



EXPLORING ECO TOURISM POTENTIAL OF AN ECOSENSITIVE REGION: THE CASE STUDY OFVELLAYANI LAKE IN THIRUVANANTHAPURAM DISTRICT, KERALA

Nandini N V ¹, Chinthan Dahyabhai Patel ²

¹ M. Plan (Urban & Regional Planning) Student, Parul Institute of Architecture & Research, Parul University, Vadodara, Gujarat

² Professor, Urban & Regional Planning, Parul Institute of Architecture & Research, Parul University, Vadodara, Gujarat

Corresponding Author E-mail – nandiniv111@gmail.com

Abstract

The study aimed to evaluate the ecotourism potential of Vellayani Lake, the only freshwater resource in Thiruvananthapuram district, Kerala. The lake's area decreased significantly due to irrational human behavior and unsustainable exploitation of ecosystem services. The primary cause of overexploitation is the failure to recognize the economic importance of the ecosystem services. The study focuses on improving the lake's ecosystem services and enhancing tourism activities. The study concluded with the development of tourism facilities and lake restoration.

Keyword: *Ecosystem services, sustainable development, lake restoration, tourism*

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is the act of individuals staying in locations outside their normal surroundings for leisure, business, or other purposes for a maximum of one year in a row. It is a dynamic and competitive industry that requires the ability to respond continuously to customers' changing wants and aspirations. Until the 1960s, tourism was mostly restricted to Europe, North America, and select sites in other parts of the world. Modern tourism experienced rapid expansion in the second half of the 20th century, with the Pacific Region and East Asia becoming the region where international tourism has grown the fastest in the past 30 years. In 1975, East Asia and the Pacific Region accounted for only 4% of international tourist arrivals, but by 1995, the share of world arrivals had increased to almost 15% and by 2006, to 20%.

This change occurred during a time when tourist numbers were growing globally. In 1995, there were approximately 78 million visitor arrivals in the Pacific Region/East Asia, compared to 305 million people in Europe and about 100 million people living in North and South America combined. In the early 20th century, Europe continued to be the most significant location for international travel arrivals, accounting for about 55% of all arrivals. In 2006, France, Spain, Italy, the United Kingdom, and Germany were five of the top ten tourist destinations, with France and Spain accounting for 14% of all international arrivals.

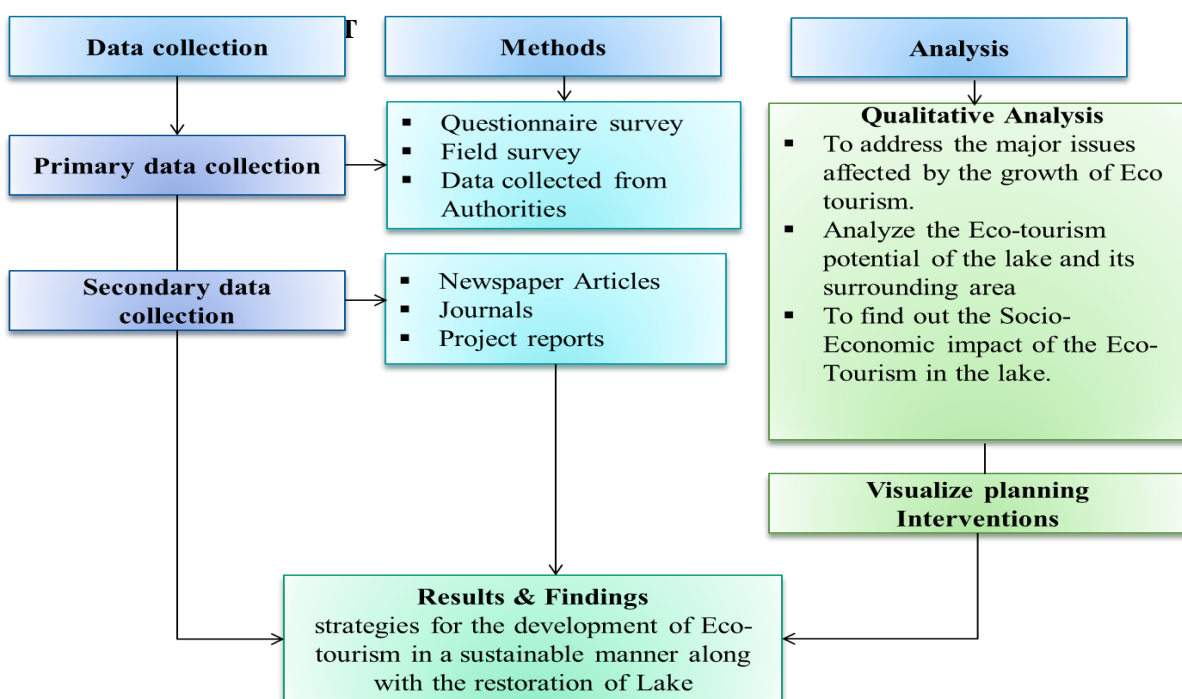
CONCEPT OF ECO TOURISM

Eco-tourism is a term used to describe environmentally friendly travel to natural areas, focusing on conserving the environment, sustaining local wellbeing, and involving interpretation and education. Sustainable tourism, on the other hand, is environmentally and culturally responsible, sharing similar concepts with eco-tourism, green travel, fair trade, and ethical travel. Sustainable tourism involves managing resources to meet economic, social, and aesthetic needs while maintaining cultural integrity, ecological processes, biological diversity, and life support systems. Ecotourism is more limited in scope and has gained popularity in recent years, driven by younger generations and savvy travelers of all ages. The market for ecotourism has expanded rapidly as people recognize the importance of protecting the environment and giving back while traveling. The term's origins date back to 1965, when Hetzer identified four pillars of responsible travel: minimizing environmental impact, honoring host cultures, maximizing advantages for locals, and maximizing visitor satisfaction.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To Scrutinize the Current Situation Analysis of Vellayani Lake.
- To Assess the Eco Tourism potential of Vellayani lake
- To put forward some planning intervention for enhancing the eco-tourism potential in Vellayani lake in a sustainable manner along with lake conservation

