

Reimagining Archaeological Tourism in Pakistan: An Inclusive Approach to Sustainable Heritage Development

Umar Farooq

Lecturer, Department of Tourism and Hospitality, Foundation University Islamabad, Pakistan

Zaina Arshad

Lecturer, Department of Management Sciences, National University of Modern Languages (NUML), Islamabad, Pakistan

Khadijah Ali

Campus Head COTHM Islamabad

Abstract

Tourism is considered to be one of the fastest-growing sectors in the world, and tourism has played an important role in economic growth, employment, and cultural interactions. In the tourism industry, archaeological tourism has also been considered an important part of tourism, particularly because of its potential to create a link with cultural and historical legacies. However, despite being a country with a strong archaeological history, Pakistan has not been able to utilize its tourism potential to a great extent. This paper aims to explore the limitations of the current archaeological tourism system in Pakistan and propose an inclusive approach to archaeological tourism for sustainable growth in the country.

This paper has been conducted with a qualitative approach, and secondary data has been used as a data collection tool. Thematic analysis has also been conducted to explore some of the key issues affecting archaeological tourism in Pakistan. The findings suggest that tourism in Pakistan is currently facing limitations such as a lack of diversification, a lack of representation of historical periods such as the Hindu Shahi Empire, and a lack of infrastructure. The paper has also shown that an inclusive approach to archaeological tourism, considering various historical legacies, has a strong potential to improve tourism in Pakistan.

Keywords: Archaeological Tourism, Inclusive Tourism, Cultural Heritage, Pakistan, Sustainable Tourism

INTRODUCTION

Thus, tourism has become one of the most vibrant and dynamically growing areas of the global economy. In the last few decades, the tourism industry has grown as a significant factor in the growth of the economy. The tourism industry is one of those

areas which contribute significantly to the growth of various economies, both developed and developing. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization, “tourism is vital for the growth of the global economy, as it contributes 10% to the Gross Domestic Product of the world. Tourism also supports one in ten jobs globally. This shows the role played by the tourism industry in the development of the economy. The tourism industry is not only significant for the economy in terms of income generation but also for integration of the people.

In the tourism industry, cultural tourism and archaeological tourism are gaining greater prominence as tourism activities, as they provide an opportunity for tourists to connect with the historical identities of the places they visit. Cultural tourism is one of the important sectors within the tourism industry, as it comprises almost 40% of the tourism activities happening worldwide. Archaeological tourism is an important segment of cultural tourism, as it involves the exploration of the archaeological sites and monuments related to the past history of the places.

In the past decades, the tourism industry has developed as an important contributor to the growth of the economy. The tourism industry is one of the sectors that contribute significantly to the growth of the economies of various countries, both developed and developing. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization, “tourism is vital for the growth of the global economy, as it contributes 10% to the Gross Domestic Product of the world. Tourism also supports one in ten jobs globally.” This statement reflects the role played by the tourism industry in the economic development of the country. The tourism industry is not only important for the economic development of a country but also for the integration of the people of the country. Across the globe, a number of countries have succeeded in utilizing the potential of the archaeological heritage sites of these countries as an important tool for the development of tourism in these countries. For instance, Machu Picchu in Peru, the Pyramids of Giza in Egypt, and the Taj Mahal in India have become important symbols of cultural identity and have played an important role in the economic development of these countries (Timothy & Boyd, 2015). Not only have these places attracted millions of international tourists, but these countries have also succeeded in earning a significant amount of foreign exchange and strengthening their economies by providing employment opportunities to a large number of people in different sectors of these countries. Therefore, it can be concluded that these places have become an important cornerstone of economic development in these countries. On the other hand, Pakistan is a country that possesses an extremely rich and diverse cultural and archaeological heritage but could not utilize the potential of the archaeological tourism of the country. The tourism industry of Pakistan is only contributing about 5-6% to the GDP of the country, and a growing trend of domestic tourism is also being witnessed in the country (World Travel & Tourism Council WTTC, 2023). The cultural and archaeological heritage of Pakistan is extremely diverse and rich and includes different civilizations such as the Indus Valley Civilization, the Gandhara Civilization, the Hindu Shahi dynasty, and the Islamic and Mughal periods (Mughal, 1990). All these periods have provided important historical, architectural, and cultural insights to the world. However, the development of tourism in Pakistan has been

limited to a few specific periods of history. For example, the Gandhara and Mughal heritage sites have been the most prominent in terms of government support, development of tourism infrastructure, and international promotion. Similarly, the geographical spread of tourism activities in Pakistan has also been limited to specific regions such as Taxila, Swat, and Lahore. Therefore, there are several other archaeologically significant regions in the country that have not been explored in terms of tourism development.

