-structured interviews

Interview	Sector	Position
1	Private	Owner – Hotel chain
2	Private	Manager – Tour operating company
3	Public	Chief Officer – Local government and rural development
4	Private	Entrepreneur – Hotel chain and travel company
5	Private	General manager – Adventure company
6	Public	Advisor – Tourism department Lecturer – Baltistan University
7	Private	Owner – Tourism company
8	Private	Mobilizer – NGO
9	Private	Owner – Business enterprise and member of civil society
10	Private	President – BATO as well as hotel owner and tourism advisor

The selected literature guided me in choosing suitable interviewees for this research. Special attention was given to involve only those participants who are accessible and can produce maximum and relevant information. Other factors including time, budget, and access were also considered while selecting the right participants. Some of the participants were included as well as removed from the interviews list during the interview sessions on the suggestions of stakeholders, using the snowball sampling technique. For example, a plan was to interview an official from a very relevant public department but one of the informed participants told that “unfortunately, it is not a good idea to interview that officer because he is an outsider and newly appointed without having knowledge of local issues”. (Interviewee 3)

5.2 Interviews

Berg (2014, p.65) defines an interview as a conversation to seek information. Interviews are considered the most important and common method in data collection. Tracy (2013, p.132) mentioned Briggs, 1986, that 90% of the data collected for research is through interviews in social sciences. Interviews need to be well structured and well planned to acquire the required information that clearly addresses the research problem. Because interviews are researcher-generated and created, they require a fair amount of planning and strategic thinking (Tracy, 2013,

p.132). A good interview also requires a lot of time, skills, and background knowledge of the subject from the interviewer. The interview questions for this research can be found in Appendix 1.

According to Berg (2014, p.66) fieldwork consist of two main parts data collection and data analysis. The collected information from the interviews and other sources is analysed to convert it into data for further analysis to produce research findings.

The following themes were developed in designing interviews for this research:

- Stakeholders' understanding of the concept of "sustainable tourism"
- Importance of tourism industry for Baltistan
- Key stakeholders' identification
- Problems preventing sustainable tourism growth

5.3 Types of interviews

There are mainly three types of interviews known as structured interviews, semi-structured interviews, and unstructured interviews. For my research, semi-structured and unstructured interviews, according to the available time and resources, were designed to address my research problem. There were, altogether, ten in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted, consisting of 20-25 main questions and many sub-questions. Six of the interviews were face-to-face video recorded whereas one was recorded on zoom and two were in written form. Length of the face-to-face video interviews was between 45-95 minutes. People who were not available or refused to give video interviews were sent questionnaires for written answers. Altogether, eight stakeholders were given the questionnaires, only two out of them send back the answers. For the local community members, local business community, and the business owners at the tourist destinations, unstructured short interviews were used and notes were taken. Three main types of qualitative interviews are discussed below.

5.3.1 Structured interviews

Although structured interviews were not employed in this research, it is important to know why they were not used. These are kind of interviews in which questions are pre-prepared and the interviewer is going to ask the questions word-by-word. Structured interviews often require the interviewee to respond to similar answers like yes, no, sometimes, never etc. These interviews are often used to compare a large amount of data with each other (Tracy, 2013, p.139). This method was not suitable for my research as it requires a large number of interviews to be conducted, therefore, more than one researcher or paid research assistants were required to

conduct the interviews. The researcher should design questions in a way that adequately produces the required knowledge for the research. The disadvantage of this kind of interview is the inflexibility and lack of depth because the respondent and the interviewer both have no chance to add personal comments or ask additional questions. This method is more suitable when conducting quantitative research thus was not used in my research.

5.3.2 Unstructured interviews

Unstructured interviews, unlike structured interviews, are flexible and conducted in informal situations. The purpose of the interview is to extract knowledge by giving full freedom to the interviewees to express their point of view on the matter. The interview is designed in a way that the interviewer is listening more than speaking by giving the opportunity to the respondent to lead the conversation (Tracy, 2013, p.139). The questions are not pre-arranged in this kind of interview, spontaneous questions are asked according to the requirement of the conversation. Although the interview theme is already prepared, the quality of the interview depends on the skills and knowledge of the interviewer that how s/he manage to acquire relevant information. To be able to conduct a good unstructured interview Tracy (2013, p.140) emphasized to have a good knowledge of the topic, goals of research, and relevant literature. Gibson (1998, p.469) found from a research conducted on the comparison between unstructured and semi-structured interviews that the former interviews provided more in-depth knowledge when talking about experiences because it allows participants to share their thoughts in more detail.

I found unstructured interviews best suited during the field visits which was also mentioned by Tracy (2013, p.139). During field visit, the interviewer does not have much time, resources, and recording options to conduct long interviews. Furthermore, short but relevant interviews provided me with an opportunity to communicate with a large number of people during field visits. For example, during a visit to the main market 9 shopkeepers were interviewed in one day. Similarly, during visits to tourist destinations, many of the hotel and site owners were approached for discussions. In this way, I was able to gather a lot of important information in a short time, leading to answer my research questions.

5.3.3 Semi-structured interviews

This kind of interview is a combination of both structured and non-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are those in-depth interviews where the respondents have to answer pre-set open-ended questions (Jamshed, 2014). The researcher's pre-prepared questions are asked by the interviewees in a systematic

order, same as in structured interviews. The difference here is the level of freedom interviewees are given to answer the questions. Also, the interviewers are allowed to ask additional questions; going beyond their original set of questions.

Semi-structured interviews were the main source of data collection for this research. As already mentioned, awareness building was also one of the sole purposes of interviews, attention was paid in designing interview questions to improve the knowledge of the stakeholders about the concept of sustainability in tourism. Most of the participants revealed it was their first interview, which shows a lack of research activities in the area, and appreciated the effort.

5.4 Field work

Field work is a common method used in data collection. Researchers need to spend some time in the field to personally observe the situation and to gather first-hand information for their research. A part of the data was collected through field work in this research. Fieldwork was probably the most interesting part of the research for me as I had a lot of chances to travel and interact with the local community. Communicating with them and understanding the problems and their practices was so exciting and enlightening. Some notes for what to observe were prepared and bullet points were created for unstructured interviews before the field visits. Spending time with tourist groups, to observe their attitude and behaviours towards environment, was also part of my original plan but, unfortunately, due to COVID19 restrictions travelling was restricted during that time. However, notwithstanding the restrictions, I managed to travel the tourist destinations myself, which were empty without tourists, and did my observations regarding the environmental changes, construction plans, approach, and the types and quality of facilities and services at the sites. Also, the hotel owners were approached for interview to share their experience and knowledge and to study their behaviours towards sustainable tourism.

Tracy (2012) has mentioned four types of field roles researchers needs to select for the purpose of data collection which are discussed below.

5.4.1 Types of field roles

The first role named as complete participant refers to people who start research in a place where they become a complete part of the group being studies; fully adopting their values and ideologies. In this type of research, people do their work secretly without other people knowing that research is being conducted; by hiding their ID's. Although this kind of research may be necessary to produce required results but not considered ethical.

The second role named by Tracy is the play participant. This is a kind of role researchers need to play by fully participating in the cultural activities of the community, but their role is not bounded, i.e., their participation is limited for the purpose of research only, not to become a part of the community. Therefore, they can end their role at any time after achieving their objectives. The kind of problem a researcher face in this role is to gain the trust of the community that the research is completely harmless (Tracy, 2013, p.110).

Tracy used the phrase “Focus participant” for the third role that refers to the situation where a researcher has a clear agenda, and the actors are pre-agreed for their cooperation for the research. People use structured interviews for short-time periods to conduct this type of research (Tracy, 2013, p.111).

The fourth and last role of the researchers is known as “complete observer”. In this type of research, a researcher observes the situation without participating in the scene and keeping their IDs hidden. The researchers have no chance to ask direct questions from the actors therefore they are not able to fully understand them.

Each role has its advantages and disadvantages. It completely depends on the researcher to choose which role is most suitable for his/her research. The kind of social reality, location, and situation are important in selecting the role. For example, the role of play participants or focus observer might be more suitable than a complete observer in a conflict area or a war zone because hiding ID in such area could be extremely dangerous for the researcher. Due to the limited time and resources, the most suitable role for me for my research was to participate as a play participant. As I am already a part of the local culture, my objectives were not hidden, and I was free to end my role at any time. Furthermore, being a member of the community, I was not likely to face the problem of trust.

5.4.2 Field notes

Field notes were taken according to the guidelines provided by Tracy (2013) as it is important to remember the important observations during field visits. Field notes must be written in a detailed and precise form in order to make them useable at any time after the research. Many observations are forgotten by the researcher shortly after the field visits therefore Tracy (2013, p.117) suggests writing up raw records within 36 hours of the field visit. She also emphasized writing detailed fieldnotes in a self-explaining way that could be used easily in future. “These notes need to be edited, corrected, and made more readable” even before organization because organization and management of data are important for a researcher (Berg, 2014, p.40). Fieldnotes should provide knowledge about what was missing in the scene

and, ideally, must be written in a way that helps a writer to understand and analyse the data whenever needed in the future.

5.5 Data analysis and coding

“Coding refers to labelling and systematizing the data” (Tracy, 2013, p.186). Codes are used to extract the relevant information and organize and categorise them on the basis of similarities which help researchers quickly find and build logical connections between the segments (Stuckey, 2015, p.7). A large amount of data is gathered during the data collection phase of research through interviews, documents, fieldwork, and other sources that need to be coded to generate data for further analysis. This information can be in any readable form such as videos, audio, documents, pictures, etc. Coding is used to convert this information into data. Before coding it is important to read the transcripts many times to get familiar with the data, keeping in mind the research question. “This process is called developing a story line which will help in organizing and coding the data, and to decide relevant themes and concepts for analysis” (Stuckey, 2015, p.8).

According to Berg (2014, p.182) “the analysis is designed to “code” the content as data in a form that can be used to address research questions”. Coding and analysing are different, coding lays the basis for analysis, it is the pre-requisite for analysis in qualitative research. Tracy (2013, p.184) mentioned, “interpretation of coding is an analysis that requires “linking the emerging meaning together, or to other frameworks”. The whole process of data analysis revolves around the “research question”. What codes are suitable for analysis must be decided by the research question/s guided by the theoretical framework. Coding is a lengthy process, the amount of data will decide how much time is needed for coding which can be from a few hours, days, even months.

