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A Comparative Study of Geo-Spatial Characteristics Influencing Eco-Tourism Development in Sri Lanka and Taiwan: Insights for Sustainable Tourism Practices

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Abstract

Eco-tourism is gaining prominence as an essential approach to sustainable tourism, supporting environmental protection while generating positive outcomes for local communities. It represents a form of travel centered on nature-based experiences that prioritize ecosystem preservation, strengthen community well-being, and encourage awareness of cultural and ecological values through learning and engagement. Despite the ecological richness of Sri Lanka and Taiwan, two island nations with significant biodiversity, there is limited comparative research on how their differing geo-spatial contexts influence eco-tourism development. This study addresses this gap by examining the spatial characteristics that shape eco-tourism trajectories in both countries. Qualitative methodology was adopted, incorporating structured interviews and sample comprises of 32 Sri Lankans at least once visited Taiwan, who were selected under snowball sampling from Sri Lanka. Policy reviews and existing literature to assess geo-spatial distribution, community engagement and sustainable eco-tourism policies based on geo-spatial distribution tailored to island contexts within eco-tourism zones. Both primary and secondary data from Sri Lanka and secondary data from Taiwan were analyzed using thematic analysis in A Qualitative Hypotheses (QHs) to investigate geo-spatial changes and eco-tourism practices. Findings reveal that Sri Lanka's diverse yet fragmented geo-spatial pose challenges for cohesive eco-tourism planning, while Taiwan's centralized and technologically managed spatial frameworks facilitate effective conservation-tourism balance and visitor management. Taiwan's robust transportation infrastructure further enhances site accessibility compared to Sri Lanka's more isolated eco-tourism regions were evident, while 68% of respondents identified limited infrastructure connectivity as a major constraint in Sri Lanka. Both nations exhibit community-based initiatives, though spatial dispersion and coordination differ markedly. About 74% emphasized the importance of community participation, though uneven due to spatial isolation. Environmental vulnerabilities also display spatial variation, affecting tourism resilience that spatial planning and local context profoundly influence how eco-tourism can be managed sustainably, offering valuable lessons for policymakers and planners aiming to balance conservation with community development. The majority (81%) agreed that integrated spatial planning can improve conservation outcomes if supported by strong policies. The study highlights the significance of geospatial characteristics in shaping tourism resilience across diverse island environments. Drawing lessons from Taiwan's spatial governance, Sri Lanka should adapt strategies to its ecological diversity and infrastructure limitations. Effective eco-tourism management must address spatial differences and environmental vulnerabilities. These insights provide valuable guidance for policymakers and planners seeking to balance environmental conservation with community development while optimizing eco-tourism to preserve both natural and social environments.

Keywords: *Communities, Ecotourism, Geospatial, Islands, Sustainability*