The limited development of tourism in Pakistan has restricted the diversification of tourism activities. Ashworth and Tunbridge (2017) have emphasized that such imbalances in the representation of heritage can negatively impact the overall potential of tourism in promoting regional development. Similarly, by promoting only a limited segment of its heritage, Pakistan has the risk of missing several significant historical stories that can attract more international visitors.

One of the important yet underrepresented eras in the archaeological history of Pakistan is the Hindu Shahi period, which flourished between 850 and 1026 CE. The settlements are located in the important regions of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa region, which provide important information about the military, political, and social history of early medieval South Asia. Furthermore, these sites possess immense potential for the development of religious tourism, particularly for the Hindu population living in different parts of the world.

Though these sites hold immense historical significance, the Hindu Shahi period remains unrepresented in the context of mainstream tourism. Such non-representation is indicative of the larger issue being faced by the tourism policies of Pakistan. As discussed earlier, the absence of an inclusive approach is the major drawback in the context of the tourism policies of the region. As highlighted in the following paragraphs, inclusive tourism is being increasingly regarded as one of the important tools for enhancing the quality of the tourist experience, promoting cultural awareness, and supporting sustainable development (Smith, 2016). As depicted in table 1, the absence of the Hindu Shahi period is also visible in the spatial representation of the region, where the development of the tourism sector is concentrated in particular regions, while several important regions, including those related to the Hindu Shahi period, remain unrepresented.

Site	Region	Civilization/Period	Tourism Status	Key Issues
Mohenjo-daro	Sindh	Indus Valley Civilization	UNESCO site, moderate tourism	Poor preservation, climate damage
Harappa	Punjab	Indus Valley Civilization	Limited tourism	Lack of facilities
Taxila	Punjab	Gandhara Civilization	High tourism	Overcrowding, limited

					interpretation
Takht-i-Bahi	KP	Buddhist Monastic Complex		UNESCO site, moderate tourism	Accessibility issues
Swat Valley Sites	KP	Gandhara		Growing tourism	Security perception
Rohtas Fort	Punjab	Mughal/Afghan		Moderate tourism	Poor infrastructure
Ranikot Fort	Sindh	Medieval		Low tourism	Remote location, neglect
Hindu Shahi Sites (e.g., Hund, Udegram)	KP	Hindu Shahi		Very low tourism	No promotion, lack of policy

Table 1: Major Archaeological Sites of Pakistan.

It is for this reason that there is a need for the adoption of an inclusive archaeological tourism framework that can help in expanding the scope of tourism beyond specific periods and regions. In this regard, there is a need for the development of a tourism framework that can help in promoting the development of tourism in Pakistan by incorporating diverse archaeological heritage, promoting regional diversity, and adopting sustainability principles.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study are:

To assess the limitations of the existing archaeological tourism system in Pakistan

To explore the role of inclusive representation in the development of tourism

To explore the opportunities offered by lesser-known historical periods, like the Hindu Shahi

To suggest strategies for promoting inclusive and sustainable tourism in Pakistan

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourism literature recognizes archaeological tourism as an important part of cultural tourism and its role in economic development and cultural preservation and identity. Literature also indicates that archaeological tourism is a site of tension and conflict between the need for preservation and consumption. The tension arises from the need to maintain the site for future generations and make it accessible for consumption by tourists (McKercher & du Cros, 2002).

From a theoretical point of view, the development of archaeological tourism is influenced by tourists' perceptions of authenticity and their personal involvement in the heritage site. Poria et al. (2003) indicate that tourists' engagement is a product of emotional and cognitive relationships with the site. Therefore, interpretation is an

important factor in the development of tourism. This is an important factor because it indicates the need for diverse historical narratives and not just a focus on a few dominant periods of history.

