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Potentials and Challenges for Cycling Tourism as a Sustainable Model of Transportation for Tourist Destination Promotion– Case Study in Ella-Sri Lanka; An Exploratory Study

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Abstract

Presently, lots of countries have initiated sustainable approaches to destination development. As result, cycling is also promoted due to the enormous environmental benefits it offers to ensure a smokeless tourism industry. Accordingly, this study aims to identify the potential and challenges of cycling tourism as a sustainable mode of transport for destination promotion. Further, the study explores the challenges of promoting cycling along with the tourists' perception. Ella-Sri Lanka was chosen as the main study location, and for in-depth analysis, the scenario study employed a qualitative approach. Purposive sampling and semi-structured interview techniques were applied for the data collection and at the data saturation point, 20 cycling tourists' responses were recorded for data analysis. The thematic analysis method was used for data analysis. Findings associated with the benefits of cycling were divided into four main themes economic, social-cultural, environmental and health, and other benefits. Additionally, tourist perception and the related challenges were categorized under three themes namely, safety and security-related issues, product, and process-related issues, and infrastructure facilities. Finally, implications for developing a more participatory policy approach towards sustainable destination development are highlighted considering the cycle renters, tourist guides, travel agents, accommodation providers, tourist services and facility providers, local authorities, government, and other relevant stakeholder groups involved in the tourism sector.

Keywords – cycling tourists, tourism development, sustainable transport, destination promotion

Introduction

The tourism sector is one of the main income-generating sectors in the Sri Lankan economy. At present, it is developing rapidly around the globe. In the Sri Lankan context, tourists are using various methods to reach their desired destinations. Such as cars, vans, motor bicycles, cycles, and so on. Therefore, in the tourism sector, transportation is taking a significant place and it is an inevitable part of the tourism system (Currie & Falconer, 2014)

The transportation sector accounts for one-third of carbon emissions (Rodriguez, 2009).and cars are the main contributor to atmospheric pollution in the world (Aldred, 2010) (Karanikola *et al.*, 2018). A move from automobiles to other transportation methods, called 'active transportation' (Teschke *et al.*, 2012) has several benefits. Walking and cycling are the most popular modes of active transportation. Many European countries encourage tourists to use cycling as an active transportation method as it offers lots of health benefits and also helps to protect the environment. It is recommended as one of the best methods to use for short journeys. Bicycling for leisure, recreation, and tourism is seeing a worldwide renaissance, according to a growing body of research (Lamont, 2009; Lumsdon, 2000; Ritchie, 1998).

Many young travelers are independent, and health-conscious, (Scol, 2016). Therefore, cycling could be an ideal means of transportation for younger modern-day travelers as it acknowledges sustainability with all other travel requirements. Sri Lanka tourism also experiencing a boom in cycling tourists. Thus, cycling is expanding as a niche segment (Gunasekara, 2008) and is a sizable market for several destinations like Kandy, Hikkaduwa, Ella, and Arugambay. This study focuses on cycling in the Ella area as it is ranked as a major tourist destination in the Badulla district of Sri Lanka and is popular among national and international tourists alike. Additionally, Ella was announced as a tourist zone (Ekanayake, 2021). Ella is a well-famous tourist destination among cycling travelers due to its isolated nature, natural attractions, bio-diversity, and budgeted services.

Cycling tourism can be classified as a green, sustainable tourist activity on its own. That indicates a type of tourism that respects both nature and the environment, and that does not pollute or harm the tourist business relationship with the authorities or the tourism area (Peter Saabye Simonsen et al., 1998).

Since most people know relatively less about cycling tourism, its purpose, and its other benefits this study aims to examine the factors influencing tourists to cycling tourism and in return how it benefits sustainable destination promotion. The study further explores the challenges associated with the promotion of sustainable cycle tourism.

