

Review of ‘Kalpitiya Urban Development Plan 2021-2030’ using TIES Ecotourism Principles**Weerasinghe M.A.M.T.^{1*}, Jayasinghe L.D.C.¹, Dissanayake, D.M.S.B.²**¹*Faculty of Graduate Studies, University of Colombo, Colombo 03, Sri Lanka*²*Institute of Development Studies, Colombo, Sri Lanka***mamtweerasinghe@gmail.com***Abstract**

Rapid urbanization-driven economic growth creates opportunities and challenges for inclusive and sustainable urban planning. Kalpitiya, being the only city in Sri Lanka surrounded by both sea and lagoon, with its unique ecosystems, and historical and cultural structures, has become an attractive tourism destination. Kalpitiya, as an emerging tourism destination, contributes 10 percent to the local economy through tourism. It experienced 15,500 visitations in 2017, while the projection for 2030 is 29,770. In 2018, 18 % of residents engaged in ecotourism as an alternative income source while 69 percent expressed their willingness. The Kalpitiya Urban Development Plan 2021-2030 (the Plan) was formulated envisioning, “Blue Peninsula Emerging from Nature Resort”-the first goal to make Kalpitiya the most attractive tourism destination. In this context, adopting ecotourism principles in development planning seems prudent for Kalpitiya. The study aimed to assess the extent to which the Plan had incorporated 8 TIES (The International Ecotourism Society) ecotourism principles, which, according to UNEP, have been embraced by a growing constituency of NGOs, private sector businesses, governments, and local communities. Utilizing a qualitative approach, incorporation of 8 TIES principles [P1-minimize impacts, P2-increase awareness, P3-positive experiences, P4-financial benefits for conservation, P5-financial benefits for locals, P6-increase sensitivity to local conditions, P7-low-impact facilities, P8-recognize community rights] into the components of the plan [Introduction-C1, Preliminary studies-C2, Need of the Plan-C3, Framework-C4, Summary and SWOT-C5, the Plan-C6 and Zoning-C7] were assessed. Secondary data were obtained from official sources and reviewed journal articles. Within all components of the Plan, the importance of tourism development was mentioned while addressing P1, P3, and P5. P6 is recognized in C6, while P7 was not mentioned. P8 was recognized in C2, C6 and C7. Although it specifically identified an ecotourism zone, C6 only addressed P2, and P4-through the development of a mangrove garden. The respective project was prioritized as 19 of 25. Rehabilitating and conserving income-earning cultural assets were prioritized as 10 and 11 of 25-without any carrying capacity considerations, despite their importance for the industry. Considering P1, water effluent control measures for shrimp farming-a means of income for many-were not mentioned, despite the pollution of groundwater and estuarine system, on which the ecotourism industry depends. The review reveals that the Plan has not adequately considered or addressed the 8 ecotourism principles, therefore, it is recommended for Kalpitiya Local Government Authority to pass bylaws in line with ecotourism principles, while enforcing a guideline by the Urban Development Authority.

Keywords: Urban development planning, Ecotourism principles, Kalpitiya urban development plan, Local economy, Environmental conservation