



INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES AND INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

(Peer-reviewed, Refereed, Indexed & Open Access Journal)

DOI : 03.2021-11278686

ISSN : 2582-8568

IMPACT FACTOR : 8.031 (SJIF 2025)

Sustainable Tourism and Hotel Industry in J&K- An Analysis of Stakeholder Perception

Shaista Mohi-ud-Din¹, Aman Sharma² and Tajinder kaur³

^{1,2,3}School of Hotel Management and Tourism, Desh Bhagat University, Mandi Gobindgarh

(Punjab, India) E-mail: shaistamalik92@gmail.com

DOI No. **03.2021-11278686** DOI Link :: <https://doi-ds.org/doilink/07.2025-37238199/IRJHIS2507017>

Abstract:

This paper explores stakeholder perspectives on the advancement of sustainable tourism within Kashmir's hotel sector. The region has witnessed rapid infrastructure development in response to increasing tourist inflow, bringing both opportunities and challenges. While tourism growth contributes to economic development, it also places pressure on the environment and local resources, emphasizing the need for sustainable practices. Understanding stakeholder perceptions is essential for effective planning and implementation of sustainable tourism strategies. Kashmir's unique natural beauty and rich cultural heritage make it a compelling case for analyzing sustainable tourism dynamics. Using a qualitative approach, the study collected data through semi-structured interviews, surveys, and field observations, engaging a broad range of stakeholders including hoteliers, government officials, local communities, travel operators, and environmental advocates. The findings reveal diverse stakeholder views shaped by economic priorities, environmental concerns, cultural values, and social implications. The research identifies gaps in coordination and communication among stakeholders, with limited community participation in decision-making processes. Despite shared concerns over environmental degradation, efforts remain fragmented. The study emphasizes the need for stakeholder education, inclusive policy-making, and improved inter-agency collaboration to foster a more coherent and effective model for sustainable tourism in Kashmir's hospitality sector.

Keywords: Sustainable tourism, Stakeholder perception, Kashmir valley, Environmental sustainability, Policy implementation.

Introduction:

Tourism has become one of the most dynamic and fastest-growing sectors in the global economy, contributing significantly to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), foreign exchange earnings and employment generation in both developed and developing countries. As a multifaceted industry, it encompasses various components such as accommodation, transportation, attractions and

hospitality services (Aas et al., 2005). Tourism also promotes intercultural dialogue, supports heritage conservation, and can serve as a tool for regional development. However, the rapid and unregulated expansion of tourism in many parts of the world has also led to a range of socio-cultural, environmental and economic challenges, including degradation of natural resources, loss of biodiversity, cultural erosion and unequal distribution of economic benefits (Beirele et al., 2005). To address these challenges, the concept of sustainable tourism has gained prominence globally.

Sustainable tourism is defined as tourism that fully considers its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities. It emphasizes responsible travel practices, environmental conservation, local community empowerment and cultural respect. Unlike conventional tourism models that often prioritize short-term economic gains, sustainable tourism aims for long-term viability and equitable development. It aligns with the principles of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to poverty alleviation, climate action, gender equality and responsible consumption and production. Hence, sustainable tourism development has evolved as a strategic approach to ensure that tourism acts as a catalyst for inclusive growth and environmental stewardship.

Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), located in the northwestern part of India, is globally recognized for its exceptional natural beauty, rich cultural heritage and diverse topography. Popularly referred to as "Paradise on Earth," the region is endowed with snow-capped mountains, lush green valleys, glistening rivers, serene lakes and vibrant cultural traditions. These attributes make J&K a prime tourism destination for domestic as well as international travelers. The state offers a range of tourism experiences—from pilgrimage tourism centered around sites like Vaishno Devi and Amarnath, to adventure tourism involving trekking, skiing, and river rafting, as well as eco-tourism and cultural tourism. The tourism sector is not only a major contributor to the regional economy but also a critical source of livelihood for a large section of the population, particularly in rural and remote areas where alternative employment opportunities are limited.