The economic role of archaeological tourism is an important part of tourism and has been widely documented. The economic benefits of cultural and heritage tourism include direct and indirect economic benefits such as employment and infrastructure development (Tisdell & Wilson, 2002). Unlike other forms of tourism, such as mass tourism, which is a homogenous market, cultural and heritage tourism is a niche market. Therefore, it is likely to have a greater economic benefit due to the longer period of stay and the amount spent by tourists (Garrod & Fyall, 2000). However, Garrod and Fyall (2000) also indicate that over-commercialization of the site may lead to a loss of authenticity and integrity of the site and thus negatively influence its value.

In developing countries, tourism is considered a means to alleviate poverty and contribute to community development. Scheyvens (1999) emphasizes that community participation is a must to ensure an equitable share of tourism benefits. This approach is particularly applicable in the case of Pakistan, where the archaeological sites are located in economically underdeveloped areas. One of the major issues highlighted in the recent literature on tourism has been the need for a holistic representation. Graham, Ashworth, and Tunbridge (2000) propose that, being selective in nature, tourism reflects dominant political and cultural ideologies. This selectivity, in turn, marginalizes some history, thereby limiting academic and tourism potential. Harrison (2013) also conceptualizes heritage as a dynamic process, where various stories exist, and promotes a more inclusive and pluralistic approach.

In terms of archaeological tourism, being inclusive means ensuring a representation of various historical periods, cultural identities, and regional stories within tourism products. Timothy (2011) also proposes that being inclusive enhances tourists' experiences, thereby making a destination more attractive to international tourists.

However, archaeological tourism also faces a number of challenges, particularly in developing countries. Shackley (2001) identifies a lack of infrastructure, trained staff, and site management as major obstacles to archaeological tourism. In addition, increased tourism activities also contribute to environmental deterioration and physical deterioration of archaeological sites if not managed appropriately (Pedersen, 2002). Ineffective marketing strategies also hinder archaeological tourism products from gaining visibility in the tourism industry at a global level (Aluza, O'Leary, & Morrison, 1998).

In South Asia, the development of archaeological tourism is not even. In India, for instance, different historical periods have been integrated into tourism circuits in a cohesive manner, which is beneficial for tourist engagement and economic gain (Chakrabarti, 2010). In contrast, the development of tourism in Pakistan is fragmented and selective. Mughal (1990) discusses the rich archaeological heritage of Pakistan but does not fully capitalize on its tourism potential. Khan (2014) also points out a lack of planning and coordination among stakeholders in the development of tourism in the country. One such gap in the literature as well as tourism practice is the lack of

representation of the Hindu Shahi period. This period is an important part of history with unique architectural styles but is lacking in tourism practice. According to Ali (2011), the inclusion of such heritage can help create new tourism products, which can attract niche tourism. This approach is particularly applicable in the case of Pakistan, where the archaeological sites are located in economically underdeveloped areas. One of the major issues that has been highlighted in the recent literature on tourism is the necessity for a holistic representation. One of the major issues that has been highlighted in the recent literature on tourism is the necessity for a holistic representation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is designed to explore the role of inclusive archaeological tourism in the development of tourism in Pakistan with the application of the qualitative research methodology. It is considered appropriate to apply the qualitative research methodology to conduct research in this field because it is easier to understand complex cultural, historical, and policy issues with the application of this research methodology compared to quantitative research methodologies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The research methodology applied in this research is descriptive and exploratory in nature. The descriptive part of the research is designed to analyze the current situation of archaeological tourism in Pakistan in terms of structural, regional, and historical limitations. The exploratory part of the research is designed to explore the potential of inclusive archaeological tourism in Pakistan by exploring some of the historical periods in the history of Pakistan that have been ignored in the context of archaeological tourism in Pakistan, such as the Hindu Shahi Period. The data that has been collected in the course of this research is dependent on secondary data sources such as journal articles, books, government publications, and international publications from UNWTO and WTTC. About 30-40 data sources have been collected depending on their relevance to archaeological tourism in Pakistan and other issues such as cultural heritage management, sustainability, and tourism policy. The use of secondary data is considered a vital factor in synthesizing the available data in a specific area of research and in exploring gaps in research in a specific area of tourism (Veal, 2018). The research has employed the use of thematic analysis in interpreting the data that has been collected. The entire procedure of thematic analysis involves several steps, such as: selection of literature, and coding of data. Thematic analysis of data is considered one of the best techniques of data analysis because it is both systematic and flexible. It can prove useful in identifying recurring patterns in diverse data sets (Nowell et al., 2017). In addition to this, the research utilizes the comparative method to analyze the international case studies of different countries, including Egypt, India, and Peru. These case studies were selected because these countries successfully integrate archaeological heritage into the tourism sector.

