Institutional arrangements for managing tourism in the Indian Himalayan protected areas

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Institutional framework best suited to manage tourism was assessed for four PAs of the Indian Himalaya.
- Multiple case study analysis using participant observations, focus group discussions & stakeholder analysis was used.
- Weak institutions and governance systems may lead to mass tourism controlled by powerful stakeholders.
- Local institutions with strong intrinsic spatial linkages are most adaptive to challenges of a globalized economy.
- Traditional local institutions assisted by government & NGOs are best suited to achieve Aichi Biodiversity Targets.

ABSTRACT

Tourism has the potential to advance biodiversity conservation through the creation of societal constituency by providing alternative livelihood to resource-dependent communities. Institutional arrangements play a crucial role in ensuring equitable benefit sharing of tourism gains among different stakeholders. We examined this role of institutional arrangements in four National Parks of the Indian Western Himalaya at varying altitude through multiple case study analysis using qualitative methods. Our results suggest that a three-tier setup involving local communities and civil society organizations, supported by enabling government policies is most efficacious in mainstreaming socio-economic development of local communities and environmental concerns in tourism management framework. Strong local institutions with intrinsic spatial linkage are required to ensure maximum benefits to all sections of society and least monetary leakages. We recommend that in natural landscapes with conflicting interests among stakeholders, a hierarchical three-tier institutional arrangement should be encouraged to achieve the goals of sustainable tourism.

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1. Introduction

The Convention on Biological Diversity articulated five strategic goals to be achieved by 2020, popularly called the ‘Aichi Biodiversity Targets’, these goals inter alia reassert the emphasis on Protected Areas (PAs) (CBD, 2011). A key concern for PA management worldwide is that the local communities often bear the indirect costs of conservation due to the creation of PAs (Badola & Hussain, 2003; Bhattarai et al., 2017; Karanth, Gopalaswamy, DeFries, & Ballal, 2012). Most of the PAs in the tropics are created on traditionally inhabited lands and used by the local/indigenous communities (Arriagada, Echeverria, & Moya, 2016; Ferraro, Hanauer, & Sims, 2011; Ghate, 2003). The unavailability of alternative resources and livelihood options for forest-dependent communities makes them hostile towards conservation efforts and creates challenges for the PA management (Badola, 2000; Badola, Barthwal, & Hussain, 2012; Brockington, Igoe, & Schmidt-Soltz, 2006). The legal status of PAs and the concerns for conservation limit the scope for providing consumptive benefits to local communities (Sebele, 2010; Sekhar, 2003). Tourism can be a mean of achieving Aichi Biodiversity Targets as it generates support for conservation by creating a source of income for natural resource-dependent...
communities (Adenle, 2012; Hussain et al., 2012; Karanth & Nepal, 2012; Nepal & Spiteri, 2011) without undermining the natural resources (Neto, 2003; Nyaupane & Pouëde, 2011). However, unregulated tourism infrastructure development, extraction of natural resources and tourists’ activities in ecologically fragile areas can create challenges for PA management (Figuerola & Rotarou, 2016).

Institutions are the conventions, norms and formal rules of the society, which regularize life, support values, and protect interests (Vatn, 2010). Institutions through the formal and informal rules determine the nature of the tourism activities and influence the tourists’ behaviour. Institutions provide incentives or disincentives to the people that determine their direct or indirect role in shaping the nature of tourism in the given area, control tourism activities and their impacts on the ecological, social and cultural values of an area, and the manner in which the benefits are shared among the different stakeholders (Liu, Cheng, & Cheung, 2017).

Institutions can be categorized into groups i.e. formal and informal. Formal institutions have codified rule while informal institutions have socially shared, openly codified and unwritten rules (Heinke & Levitsky, 2004; Holmes, Miller, Hitt, & Salmandor, 2013; North, 1990; Torniainen & Saastamoinen, 2007). It is largely accepted that in the developing countries the representation of poor and communities in the management and decision-making are mostly in informal local level institutions rather than the formal institutions that are largely looked upon as the bastion of the educated, rich and men (Thomas, 2004; Bjarnegård, 2013; Chappell & Waylen, 2013; UN, 2013, p. 4). Local institutions can prevent nature-based tourism from transforming into mass-tourism by restricting the volume of tourists and development of physical infrastructure. Strong local institutions augment the resilience of the local communities to adverse social, cultural and ecological changes and ensure equitable benefit sharing (Bhatt, Bivakatte, & Subramanian, 2012; Ogra & Badola, 2014; Stronza & Pegas, 2008).