Despite its immense tourism potential, Jammu and Kashmir's tourism industry faces a range of structural and systemic challenges. The region has been affected by prolonged periods of political instability and conflict, which have hampered consistent tourism growth and discouraged long-term investment in infrastructure. Additionally, the tourism sector in J&K remains largely seasonal, with heavy tourist inflow concentrated in specific months, leading to overuse of infrastructure and pressure on natural resources during peak seasons. The absence of a comprehensive sustainable tourism strategy has resulted in unplanned construction, environmental degradation, pollution of water bodies, and loss of biodiversity. Moreover, the benefits of tourism have not been equitably shared among local communities, many of whom remain economically marginalized and

disconnected from the mainstream tourism value chain.

Recognizing these challenges, there is a growing consensus among policymakers, researchers and civil society actors that a sustainable tourism framework is essential for the long-term prosperity of the tourism sector in J&K. Sustainable tourism has the potential to act as a unifying platform for peacebuilding, ecological conservation, economic resilience and cultural preservation. Several initiatives have been undertaken by the Government of Jammu and Kashmir, often in partnership with national and international organizations, to promote eco-tourism, responsible travel behavior and local community participation. Efforts have also been made to develop infrastructure, enhance tourism services and train local youth to participate meaningfully in tourism activities. However, the success of these initiatives largely depends on the involvement and perception of various stakeholders, including tourists, local residents, government agencies, tour operators and non-governmental organizations.

Understanding the perception and role of stakeholders is therefore crucial in designing tourism policies that are inclusive, locally grounded and environmentally sustainable. Stakeholder engagement ensures that tourism development reflects the aspirations of the local population, mitigates conflicts and fosters a sense of ownership among communities. It also helps in identifying gaps in service delivery, regulatory enforcement and capacity building. Unfortunately, in the context of Jammu and Kashmir, there remains a dearth of empirical studies that systematically assess stakeholder perspectives on sustainable tourism development. Most policy interventions have been top-down, with limited input from grassroots stakeholders who are most affected by tourism activities.

In this backdrop, the present study aims to fill the existing knowledge gap by examining the perceptions of key stakeholders regarding sustainable tourism development in the Kashmir Valley. Through qualitative and quantitative analyses, the study seeks to uncover attitudes, concerns, and expectations related to sustainable tourism practices. The objectives include identifying the drivers and barriers to sustainable tourism, evaluating the effectiveness of existing tourism policies, and proposing actionable recommendations for strengthening sustainability across the tourism value chain. The outcomes of this research are expected to inform policymakers, tourism professionals, and development practitioners engaged in promoting tourism as a tool for economic development and peacebuilding in the region. It also aims to contribute to the broader academic discourse on sustainable tourism, with insights that are replicable in other conflict-affected and ecologically sensitive tourism destinations. In doing so, the study aligns with the larger vision of creating a tourism sector in Jammu and Kashmir that is economically vibrant, environmentally responsible, socially inclusive and culturally sensitive.

Review of literature:

The concept of sustainable development gained global recognition with the publication of the Brundtland Commission Report in 1987, formally known as the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED). It defined sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987). This definition emphasizes the importance of intergenerational equity and the responsible use of environmental, social and economic resources. It serves as the foundational philosophy for a wide range of sustainable practices, including those in the tourism sector.

Sustainable tourism, as a derivative of this broader concept, refers to the continuous development of tourism-related infrastructure and the consistent, long-term growth of tourist arrivals in a manner that does not cause irreversible damage to the environment or local cultures. It aims to balance the needs of tourists, host communities and the environment while fostering economic viability, socio-cultural authenticity and ecological responsibility. It seeks to minimize the negative impacts of tourism while enhancing the benefits for all stakeholders involved. The importance of sustainable tourism has gained momentum globally, especially as the environmental consequences of mass tourism—such as pollution, over-tourism and biodiversity loss—have become more visible. The transition to a “green economy”, which integrates environmental health with economic growth, has accelerated in recent years due to increasing environmental awareness and climate change impacts (Lipman and Vorster, 2011). A green economy promotes low-carbon development, resource efficiency and social inclusivity, and sustainable tourism fits naturally within this paradigm by encouraging responsible travel, conservation efforts and community empowerment.

