Chapter 10

Darjeeling District as a Tourist Destination: The Future Vision

10.1. Introduction

Darjeeling District as a tourist destination is in the stages of development and consolidation. Its visitors increased from 310,000 in 2009-10 to 470,000 in 2010-11. Due to political unrest, the number of tourists came down to 405,000 in 2011-12. The tourist season -- from March to June extended to July in 2014 due to large-scale influx of tourists (Sanyal Samart,, Personal interview, 20 April 2015). Considering the appreciation local people have for tourism as the engine for economic growth it can be assumed that the destination is in the consolidation stage as it is envisaged by Butler. The attitude of local people towards tourists is overwhelmingly positive as they welcome tourists wholeheartedly and serving the tourists is considered to be an obligation to be fulfilled (Babu Joseph, Survey of Local People, 2012). Though tourism began in Darjeeling District in 1835 till today no incidence of antagonism towards tourists is reported.

The circumstances being favourable for the further development of the destination, it is desirable to have a vision for the future development of the destination based on sustainability giving due consideration to the various aspects of the destination such as topography, demography, human resources, ethnic composition, religious practices, rural setup, tea and cinchona plantations, agrarian structure, and indigenous medicines while making the plan for future tourism development.

Sustainable development is the one that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the capacity of the future generation to meet their needs. The tourism development up to now in the region was largely urban-based, which cannot be sustained in the long run. So the future vision should have an alternative strategy which can sustain for an indefinite period of time.
10.2. Sustainable Tourism Development Is Key to the Future of Darjeeling District

10.2.1. Definition of Sustainable Tourism

The idea of sustainable tourism began to appear in the tourism literature in 1980s as an alternative to mass tourism which was thought to be unsustainable. A new trend of thought, which emerged in 1990s, altered this viewpoint and brought about a difference between scale and impact of tourism. It is the impact of tourism that affects the destination negatively, not the scale of tourism. So, even a small-scale alternative tourism can affect the destination negatively if not managed well, while a large-scale mass tourism can have positive impact on the destination if the resources are managed effectively and the place of implementation is carefully chosen (Sharma K. K., 2005).

Sustainable tourism can be conceived as an offshoot of sustainable development. Brundtland Report defines sustainable tourism development as the development that takes care of the present needs without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs. A sustainable development programme should strictly adhere to environmental ethics rather than on customer satisfaction in order to take care of the long-term and short-term impacts of tourism on the environment and community (George, Mair, & Reid, 2009).

10.2.2. Sustainable Tourism Development and the Host Community

Sustainable tourism development takes into consideration the impact of tourism on the host community. The host community provides resources for tourism development and bears the social cost of tourism in terms of negative impacts. The tourism resources of the destination belong to the host community and most often they are not adequately paid for the use of these resources by the tourism industry. The only way to ensure that a destination is sustainable for an indefinite period of time is through the involvement of the community in the planning, execution, and benefit sharing of the tourism projects. This is a paradigm shift from the industry-controlled tourism which bases itself on customer satisfaction to a community-regulated tourism which focuses on the sustainability principle (George, Mair, & Reid, 2009).

The resources of the destination can include not only natural resources but a wide variety of resources such as human and financial. These resources that belong to the host community are assets of the community. Since they are used for producing wealth, they can be seen as capital from a sociological perspective quite different from the perspective of business, which
recognize only financial capital. The capital can be divided into fourfold category -- human, social, financial, and natural (Flora (2001) as cited in (George, Mair, & Reid, 2009).

Human capital includes knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social, and economic wellbeing (George, Mair, & Reid, 2009). Hancock (1999) as cited in (George, Mair, & Reid, 2009) denotes human capital as consisting of healthy, well-educated, skilled, innovative, and creative people who are engaged in their communities and participate in governance.

According to the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2001) (as cited in (George, Mair, & Reid, 2009), social capital resides in social relationships and it can be conceived as a resource that we invest to get a stream of benefits. It is the product of inherited culture and norms of behaviour. It differs from human capital in two ways. First, it is relational rather than being the exclusive property of an individual. Second, it is a public good shared by a group and it is produced by societal investments of time and effort. Following this view an active volunteer network in a community is a form of social capital (George, Mair, & Reid, 2009).