METHODOLOGY CHART



STUDY AREA

Vellayani Lake is situated at Thiruvananthapuram District in the State of Kerala. The Vellayani Lake is a significant coastal wetland that is situated between 8°25'35.21"N and 76°59'35.87"E, south of Thiruvananthapuram and north of Vizhinjam fishing harbour. It is the Second Largest Freshwater in Kerala stretches about 750 ha; by 2005, it had shrunk to 397.5 ha. This lake has a length of 3.7 km, a maximum width of 2.1 km, and a maximum depth of 3.0 m. The Vellayani Lake is surrounded by Kalliyoor Panchayat in the North, Venganoor Panchayat in the South & Thiruvallam Gramapanchayat in the West

FINDINGS

The Entire Water body of Vellayani Lake is lies in Kalliyoor and Venganoor Panchayat. The majority of locals in Kalliyoor and Venganoor Panchayat work in agriculture. The base crop for both Panchayats was coconut, and their cropping patterns were quite similar. Other important crops in the regions with vegetables, bananas, and mixed perennial-annual plantings include Jackfruit, Mangoes, Arecanuts, cashews, pepper, tapioca, lentils, and fodder. In the Palapoor region, betel vines are grown. Certain areas of the Kanjirathadi, Pandarakkari, and Mangilikari also practice paddy agriculture. Animal Husbandry is common in both Panchayat. Fishing is a traditional means of subsistence for local communities from Vellayani Lake. During paddy cultivation, there were wide array of fish species in large quantities. However, destruction or modification of the fish habitat due to anthropogenic stresses caused decline in the distribution of the variety and quantity of fishes in the lake. This reduced the income of the fishermen community and many migrated to other jobs for their livelihood, leaving only 50% of them in this profession. The lotus plant's existence in Vellayani Lake was noted in history, and it has a connection to the customs and cultures of the area. For the Lord SreePadmanabha, the lake was mostly utilized to cultivate lotus flowers. Later, when paddy cultivation was begun, dewatering caused the lotus plants to die. When paddy farming was stopped, the lotus plants have luxuriantly expanded, and they now cover a considerable portion of the lake. People eventually began to gather the leaves and blossoms for their own use and to sell them in the neighborhood markets. Instead of being artificially farmed, the lotus plants in the lake are organically produced. Vellayani Lake is the Second largest Freshwater Lake in Kerala and also an Emerging Tourist Destination. Vellayani Lake possess a great Natural Beauty with a wide variety of migratory birds. The biodiversity that exist in and around the Vellayani Lake supports the local population's way of life. The people visit the lake for enjoying the scenic beauty. Vellayani Lake is an Emerging Tourist spot in Thiruvananthapuram district.

RESULTS

The lake surrounds and biodiversity made it the ideal location for ecotourism amenities. Construction will just provide the most fundamental conveniences for the assembling tourists. The main focus shall be to:

- Improvement of the Muddy Path will be the main focus in order to make it appropriate for leisurely cycling and walking.
- Protecting the canal's embankment
- Opportunities to enter the fields on each side of the pathway
- Possibility of elevated vantage points for taking in the environment and birds.
- Making the Kireedom Bridge the focal point and focal point of the region.
- Basic tourist amenities like restrooms and refreshment stands.
- Bird species information shows in the area
- Lighting for nearby activities at night
- General Landscaping to provide shade Security system

The Vellayani Lake are considered as a freshwater wetland eco system of Thiruvananthapuram district. The lake act as a major livelihood of the local people surrounded by the lake. But the lake is now degraded because of the anthropogenic factors such as waste disposal, encroachment etc. The growth of ecotourism, together with the corresponding infrastructural and economic growth, is highly promising in this area. The residents of the area and this development will benefit each other. Using architectural forms that are harmonious with the natural landscape and planning with long-term environmental requirements are always vital to achieve environmental harmony while building tourist amenities. The Vellayani region is being considered as having significant tourism potential due to its paddy fields and the well-known Kireedam Bridge. Thiruvananthapuram's District Tourism Promotion Council (DTPC) has presented the government with a comprehensive plan to turn the area into a popular tourist destination. North west part of the lake is suitable for the tourist activities. This is the major spot for fishing and lotus farming. The roads from the region connecting with the highway and it approach towards the kovalam, one of the famous in the district. This road connectivity enhances the tourism promotion there.

CONCLUSION

The research project titled "Exploring Eco Tourism Potential of Eco Sensitive Region: A Case Study on Vellayani Lake, Thiruvananthapuram District, Kerala" aims to explore eco-sensitive regions through ecotourism. The study assesses the ecotourism potential through primary surveys and data collection from official authorities. The study reveals that people's ignorance of the value of Vellayani Lake's eco system is the main cause of the degradation and loss of wetland functions. The main anthropogenic stressors on lakes include unsustainable farming and fishing practices, watershed impact from canals carrying water to the lake, and habitat modification. Initiatives supporting Vellayani Lake tourism growth and conservation are essential. The most important idea is to manage the lake in an integrated manner to protect its valuable services, which cannot be replaced by other means. The study's recommendations and ecosystem services can help develop sustainable strategies for conservation.

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