Despite this global shift, the extent to which sustainable tourism has been integrated into national and regional tourism policies varies significantly across countries. Developed nations, equipped with stronger institutional frameworks, higher levels of environmental consciousness, and greater financial resources, have often led the way in implementing sustainable tourism practices. Many European nations, for instance, have incorporated stringent environmental standards and stakeholder participation models in their tourism development strategies. Conversely, in developing and conflict-affected regions, such as parts of South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, the adoption of sustainable tourism principles has been slower. In these contexts, tourism development often prioritizes short-term economic benefits over long-term sustainability goals, sometimes leading to overexploitation of natural and cultural resources.

Researchers have increasingly emphasized the need to contextualize sustainable tourism within specific local settings. Studies indicate that stakeholder involvement, especially that of local communities, is critical to the success of sustainable tourism initiatives. According to Bramwell and Lane (1999), sustainable tourism should not be seen merely as a set of practices but as a process that

evolves through negotiation and dialogue among stakeholders. Moreover, Mowforth and Munt (2015) argue that sustainable tourism must address issues of power dynamics, equity and local participation, rather than functioning solely as an environmental conservation tool. Further, the literature suggests that the lack of awareness, institutional coordination and regulatory enforcement are among the key barriers to implementing sustainable tourism in many regions. Tosun (2000) categorizes the limitations into operational, structural and cultural, highlighting the complex nature of barriers that prevent communities from fully embracing sustainable tourism. In fragile and conflict-affected regions like Jammu and Kashmir, these challenges are further compounded by political instability, limited infrastructure and restricted access to international tourists.

In the Indian context, several scholars have examined the potential and constraints of sustainable tourism development. Studies have pointed out that India's vast geographical diversity, rich cultural heritage and varied ecosystems provide immense opportunities for promoting sustainable tourism. However, these opportunities are often undermined by over-tourism in certain hotspots, inadequate planning and insufficient engagement of local communities in tourism governance. In regions such as the Himalayan belt, including Jammu and Kashmir, tourism has emerged as a critical economic activity, but its environmental and social impacts have often gone unaddressed. Thus, while the global discourse around sustainable tourism is robust and evolving, there remains a significant gap between theory and practice, especially in regions facing structural, environmental or socio-political constraints. The review of existing literature underscores the need for region-specific studies that evaluate the on-ground realities, stakeholder perceptions and institutional responses related to sustainable tourism development. Such research can bridge the gap between policy and practice, and help in the formulation of effective as well as context-sensitive tourism strategies.

Key stakeholders in sustainable tourism development:

Tourism is a multifaceted industry that relies heavily on the collaboration of diverse stakeholders for its growth, sustainability and socio-economic contributions. These stakeholders include governmental agencies, destination management organizations (DMOs), tourism trade associations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), private entrepreneurs, community members and various service providers, such as houseboat and shikara owners, hoteliers and local artisans. Each of these groups contributes uniquely to the planning, implementation, regulation and promotion of tourism initiatives within a destination.

The development and sustainability of tourism are greatly influenced by how well these stakeholders work together. For tourism to be sustainable, it must address the long-term needs of both tourists and host communities without compromising the integrity of the environment and local culture. This aligns with the broader framework of sustainable development, which emphasizes

meeting present needs without compromising future generations' ability to meet their own (WCED, 1987).

Modern tourism extends beyond recreation; it is a powerful vehicle for economic development, cultural exchange, and environmental awareness. As Holden (2001) highlights, tourism has evolved into one of the most significant global industries, promoting peaceful and meaningful interactions across cultures (Lett, 1989). Its explosive growth since the 1950s (Weaver, 2000) has brought prosperity but has also raised serious concerns about environmental degradation, cultural commodification, and uneven development. UNEP and WTO (2005) caution that without proper planning and regulation, tourism can exert immense pressure on fragile ecosystems and socio-cultural fabrics.