There are several methods for data analysis, the researcher is free to choose any method as long as it is logical and systematic. It also depends on the size of the data, resources available, and participants own abilities. There are a number of software available for qualitative data analysis; which are mostly used when the data is large, or the researcher is familiar with the software and has easy access to it. Coding can also be done manually, which is time-consuming but suitable if data is less. Figure 1 describes different stages of manual coding in this research.

Step 1: Initial coding

What do you think about service providers? Do they have a trained staff to provide better services?

No, not at all. This is also a glitch in the tourism industry (lack of staff training) (WZ-C384).

There should be proper training for businesses related to the tourism industry. Transportation, traveling and hoteling businesses should have SOPs to have proper trained staff and also there must be training sessions for already hired employees. I recommend providing skill development training (WZ-C385).

Do you think there exist institutes for skill development?

Not before, but recently University of Baltistan has developed a department of tourism management to teach proper skills and awareness about the tourism industry (WZ-C386). It also shows the emerging importance of tourism in our country.

Students are graduating in hotel management and hospitality management from the department of tourism management, university of Baltistan (WZ-C387). This is a good sign.

What do you think about the changes we need to make in order to have a sustainable tourism industry?

Step 2: Categorization

Categories	Quotations
Potential/Importance	"Crude oil will perish from the world in the future but tourism won't" and especially in Gilgit Baltistan the tourism industry is the backbone because we are lacking other industries like sugar or textile mills hence I think the employment opportunities for all people in Gilgit Baltistan is linked with this tourism industry (AS-C432). The main attraction according to me in Baltistan is adventure tourism as there are 14 peaks of mountain all around the world and Pakistan has 5 of those peaks that are above eight thousand metres including K2 which is the Second highest peak in the world. Mashabroom 1 and Mashabroom 2 which are on the top of Baltoro glacier and Nanga Parbat is located on KKH (AS-C433) Baltistan is considered an adventure hub all over the world therefore to summarise we have peaks above eight thousand metres, we have rock climbing peaks, plateaus and K7 so all in all we have various kinds of peaks which are special for our Baltistan and we have snow lakes as well. We have big glacier like Siachen glacier, Biafo glacier and Parma glacier etc and many more, therefore in my opinion when we talk about tourism in Baltistan the first thing that comes to mind is adventure related tourism and we have some really big mountains (AS-C414). If we talk about crime ratio in Baltistan its near to zero and to give you an example of how peaceful it is that we don't even feel the need to lock our houses when we go outside and people here are really welcoming and because of this reason domestic tourism is also increasing by every passing day (AS-C445).
Resources Available/not available	The main attraction according to me in Baltistan is adventure tourism as there are 14 peaks of mountain all around the world and Pakistan has 5 of those peaks that are above eight thousand metres including K2 which is the Second highest

Step 3: Final coding and themes generation

Resources

Natural Resources: Adventure tourism (WN-C102), landscaping (WN-C103), lakes (WN-C105), water resources (WN-C125), fountains (WN-C126), lakes (WN-C126)

Wildlife:

Cultural Resources: cultural tourism (WN-C104)

Human Resources:

Resources lacks or not available:

Changes:

Environmental Changes:

Cultural Changes: Lifestyle changed (WN-C140), Income increased (WN-C141)

Behavioural changes:

Financial changes: GB economy improved

Roles:

Duties: work load increases (WN-C109), sport tourism (WN-C110)

Responsibilities: tourism department inefficient (WN-C116), waste management (WN-C145), construction planning, (WN-C131)

Practices:

Beneficial: guidelines for tourist site development is provided and implemented (WN-C137), medical fitness (of the tourism workers), is being checked (WN-C158)

Damaging: poor interdepartmental communication (WN-C123), policy guidelines comes from secretariate level (WN-C151), red tapism (WN-C155), no safety measured implemented (WN-C158)

Policy:

Poor infrastructure (WN-C108), poor communication infrastructure (WN-C108), lack of planning

Step 4: Combining all codes together

Categories	Sub-Categories	Codes
Potential/Importance		Backbone (IS-C1), High potential (IS-C4) Employment opportunities (QJ-C64), Improved living standards (QJ-C65), High potential for adventure tourism (QJ-C72), CPEC (QJ-C82), Backbone (QJ-C94)
	Strategic Location	Dependency (WN-C101), lack of job opportunities (WN-C101) Backbone of the economy (AS-C165), highly dependent (AS-C166), highly dependent (AS-C170), Dependency (AS-C179), Multiple attractions/tourism
	CPEC	Main source of employment (WS-C212), Highest peaks (WS-C213), peaks viewpoints (WS-C214), cultural tourism (WS-C215), ecotourism (WS-C215), adventure tourism (WS-C215), tracking (WS-C216), expedition (WS-C216), 4 to 6 thousand-meter peaks (WS-C217), largest and highest glaciers (WS-C218), mining tourism (WS-C219), largest revenue generating industry (WS-C248), highest employment industry (WS-C248)
	Unique natural Resources	resources (IK-C270), Unexplored areas/attractions (IK-C268), unmatched beauty/competitive edge (IK-C272), economic game changer (IK-C298), dependency (IK-C299), Multiplier effect (IK-C306), Most important aspect of area's economy (WZ-C326), Unmatchable beauty (WZ-C330), hospitality (WZ-C338), cultural norms (WZ-C338).

FIGURE 1 Coding stages of this research

A manual coding method was used in this research using Microsoft word. In the first stage, the storyline was built by reading the transcripts several times. Second, relevant codes were assigned to each of the content using a hybrid approach of inductive and deductive coding in which initial codes are generated from the literature and research question and then new codes, generating from the data, are added to the existing codes. Each code was given a unique number to identify the participant. Third, themes were developed and quotes were grouped according to the relevant themes. Fourth, the data generated from all the participants was

combined in one place. During this process, unnecessary themes and codes were removed and new sub-themes of the existing themes were developed. The relevant information was then grouped under the relevant themes and sub-themes. Each participant was given different colour and unique code to quickly find and use the information for analysis and review.

5.6 Ethics of the research

Good research demands researchers to follow certain ethical standards in their research. Sometimes, the researcher also needs to compromise research quality to follow research ethics. Hiding researcher ID, disclosing the information collected without permission, seeking information by illegal or unethical means (e.g., bribing or forcing someone) are some issues of research ethics. Researchers hiding their IDs in research were given the name “covert researchers” by Tracy (2013, p.124). She explains that covert interviews are structurally guided and results in attaining a less complex data set and leads to produce similar information from the interviewees which ultimately affects the quality of the research findings. Yet, professionalism requires following ethical guidelines to avoid controversies. The ethical guidelines provided by my university were followed in this research. During fieldwork, my ID was not hidden and the research objectives were mentioned to the participants before discussions. After recognising the importance of this research the stakeholders agreed for the recorded interview. However, it was requested by few of them to keep their IDs hidden. The assurance was given to them that the interviews will only be used for this study. I am extremely thankful to my teacher/supervisor for issuing me an introduction letter (which helped me a lot) mentioning my research objectives which was circulated to the stakeholders prior to the interviews. The names and the information collected from the interviews were displayed with the permission of the participants. Also, the traditional values and local norms were given respect. For instance, permission from the relevant authorities was granted before visiting a site and taking pictures.

5.7 Data collection challenges

The data collection in Baltistan is a challenging task. The official information in the region is either not available or not easily accessible for the public, therefore, it was planned to visit government and private departments myself to collect information for the research. Unfortunately, the data is not compiled by the relevant departments hence not available in a single place. For example, the data on the number of tourist arrivals can only be collected through visiting different organizations like PIA, police, transport companies. All of them have their own information which is not properly organized. Therefore, it was not possible to collect some important information. Furthermore, the non-cooperative behaviours

from the officials and lack of access to the relevant officials were the hurdles confronted during data collection. In addition, the lockdowns, short office hours, and social distancing due to the COVID 19 situation made it even more difficult to approach the officials and the interviewees.

Travel restrictions was another problem I faced. During my stay in Baltistan, strict restrictions were imposed on travelling due to the upcoming Eid festival to control the spread of Corona Virus. No outsiders were allowed to enter Baltistan, therefore, tourism activities were extremely reduced and limited to the locals only. My fieldwork plan was severely affected due to this extraordinary situation.

5.8 Positioning/Reflexivity

“Practices of self-reflexivity include sharing one’s motivations to conduct a certain study and engaging in practices that promote self-awareness and exposure” (Tracy, 201. P.233). As a part of the community under scrutiny, I am highly concerned about the future of the tourism industry in my region. I position myself as a community member who aspires to create awareness among the fellow community members regarding sustainable tourism through my research. Being a native and a student of development studies, I am aware of the importance of sustainability and able to observe the negative changes occurring in the region due to rapid tourism growth in the form of poor waste management, scarcity of water, improper land use, unplanned urban growth, deforestation etc. Moreover, the lack of research culture in the area is preventing the production of local knowledge which is necessary for good planning. To find out the reasons and solutions to the problems, an in-depth research is needed which was a motivational factor for me to conduct this research.

6 FINDINGS

The findings of this research are presented in four parts which are the main themes generated during data-analysis. Section 6.1 identifies the key stakeholders in the tourism industry of Baltistan. The next part, section 6.2, provides an answer to research question 1, i.e., discusses the importance of tourism industry for the local economy and identify the main characteristics of Baltistan's tourism. The third section, 6.3, deals with the stakeholders' perception on socio-economic and environmental changes occurring in the region due to increased tourism activities, providing the answer to research question 2. The last section, 6.4 is the main part of research findings answering research question 3; mainly discusses the problems and practices preventing the sustainable growth of the local tourism industry.

6.1 Key stakeholder identification

The theme "stakeholder identification" was developed with the sub-themes of primary stakeholders and secondary stakeholders. The identification of key stakeholders is the first and most important step in analysing sustainable tourism development as the efficiency of tourism industry relies on establishing a functional network of the relevant stakeholders in the area.

The category "key-stakeholder identification" was further divided into primary and secondary stakeholders which are presented in figure 1 according to the level of their power and interest.