Prugh et al. 1995 (as cited (George, Mair, & Reid, 2009) divides natural capital into two major classifications and one hybrid namely renewable natural capital, non-renewable natural capital, and cultivated natural capital. The renewable natural capital includes natural assets like forests which can be destroyed or its capacity to regenerate can be diminished by overuse and other factors. Ecosystems comprise largely of renewable natural capital. Non-renewable capital includes fossil fuel and mineral deposits which are lifeless and finite. Cultivated natural capital includes agriculture and aqua-cultural systems which have two components -- one is natural while the other is manmade. Examples of which can be found in tree farms, sod farms, fish ponds, etc. Financial/built capital consists of cash, buildings, and other assets used to create new resources and generate new wealth (George, Mair, & Reid, 2009, p. 185).

Flora (2001) as cited in (George et al. 2009) is of the opinion that for a community to be sustainable there must be a balance between these four forms of capital. Finding a common ground among people who have emotional, symbolic or economic identification with a place is necessary to make decisions about development and resource use that will enable communities and their resource base to survive and thrive. Over emphasis to one form of capital over the others can affect the host community and ultimately destroys it (George, Mair, & Reid, 2009, p. 185).
10.2.3. The Capitals of the Host Community in Darjeeling District

The host communities in Darjeeling are rich in various forms of capitals. It is important to take a stock of each of these capitals as it will help in shaping a future vision for the sustainability of the destination.

10.2.3.1. Human Capital

As far as human capital is concerned Darjeeling District is in a better position compared with other districts of West Bengal. The district is having a literacy rate of 71.9%, while the total literacy rate of the state is 50.1 (West Bengal Bureau of Applied Economics & Statistics, Government of West Bengal, 2012, p. 53). It is to be noted that mere literacy rate cannot be counted as human capital though it is fundamental. Literacy together with adequate skills makes human capital.

The dearth of facilities for skill development is increasingly felt in Darjeeling District as tourism industry grows and a number of accommodation facilities augment. The few institutes for skill development in the area of tourism and hospitality can be listed as follows.


2. Salesian College, Sonada, offers Diploma and Advance Diploma courses in Tourism and Hospitality (Salesian College, Sonada, 2014).

3. Good Shepherd Institute of Hotel Management offers Degree and Diploma courses in Hospitality Administration (HimalayanTechies, 2013).

4. Bosco Academy of Skill and Employment (BASE), an NGO based in Bangalore, offers three-month’s certificate course in hospitality with 100% job placement. It is being run in Salesian College, Sonada, and Don Bosco Job-oriented Training Institute at Kalimpong.

All these institutes train personnel mainly for tourism and hospitality. Apart from these institutes, there are many schools and colleges imparting education in the district. Thus the host community of the destination has many individuals who are educated, trained who can contribute towards the sustainable development of tourism in the destination.
10.2.3.2. Social Capital

Social capital of Darjeeling can be considered a major asset for the tourism development. Youth of the community is drawn towards the volunteer service when the community demands it. The Gorkha Land Personnel (GLP) is one of the unique organizations which was created for volunteer service during political unrest (2007-12) in Darjeeling District, which attracted thousands of youngsters (Mungpoo news, 2014). The organization has been effective in rendering the much-needed services during the natural calamities such as landslides and storms. It shows that the host community has the ability to muster volunteer support when it is required. This volunteer force, which is the social capital of the community, can be used for tourism development.

10.2.3.3. Natural Capital

Darjeeling District as a destination is endowed with natural capital especially of the renewable type. The forest cover of Darjeeling District is 38.28% of the total area of the district. 124,575 hectares of land is under forest cover and it is the highest in the state of West Bengal. The district is rich in minor forest resources like ‘Amliso’ grass which is used for fodder, and for making brooms. Totala fruit which is in abundance is mainly used for decoration purposes. The district has a vast collection of medicinal plants which are used to meet the raw material requirements of the pharmaceutical and ayurvedic establishments outside the district (sakthirani, 2013).