Given this complexity, effective tourism governance necessitates a thorough stakeholder analysis—a strategic approach to identifying, categorizing, and understanding the roles, influence, and expectations of different actors. Such analysis allows planners and policymakers to design interventions that are inclusive, participatory, and context-sensitive. For example, houseboat and shikara owners not only contribute to the local economy but also serve as custodians of cultural heritage and environmental stewards of water-based tourism. Similarly, NGOs often act as watchdogs and advocates for sustainable and ethical practices, while governmental bodies create regulatory frameworks and provide infrastructure support. An essential stakeholder group in any sustainable tourism framework is the local community. Their support, active participation, and sense of ownership are crucial for developing tourism that is socially acceptable, economically viable, and ecologically responsible. As noted by Gunn (1994) and Bae (2013), not all stakeholders are equally involved or affected by tourism activities; some have more at stake or more direct interactions with tourists. Those on the frontlines—such as local entrepreneurs, hoteliers, artisans, and transportation providers—face immediate challenges and benefits from tourism and thus play a central role in shaping its direction.

To foster sustainable tourism, destination planners must establish collaborative platforms where all voices—especially those of marginalized or less powerful groups—are heard. This ensures equity in benefits distribution, reduces conflicts, and builds resilient tourism systems that can adapt to changing demands and challenges. Moreover, stakeholder coordination enables the integration of local knowledge, strengthens cultural authenticity and enhances the overall tourist experience. In summary, the success of sustainable tourism hinges on a well-coordinated stakeholder approach that leverages the strengths, mitigates the conflicts and aligns the interests of all parties involved. The integration of environmental consciousness, cultural respect, and economic prudence through stakeholder collaboration creates a foundation for tourism that truly supports sustainable development.

Methodology:

This study adopted a qualitative research approach due to its exploratory nature, aligning with the objective of gaining in-depth insights into stakeholder perspectives on sustainable tourism in the Kashmir Valley. Qualitative techniques were deemed appropriate for understanding the complex and context-dependent dynamics that influence tourism development in the region. A total of 86 respondents contributed to this research through semi-structured interviews, which were developed based on an extensive review of the existing literature on sustainable tourism and stakeholder engagement. The interviews were designed to explore attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of various stakeholders who are directly or indirectly involved in the tourism sector. The sampling technique employed was purposive sampling, targeting individuals with relevant experience and involvement in the tourism industry. The respondents included:

- Representatives from the Jammu & Kashmir Tourism Development Corporation (JKTDC)
- The Assistant Director of Tourism, Kashmir (DTK)
- Tourism professionals and subject-matter experts
- Government officials associated with tourism development and environmental management
- Hoteliers, travel agents, and tour operators
- Local community members, including houseboat owners and shikarawalas

These stakeholders were selected due to their direct engagement with tourism planning, management, and service delivery, and their influence on the promotion of sustainable practices within the region. Data collected through the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. This method facilitated the identification of recurring themes and patterns, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the enablers and barriers to sustainable tourism in Kashmir. Furthermore, the study paid particular attention to the types of tourism that the Kashmir region can potentially develop, capitalizing on its distinctive geographical setting and rich cultural heritage. Based on the physical and cultural characteristics of the region, tourism in Kashmir was categorized into three primary forms:

City Tourism: Focused on urban areas with historical landmarks, cultural sites, Mughal gardens, and local crafts.

Lake Tourism: Centered around the scenic beauty and ecological value of Dal Lake, Wullar Lake, and their surrounding environments, including activities involving houseboats and shikaras.

Mountain or White Tourism: Encompassing adventure tourism and eco-tourism in the Pir Panjal and Himalayan ranges, including skiing, trekking, and exploration of natural

landscapes.

The methodological approach thus allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the sustainable tourism landscape in Kashmir, with implications for planning, stakeholder collaboration, and policy development.