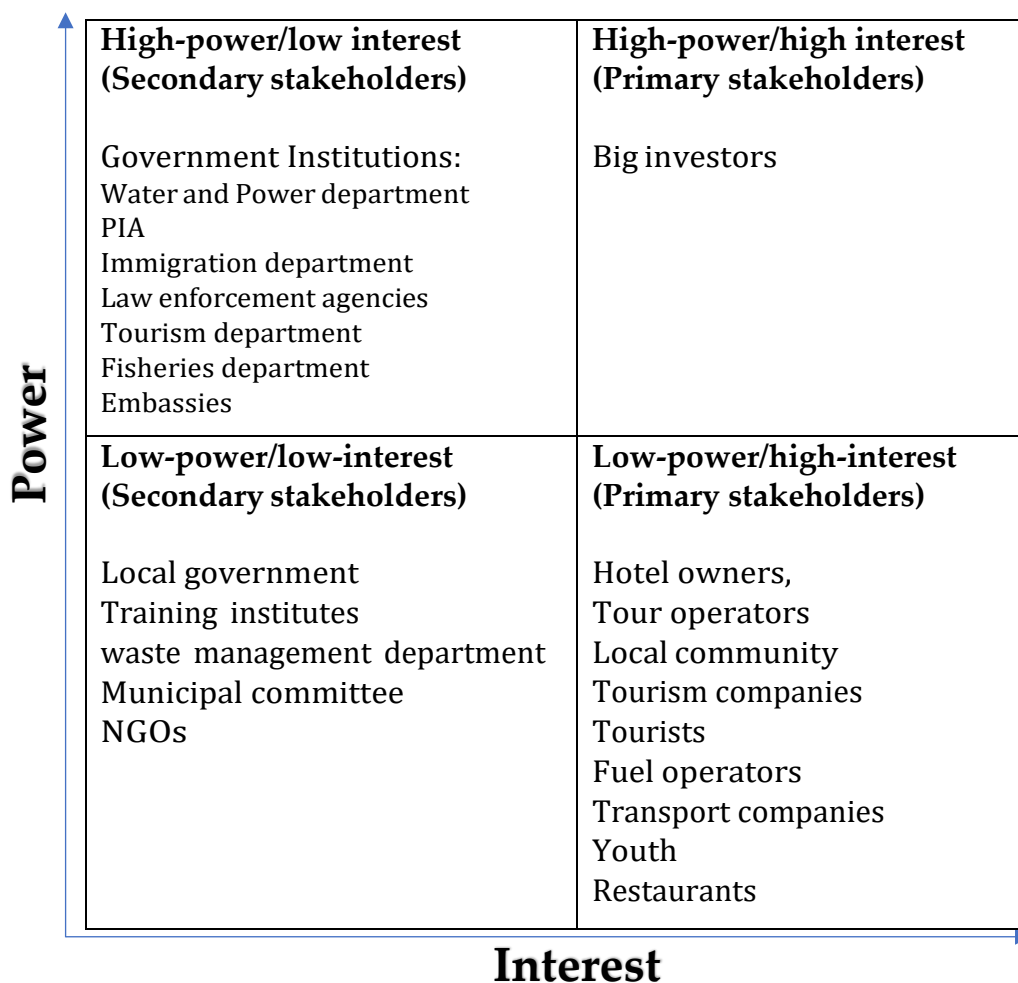


FIGURE 1 Stakeholder Identification using power-interest matrix

6.1.1 Primary stakeholder identification

The theme “Primary stakeholders” was developed as a sub-theme of the theme “stakeholder identification”. All tourism agencies (the direct beneficiaries) including hotels, restaurants, tour operators, tourism companies, and big investors fall into the category of primary stakeholders. In addition, the local community, the youth, and transport companies were also identified as primary stakeholders. Except for the big investors, all primary stakeholders possess low-power and high-interest. Whereas the big investors were the only ones found with high-interest and high-power, during analysis.

6.1.2 Secondary Stakeholder identification

After analysing the interview data, federal government institutions, local government departments, and NGOs were categorized as secondary stakeholders,

where the influence of federal government institutions is high due to the high power they have in decision making, administration, and resource provision. However, being a secondary stakeholder, their interest was found low. Whereas the local government departments, NGOs, and training institutes were found with low power and low interest. The lack of secondary stakeholders' interest in the development of local tourism industry validates the findings. For instance, an increase in tourism activities was considered a burden for the local government, because it increases their workload; they had to work with the same manpower and resources which is already insufficient.

6.2 Importance of tourism industry

Section 6.2 provides the answer for the research question, "why tourism industry is important in the socio-economic development of Baltistan"? The importance of tourism for the area was evidently highlighted by all the stakeholders interviewed. All of them declared tourism as the most important industry and the game-changer for the destiny of deprived people of Baltistan. They firmly believe that the tourism industry is the backbone of the local economy. An interviewee responded:

"Crude oil will perish from the world in future, but tourism won't". especially in Gilgit-Baltistan, the tourism industry is the backbone because we are lacking other industries like sugar or textile mills hence, I think the employment opportunities for the people of Baltistan is linked with tourism industry. (Interviewee 10)

The theme "importance of tourism industry" was further divided into four sub-themes, i.e. 1) the strategic location of the region and CPEC 2) competitive advantage 3) multiplier effects and 4) dependency. The detailed findings for each theme is provided below.

6.2.1 Strategic location and CPEC

Surprisingly, the importance of CPEC's role was highlighted by only one participant. According to him, the mega project will have a great impact on the development of tourism industry. He was optimistic that effective policies on environmental protection and infrastructural development will be made because of CPEC. He stated:

There is no such major action taken by the government to save the environment, but I am positive due to the CPEC government will obviously take good actions for environmental protection. At another place, he added: Since CPEC is at its peak, we are hopeful that government will definitely work on the development of tourism infrastructure. (Participant 2)

6.2.1.1 Personal reflection

It was surprising for me that only a single participant talked about the importance of CPEC. In my opinion, the project will be a game-changer for the development of

the local tourism industry. Although the Indian border with Baltistan is ceased due to the hostile relations between Indian and Pakistan, Gilgit-Baltistan has gained significant importance in the region with the initiation of China's "one belt one road" project because Gilgit-Baltistan is the only area connecting China to Pakistan. Therefore, it is now considered a gateway for the multi-billion project, CPEC. According to Statista, 2019, China has the highest number of outbound travel and tourism expenditure (\$262.1 billion) followed by the USA (\$184.2 billion). Even though China is a neighbour and a good friend of Pakistan, the number of tourists from China in Baltistan is unnoticeable. This is not surprising in the absence of good transport infrastructure and effective marketing strategies. However, it is highly expected that the situation will change after the full operationalization of CPEC. The project not only focuses on trade, but several other development plans are also basic features of the project. The potential areas of cooperation include regional connectivity, industrial cooperation, financial and agricultural cooperation, tourism, education, human resource development, and enhance security and stability of the region (CPEC secretariat). Thus, the location of Baltistan has gained high strategic importance after becoming a part of CPEC. The impact of this project on the local tourism industry is expected to be very high as the area is expecting to receive a large number of international visitors, especially from China, in near future.

6.2.2 Competitive advantage

The presence of multiple natural beauties in a small region provides a big competitive edge to Baltistan's tourism industry. The most important and famous form of tourism identified by the interviewees was adventure and mountain tourism due to the presence of several highest and unique mountains. Secondly, the presence of multiple natural attractions at a single place such as the highest and biggest glaciers, plateaus, rich culture, hospitality, cold desert, green lands, rivers, and lakes was also mentioned by the interviewees as potential tourism resources, providing a clear competitive edge to the area.

We have 5 out of 14 peaks above 8000 meters here in our region. There are different adventure opportunities on these peaks. There are several locations where you can have a view of all these peaks in a short run. You cannot compare Baltistan with any other place because it has matchless beauty. Magical mountains attract tourists. (Interviewee 7)

Desert, rivers, green belts, mountains covered with snow, desert all these things are available at the same place. I think there is no second place on the earth where all these sceneries are available at the same time. Autumn is especially very eye-catching and alluring. (Interview 8)

Another important aspect found was the unexplored sites in the region. Since it is the beginning of mass tourism in the region, many attractive sites are still unexplored and untouched. In my opinion, the difficult and dangerous access, lack of tourism activities in the past, and lack of resources are the main reasons. However, I consider these sites an important asset of Baltistan as these places are secured from the environmental pressures, they can be efficiently utilized in future with better planning and enhanced resources.

In short, I believe, Baltistan has the potential to attract millions of tourists from all over the world. Some natural resources, identified by the interviews, provides a clear competitive advantage, ensuring continuous tourism growth in the region.

6.2.3 Multiplier effects of tourism

Due to the important characteristic of multiplier effects, tourism industry highly contributes to the overall growth of Baltistan's economy. The direct beneficiaries of tourism industry, mentioned by the stakeholders, includes local community, tour operators, hotel owners, tourism companies, fuel operators, travel agencies, food chains, transport companies, airlines, government, and the big external entrepreneurs. Apart from this, it was revealed during field work that the whole market benefit during peak tourism season. An interviewee (who was also an owner of a stationary shop and a printing press) revealed a significant increase in sales during peak tourism season. He stated:

When tourists come in our area, money circulates in the market and all of the business community benefits. Our daily sales increases during peak tourism season because we receive many orders from the tourism agencies and government departments to prepare banners, pana flex designs, brochures, leaflets, stationary items etc. (Interviewee 9)

Similarly, a garments shop owner mentioned the same experience while an informal conversation during a field visit. Figure 2 represents the direct and indirect multiplier effects of tourism found in Baltistan.

