

CONSUMERISM OF ENVIRONMENTAL GOODS IN SRI LANKA: FLORA-BASED ECO-SYSTEM VERSUS FAUNA-BASED ECO-SYSTEMS

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Mass consumerism, which is inter-linked with development, modernization, and rapid population growth has induced recreation which has already taken a heavy toll on the ecological environment in Sri Lanka. In particular, increasing demand for nature-based recreation has generated a competition between fauna-based reserves and flora-based reserves. Growing admiration of bio-diversity throughout the world has created a higher demand for flora-based recreation, which is a shift from the traditional recreation demand, dominated by fauna. Environmentalists strongly canvass that the existing forest and wildlife reserves be strictly preserved for bio-diversity conservation. Conservation yields use and non-use benefits. However direct benefits from conservation of forest reserves are considered non significant. Economic justification of conservation of forest reserves need optimization of direct-use benefits. Hence, *raison d'être* to promote recreational use of existing forest reserves as a strategy to increase direct- use benefits of conservation.

References did not show a study that attempted to reveal, wholly or partly the consumer preferences for recreational benefits of the natural eco-systems in Sri Lanka.. The primary objective of this study was to identify the actual recreational demand generated by different types of eco-systems in Sri Lanka. Initially, estimates of the visitation (recreational) demand for two markedly different bio-ecological regions were obtained. The two systems investigated are the Sinharaja Forest Reserve and Yala Wildlife Sanctuary. This strategy enables estimating and comparing the consumer surpluses of the visitors of the two sites. Further, the study also analyses the relationship between socio-economic characteristics of the visitors and the visitation rate for each eco-system.

The analysis utilizes the Trip Generating Function (TGF) using zonal travel cost model, first employed by Wood *et al* (1958) and later developed by others. Linear form and the semi-log form of the multiple regression model were used to estimate the demand parameters of the TGF. Results revealed that the linear form is more appropriate than the semi-long form in using the zonal method.

Significant differences between visitors to the two eco-systems are observed. The rate of visitation is considerably influenced by the socio-economic characteristics of the people. The adoption of the same method to derive eco-tourism values of the two sites (Sinharaja and Yala) enhances the potential for comparability between the two sites. The usefulness of travel cost method in estimating recreation benefits and the possibility of including those realised values in extended cost-benefit analysis is emphasised.