Non-renewable natural capital includes minerals. Minerals such as sand, stone, and gravels, which can be used for construction, are available in abundance in Darjeeling District. The production of sand is 1,913,111.75 tonnes while that of stone and gravels are 1,041,403.425 and 2,452.25 tonnes, respectively, according to the 2010-11 figures (sakthirani, 2013). These minerals are very important when it comes to the construction of accommodation facilities and infrastructure which are essential for tourism development in the region. The future of the destination will be greatly depending on the availability of these materials as it requires further infrastructural development as a prelude to the expansion of the tourism industry.

The district is also rich in cultivated natural capital in the form of agricultural farms and tea gardens which are part of the beautiful landscape of Darjeeling District. Agricultural farms filled with cereals, fruits, vegetables, and lush-green tea gardens (Gorkhaland Territorial Administration, 2014) can be counted as the cultivated natural capital of the district. The
district has also many rivers, mountain streams, and lakes. The Samendu Lake in Mirik is the major water body of the District (Roy P. P., 2007).

10.2.3.4. Built Capital

Built capital includes assets such as cash and buildings which can be used to create new resources and generate wealth. The district is rich in terms of heritage buildings. Darjeeling Municipality itself has shortlisted 12 historical buildings (Baid, Darjeeling Historical & Heritage Buildings, 2010). In addition to these, there are many historical buildings in the district, which are yet to be shortlisted by the State Heritage Commission. A project is underway by the West Bengal Heritage Commission to prepare a list of heritage buildings in the whole of North Bengal region including Darjeeling District (The Telegraph English Daily, 2012). The financial capital of Darjeeling District includes financial support from the state government and Gorkha Territorial Administration. Investment by the private companies and individuals is another source of financial capital.

Darjeeling District as a tourist destination is endowed with human, social, natural, and built capital. Proper use of these capitals can make the destination sustainable for an indefinite period of time.

10.3. The Future Vision

Having made an assessment of the various assets of the destination in the forms of various capitals, namely, human, social, financial, and natural, it is appropriate to present a future vision which can help the further development of the destination. The future vision suggests a move out of the present urban-based mass tourism towards a rural, pro-poor, community-based tourism with local participation in its core for achieving sustainability. A working model for future vision can be framed taking into consideration of various facts. At present a large portion of the population is not the beneficiaries of tourism because of its concentration in the urban centres and its seasonal character (Datta T. K., 2010). The rural inhabitants of the district hardly benefit from the tourism industry, which is urban-based.

A shift from urban to rural tourism is desirable because of the fact that rural areas are abundant in tourism resources such as natural beauty, wildlife, and socio-cultural heritage. As of now, the destination promotes mainly mass tourism which is consisted of sightseeing, rest, and relaxation. Alternative tourism, based on various models such as eco-tourism, nature tourism, wildlife tourism, and heritage tourism, can be well promoted in rural areas where the
bulk of the local population lives. Promoting tourism in rural areas also will reduce the pressure of visitors to the urban centres of Darjeeling District during the tourist seasons.

Benefit sharing is a major issue in tourism. The benefits of tourism are to be shared with the host population as they endure the social cost of tourism in the destination area. When the host population shares the benefit of tourism, their support for tourism grows whereas when there no benefit to the host population they tend to oppose its growth. The best way of benefit sharing is through participation. The participation of the host population in tourism should begin with planning, sustained through implementation, and ends in benefit sharing. The proposed Future Vision of Darjeeling District aims at sharing the benefit of tourism with local community as the tourism moves towards rural areas from urban centres.

It is to be acknowledged that there are some moves in this direction. It is encouraging to note that there are some sporadic attempts by certain Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Forest Department to launch eco-village tourism projects in the destination area. The West Bengal Forest Department has launched 11 eco-tourism resorts (major_activities.html, 2014). Help Tourism, an NGO, tries to reach out tourism development to the villages through their village tourism project in Lingsey village in Kalimpong(lingsey-kalimpong.php, 2014). These efforts are to be considered as a drop in the ocean compared to the vast potentials of the rural areas for tourism development.

In all these projects the element of community participation is minimal. Vibrant community participation is quite essential to make rural tourism a sustainable project. The protagonists of the above-mentioned projects are government and outside agencies. For tourism projects to be sustainable, it should be conceived, implemented, owned, and operated by the rural community. The role of outside agencies should be limited to capacity building.