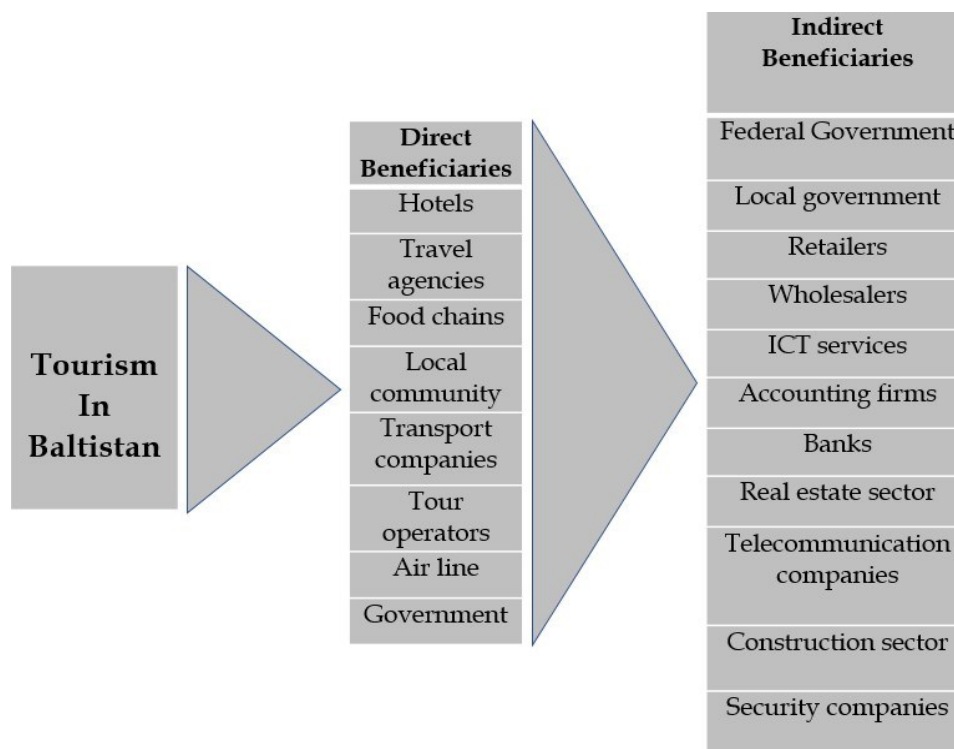


FIGURE 2 Multiplier effects of tourism in Baltistan

6.2.4 Dependency

It was mentioned by many of the participants that due to the lack of a potential to have other industrial activities in the region, the local economy is highly dependent on the tourism industry; providing largest number of employment opportunities to the local population and generating highest revenue. According to a participant:

70 per cent of the revenue is generated through tourism and there is no industry except tourism to provide large scale employment. (Interviewee 6)

Another participant mentioned that, although, the area has a great potential to develop some other industries, but due to lack of resources it is not possible:

I believe we have a lot of potential in mining industry. We have several precious stones like topaz, aquamarine, tourmaline, and sphen in our mountains. But mining industry needs a lot of financial resources, machinery, and technical skills, therefore, it is not possible for the local population to benefit from this industry. (Interviewee 9)

This illustrates that, in the absence of other industrial activities tourism is the most important industry as it requires, comparatively, less economic and technical resources. Therefore, it indicates that, the high dependency of the local economy on tourism make tourism the most important industry in Baltistan.

6.3 Perceptions on socio-economic and environmental impacts

Section 3.3 provides detailed findings on the cultural, economic, and environmental impacts of tourism growth in Baltistan. Stakeholders were asked different questions to find the answer to research question 2, which includes questions related to the changes occurring in the region and the current practices. The theme is further divided into four sub-themes: environmental changes, socio-cultural changes, socio-economic changes, and current practices. The answers from the participants are important to identify the problems related to the growth of sustainable tourism in the area.

6.3.1 Environmental changes

The environmental changes occurring in the region was considered the most threatening factor for the development of sustainable tourism. During the interviews, participants identified water, air, and noise pollution (due to increased traffic and poor waste-management); global warming; rapid and unplanned urbanization (destruction of Earth's surface and soil); deforestation; species extinction; green space reduction; and water shortage as the main environmental changes observed in last few years. Following participants shared their observations on the environmental changes that occurred in Baltistan:

The phenomenon of global warming has started to affect GB too. I remember in my childhood there was hardly any car seen but now the scenario is pretty much the opposite, we hardly find any parking space in markets. The emission of carbon dioxide from cars is causing air pollution and increasing global warming. In my childhood 2-3 ft snowfall was pretty normal but now for ages, we have just heard about it but not seen it. (Interviewee 9)

In the old days when we only locals use to go Deosai, we normally found the brown bears and many other animals around us. But now after the construction of a good road, this is not the case because many people are visiting the place every day, so obviously they (wildlife) are getting disturbed. (Interviewee 1)

The information on environmental changes provided by the participants was observed and verified by myself during field visits. The signs of rapid urbanization, green space reduction, increased traffic, water shortage, and unplanned construction were noticed in Skardu city as well as other tourist sites.

3.3.2 Socio-cultural changes

Mixed, positive and negative, response was received from the participants regarding questions related to cultural changes. Even two of the participants mentioned no major changes in the culture since people are strongly attached to their traditional culture. Most of the participants mentioned major changes in the lifestyle of the local populations like eating, dressing, and thinking. Some were

worried about the effects of modernization in the region as it is threatening the local language and cultural heritage. For instance, cultural events are forgotten, important traditional values like help, care, and respect have been weakened. In addition, the private sectors' materialistic approach and non-serious behaviour towards natural environment and societal values were also observed. Although a local hotel owner refused such practices, but during a field visit to a famous tourist destination it was seen children asking money, using English language, from the tourists which is totally against the traditional norms and values. In my view, the increased importance of "money" in the society is likely to cause irreparable damage to the natural environment and local culture. A participant shared his views about the effects of modernization in the society:

Most of the people especially the youth don't know our culture at all. They are unaware of cultural foods and dresses. We used to build wooden houses but now there are paved houses of bricks and cement. Now there are well-engineered buildings but not suitable for our environment. Events are forgotten completely. For example, Nauroz, I can remember the Nauroz celebration from my childhood and all the preparations we made for the event. But now there are no recognitions of such events. (Interviewee 8)

However, some positive changes were also observed which includes increased in income, reduction in crime rate, and social well-being.

3.3.3 Socio-economic changes

Most of the participants observed a significant increase in the income of the local population due to increased tourism activities. The improved lifestyle of locals was used as an indicator to verify rising income, which was repeatedly mentioned by all of the stakeholders. Changes like overall economic growth of Baltistan region, increase in per capita income and increased job opportunities were also identified by the interviewees. Another important change, which was necessary for the revival of tourism industry, was the boom in domestic tourism in last six years. The local tourism industry is now not dependent on only international tourism which was the case before 2014. Domestic tourism, although, is less beneficial than international but more reliable and has more potential to bring economic prosperity in the region, as domestic tourism is less likely to be affected by the international political situations. According to participant who was a tourism expert, teaching hospitality in Baltistan University:

Since 2014 Pakistani domestic tourism has been groomed a lot. People were travelling a lot from Islamabad, Lahore and Karachi to Gilgit Baltistan because there were no opportunities to travel abroad and these areas were open to explore, so the people headed towards GB for summers. Domestic tourism has more potential here. We have statistics from 2018-19 and 1.25 million tourists have been to Gilgit-Baltistan. It means that there are 80 per cent domestic tourists and 20 per cent is foreign tourists. (Interviewee 6)

According to a civil society representative:

It has developed the lifestyle of our people and they are earning a good livelihood. People related to travel and transportation are also getting in a better economic situation. They have established their business as travel agents, travel guides and tourist guides. Per capita income has finally increased here. Overall, there is a lot of betterment in our economy due to tourism. (Interviewee 8)

6.3.4 Current practices accelerating or protecting sustainable tourism growth

The beneficial and damaging practices were identified as the sub-categories of the theme “current practices”. All stakeholders interviewed were asked questions regarding the current practices in local tourism industry to identify the main problems preventing sustainable tourism growth. The contribution of each stakeholder to promote sustainable tourism, their suggestions, and the hindrances in the implication of these suggestions were discussed during the interviews.

6.3.4.1 Beneficial practices

From the results, it was identified that the private sector’s role in the development of sustainable tourism is positive and appreciable. After talking to different stakeholders and field visits, effective collaboration between private stakeholders was observed. Despite of limited resources and power, the local entrepreneurs, hotel associations, and tourism organizations collaboratively undertaking several activities enhancing tourism sustainability. Important initiatives from them include self-motivated waste collection campaigns, GB photographer association sharing high-quality pictures and videos on social media platforms (many of them have won international photography competitions and published in famous magazines), winter tourism campaigns, BATO arranging regular meetings to discuss problems related to tourism and to reduce the communication gap between private and public stakeholders by sending proposals to the relevant government departments (some of them are accepted by the government), self-initiative for cultural preservation, active youth participation, effective utilization of social media platforms, provision of on job training (like guides, porters, rope fixers, etc.), and the role of NGOs in promoting sustainable tourism; cultural preservation; and awareness building for environmental protection. For example, BATO initiative to stop the construction work going on Sadpara lake without proper waste-disposal arrangements as the lake is the only source of drinking water for the whole population of Skardu. A participant explained their organization’s efforts in the protection of natural environment:

We banned hotels which were being established near Sadpara lake and Baltoro glaciers as they were contaminating it and they are the main source of drinking water in our area. As you know the next World war is going to be for the water that’s why we must

take care of water and make sure that everyone has clean water to drink. (Interviewee 10)

According to an owner of a tourism company:

When there was no winter tourism before, we were working on it since then and now we have arranged a walk for the awareness of winter tourism on our own. We have explored winter tourism for the locals too, we captured the winter photography and published it on different platforms to end the seasonal limits on the tourism industry. We have also worked with Italian company to make tourism more sustainable along with the government department. (Interviewee 7)

Images of cleaning awareness campaigns ran by GB photographers Association, at two different tourist sites, are presented in figure 3.



FIGURE 3 GB Photographers Association cleaning awareness campaigns.

(Images shared by GB Photographers Association on social media)

Facebook groups like Skardu tv, Skardu Baltistan, and GB Photographers Association were joined to observe the relevant activities regarding tourism development on social media. Although these are not tourism-specific groups, their contribution for tourism promotion is remarkable. A lot of positive work from them is being done to promote tourism. For instance, many unexplored sites have been discovered and many important issues related to environmental pollution, governance, road conditions, traffic issues etc. are constantly highlighted by the

youth of Baltistan in these groups. In addition, local talent is also explored and encouraged at these platforms. Considering the importance of social media, these efforts have a significant positive impact on the development of sustainable tourism industry. The following pictures shared on social media, are of two newly discovered sites near Skardu town.