Literature Review

Cycling Tourist

Knowing the behavioral characteristics of cycling tourists would be significant in tourism planning, product designing, segmentation, and promotion. According to the UNWTO, a tourist is defined as *"Any person, who travels to somewhere that is not his or her usual surroundings for less than 12 months, and for whom the most important objective of the journey is other than salaried activities at the destination."*

Scholarly articles define a cycling tourist as a *"person of any nationality, who are at some stage or other during his or her holiday uses the bicycle as a mode of transportation, and to whom cycling is an important part of this holiday. However, short trips to the "corner shop," etc., are not included."* Yet, the general definition differs for cycling tourists as they use the bicycle as a mode of transportation. Accordingly, scholars emphasize the importance of focusing on the number of days that tourist plans to use the bicycle during their anticipated stay. In addition, there are sub-categories of cycling tourists. For example, those who cycle only for one or a few days consider it as an alternative and enjoyable mode of transportation when exploring a destination. Another is hardcore cycling tourists for whom the cycle is the sole form of transportation and the only method to enjoy their vacation. Considering the above background, this study only considered tourists who use

cycles as a main mode of transportation during their tour at Ella and who stay more than 24 hours away from their usual place.

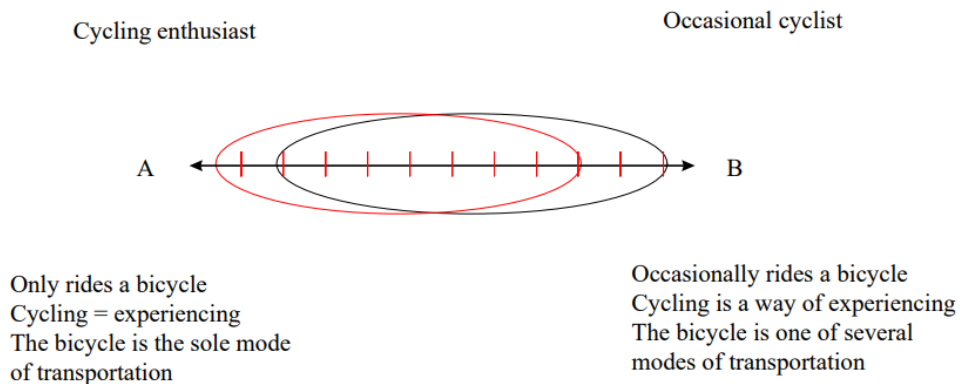


Figure 1. Types of Cycling Tourists. Source - (Simonsen, 1998)

According, to Simonsen et al., (1998), the above figure demonstrates that the cycling tourists can be graded according to the level of their commitment to the cycling tourism concept and according to the purposes of the cycling holiday. When considering cycling tourism, some tourists would like to tour anywhere with their cycle. The main aim of attracting cycling tourists is to ensure that it is enjoyable for them to cycle. This study focuses on the potential of a destination for cycling as a sustainable mode of transportation for tourist destination promotion.