It is to be noted that there are a large number of families belonging to the Below Poverty Line (BPL) category (Dasgupta, 2011) in the district. In order to reach the benefits of tourism to these people tourism development should also be pro-poor. Pro-Poor Tourism is one of the components of sustainable tourism which gained popularity in the context of millennium development goals. Pro-Poor Tourism will benefit the host population in many ways such as augmenting their income and providing them employment during the offseason period when they are not engaged in agriculture. It also can provide employment to a large number of non-workers residing in the tea gardens.
Heritage is one of the prominent attractions of Darjeeling District. Numerous heritage properties spread out in the rural and urban centres, in the form of government buildings, residences, churches, temples, clubs, schools, and sanatoriums make it a destination for heritage tourism. The listing and restoration of heritage properties should be considered as an urgent need. The heritage properties are invaluable tourism resources which could be made as heritage tourism products. Promotion of heritage tourism especially in the rural areas can benefit the rural people.

Darjeeling was founded by the British as a sanatorium for convalescence and recuperation of the British citizens and invalid soldiers of the East India Company. Later even the wealthy Indians made use of these benefits. The salubrious climate of Darjeeling is still a great attraction for tourists. The future vision of Darjeeling as a destination includes health and wellness tourism. Indigenous medicines and faith healers abound in the district (Lama M. P., 2011). They could be partakers in the implementation and advancement of wellness and health tourism projects (Lama M. P., 2011).

Agriculture is the main occupation of the rural flock in Darjeeling District even today. Darjeeling Himalaya, popularly known as Darjeeling hills, has only 13% of the land under cultivation (Khawas, 2014). A large section of the population, living in the rural areas, practises traditional methods of cultivation (Government of India Planning Commission, 2008). Farming is largely depending on the rainfall. Irrigated agricultural plots are seen in the lower altitudes while the rain water fed agricultural land is found in the higher altitude. The agricultural crops can be divided into two main categories -- food crops and cash crops. Food crops include rice, maize, potato, wheat, barley, etc. Cash crop comprises of tea, cinchona, ginger, etc. Fruits such as orange, papaya, peach, guava, plums, and mangoes are grown in lower altitude areas. Apart from these the rural flock engage themselves in livestock and animal husbandry (Khawas, 2014). Considering the situation of the rural flock and their occupational structure, tourism can play a vital role in improving their economic lot. Agro-based Rural Tourism or Farm Tourism could be a viable option for the villagers. The villages which cultivate various types of fruits are a big attraction for tourists.

Adventure Tourism in Darjeeling District is as old as the destination itself. Beginning from the insignificant trekking tours organized by Fr. MacDonald SJ of St. Joseph School, North Point; Darjeeling District has grown to become an important destination for adventure
tourism. Among the many treks organized in the area, Sandakphu trek is the most popular. Though trekking and camping could go hand in hand, it is not yet a popular sport in Darjeeling District. The cooperation of Forest Department and the local people is vital in starting camping as it may be necessary to use the forest territory. The permission of the forest authorities is not easy to obtain in Darjeeling, whereas that is easily available in Sikkim (Dawa Sherpa, Personal Interview, 16 June 2014). Adventure Tourism should be a part of the future vision of the Darjeeling District as a tourist destination.

Nature Tourism is one kind of tourism which is acclaimed very much in the present tourism scenario. More and more tourists long to relax in the lap of nature to feel the loving embrace of Mother Nature. Nature Tourism cannot be equated with eco-tourism. The difference is subtle and the concept is still evolving. The difference is in the experience and the personal interest of the travellers. The eco-tourism concentrates mainly on promoting the responsible travel and preservation of the local culture and ecosystem in the destination while the nature tourists may learn more about the local cultures and enquire into the causes that damage the ecosystem. The concern of the nature tourists is about personal learning, while the eco-tourists concentrate on preservation and conservation. The difference is not mainly on the type of activities but on how the tourists look at the activities and derive personal satisfaction and pleasure (Moon, 2014). Darjeeling is a destination which has abundance of resources for nature and eco-tourists. There are enough flora and fauna and avifauna in the district. It can be a haven for both eco tourists and nature tourists. Though there are some ecotourism centres, the full potential of both eco-tourism and nature tourism is not well utilized. The future vision should be more focused in using these potentials so that the destination will become more popular for eco and nature tourists.
10.4. A Model for Future Vision

It is also important that the future vision should not be a bundle of suggestions, but a road map for sustainability. So it should be based on a model. A model is a simplification of reality, constructed after study of the representative real-world circumstances and is valid in making prediction about the changes if certain conditions are changed. By altering these conditions and observing or forecasting the results, an ‘optimum’ approach to management or development from a range of alternatives might be selected (Howie, 2003, reprint 2004).