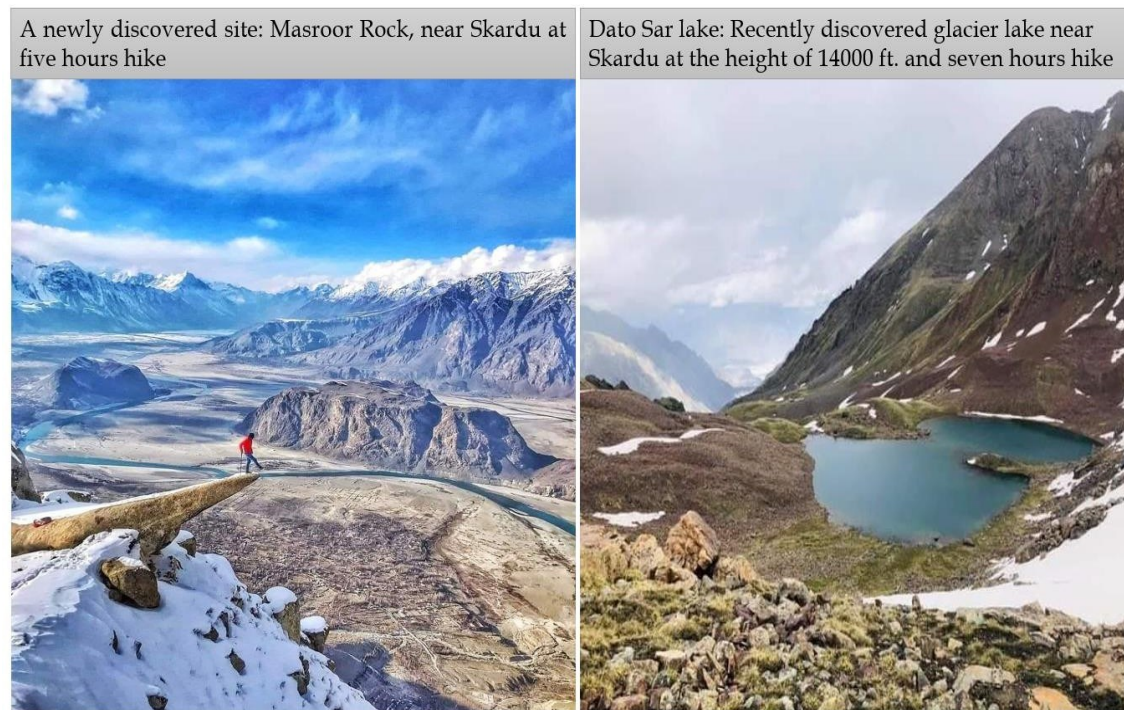


FIGURE 4 Pictures of two newly discovered tourist sites near Skardu, without road access. (Images shared by Kaif Changezi and Explore Beautiful Pakistan on social media)

NGO's role is also important in cultural preservation, skills development, and environmental protection, especially the contribution of AKRSP, AKCSP, AKDN, and BCDF. Many projects on gender equality, cultural revitalization, skill enhancement, environmental protection, human resource development, and sustainable tourism development have been initiated by these organizations which eventually promote sustainable tourism in the area. An NGO representative mentioned their work on the modification of traditional dresses:

Tourism impacts every field of life here. As already discussed, I need to narrate some additional changes that we have introduced in our culture. Our cultural dresses were a bit warm according to the weather conditions here. But we collaborated with the designers and made some changes according to the modern era. This made a good impact on the tourists. It was less expensive for them to buy, and we also tried to enrich our cultural values. We have also worked with an Italian company to make tourism more sustainable along with the government department. (Interviewee 7)

On the other hand, the role of public stakeholders was found limited and to some extent negligible. Notwithstanding that, some positive activities found includes private stakeholders' involvement in decision making (although occasionally), provision of some policy guidelines to the tourism companies regarding health and safety instructions and construction plans, local representation at international platforms, and efficient wildlife policies. Most of the participants were satisfied with the new government tourism policies. They recognized Skardu-Gilgit road widening project, increase in the number of flights, Skardu airport expansion plan, and domestic tourism marketing as encouraging initiatives from the federal government for tourism development. According to an owner of an adventure tourism company with experience of more than 40 years:

Considering it a fast-growing revenue stream the government has mainstreamed the tourism sector while introducing road connectivity, improved physical infrastructures as well as enhanced security plans. Similarly, it has shown emphasis on cultural revitalization of the ancient Balti culture. (Interviewee 5)

Government wildlife policies were found very effective. For example, a significant increase in the number of brown bears was mentioned by a participant due to the strict measures taken by the government for their protection. It was also observed that despite of immense tourist pressure, the high-altitude park still maintains its original form. The important observations in Deosai plains include an excellent waste management system, well-controlled constructions (cement and concrete buildings, shops, hotels, and metalled road are not allowed), and strict hunting laws.

6.3.4.2 Damaging practices

Analysing interviews data also revealed many practices extremely damaging the sustainable growth which include tourist careless attitude towards the environment, lack of collaboration among the stakeholders, unplanned constructions (without proper drawings), tourism agencies materialistic approach (earning profit without paying attention to the environment), and owners' reluctant attitude towards staff-training. Besides these, some important points were raised by a representative of the local government. According to him, the lack of interdepartmental cooperation, lack of comprehensive policies, top-down decision-making approach, tedious official procedures, and lack of resources are the main hindrances preventing good governance. He stated:

If there is a need to establish a picnic spot or viewpoint. It is ordered by the higher-ups, but the lower-level management is not willing to work on it because of lack of cooperation and resources. The wooden industry consults us in many ways, but we are only able to help them on a little basis. We have limited resources with no training about waste management like its collection and disposal. We have policies about it, but we are facing some hurdles in the implementations. (Interviewee 3)

6.4 Problems

The following table provides a list of main problems hindering sustainable tourism growth, found from the results, as well as the indicators mentioned by the stakeholders.

TABLE 2 Problem identification in tourism industry of Baltistan

Problems	Indicators
Environmental degradation	Pollution, traffic, excessive garbage, wildlife extinction, disappearance of green lands, deforestation, wood burning, bad policies, water shortage
Cultural destruction	Destruction of cultural values, adopting westernization, cultural events vanishing, non-traditional constructions, growing materialistic approach
Policy issues	Ineffective visa policies, unavailability of a proper policy document, weak visa policies, top-down approach for decision making, lack of stakeholders' participation in policy formulation, implementation issues, lack of inter-departmental cooperation, lack of financial resources, tourism statistics not available or not accessible, insufficient financial resources
Law-and-order issues	Pakistan's overall negative image, terror incidents, social unrest, crime escalation, unstable political situation, overall law-and-order situation of the country, regional conflicts, international incidence
Inadequate Infrastructure	Poor transport infrastructure, unplanned constructions, poor communication system, substandard hospitality services, electricity issues,
Human resource management	Insufficient human resource development, lack of training opportunities, lack of professional staff, owners' unprofessional attitude toward staff training, inactive women participation

6.4.1 Limited understanding of the concept "sustainable tourism"

Each of the participants was asked to define sustainable tourism in their own words. For most of the participants, sustainable tourism is to obtain a long-time benefit from the industry. One of the participants reflected sustainability from a tourist point of view, for him it was responsible tourism i.e., taking care of local norms, environment, economy, and culture. For another participant sustainability was all about taking care of local culture and environment. For one more participant, sustainability is the provision of good services to the customers for their best experience. He said:

Yes, we have an idea about sustainability in our business related to tourism. We are working hard to provide the best services to our clients and with their feedbacks keep trying to improve the standards of our services with every passing. Sustainability in the hotel business totally depends on the services we provide and its same for the tourism industry as the requirements of clients/tourists need to be addressed for creating a tourism-friendly environment in the region. (Interviewee 4)

For all other stakeholders, sustainability is the smooth running of industry for a long period of time. According to a stakeholder:

For me, it's like a flow and a long run. That will provide business throughout the year. And I think sustainability is to gain long term revenue and business. (Participant 7)

Another participant defined sustainability as:

Sustainability means, tourism should well-flourish here. There are always some negative factors impacting tourism, that stop tourism in the area. We need to prevent the impacts of negative factors on tourism. There should be a continuous flow in tourism. (Interview 3)

Answers from the stakeholders reveal the limited understanding of the concept “sustainable tourism”, although, most of them have a general idea about sustainability i.e., long-term growth. The detailed understanding of the concept was missing as the answers only provide the literal meaning of sustainability. In the modern definition of sustainable tourism all aspects of sustainability (i.e., social, economic, and environmental) are included and all these aspects are interdependent on each other to achieve sustainable growth.

6.4.2 Environmental degradation

Increased pollution and poor waste management were considered the main environmental problems by the stakeholders. After analysing the data, the increased traffic, deforestation, use of wood fuel in winter, and green space disappearance (due to increased construction) were found as the main causes of pollution. Whereas water pollution, water life extinction, irresponsible behaviours of tourists and locals, and bad policies were the main indicators for the serious problem of excessive waste generation. A participant from the civil society shared his views:

Markhor and brown bear are going to extinct too due to illegal hunting. As I told earlier, increased tourism has caused excessive littering, thus, cleanliness of our area is being compromised. Environment is being damaged as a lot of land has been used to make guest houses or hotels for the stay of tourists. This has caused deforestation. Moreover, due to global warming the water resources have decreased, however, few dams are being made to store water which might increase sustainability of water for some time. 10 years ago, the places that used to be famous picnic spots have now been demolished and construction has taken place on these sites therefore the environment faces big threat from tourism industry. (Interviewee 9)

In addition, an important problem identified by a few of the participants was regarding waste dumping. They mentioned that waste is not properly disposed of, and the dumping sites are not suitable for dumping purpose. The statement was witnessed by paying visits to the dumping sites myself. Few of the sites are very near to water resources and few are near to the residential areas without any protection and disposal mechanisms. An experienced tour operator revealed:

The main problem is dumping, which is a serious issue because it is contaminating the water, destroying the environment, nature and the beauty of the sites. Unfortunately, no one is responsible for the maintenance of tourist points, therefore I mentioned earlier to educate local people to keep those places clean. (Participant 10)

Figure 5 is an image, taken during field visit, of a waste dumping site in Skardu, very close to the River Indus.



FIGURE 5 A waste dumping site in Skardu, adjacent to the River Indus

Apart from this, wildlife extinction and water shortage due to global warming and population pressure were also identified by the stakeholders.

As the tourists throw garbage and waste at the tourist destinations, they are destroying the destinations gradually. Siachen glacier, Baltoro glacier and Biafo glacier are the main water resources here. We need to protect the environment so that we can avoid water

pollution. The more human traffic the more chances there are to melt the glacier. We need to worry about these water resources and the stakeholders should take steps toward it. As the population is increasing our wildlife species are being insentient; they are no longer to be seen around here. (Interviewee 6)

6.4.3 Cultural destruction

Changes in the behaviours, lifestyle, and thinking of the local people were considered a threat to the traditional cultural values by most of the participants. The influx of money has developed a materialistic approach among the local population. The traditional values like hospitality, care, social bonding etc., are going to vanish due to the increasing importance of money in society. Also, the new generation is adopting modern values like western dresses, food, language etc., and forgetting the traditional lifestyle.