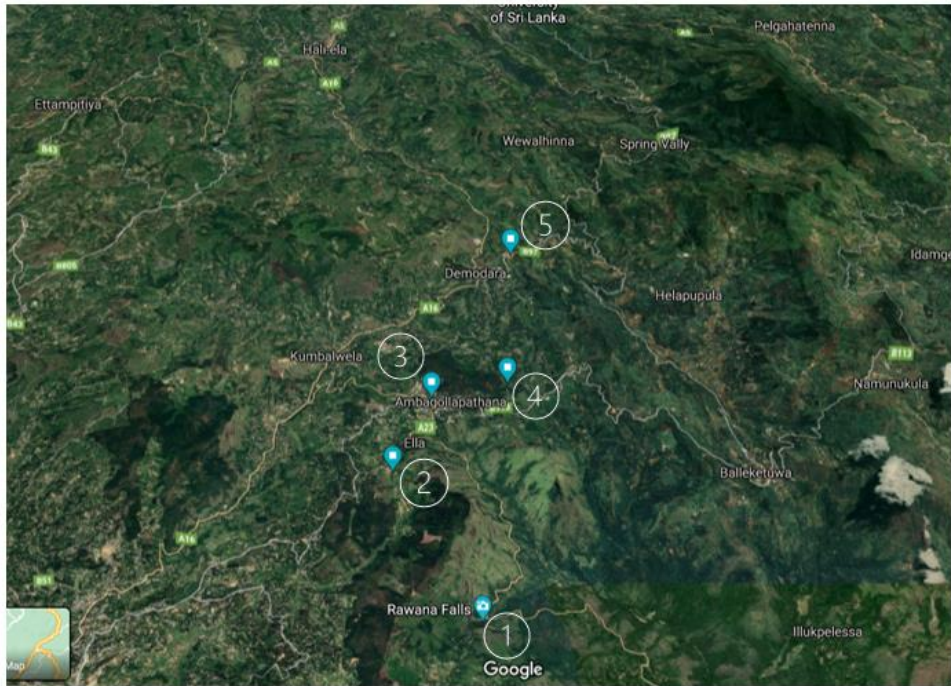


Figure 2. Map of Ella Tourism Zone and the Study Sites.

Source: Google images (2021)

The above map details the data collection sites for the study. 1. Little Ravana Falls, 2. Kithal Ella Falls, 3. Ella Spice Garden, 4. Nine Arches Bridge and 5. Demodara railway loop. Ella area is a mountainous area, and it is situated in a valley at about 1000m elevation, surrounded by higher mountains and hills. Further, Ella was considered for the national tourism development master plan for the year 2020-2030, considering its unique destination attraction features and the significance of the other surrounding attraction sites. The magnitude, climate, natural and man-made attractions, etc. increases the Ella potential and significance relevant to Ella's tourism industry. Therefore, most cyclists can enjoy nature, culture, adventure, etc, while riding and touring.

Sustainable Transportation

"sustainability" is intended to make the balance of economic, social, and environmental. Sustainable transportation is also derived from the sustainable concept, and in the contemporary world, humans are seriously considering these concepts (*World Ocean Review*,2019).

Sustainable transportation is generally referred to as “Green Transportation.” It is essential to know that sustainable transport utilizes renewable energy rather than the use of coal, petroleum, or other fossil fuels that can harm the earth. However, sustainable transportation is safe since it makes use of renewable energy sources. Walking, sailing, and cycling are examples of sustainable modes of transportation. (Rankesh, 2018)

Cycling is been taken as the best method of sustainable tourism. Because it is a means of transport that reduces costs, improves health, and offers environmental benefits for tourism destinations (Lancaster, 2020). Many scientists have proven that it is one of the best methods to reduce obesity and the best way to enjoy nature other than walking (Blau, 2008). Cycling just creates very insignificant environmental damage compared to other modes of transportation including air, road, railway, cruise, etc. Moreover, it takes up a small amount of area, and it is one of the most cost-effective methods of transportation, both in terms of immediate user expenditures and public infrastructure expenses. Therefore, it is clear that cycling promotes a lot of benefits including environmental, social, and economic, and health and well-being of persons. In urban settings, sustainable transportation can refer to active transportation options. As a result, cycling is perhaps the most environmentally friendly mode of urban and rural transportation. It is very feasible for short trips and medium-distance trips (John Pucher, 2008).

Socio-Economic, Health, and Other Benefits of Promoting Cycling Tourism

Presently, travel motivations and consumption patterns have been largely transformed. For example, the shift from mass to FIT tourism in the recent past and now moving towards special interest alternative-travels emphasizes the people's demand and engagement in tourism. (Nepal 1997; Mansuroğlu 2006; Cengiz 2007; Pirselimoglu Batman 2013). Social changes greatly impact the lives of people in every aspect. Thus, people used to go on vacation to escape the usual daily -routines and busy work schedules. Since cycling offers opportunities to enjoy nature, and culture while riding it is very much popular among foreigners in Ella.