Results and discussions:

The many stakeholders held varying opinions. According to one respondent from Director of Tourism Kashmir (DTK):

Sustainable tourism in perspective:

The various stakeholders involved shared views that we ought to protect the environment for the next generations as well. Even though various stakeholders have differing perspectives, they are all sensitive to the state of the natural environment deterioration. The natives don't understand what sustainability is. As a result, different stakeholders have differing opinions on the various government decisions. Additionally, some stakeholders believe that because the workers in the state's major tourist departments are not professionals in the industry, the policies formulated are not as successful. According to one respondent,

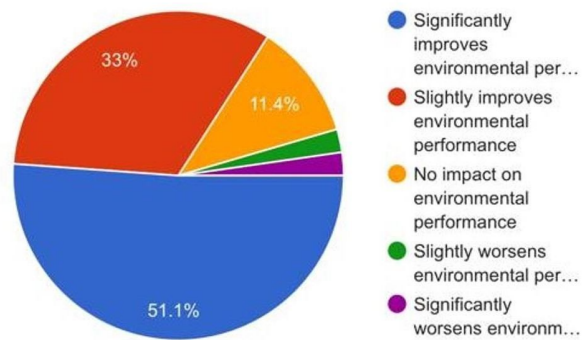
“...Sustainable tourism development is that which prioritizes the growth of tourism while also implying the best possible use of natural and cultural resources. Periodically, our department hosts a variety of awareness-related programs...”

Year	Arrivals	% distribution by mode of travel		
		Air	Sea	Land
2007	5081504	88.4	0.6	11.0
2008	5282603	89.1	0.7	10.2
2009	5167699	89.8	1.0	9.2
2010	5775692	91.8	0.7	7.5
2011	6309222	92.0	0.8	7.2
2012	6577745	91.7	0.7	7.6
2013	6967601	91.0	0.5	8.5
2014	7679099	86.1	0.4	13.5
2015	8027133	84.5	0.7	14.8
2016	8804411	84.1	0.9	15.0
2017	10035803	79.6	0.7	19.7
2018	10557976	79.6	0.8	19.6
2019	10930355	77.4	0.9	21.7
2020	2744766	79.2	1.5	19.3

Table: Tourist Arrival and Responses about Sustainability (Courtesy Bureau of Immigration, Govt. of India)

According to the Travel agent:

To expand tourism sustainably, we must protect the environment. Each person must contribute in some way to the preservation of the environment.



According to Tourist:

Sustainable tourism refers to the efficient use of available resources. Since we can observe the deterioration of Dal Lake and other places, I believe it is an urgent necessity, while development is important, we also need to consider the future.

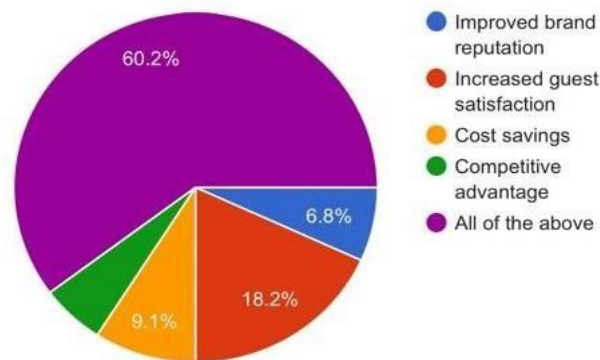


Fig. 2: Tourist Perception vs Sustainability

According to Locals:

We haven't heard the idea that sustainability is tied to tourism in this way before, but it is good if it entails the conservation and preservation of our natural and cultural heritage.

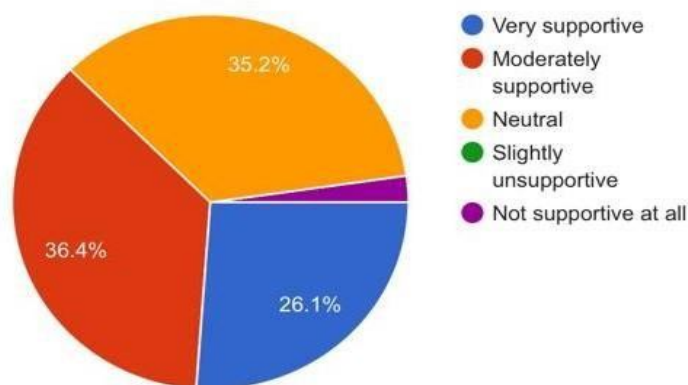


Fig. 3: Local Perception vs Sustainability

According to a respondent from DTK:

Planning is necessary to accomplish sustainability, and there's no denying that the government often creates new rules to protect the environment. All parties involved must assume responsibility for protecting the environment to achieve sustainability. The government alone cannot do this.