The cultural events are forgotten and not celebrated as they were in the past. The construction designs are not suitable for the weather of the area. People are building big houses and using concrete which keeps the building cold in the winter thus require an excess budget for heating. A hotel owner emphasized using traditional construction methods. He said:

We need to educate our people to use traditional building methods by using stones and smooth clay that we possess, and believe me houses are pretty strong even after using smooth clay as we still have many houses built 400 years ago with smooth clay. Make them understand that tourists will be attracted to all these things hence they should use organic things as much as possible. (Interviewee 1)

In my view, in the globalised world of today cultural changes are inevitable, however, there should be filtered changed, i.e., accepting the positive changes and rejecting the negative ones. It is also important to preserve the traditional culture in order to achieve competitive advantage for the promotion of sustainable tourism. for example, houses should be made using modern technology, but attention must be given to maintain the traditional style of the buildings.

6.4.4 Policy issues

Lack of effective policies was one of the main problems identified by the stakeholders. It was repeatedly mentioned by all of the participants that policies are not appropriate and according to the needs of local conditions hence considered the root of all the problems. All of them were ignorant about the existence of any government policy document regarding tourism. Some of them said that the document must be in the files, but they have no access to that. According to a civil society representative:

All the stakeholders must be involved in policymaking or decision making but unfortunately, it is not practiced here. Policies are introduced by higher ups and they plan them behind closed doors. I think those are not policies that are just a waste of paper until they put efforts to implement those policies with the collaboration of all stakeholders. The people who seem to implement them are totally unaware of these decisions. They should be involved in decision making. (Interviewee 8)

Many of them mentioned about strict visa policies. Many international tourists hesitate visiting Pakistan because of the complex and long visa procedures. The tour operators complained that many groups from different countries are cancelled every year because of visa issues. The problems in the formulation and implementation of policies are discussed below.

6.4.4.1 Lack of stakeholder participation in decision making

The top-down approach for decision making was considered the main problem regarding ineffective policies. Most of the participants agreed, they have no role in decision making regarding tourism development and management. Only a few of them mentioned their limited role in making specific decisions. The representative from the local government mentioned, the decision-makers are unexperienced and unsuitable who are unaware of the actual situations on the ground. A participant showed his anger towards government wrong and exclusive policies:

There are a lot of things that need to be changed, this is not fair that government make a bunch of policies and smack them on our faces instead they should make the right policy at the right time as the saying goes one should strike the iron while its hot. There is no point in making a policy at a wrong time, therefore, government needs to be on the same page as tour operators so that we could collectively make right policies. (Interviewee 1)

6.4.4.2 Issues related to policy implementation

The problem related to policy implementation was highlighted by most of the stakeholders. They mentioned, due to poor management and lack of resources, existing policies are not properly implemented. Lack of resources was found as the biggest hurdle in policy implementation. A representative from the local government revealed that:

We have only one person available for waste collection for the whole district, who has no vehicle and fuel. We hire a vehicle and a driver to collect waste from our emergency funds. Still people complain about poor waste management. (Interviewee 3)

6.4.4.3 Lack of inter-departmental cooperation

Participant representing local government reveals diffusion of responsibility as another hurdle for policy implementation. The government departments' roles are not properly defined. There are constantly new problems generating but no one is ready to take responsibility. For instance, who is responsible for waste collection at

the tourist sites: local government, tourism department, waste-management department, or environment department; no one knows. A local government official explained the problem by providing an example:

A road was needed at a potential tourist destination. The tourism department sanctioned funds for the project and the road was constructed. But they must approach us and the water and power departments, so we could have provided waste management services, water, and electricity to that area. But now the road is there but without waste management services, water, and electricity. (Interviewee 3)

It was also found that most of the projects are not able to achieve their objectives because of a lack of collaboration between government departments. New projects are initiated without consulting other relevant departments.

6.4.4.4 Unavailability of tourism statistics

It was revealed from the participants that, unfortunately, that tourist data is not properly compiled by any government department. The information on actual market data (e.g. number of visitors, their spending etc.) is not available at any platform. Most of the participants were unaware of the availability of tourism data. Two of them suggested me to contact the tourism department for the data. The department was approached several times, as per their suggestions, but the data was not provided by them.

In my opinion, either the data does not exist or not available for the general public or might be in uncompiled form. The basic flaw in the policies might be due to this reason because without market data effective planning and policy formulation becomes impossible.

6.4.5 Lack of financial resources

High poverty rate in the region, poor funds allocations, lack of interest from the big investors, expensive services, seasonal industry, and weak tax collection systems were considered important reasons for the financial problems preventing sustainable tourism development. The following participant told:

The poverty rate is already high here due to lack of industries and job opportunities, therefore, people use to do limited farming here to earn their livelihood. (Interviewee 1)

Another participant mentioned that:

The land prices have been dramatically increased. The value of 1 Kanal of land has been raised from Rs.10,000 to Rs.10,000,000 in last 15 to 20 years. People are generating money to construct hotels by selling their lands. (Interviewee 9)

In addition, problems related to poor budgetary allocations and lack of big investments, were also highlighted by the stakeholders. According to my analysis, tourism industry in Baltistan is at development stage. The increase in the number

of visitors is not because of services but the competitive advantage the area has due to the unique natural tourism resources. The protection of these resources, provision of decent services, and infrastructure development are the main challenges industry is facing. These issues need a huge investment and resources which is not possible without government support. In short, people lack investment, tourism development fund in annual budgets is negligible, and the available funds are not properly allocated. Therefore, the lack of financial resources along with the poor financial conditions of locals is one of the main problems for the growth of sustainable tourism in the region.

6.4.6 Law and order

There were found two main factors involved in maintaining the law-and-order situation. Therefore, this problem was further divided into two categories: 1) Internal factors 2) External factors. Each of the categories affects different types of tourists. Tourists can be divided into two categories: domestic and international. Following is the detail provided for each category.

6.4.6.1 Internal factors

Internal factors refer to the internal law and order situation of Baltistan. Social unrest, crime escalation, terror incidents, and instable political situation in the region were considered main factors impacting tourism industry of Baltistan. In my view, internal factors mainly affect the arrival of domestic tourists (coming from different parts of Pakistan). For one of the participants, the law-and-order situation is the most important factor affecting domestic tourism:

The most important factor that affects the tourism industry is the social unrest in our country but thankfully it's not here in Skardu. But even if something happens in Peshawar, which is quite far away from Baltistan, badly affects local tourism. Plus, media plays an important role, it should adopt responsible behaviour. Small news has a great impact on our industry. (Interviewee 1)

However, a massive increase in the arrival of domestic tourists clearly indicates the improved law and order situation in Baltistan and all over the country. Social media is playing an important role, many confusions and misleading news are cleared with the opportunity of direct communication between tourists and locals at social media platforms.

6.4.6.2 External factors

External factors mentioned by the participants affecting the law-and-order situation hence tourism growth in Baltistan include regional conflicts, the overall law and order situation of the country, international politics, and visa policies. The following participant narrated the impact of external factors as:

Instability in the political situation in the country is the main thing that affects tourism. Also, the international strategies decide the future of tourism in Pakistan. In 2018 Pakistan and India had an issue at Kashmir, an Indian jet crashed in Pakistani territories, that was the beginning of tourism season in Pakistan. Any conflict in the region like between Afghanistan or Pakistan affects tourism ultimately. (Interviewee 6)

According to an interviewee, Pakistan's international image is the main reason for international tourism decline. He explained:

International media has portrayed Pakistan as a terrorist state which has created many problems for us, especially it has affected tourism in Pakistan. A huge number of Europeans want to visit Pakistan, but they are afraid because they have heard a lot of things about terrorism in Pakistan and negative statements like this. But this is not true. Pakistani people are very humble, loving and caring. They are extremely hospitable. (Interviewee 1)

In my opinion, external factors directly impact international tourists who are planning to visit Pakistan. Most of the international tourists visit Pakistan to explore the natural beauty of Northern areas of Pakistan, which mainly consist of adventurers and trackers. When any of the above-mentioned situation happens, hundreds of groups are cancelled. One the participant, who is running an adventure tourism company for more than 30 years, told that

Since the American war on terrorism in Afghanistan, every year we have hundreds of cancellations from the foreign groups due to terrorism and the unstable political situation in Pakistan. (Interviewee 10)

6.4.7 Infrastructural Problems

6.4.7.1 Poor transport infrastructure

"Poor access" was considered one of the major problems by all the participants. Worst road conditions is resulting many serious problems. Most important mentioned by the interviewees include fuel shortage (roads are often blocked due to land sliding), high commodities prices (due to higher transportation costs), waste collection problem (because few sites are unreachable), uncertain flights (because the airport is not all-weather), and difficult access to many tourist sites. In addition, few roads are built along with the glaciers and wildlife sites which is seriously threatening the already endangered natural environment. Participant 6 stated:

Due to some roads wildlife started disappearing. Markhor in our region is an example of it. Roads connect the cities but it also destroys wildlife. Tourism policies should contain wildlife preservation SOPs. Some roads go with the glaciers and water resources. (Interviewee 6)

There are also many sites unexplored and unreachable due to the unavailability of roads. Some sites, like K-2 base camp and snow lake, need multi-days difficult hike

to reach, i.e. from 3 to 30 days which needs a lot of time, fitness, and other arrangements. A stakeholder mentioned, for the people like businessmen it is not possible to visit these sites:

“Every person wants easy access, for example, if a businessman wants to visit he would want to come on Friday and leave on Sunday so that he can carry on his business on Monday. But sadly, we don’t have easy access to all of our tourist attractions at the moment”. (Interviewee 10)

During a field visit, a tourist complaint about the unavailability of pharmacy shops and road access to some sites. She said:

The area is so beautiful, sceneries are so mesmerizing. We cannot compare this beauty with any part of the world. But the government should provide necessary facilities at tourist destinations. At some places, it is difficult to find pharmacies and there are great tourist sites without road access. Therefore we, women with children and old people, cannot reach there. (A female tourist)

6.4.7.2 Unplanned constructions

The construction of new markets and hotels are not well-planned and sometime do not even fulfil the basic safety guidelines. The traditional architecture designs are not followed which were more attractive, economical, and weatherproof. During the field observation, it was also observed that hotels are constructed without road, water, electricity, and waste management facilities. A hotel owner mentioned:

Tourists come far from their cities to enjoy the non-polluted environment here. But, nowadays, people are not considering this and making concrete building hotels because of recent increase in domestic tourism and destroying forests which will eventually lead to a decrease in tourism in the near future. So, we should need to take care of trees and plants while building such hotels and avoid use of concrete and go for old house building methods used by our ancestors. (Interviewee 1)