According to a study conducted by the Austrian Ministry of the Environment, sightseeing and shopping by cycles account for EUR 2.53 billion in annual consumption, and that increasing the modal share of cycling by one percentage point would increase local retailer turnover by 0.2 percent, or EUR 87.6 million per year in Austria. If the entire potential of cycling for shopping excursions were realized, local shops' turnover would increase by EUR 1.3 billion. This would primarily assist the city and village retailers. Additionally, without spending money on any oil, gasoline, etc. cycle can be used and it is a pocket-friendly way to go on short journeys.

Moreover, the distinguishing features of cycling tourism such as diversity, integrity, and multiplier effects it has a great potential to contribute to the economy (Blondiau, T et al, 2016). Rapid social and lifestyle changes increase economic gains through manufacturing, developing and modifying cycles and creating sustaining constructions and designing, etc. (Scotini et al 2017). Additionally, the promotion of cycling tourism at destinations provides great benefits while opening up doors for new services and businesses which contribute to generating new direct and indirect job opportunities for locals, such as mobility managers, cycle tourist guides, repair shops, and so on. Klemmer et al. (2018) discovered an increase in recreational cycle tourists make a considerable contribution to new stores and local businesses in transit regions and amenities situated in recreational areas.

In the recent past, with the growing interest in the field of sustainable transportation and destination promotion scholars have explicitly studied this phenomenon and found that energy incentive, active travel has a positive contribution towards the health and wellbeing of people (Pucher, Buehler, et al., 2010). There is no doubt that cycling can be identified as a significant potential means to promote health and wellness among all (Bassett et al., 2008; Bauman & Rissel, 2009)

Tourist Destinations

A tourist destination is a collection of tourist products, services, and public goods sold under the same brand name to provide a seamless experience for the customer (Buhalis, 2000). Rather than describing it in terms of a well-defined geographical area such as a country, island, or town (Davidson, 1997). According to current definitions, a destination is a combination of a tourist environment and tourism products and services that provides a holistic experience that is subjectively evaluated based on the traveler's touring itinerary, the purpose of the visit, tour experiences, cultural background, etc. elements. (Fuchs and Weiermair, 2003).

Destinations are places that would attract visitors for a short-term stay. In brief, a destination can be explained as the local government boundary that needs essential for communities (Pike, S., & Page, 2014). Furthermore, Destinations are placed with some form of actual or perceived limitations, such as the physical boundary of an island, political boundaries, or even market-created boundaries, are included (Kotler, et al, 2017).

As per Ajzen, I. Driver (1991), tourist destination selection behavior is an important subject that is widely studied by researchers. Literature suggests that destination selection behavior is largely influenced by rules, psychological decision-making processes, and choice criteria have all been related in these behavioral investigations of destination choice.

This study is mainly based on cycling tourists, and their choice of destination should be the place where they can do cycling, and promote that particular place as a tourist destination. Accordingly, the study has chosen Ella as the main location.

Because, previous tourists also proved that Ella is one of the best destinations to get the cycling experience (*Trip Advisor - Ella Cycline*, 2020)

Destination Promotion

Mainly, a tourist destination is a geographical area that attracts tourists and it may have attractions including natural, cultural, man-made, or events. Accordingly, to determine the tourist destination's popularity, counting the number of visitors in a specific period to the destination site is the best answer (O. Kim and Shin, 2004). Nevertheless, there could be opposite ideas, that this can be an option of 'quantity' over 'quality' which smaller destinations do not appear to be essentially inferior because they have a less number of visitors. It is recognizable that little-known or remote destinations have less- popularity and a less number of visitor arrivals. Hence, it is important to take an effort to promote a destination while analyzing its scope the strategic vision. Finally, in the future, it may lead to a wide array of individual businesses and makes it a major destination among travelers one day (Lingxu Zhou, 2014).