The comparative method is useful in analyzing data because it provides the best possible solutions to any problem. It is useful in the identification of the similarities and differences between different data sets (Ragin, 2014). Although the research is based on the best possible methodology, it still has some limitations. One such

limitation is the inability to collect data using the secondary data method. It is not possible to collect data using this method because it is based on the interpretation of the data. Moreover, the research is based on the secondary data method, which is not capable of showing the current situation. Despite these limitations, the methodology is useful in the identification of the structural challenges and the creation of the inclusive tourism framework.

DATA ANALYSIS

The thematic analysis also reveals other structural and institutional challenges affecting the development of archaeological tourism in Pakistan. Among these challenges are the following: the lack of an integrated tourism framework has led to fragmented development in the country; the overemphasis on some periods of history, such as Gandhara and Mughal heritage, has limited the diversification of tourism products in the country; inadequate infrastructural development, poor global marketing strategies, and poor institutional coordination have weakened the country’s capacity to attract and retain international tourists; limited community participation has limited the equitable benefits of tourism development. The key challenges and their impacts on the development of tourism in the country are presented in table 2 below.

Table 2: Key Challenges in Archaeological Tourism in Pakistan

Category	Issues Identified	Impact on Tourism
Policy	Lack of integrated tourism framework	Fragmented development
Representation	Focus on Gandhara & Mughal periods	Limited diversity
Infrastructure	Poor roads, facilities	Reduced visitor satisfaction
Marketing	Weak global branding	Low international arrivals
Governance	Institutional coordination gaps	Inefficient management
Community Involvement	Limited participation	Unequal benefit distribution

Source: Developed by the author based on thematic analysis of secondary data.

Firstly, the economic potential of archaeological tourism is considerable but not well exploited. This is supported by various examples from different countries worldwide, which show that heritage tourism can be an important source of income. In the case of Pakistan, the tourism sector is not well developed despite the potential for tourism being the same as in other countries. This suggests that the problem is not related to the potential but rather to the management. The second limitation is the issue of the selective history presented by the archaeological sites. In the case of Pakistan, the tourism policy is mainly focused on the Gandhara and Mughal eras, with little attention given to the Hindu Shahi era.

Thirdly, the geographical aspect is also an issue in the archaeological tourism in the region. The areas where tourism is well developed include Taxila, Swat, and Lahore, whereas the rest of the region is not well developed. The next limitation is the lack of information on the Hindu Shahi period. This is an important period with unique architectural styles, and information on this period is not included in the tourism policy. The limitations also include infrastructure, governance, and issues. The findings indicate that the tourism policy in the region should be inclusive to address all the limitations.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS (DETAILED VERSION)

The major objectives of this research were to identify the constraints in the current archaeological tourism policy of Pakistan and to assess the potential benefits of an inclusive policy in promoting tourism development in the region. The research findings reveal that despite the fact that Pakistan possesses a rich archaeological heritage of diversified nature, there remains a significant level of underutilization of tourism potential in the region due to some structural, institutional, and representational issues, which have been critically discussed in this chapter in accordance with the available literature on the topic.

Economic Potential and its Underutilization

The first significant research finding of this research is the identification of significant economic potential of archaeological tourism in Pakistan, which remains in infancy in terms of its utilization. The international examples of Egypt, India, and Peru reveal that archaeological heritage possesses significant potential to contribute to the national economy of these countries, which have successfully integrated the preservation of heritage with tourism development through the provision of proper policy support. Pakistan ranks very low in terms of its contribution to national GDP through tourism. It is evident that there remains significant underutilization of heritage potential in the country, which should be addressed through the provision of proper support in the context of policy development. The research findings are in accordance with those of Garrod and Fyall (2000), who have emphasized the need to integrate heritage tourism development with other areas of development in order to enhance its potential benefits.