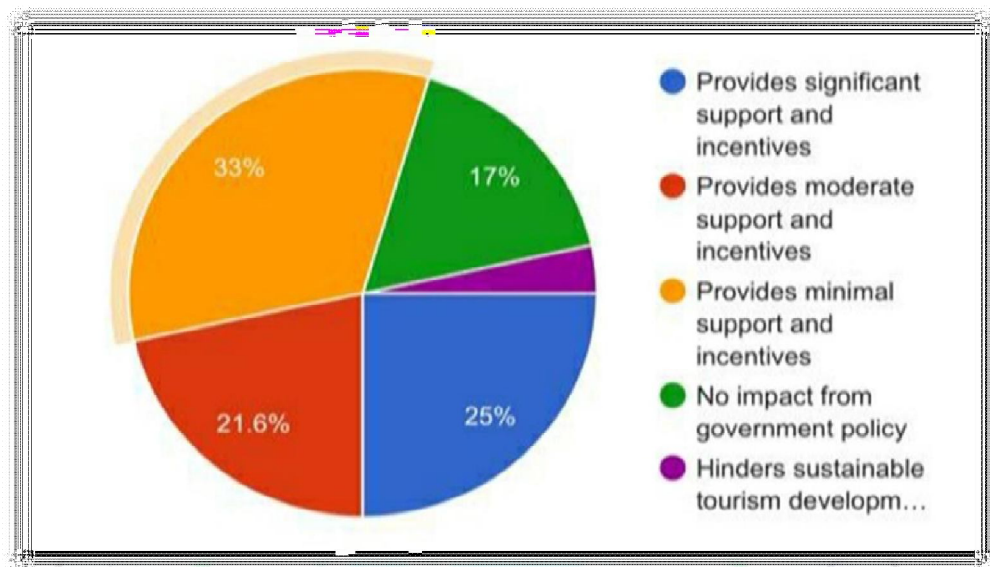


Fig. 4: Government policy vs Hoteliers



Fig. 5: Graph showing responses from different stakeholders towards sustainability.

Sustainable policy:

Several key stakeholders, such as hoteliers, have proactively adopted alternative practices at their individual levels to optimize the use of available resources and promote sustainability. Despite these efforts, there is a growing sentiment among the local population that government policies regarding tourism and lake management are either inadequate or poorly implemented on the ground. A particularly strong viewpoint emerged from a local houseboat owner, who voiced the collective frustration of the community:

"We, the houseboat owners, are the real stakeholders of Dal Lake. We have lived here for generations and understand its ecosystem better than anyone. Yet, when the Lakes and Waterways Development Authority (LAWDA) was formed, our voices were completely excluded from the planning and decision-making processes".

This exclusion has not only alienated a major stakeholder group but has also resulted in strong community resistance toward government-led initiatives. The lack of meaningful engagement with local stakeholders continues to be a major barrier to the successful implementation of sustainable tourism and environmental protection policies in the region.

Suggestions:

To promote sustainable tourism development, it is imperative to enhance public awareness regarding the importance of sustainability. Sensitizing the local population, tourists, and service providers to the long-term environmental, economic and socio-cultural benefits of sustainable tourism can significantly influence attitudes and behaviors. A fundamental requirement is the provision of education and training for all stakeholders—including government officials, tourism operators, hoteliers, houseboat owners, shikarawalas and community members. Empowering these groups with knowledge and skills will strengthen their capacity to adopt environmentally friendly practices and contribute meaningfully to sustainable initiatives.

The study also identified a lack of coordination among various stakeholders as a major obstacle. Bridging the communication gaps between government agencies, private sector entities, and local communities is essential for the development of coherent and inclusive tourism policies. Enhanced collaboration among stakeholders can lead to creative synergies that foster innovation, improve efficiency, and strengthen accountability. Furthermore, authorities must prioritize inclusive decision-making by involving key stakeholders at every stage of policy formulation and implementation. Meaningful engagement builds trust, promotes transparency, and ensures that the perspectives of all affected parties—especially local communities—are taken into account. For the objectives of sustainable tourism to be realized, stakeholders must also demonstrate a high level of responsibility and commitment. Lastly, the successful execution of government-led sustainable tourism initiatives depends not only on planning but also on their effective and transparent

implementation on the ground.