6.4.7.3 Poor communication system

Few of the participants pointed out the poor communication system in the area as an important problem. Issues like slow internet speed, low call quality, and at some places unavailability of mobile signals were found during the data analysis. For me, this is very important because mobile and internet services have become an integral part of peoples’ lives today. Reliable telecommunication services are an important part of tour planning for many tourists. According to a stakeholder:

Gilgit road is under construction and tourists also face land sliding there. They do not have a local sim card and they face trouble when they are disconnected from their friends and family. There are electricity issues, every hotel has its own generator but it increases cost. Government should provide electricity. Tourists need to be connected to the internet. The internet services should be provided. Sometimes they need to operate their work remotely, but unavailability of the internet stops them. (Interviewee 7)

6.4.7.4 Poor service infrastructure

The problems found in this category includes poor hospitality services, unavailability or too expensive traditional items in the markets, untrained staff, and poor waste management services. A representative from the tour operators talked about the unavailability of traditional items in the market:

In Skardu town market, you don't have many shops offering traditional clothes, and this is really worrisome as when tourist visit he would want to buy traditional things. (Interviewee 10)

The results showed that, the provision of decent services for the tourist is important for the growth of tourism industry which was accepted by many of the participants. It was also found during field visits and interviews that tourism services need a lot of improvements as the sector is at its development stage. In one of the interviews on social media, tourists were complaining about the unavailability of first aid services, pharmacies, and quality restaurants at tourist sites. Also, an interview participant mentioned about the unfair rates at tourist destinations:

The main problem that occurs at picnic places is that a thing you are buying in 20 rupees normally, is sold for 200 rupees. Just because it is a tourist site, and they have to purchase it. We are in the development phase and we are not properly developed. Actually, we should ease them instead of teasing them with such behaviours. (Interviewee 8)

6.4.7.5 Electricity issue

Representatives from the tourism service providers highlighted the poor electricity services as a big hurdle in the provision of quality services. Electricity services at far tourist destinations is not too bad but the conditions are worst in the Skardu city due to the increasing demand and low production. An owner of a tourism company said:

Infrastructure is not only Gilgit-Skardu road. There are electricity issues, every hotel has its own generator, but it increases cost. Government should provide electricity. (Interviewee 7)

Another Participant discussed the environmental impacts of electricity shortage:

In winters we burn wood for heating because in winter we have very little access to electricity and considering this recent increase in tourism means we will have to burn more wood to keep our hotels warm for the tourists which in turn could result in an increase in pollution. (Interviewee 1)

In my view, wood fuel is not only hazardous for the environment but also expensive and difficult to use. The electricity shortage is resulting increase in hotel rents in winter due to extra heating expenses. Therefore, the problem severely affects winter tourism in the area.

6.4.8 Inadequate human resource development

All of the interview participants unanimously agreed on the importance of human resource management for sustainable tourism development. It was found that the service providers in tourism industry lack basic training and professional skills to provide high-quality services to the visitors. Also, in the absence of any regulatory mechanism, there is no mandatory requirement for the owners to hire professional staff. Many problems related to human resource management were found which are discussed below.

6.4.8.1 Lack of training opportunities

During data analysis, it was found that opportunities for training and tourism education is limited in the area. The University of Baltistan has recently started a short tourism and hospitality course but due to the lack of financial resources and a limited number of study places, the outcomes of the project are limited. In addition, the quality of education is not up to the mark, the faculty lacks professional teaching staff. The only hotel with qualified and trained staff and management team is the Serena hotel (running Shigar and Khaplu Forts). They also, occasionally, offer hospitality training programs to the locals. Apart from this, a participant mentioned that their association provides on job training to the workers like high altitude mountain guides, rope fixing, cooking, etc. He mentioned:

Hotels like Serena and PC are able to alternate their staff when the tourist season is off. They send their employees to the other branches of the business. But other small businesses are unable to do so. And they face a shortage of demand. They do not have revenues to send their staff to the down cities for training so, yes they cannot conduct training". He added:

We always try to send at least two people for tour guides and cooks. One as the main guide and the other one as an assistant. The reason behind this is very clear, the assistant is for education purpose, he goes as a student with the main guide or chef. It helps train our employees. This is how we generate human resources by ourselves. Because there are zero training opportunities. (Interviewee 6)

This illustrates, acknowledging the importance of quality services; the qualified, educated, and trained people in Baltistan's tourism industry are non-existent. During field visits, it was found that many of the adventure groups outsource their guides, rope fixers, and cooks from other countries like Nepal, who have built good training institutions. High altitude guides, porters, cooks, and rope fixers require a high level of professional skills and fitness which local people do not possess. Few world-famous local mountaineers, like Hassan Sadpara and Ali Sadpara, were self-trained. The experience and skills of these and many other local mountaineers have been wasted. A tourism company owner stated:

It is very unfortunate that there is no such training. For example, we have world records in mountaineering, but the mountaineers did not have any professional training they were just self-taught. (Interviewee 10)

A short meeting was arranged with a famous mountaineer Little Karim in his village Hoshe, where he is running a Spanish-funded organization for sustainable tourism development, health, and education. For him, training and lack of financial resources are the main hurdles in the development of sustainable tourism in the region of Baltistan.

6.4.8.2 Lack of trained staff

For many of the participants, lack of trained staff is a major problem in providing high-quality services as well as paying decent salaries to the local staff. Results revealed that unavailability of trained staff also leads to several other problems which include low salaries, no job security, less customer satisfaction, and health and safety issues. A stakeholder mentioned:

If we talk about hotels, the waiters aren't paid that well and they are not even given extra incentives. The main two causes why the staff is not paid well are: 1) They aren't trained 2) They aren't aware of how worthy and important their job is. It would affect the sustainability and the person's household as a pay scale of PKR 10-15 thousand is hand to mouth and there'd be no savings and it wouldn't help them working at full potential. (Interview 3)

6.4.8.3 Owners' unprofessional attitudes

An important problem found from the interviewees was the attitude of hotel and tourism companies towards staff recruitment. The demand for trained staff was found very low, thus locals are not interested in training and tourism education. Surprisingly, the professional abilities of the workers are not considered while hiring, instead, priority is given to untrained people. The reason for this attitude, explained by a participant, is due to the demand of high salaries and other employment rights from trained and educated people. Also, workers leave their jobs when they are trained because they create value in the market. A participant narrated:

We have never demanded the government for training institutions because people believe that if they train the staff well, they will ask for more money and would probably leave, so lack of trained staff is partially the hotel owner's fault. (Interviewee 9)

Another reason is the reliance on their traditional hospitality talent instead of professional skills. Due to this non-professional attitude, the majority of the workers in tourism industry are unskilled and non-professional. Therefore, low-quality services is the main obstacle in achieving the objectives of sustainable tourism.

6.4.8.4 Missing role of women

During the field visits, it was observed that women participation in tourism industry was almost no-existent. At any of the tourist destinations (including hotels, shops, restaurants, transport offices) female workers were not found. This shows women have fewer opportunities for economic participation in the tourism industry. Although some of the hotels were owned by women, they were not seen working on the front; male staff was hired by them. There could be many possible reasons according to my understanding. Firstly, the nature of work is not suitable for women, therefore, most of them are not interested to join this profession. For example, sometime travelling far and hard places alone with tourists, staying late nights in the hotels, etc. Secondly, the demand for women workers is low in the market. And lastly, the most important reason is the financial barriers which stops women joining the industry.

However, some indirect benefits were taken by the women by participating in handicraft making; cooking; working and investing in women markets, bakeries, and restaurants. Surprisingly, none of the participants pointed out this problem during the interviews. I found this alarming and a threat to sustainable tourism growth because women role should be equally important with that of men and their participation can take the industry to next level.

7 CONCLUSION

Acknowledging the importance of Jafari's knowledge-based platform, this research was conducted to generate important knowledge about the tourism industry in Baltistan. Using a stakeholder theoretical framework, the emerging problems hindering sustainable tourism growth in the area were identified. Furthermore, during field visit meetings with different stakeholders, the impacts of mass tourism on the sustainability of tourism industry were examined, which covers the socio-economic, socio-cultural, and environmental aspects of sustainability. In the first part of the findings, the key stakeholders of tourism industry were identified using literature review, stakeholders' interviews, and field observations. The next part described the importance and main characteristics of the Baltistan tourism industry. The third part of the findings examined the economic, cultural, and environmental changes occurring in the region due to the growth of tourism industry. In the last section, problems preventing achieving sustainable tourism objectives were explored. To the best of my knowledge this is a first study on the issue of sustainable tourism development, especially after the emergence of mass tourism in Baltistan, from the perspective of local stakeholders.

The stakeholder theory was found very effective in the production of local tourism knowledge. The study mainly focused on the descriptive aspect of stakeholder theory by providing past, present, and future aspects of local tourism industry and its stakeholders, i.e., stakeholder identification, key-resource identification, main problems industry is facing, policy gaps, and overall impact of tourism on the society; many of them were also mentioned by Byrd (2006, p.7) earlier in this paper. A part of the instrumental aspect of this theory is also covered in the findings of this study such as the impact of stakeholder collaboration and participation on the performance of tourism industry. The third aspect of this theory, normative, is still unexplored hence demand detailed research.

After analysing the interview data, tourism companies, hotel owners, and the local community were recognized as primary stakeholders. Whereas NGOs, and the federal and local government were identified as secondary stakeholders of the Baltistan tourism industry. Regarding the question of, the importance of tourism industry, all participants unanimously considered tourism as the backbone of the local economy because a large part of local inhabitants is dependent on tourism industry. The results revealed that the major factor enhancing the importance of tourism is the competitive advantage it has in the form of unique natural resources, high strategic importance due to the initiation of CPEC, and the lack of other industrial opportunities. It clearly shows that the livelihood of a large part of local communities is linked with the performance of tourism industry. A small change in

the industry has a huge impact on the local economy. The main tourism resources for all participants were the highest mountains, glaciers, and plateaus offering a wide range of tourism opportunities in the region like climbing, adventure, hiking, tracking, etc. In addition, rich cultural heritage, scenic views, flora and fauna, rivers, and lakes were also mentioned as potential tourist attractions.