The following model is a guide for the further development of Darjeeling District as a tourist destination. The core concept of the model is sustainability of the destination. Sustainability can be achieved through diversification of tourism by shifting the focus towards rural areas of the district rather than concentrating on urban centres. The introduction of varied types of tourism not only enhances visitor experience but also attracts special interests among tourists that bring even the remotest areas of the district into the tourist map.

The second important aspect of sustainability is of local participation as it is the best way to share the benefits of tourism with local people. As of now, the rural part of the district is not much involved in tourism industry. The benefit of tourism is not reaching the local people especially those who are residing in the village, away from the urban centres. That can be achieved by adopting a new modus operandi in tourism business. Tourism should go to the rural areas rather than bringing people to the urban centres which are already congested and overcrowded. The model suggests various types of tourism which should capture the attention of future planners and policy makers who can make the destination attractive to tourists and beneficial to the local people which ensure sustainability of the destination in the long run.
The modus operandi changes: There is a paradigm shift in the way tourism business will be conducted in the future

Figure 10.1. Modus operandi changes: A paradigm shift

The model suggests a future vision of the destination which is based on sustainability through diversification of tourism and local participation. This model provides a way out of the present urban-based mass tourism to a more rural, community-based pro-poor tourism where local people engage themselves from planning to benefit sharing. Tourism becomes a community-owned enterprise, rather an initiative by an outside agency with multinational corporate links. Different types of tourism can be introduced depending on the tourism resources or capitals of the destination. The basic criteria should be local population’s participation from planning to benefit sharing so that no one entity carries all the benefits leaving others high and dry.

The following flow chart explains how the future vision can be implemented involving all different tourism organizations, tourism industry, NGOs and local-level organizations such as panchayat and village committees.
Figure 10.2. Implementation of future vision

The flow chart shows how the future vision can be implemented in the context of various existing tourism organizations in the national, state, and regional level. The functions of these organizations are already laid out. In the local level there are no tourism organizations. The management of the tourism projects should be done by the local community at local level which can be carried out through already existing local level organizations such as panchayat and village committees. Tourism superstructure can be built by the tourism industry of the region. The capacity building and skill development have to be done by various NGOs, educational institutions, and tourism industry in the destination area.

10.5. Conclusion

The future of Darjeeling District as a tourist destination should hinge on sustainability. As of now the tourism in the district is largely confined to urban centres. The urban centres are already experiencing the negative effects of mass tourism which is promoted now. The infrastructure which was created for a small number of people 10,000 in 1850, by the British Government, today is overcrowded and congested especially during the tourist season. The solid waste management system of Darjeeling has totally collapsed and even other urban
centres like Kalimpong, Kurseong, and Mirik are experiencing the same. The yearly flow of tourists to these centres is on the increase in spite of certain sporadic events of hartals and strikes which affect the tourist flow for a short time.

As these urban centres are experiencing overcrowding, water scarcity, and congestion during the tourist season. The only way to sustain the destination and expand further its capacity to receive more tourists is by taking tourism to the rural areas. The rural areas of Darjeeling District are unalloyed in natural beauty and the people are tourist friendly. The rural ambience together with the touch of local culture is surely going to increase visitor satisfaction. The rural people who are not involved in tourism industry will get a golden opportunity to participate in the development of the destination and receive financial and other benefits from the industry.

The tourism resources of the rural areas are hitherto untapped in a major way. Cultural tourism which includes study and participation in the way of life of rural flock will be a boost to the industry as special interest tourists may prefer a village location and home stay for their touristic experience rather than an urban location which provides them with all the modern comforts. In fact all the tourism resources are concentrated in the countryside rather in and around urban centres. All these resources can be used for tourism development with local participation which give due benefit of tourism to local communities.