Promotion of destination mainly considers promoting a town, an area, or a country to increase visitor numbers. In other words, destination marketing is the promotion of a particular region as a tourist destination. In contrast, sustainable destination promotion in Ella needs to draw significant attention from the product development stage to distribution and marketing (Promodo, 2018).

Methodology

Due to the multidisciplinary nature of the transportation and tourism industry, this study used both primary and secondary data. To in-depth analyze the scenario this study adopts the qualitative approach. It consists of various methods such as document analysis, participant observations, and semi-structured interview sessions with purposive sampling techniques. The study also used secondary data from different sources including data from the reports published by the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) and Senses and Statistics of Sri Lanka, and the Ella Tourist Information Center (TIC). Gathering information from different

sources allows the data triangulation process to get a rich outcome and to ensure the credibility of the findings (Bowen, 2009; Denzin, 2006).

Due to the qualitative nature of the study data were collected from twenty participants. The qualitative nature of the study the data ‘saturation criterion’ determined the sample size of the current study (Patton, 1990). Further, the study employed a semi-structured interview method for data collection, and data were collected during the period of October 2019. The unit of analysis of the current research was at the individual level, and the Thematic analysis technique was used to analyze the collected data.

Ella, Sri Lanka- The Study Location

Ella, Sri Lanka was selected as the study location since it is one of the most famous tourism hotspots among tourists in the hill country rural area and lots of cycling tourists visit Ella, to take some different touristic experiences including cycling, local cuisines, nature, and climate differences.

Ella is a small town situated between Badulla and Bandarawela and it is governed by the Uva provincial council of Sri Lanka. This scenic little town is one of the most famous attractions among tourists due to its unique geographical positioning. It is located in a misty hill countryside approximately 210 km away from Colombo. It is situated nearly 1100 m above sea level and has a high biodiversity with unique flora and fauna. Ella receives more international than local tourists. Because of this, it is changing into a foreign-dominated resort; hence Ella is considering a different destination from the other ecotourism destinations in Sri Lanka (Ekanayake, 2021). Previous studies have indicated that most tourists admire Ella as an eco-friendly, nature based-adventure destination (Fernando, 2010). Because of its central location, tourists stay in Ella to relax and enjoy nature, while admiring a clean environment, fresh air, and the soft and hard adventure activities in the region around Ella. Further, Ella has a rich historical background that dates back to the famous Rama, and Ravana-Ramayana trails. The surrounding attractions such as the Ella loop, Demodara Bridge, Ravana Cave, and so attraction also add more historical and

cultural value to the destination (*Lost in Sri Lanka*, 2019). Since Ella has a high tourist influx lot of traditional and pop culture events also have become a significant attractions. Particularly the food festivals, cultural festivals, and other important day celebrations, etc. The unique taste of local cuisines, textures, simple, attractive garnishing, and eco-friendly packing methods are some key reasons that travelers are attracted to Sri Lankan food in the Ella area. According to Ella Tourist Information Center (TIC), there are so many remote tourist destinations that tourists can observe in Ella and the suburbs. As Fernando, 2010 stated most tourists visiting Ella are interested in visiting less popularized places with adventure experiences.

According to the secondary sources, information, and the Ella TIC information five remote tourism destinations were identified in Ella and the suburb area for the current study. They are Demodra loop, Nine arches, Ella spice garden, little Ravana falls, and Kithal Ella.