A set of vertically integrated and hierarchical institutions that include frameworks such as polycentric governance, nested institutions and boundary organizations or ‘hybrid environment governance’, and an understanding of institutional void is advocated for managing and conserving biodiversity (Araral & Hartley, 2013; Ostrom, 1972, 2010a; Rowley, 1997; Roxas & Chadee, 2013; Tumusiime & Vedeld, 2012). The role of such ‘hybrid environmental governance’ has been the hallmark of forest management by local communities and the state in the western Himalayan region (Armitage, Lo & Plummer, 2012). However, the rapid infrastructure and economic development in the region, the resultant emergence of new stakeholders and changes in the roles and position of the existing stakeholders may have undesirable impacts on the vulnerable groups (Jegadeesan & Fujita, 2011) and therefore the efficacy of these institutions needs to be assessed and remodeled.

This study aims to examine institutional arrangements both formal and informal for managing tourism in PAs in Indian Western Himalaya (IWH) to advance the objectives of biodiversity conservation and equitable benefit sharing of tourism gains among various stakeholders. The PAs in the IWH cover 10.9% of the geographical area and are the repository of crucial and varied ecosystems and the last refugia for some of the iconic species. The region serves as the catchment of some of the important rivers with an annual discharge of 1,200,000 million m$^3$, providing water to millions of people, both upstream and downstream (Nepi & Joshi, 2002; Singh, Arora, & Goel, 2006), and other ecosystem services (Badola, Hussain, Dobriyal, & Barthwal, 2015; Badola et al., 2010). The challenges for the Himalayan PAs include sensitive ecosystems that require protection, natural resource dependent communities in need of alternative livelihoods (Maren, Bhattrai, & Chaudhary, 2014; Pandit, Kumar, & Koh 2014) and a landscape that has traditionally attracted tourists for religious, nature-based and leisure activities. Tourism in the PAs of IWH provides alternative development trajectories to the resource dependent and development deprived communities living in Protected Area borderlands (Dobriyal, Badola, & Hussain, 2017; Kent, Sinclair, & Diduck, 2012) Tourism is also a potential means to create a larger societal constituency to support biodiversity conservation. However, it can be a double-edged sword for the region, providing potential solutions to key challenges in the PAs of IWH, but can pose additional threats to biodiversity and local culture if unregulated (Zhong, Deng, Song, & Ding, 2011).

The present study was undertaken to i) identify the institutions, their characteristics and role in managing tourism, and ii) determine the governance setup and institutional framework best suited to achieve equitable benefits sharing among various stakeholders and biodiversity conservation via tourism in the PAs of IWH.

In the present study, the formal institutions include the state governed institutions such as those created by and under the control of the forest department and the formal laws and policy related to PA tourism. The informal institutions include those that have been initiated by the local people and their practices.

2. Approach and methods

2.1. Tourism in the Protected Areas of Himalaya

The Himalayan ranges extend for about 3000 km from east to west, with elevation ranging from about 300 m asl to more than 5000 m asl. The major landforms of the ranges, separated by transverse valleys and river gorges, are the Shiwalik (hills ranging from 500 to 1200 m), Outer or Lesser Himalaya (rise sharply up to 2500 m and above) and Greater Himalaya with glaciers and permanent snow (peaks rising beyond 5000 m). The temporal and spatial variations in physical conditions and diverse climatic conditions result in markedly diversified phyto-geographic stocks. Four PAs that are popular tourist destinations, located in the IWH namely Hemis National Park (HNP) in Jammu & Kashmir and Valley of Flowers National Park (VOF), Nanda Devi National Park (NDNP) and Corbett National Park (CNP) in Uttarakhand, were selected (Fig. 1) for the study. These sites have varying elevation gradient, resulting in differences in natural resources, livelihood patterns, social structure, tourist profile and nature of tourism (Table 1).

These sites are designated as National Parks under the Indian Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972, where no human activities are allowed. However, local communities have traditionally resided in and around these National Parks and are dependent on the natural resources.

2.2. Examining institutional framework through multiple case study analysis

The study was conducted applying multiple case study analysis approach to understand the formal and informal institutional arrangement for tourism management in the aforementioned PAs (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2014), without differentiating between tourism, ecotourism and any other prevalent tourism models. Qualitative methods including participant observations, focus group discussions (FGDs), stakeholders analysis, and literature review were used for the study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Rastogi, Badola, Hussain, & Hickey, 2010; Yin, 2014) (Fig. 2). More than two years of stay with the local communities, by the authors enabled participant observation at each site. For each site, the components of PA management i.e. the government departments and organizations involved in the management of PA, natural resource dependent local communities, tourism apparatus and tourism revenue sharing mechanisms were examined. Through
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