Selective Heritage Representation

The second important finding of the research is associated with the selective representation of historical periods in the existing tourism policy of Pakistan, which is based on Gandhara and Mughal heritage and does not take into account other important historical periods of the region. The research finding is consistent with Graham et al. (2000), who have emphasized that the heritage is inherently selective in nature and is largely a product of dominant cultural and political narratives. The selectiveness not only acts as a barrier for the diversification of tourism but also for reaching out to a wider international community. In the context of tourism development, the diversification of historical periods is important for the development

of tourism experience. Harrison (2013) also highlights the significance of the representation of heritage as an evolving process and the inclusion of multiple voices and histories in the process of representing heritage. The absence of the Hindu Shahi period is an important case in this regard. The Hindu Shahi period is not a part of the tourism discourse despite the presence of important architectural and historical significance.

Regional Disparities and Irregular Development

The research findings have also highlighted the geographical imbalance in the development of tourism in the region. The tourism activities have been developed in specific regions of the country, such as Taxila, Swat, and Lahore. However, the development of tourism in other regions of the country is less. This is in accordance with the views of Garrod & Fyall (2000) regarding the need for the development of tourism in the region. In terms of international best practices, it has been found that the development of tourism in the region can be done through the development of tourism circuits. In the context of Pakistan, the development of tourism circuits involving less-known archaeological sites can prove to be beneficial for the development of tourism in the region.

Sustainability and Conservation Challenges

This study has also highlighted the importance of the concept of sustainability in the context of archaeological tourism. It has been argued that the increase in the number of tourists can cause environmental degradation. The views of Pedersen (2002) have highlighted the importance of sustainable management techniques for the conservation of archaeological sites. In the case of Pakistan, a lack of infrastructure facilities, site management, and regulatory control is creating challenges in the sustainable development of archaeological tourism. Further, a lack of integrated strategies in conserving these sites is creating challenges in their integrity. Nuryanti (1996) opines that sustainable tourism is a type of tourism which provides a required balance in terms of conserving these sites, their development, and participation of people. If this balance is not maintained, then the development of these sites would result in short-term benefits with long-term losses.

Role of Community Participation

The other significant aspect, which has come out of this study, is the lack of community participation in the development of archaeological tourism in Pakistan. Community participation is one of the significant aspects which can contribute to the sustainable development of these sites. In the context of Pakistan, it is evident from the findings that the local communities are not being allowed to take part in the decision-making processes. It is argued by Scheyvens (1999) that community empowerment is required to ensure the long-term benefits of the sites. Community participation can also contribute to the conservation of the sites and the quality of services, which can enhance the quality of the experience.

Recommendations

Pakistan should formulate a national tourism policy that incorporates heritage conservation with tourism development by considering diverse historical periods in the national tourism framework.

Diversity in tourism strategies should also be introduced by considering less represented heritage, such as the Hindu Shahi era, to expand tourism activities in the country.

Promotion of tourism development in different regions of the country should also be ensured by establishing tourism circuits that connect less known archaeological sites to more known ones.

Sufficient investments should also be made in improving tourism infrastructure, such as transportation systems, to enhance the tourism experience in Pakistan.

Promotion of community-based tourism should also be enhanced by promoting community-based tourism in the country.

Marketing of tourism in Pakistan should also be enhanced by adopting new digital marketing platforms to improve the international image of Pakistan in the context of tourism.

The framework presented in Table 3 offers a systematic approach to address the major gaps in the tourism sector of Pakistan. The framework can help address the gaps in the tourism sector of Pakistan by considering inclusive heritage representation in sustainable tourism development.

Component	Strategy	Expected Outcome
Heritage Inclusion	Integrate Hindu Shahi & lesser-known sites	Tourism diversification
Regional Development	Develop tourism circuits	Balanced growth
Infrastructure	Improve roads, facilities	Better visitor experience
Community Engagement	Promote local participation	Sustainable development
Marketing	Digital campaigns & global partnerships	Increased international tourism

Table 3: Proposed Inclusive Archaeological Tourism Framework

Limitations of the Study

It is worth noting that there are certain limitations associated with this particular research, which are as follows:

This research is based on secondary data, which makes it difficult to incorporate on-ground realities.

The fact that this research is qualitative in nature makes it susceptible to a certain level of subjectivity.

The fact that there is a scarcity of updated statistical data makes this research susceptible to a certain level of empirical analysis.

The fact that this research is focused on certain aspects of archaeological tourism, especially those which are underrepresented, makes it difficult to get a comprehensive overview of the entire archaeological heritage of Pakistan.

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