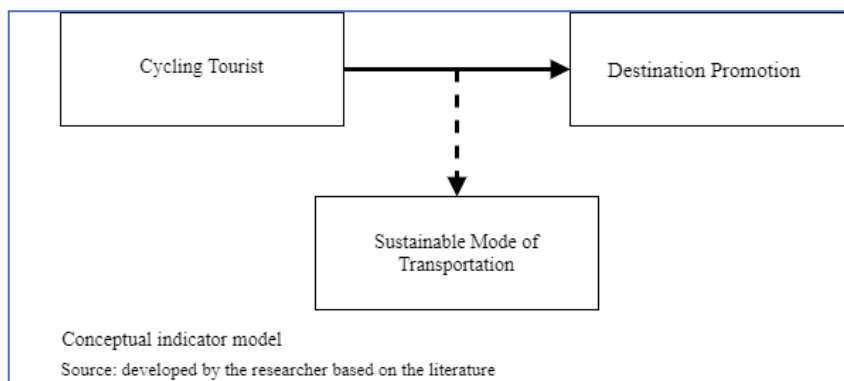


Figure: 3.1 Conceptual Indicator Model

The literature has demonstrated the various, economical, social, environmental, etc benefits as well as issues about cycling and destination promotion. Particularly, the European Cyclists' Federation (ECF) also highlights the significance of cycling tourism as a sustainable transportation mode. Based on the literature, the study

developed the above conceptual model to examine the potential and challenges of cycling tourism as a sustainable mode of transportation for destination promotion.

Results and Discussion

N o.	Respond ent ID No.	Gend er (F/M)	Age Gro up	Mont hly Incom e \$	Marit al Status (M/S/ L)	Occupa tion	Educatio nal Backgro und	Cou ntry/ Regi on	Length of Stay in Ella
1	A1	M	21- 30	>2500	S	Private Sector	Degree	EU	<5
2	B1	M	21- 30	<2000	M	Private Sector	Diploma	A	>3
3	C1	F	31- 40	>3500	L	Bank	Degree	EU	>5
4	D1	M	31- 40	<2000	M	Private Sector	High School	EU	>5
5	E1	M	31- 40	>3500	M	Private Sector	PG.Dip	A	>5
6	F1	M	21- 30	<2000	L	Private Sector	High School	A	<5
7	G1	M	31- 40	>3500	M	College	Degree	EU	>7
8	H1	F	31- 40	>4500	M	Marine r	Degree	EU	>7
9	I1	M	31- 40	>3500	L	Private Sector	Degree	EU	>3
10	J1	F	31- 40	>3500	L	Private Sector	PG.Dip	USA	>5
11	K1	F	31- 40	>2500	M	Private Sector	High school	A	<5
12	L1	M	21- 30	>2500	S	Private Sector	High School	EU	<5

13	M1	M	31-40	>3500	M	Public Sector	Degree	EU	>5
14	N1	F	41-50	>3500	L	Public Sector	Matser	EU	>7
15	O1	F	41-50	>3500	M	Entrepreneur	High School	USA	>5
16	P1	M	21-30	<2000	S	Private Sector	High School	EU	>5
17	Q1	M	41-50	>3500	M	Public Sector	PG.Dip	A	>5
18	R1	F	21-30	>2500	M	Naturalist	Matser	EU	>7
19	S1	F	31-40	>4500	M	Entrepreneur	M	USA	>5
20	T1	M	31-40	>3500	L	Private Sector		EU	>7

Table 4.1 Interview Participants' Profile

According to the profile of the respondents, males have dominated the cycling tourist category. Further, most of the respondents were in the age group of 31-40 years and most of them were having in-between USD 2500-3500 monthly income and the majority were married. Moreover, the majority of the respondents were private sector employees and they were mainly from the European region. Another important factor is that majority of the respondents were having a minimum of 05 nights' stay at Ella. Based on the above facts it can conclude that Ella is getting good demand from European tourists and mainly it is famous among young and middle-aged adventure-seeking tourists. According to the income patterns and the occupation of the respondents promoting local food, handicraft items, and reasonable tourist services would be ideal to promote the destination.

The success of destination promotion by Cycling as a sustainable mode of transportation

According to the objectives, the current study revealed four main themes regarding the sustainable mode of transportation.

Economic Gains

Generally, any visitor may conduct a Cost and Benefits Analysis (CBA) before making a travel decision. According to the field survey, it was discovered that traveling by cycle is a low-cost transport method. Further, findings revealed that Ella cycling tourists are a bit price-conscious and the majority are seeking budgetary facilities and services. Further, the majority mentioned that since Ella is one of the most beautiful places on earth with a very pleasing climate cycling is the best method to discover the beauty of nature. Further, it was identified that long-staying cycling tourists spend a considerable amount of money on modifying and repairing their cycles. It will help to generate new business opportunities for the local communities.