Stakeholders identified several positive and negative impacts of tourism on livelihood and the natural environment. All participants agreed that tourism has brought a lot of positive changes in society. It is providing the highest number of employments, transport infrastructure has improved, people are learning modern lifestyle, the value of land has been increased, and providing a great opportunity to the youth to use their creative abilities. On the other side, several negative impacts of tourism activities were also observed, threatening sustainable tourism development. The environmental changes were clearly visible and mentioned by all the participants. The increased water, air, and noise pollution; waste generation; species extinction; unplanned urbanization; green space reduction; and water shortage were identified by the participants. Besides environmental changes, changes in culture were also noticed such as forgetting cultural events, language; and disappearing strong traditional values, i.e., respect, care, and help. The increased value of money in society is the main reason for these changes because people are now more materialistic, i.e., giving importance to money on values. This kind of attitude is resulting in the destruction of cultural heritage which is a potential tourism resource as well as a helping tool for stakeholder collaboration.

The importance of stakeholder collaboration is distinctly highlighted in the literature review, which was found missing in Baltistan. The absence of government role was highlighted by most of the stakeholders and their collaboration was almost non-existent. The private stakeholders were not included in the decision-making process. Top-down decision-making approach was practiced in government departments and the inter-departmental cooperation was found very low. Due to this strong bureaucratic setup, policies were not made according to the needs of the industry. Aligning with the view of World Bank report (2020), that stakes of primary stakeholders are high, effective collaboration was found between tourism service providers and local communities in resolving issues related to tourism. However, their efforts were on a small scale due to insufficient resources and lack of power. Constructive activities like waste collection campaigns, guides training, and social media marketing campaigns were also found from the private stakeholders

Additionally, the undeveloped infrastructure was considered another major problem hindering sustainable tourism growth. Poor transport infrastructure; insufficient electricity supply; unplanned construction; and poor communication, and service infrastructure were identified as main infrastructural problems. The

results revealed that some positive initiatives have been taken from the federal government to improve the transport infrastructure. Projects like the widening of Gilgit-Skardu road; and increase in number of flights, and destinations along with the expansion of Skardu airport were highly appreciated by the stakeholders. Secondly, the impacts of unplanned constructions were found very high; giving birth to many other problems. The new constructions were not according to the safety guidelines, the environmental aspects were ignored, provision of basic facilities was not considered, and it was also noticed that many hotels were constructed without proper road access. This problem is likely to build immense pressure on the natural resources, resulting in water shortage and green area reduction. It will also cause increased traffic and security related issues. Moreover, the trend is likely to create serious problems in future by destroying the original plan of the city.

Unplanned development indicates a lack of planning and effective policies which was also mentioned by most of the participants. Lack of stakeholders' involvement in decision making and lack of market data were the main reasons for ineffective policies. It was aligned with Kimbu's (2010) finding that scientific analysis, based on actual knowledge, is needed for the formulation and implementation of planning and strategies for tourism development. Thus, existing policies are not properly implemented. Secondly, the lack of resources and diffusion of responsibilities between public departments were also identified as a major hurdle in policy implementation. Sustainable tourism development is not possible without decent hospitality infrastructure and effective policies.

Furthermore, the importance of human resource development in tourism industry was agreed upon by all stakeholders. However, unfortunately, results revealed that no one was interested in providing professional training to their staff. Some of them mentioned that they do not have enough resources and opportunities for staff training. For few participants, the approach was highly unprofessional; for them trained and educated staff was not required because they ask for high salaries, employee rights, and leave their job when finds better opportunities. The findings showed that none of the hotel or tourism company has hired professionally trained workers except a five-star hotel chain. The main reasons for this situation were the unavailability of professional staff, lack of training opportunities, and unprofessional attitude of the owners towards provision of good services. It was also observed that people were ready to spend huge amounts on physical infrastructure but when it comes to human resources, they prefer low-paid and untrained workers. However, some of the hotel owners had found an economical solution; they provide on-job training to their staff using content from the internet. There is a need to formulate comprehensive policies for human resource development which includes training programs and awareness building. The

results also found that the talent of many world-class mountaineers, who were self-taught, has been wasted. If government provide resources, their experience and professional skills could be used to train high-altitude local guides, porters, even climbers.

The law-and-order situation in the area was found satisfactory from the results. The increase in the number of tourists in recent years can validate the information. There were two factors identified during the analysis that affect tourist arrivals, i.e., internal and external factors. The former is linked with the arrival of domestic tourists whereas the latter is mainly concerned with international tourists. A piece of small news on international media results in the cancellation of many international groups. According to different stakeholders, it was found that international tourists are more beneficial and valuable for the region. However, the flow of domestic tourists is much higher than that of international tourists. Statistics from the last 6 six years shows a tremendous increase in domestic tourism, which is very encouraging. The positive impacts can be seen in the region. The low numbers of international tourists, as compared to neighbouring countries with similar conditions, showed that international tourism is still not well-developed in the area. Several factors were identified by the stakeholders for this problem. The most important include government visa policy, countries law and order situation, regional conflicts, Pakistan's bad international image, and the poor transport services in the area. Luckily, local tourism industry is now more relying on domestic tourism, which is a positive sign for long-term development.

Interestingly, despite the fact that women have a very important role in the development of tourism industry, none of the participants identified the negligible role of women as a problem. The demand for female workers in the tourism industry is higher than males hence it provides employment opportunities to women (ILO, 2010 and UNWTO, 2019). The direct women participation in local tourism industry was found, almost, negligible. None of the hotels in Baltistan has hired female staff, nor is the intention in future. This illustrates the importance of women's role in tourism industry is not recognised in Baltistan. Some cultural and religious issues also hinder the women equal participation in the development of the industry.

To conclude, tourism leaves both positive and negative impacts on local culture, environment, and economy. The tourism industry of Baltistan is highly dependent on unique natural resources which are nonreplaceable. Secondly, the livelihood of the local population is closely linked with the operation of this industry. The rapid increase in tourism growth is resulting environmental degradation and cultural destruction. Moreover, the increase in the number of tourists is likely to leave severe negative impacts on the sustainability of the industry if no remedial interventions

are taken. The local tourism industry has immense potential to uplift the economy of the whole area. Therefore, the policymakers need to include the concepts of sustainable development and sustainable livelihood, from the perspective of key stakeholders, as a necessary component of tourism policies without affecting employment and economic opportunities.

7.1 Recommendations

Considering the importance of Jafri's knowledge-based platform, this study produces local knowledge regarding the importance of Baltistan's tourism industry, the identification of key stakeholders, important tourism resources, and the problems industry is facing in making tourism sustainable. Therefore, firstly, I recommend further research to understand the attitudes, behaviours, and preferences of stakeholders; and tourist experience and response. Moreover, an avenue for further research will be to find ways to enhance collaboration between the key stakeholders and to observe the environmental impacts of tourism in the region.

Secondly, decent tourism infrastructure is essential to enhance sustainability. Better road connectivity, regular flights, reliable electricity services, clean water, decent hotels and transport facilities, better communication services, and availability of basic facilities at tourist destinations like clean washrooms, emergency healthcare, etc., are needed for the best tourism experience. Since most of these services require a lot of resources, it is recommended to the government to allocate necessary funds and technical support along with good planning to develop appropriate tourism-friendly infrastructure. Some of the projects are already in progress like the construction of Gilgit-Skardu road and expansion of Skardu airport but there is much more need to be done.

Thirdly, the policymakers are recommended to incorporate sustainable development principles with the engagement of all stakeholders in the formulation of tourism policies. All components of sustainability (environment, social, cultural, economic) need to be addressed in the policies. Along with policy formulation, effective planning for the implementation is also needed. The participation of each key stakeholder is important and must be ensured in decision making. The policies should also contain strict environmental laws and penalties for the violations. I also recommend building a productive working environment that facilitates smooth stakeholder collaboration.

Fourthly, it is also recommended to pay attention to improve the quality of services. The awareness needs to be created among hotel owners and tour operators to provide professional training to the staff. Effective collaboration between

government and NGOs is needed to provide opportunities for high-quality training and hospitality education.

Fifthly, it is highly recommended to the government to prepare a master plan, with the consultation of all stakeholders, providing guidelines for the new constructions. Aspects like the environmental impacts, safety standards, basic facilities, etc., should be considered in the guidelines. In order to restrict haphazard constructions in Skardu city and other towns, proper town planning be made by the local government and ensure its implementation by the public.

Sixthly, all of the participants showed their willingness to share some of their profit for environmental protection and waste management. However, many of them showed dissatisfaction on the right use of their money. Therefore, I recommend government reducing the trust deficit between the private and public stakeholders and introduce comprehensive strategies to solve financial problems.

Finally, I recommend effective tourism marketing at international platforms. Government should fully support local tourism professionals in providing access to attend international tourism fares, where they can avail the opportunity to introduce Baltistan to the world and learn the latest trends in the tourism industry.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Numbers	Questions
1	How important is the tourism industry for the region and why?
2	What are the main features of tourism in Baltistan?
3	What factors, in your opinion, (domestic and international) have significant effect on the growth of tourism industry?
4	How tourism industry effects your organization/business?
5	Do you know the concept of sustainability in tourism? How would you define it, with our own words?
6	Who are the important stakeholders and main beneficiaries of the tourism industry in Baltistan? And what role they have?
7	To what extent the stakeholders collaborate for tourism development and solving the problems related to the tourism industry?
8	In your opinion, what your company's/department's contribution towards sustainable tourism?
9	In your view, what are the main environmental issues emerging due to the increased tourism activities in the region?
10	What cultural changes you observe in the society due to increased tourism activities? (e.g. changes in attitudes, thinking, living styles, food, clothing, etc.)
11	In your view, how has tourism changed the income and livelihood patterns in the area?

12	What efforts have been done (both at government and private level) to promote sustainable tourism? (environmental protection, socio-economic measures, cultural preservation)
13	Are you ready to do some compromise on your profit to protect the environment and why? (e.g., bearing extra expenses for proper waste management, maintenance of vehicles for low carbon emissions, promoting eco-friendly tourism through advertisement etc.) And what other stakeholders think about it?
14	Who is responsible to provide waste management services in the region especially at tourist destinations?
15	Do you know what kind of tourism policies are there and do you have access to those documents? If yes, to what extent these policies have been implemented? What need to be added or remove from these policies?
16	Does your organization have a role in tourism-policymaking?
17	What changes, in current practices, you think would be needed in order to increase the sustainability in the tourism industry?
18	What would be the main hindrances to achieve these changes?
19	In your view, is it possible to achieve the targets of sustainable tourism and economic maximization simultaneously? If yes, how? Would you be ready to do it?
20	Is there anything you would like to add or ask me, please feel free?