Conclusion and recommendations:

The study reveals a complex yet critical scenario concerning the implementation of sustainable tourism in Kashmir. While there is a shared understanding among stakeholders about the urgent need to protect the natural environment for the benefit of future generations, the path toward realizing this vision is fraught with challenges. One of the most pressing issues is the widespread lack of awareness about sustainability, especially within local communities who are vital to the success of tourism initiatives. These communities often remain unaware of the long-term benefits of sustainable practices and, more critically, are routinely left out of decision-making processes. This exclusion not only disempowers them but also hinders the development of tourism strategies that are both inclusive and grounded in local realities.

To address this, there is a strong need for targeted education, capacity-building programs, and awareness campaigns aimed at empowering local residents with the knowledge and tools necessary to participate meaningfully. Another significant barrier is the lack of coordination between various stakeholders, including government bodies, tourism departments, private enterprises, and community members. The absence of effective communication channels often leads to fragmented efforts, duplication of work, and the implementation of poorly designed policies that fail to meet the needs on the ground. Adding to the complexity is the concern regarding the placement of individuals lacking domain expertise in key decision-making positions within tourism departments. The appointment of such non-specialists often results in policies that are not informed by scientific research or practical realities, thereby compromising their effectiveness. Furthermore, valuable insights from previous sustainability-focused studies are frequently disregarded, resulting in repetitive planning and policy failures.

To move forward, the study strongly recommends a multi-pronged approach. This includes raising stakeholder awareness through structured education programs, ensuring better inter-agency coordination to harmonize objectives, and establishing participatory frameworks that give voice to local communities. In addition, recruiting trained professionals in tourism and sustainability, adopting evidence-based policy planning, and setting up robust monitoring and evaluation systems will greatly enhance the potential for successful, long-term implementation of sustainable tourism initiatives in Kashmir.

References:

1. Aas, C., Ladkin, A. and Fletcher, J. (2005). Stakeholder collaboration and heritage management. *Annals of Tourism Research*. Vol.32, pp. 28-48.
2. Bramwell, B., and Lane, B. (1999). Collaboration and Partnerships for Sustainable Tourism. *Journals of Sustainable Tourism*. Vol.7,3 & 4. pp. 179-181.

3. Bae, K.K. (2013). *The Perceived role of Key Stakeholders' involvement in Sustainable tourism development*, PhD Thesis, University of Nottingham.
4. Beirele C Thomas and Konisky M David. (2005). Values, conflict, and trust in participatory environmental planning, *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, vol.19, issue-4, pp. 587-602.
5. Gunn CA. 1994. *Tourism Planning: Basics, Concepts, Cases*. 3rd ed. Washington, D.C.: Taylor & Francis.
6. Holden A. 2001. *Environment and Tourism*. Routledge, London.
7. Lett JD. 1989. Epilogue: Tourism, authenticity and commodification. In: Smith VL (Ed.), *Hosts and Guests: The Anthropology of Tourism*, 2nd ed., University of Pennsylvania Press, pp. 247–260.
8. Lipman, G., & Vorster, S. (2011). *Green Growth and Travelism: Concept, Policy and Practice for Sustainable Tourism*. Routledge.
9. Mowforth, M., & Munt, I. (2015). *Tourism and Sustainability: Development, Globalisation and New Tourism in the Third World* (4th ed.). Routledge.
10. Tosun, C. (2000). *Limits to community participation in the tourism development process in developing countries*. *Tourism Management*, 21(6), 613–633.
11. UNEP & WTO. 2005. *Making Tourism More Sustainable: A Guide for Policy Makers*. United Nations Environment Programme and World Tourism Organization.
12. WCED (World Commission on Environment and Development). 1987. *Our Common Future*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
13. Weaver D. 2000. *The Encyclopedia of Ecotourism*. CABI Publishing.