Tourism to be successful needs to be pro-poor, considering the economic and social conditions of the destination. The large number of people living below the poverty line cannot be ignored by the industry. Pro-Poor Tourism is one of the segments of sustainable tourism promoted by UNWTO. The future tourism development needs to be pro-poor to ensure benefits to the local people living below poverty line.

For the sustainability of the destination, the nature of tourism industry should undergo a change. It should move away from mass tourism which is largely unplanned as of now. The tourism industry of the future should focus on the tapping of hitherto untapped resources, especially of the rural areas, while ensuring the community participation which needs training and capacity building among the community members which could be taken up the educational institutions and NGOs with the help of the tourism departments of GTA and Government of West Bengal.

Tourism of the future should be pro-poor, community–oriented, and using the resources of the major industry of the destination which is tea industry to develop new and attractive
tourism products with the participation of the permanent and causal labourers in the tea
gardens. This would go a long way to improve the economic conditions of the people who
depend on tea industry for their livelihood. Tea Tourism which has the capacity to add new
and exciting tourism products to the destination will make the destination dearer to many
tourists from India and abroad.

Heritage Tourism which also falls under Cultural Tourism has a bright future for Darjeeling.
The heritage status of Darjeeling is appreciated by many foreign tourists during the survey.
Among the 260 foreign tourists surveyed, 258 of them (99.2%) say that the heritage of
Darjeeling District makes it a unique tourist destination. Among the domestic tourists 329 out
of 337 believe that heritage status of Darjeeling will make it a unique tourist destination
(Survey of Domestic Tourists , 2012). It is one of the factors which attract tourists to
Darjeeling and it is one of the added advantages Darjeeling is having over Sikkim, especially
the city of Gangtok which is growing as a competing destination to Darjeeling in the recent
years. The heritage properties of Darjeeling include heritage buildings, the world heritage site
DHR, Tomb of Captain Lloyd, the discover of Darjeeling, Tomb of Alexander de Csoma
Koros, the author of first English Tibetan Dictionary (Banerjee A. , 2012) and many other
heritage sites which need to be identified and listed.

In the future vision of Darjeeling District as a tourist destination, Heritage Tourism will
occupy a pride of place because of its international reputation, as a British hill station, and the
presence of a large number of heritage properties which include Tudor Cottage, Gothic
churches, and indigenous heritage properties like Lepcha Fort. The appreciation of heritage of
Darjeeling, which is proved by the survey, is an indication that the future vision of
Darjeeling should include large-scale promotion of heritage tourism while taking effective
steps to restore the heritage properties scattered all over the district. At present, the heritage
tourism is confined to some heritage walks. The introduction of heritage studies in the
curriculum of educational institutions was planned (Das C. , 2004), however, the
implementation is still awaited.

The future vision of Darjeeling District as a destination should look into various types of
tourism like Health Tourism and Wellness Tourism, considering the history of Darjeeling as a
health destination and the salubrious climate which is suitable for convalescent and healing.
Farm Tourism with its exciting variety of fruits like oranges, pears, peaches, mandarin,
pineapples, and vegetables like cucumber, cabbage, cauliflower, potatoes, radish, and
plantation crops like tea, ginger, and large cardamom (Darjeeling Krishi Kendra , 2012) can
be another viable option for Darjeeling in the future. Adventure Tourism for Darjeeling is not anything new. As of now there are many adventure sports like paragliding, mountain biking, hiking, trekking, and river rafting. It is sad to note that this place which hosted many prestigious Himalayan expeditions is losing its competitive edge over many other destinations like Nepal and Sikkim. Darjeeling, once a well-known destination for mountaineering lost its sheen now. Its past glory should be re-established. A combined effort of both GTA Tourism Department and West Bengal Tourism Development Corporation with all tour operators of the region can fasten the development of adventure tourism in Darjeeling District.

The key to the future of Darjeeling District as a tourist destination is the sustainability which can be achieved through a shift in focus from today’s mass tourism to diversified rural centered, community-based, participatory tourism which can ultimately sustain the destination and increase the satisfaction level of tourists while sharing the benefits of tourism with the local people.