“A great trip. Yes! Ella is very beautiful and we love the climate and the environment here. Very Cool. And with YouTube and other social media, we came to know that this is a budget destination for most tourists. Especially the local foods, accommodation, transport, etc. And our friends recommend getting a cycle and do discover nature and the beauty of the hills. Before coming here, we search a lot of information about the destination, and, since this is an Asian country with low cost, we selected this destination. And cycling is nothing new for us. Usually, we are taking the annual foreign tour. So, we used to be environmentally friendly and this cycling concept is very famous in Europe too. Since we planned to stay at Ella for a week because of my travel colleagues’ advice. They said the cycle is an ideal vehicle to access some destinations in Ella and also, and they advised me to get regular check-ups of the cycle and to put attention to its performance before cycling because cycle repair shops are not widely available beside destination routes. So, I think tourism people may think of putting some cycle repair shops for the

convenience of cycling tourists. It will also increase your income too. Hahahhahaaa... So, I feel you can promote cycle tourism as an eco-friendly method.....”

Another intriguing aspect of cycling is that it is largely encouraging tourists to spend more on the local economy than other modes of transportation. Because, cyclists frequently visiting for local shops, restaurants, cafés, and other businesses. Therefore, there is a big opportunity to promote a local destination through cycling tourism activities.

Health and Other Benefits

During the study, some respondents highlight the health benefits and the safety side of cycling. Especially, it was mentioned that cycling is an active, energy-efficient physical activity. Hence, there is no doubt that cycling can be identified as a significant potential means to promote health and wellness among all (Bassett et al., 2008; Bauman & Rissel, 2009)

“Mmmmm..... perhaps I think cycling is good because it improves our cardiovascular fitness and muscle flexibility. And it is good exercise for the entire body. Isn't it? So, my wife and I used to go on a cycle, especially during vacations. You know; because we are working a lot of time with a huge pressure during our work life there. So, vacationing and cycling is a way to reduce our stress and relax. Because we both are working and have no time to rest during the work life. Therefore, I believe cycling is good for anyone regardless of age or wealth. Not only that, I guess cycling is a safe kind of transport mode. Because most of the time only the rider is there and the mind is not disturbed by another person. So, I believe cycling is all about having fun while riding. Usually, in our country (Scotland) they encouraged us to use cycles and highlight their benefits to society. In our countries, we have separate lanes (sections) to ride cycles. It reduces traffic and it is also good for our safety. Automobiles usually have separate lanes with speed limits. Since cycles don't have speed limits the rider can manage the speed and it helps to control the traffic in lanes. It is quite a peaceful way and ideal for short trips.... As I

observed Siri Lanka roads have mainly two lanes. Thus, it would be great to have separate lanes for cycle riders, especially in city areas as it reduces traffic.....”

Many respondents highlighted the fact that cycling is one good way to reduce traffic congestion and negative environmental impacts. Further, they mentioned having their cycle allows them to manage time without depending on taxi services that are unknown to them. Apart from that, they said especially in the rocky, hilly, mountainous areas better to have cycling as an alternative transport method as it helps people to get to their destination. The next factor is accessibility. Respondents emphasize that a cycle is one of the best ways to access the roads, paths that are not accessible by other motor vehicles. Hence, they said sometimes they can go closer to the attraction with the cycle.

“Well, I guess the cycle is very important to access some difficult roads because sometimes we can't get them accessed by a motor car or van. And we both find it a very friendly mode of transportation as it helps us to manage our travel time because we don't want to waste our time while waiting for taxi services. We can go for the time we need and we can enjoy ourselves and come back. It is an interesting kind of journey. And we get chances to try local foods. We went to 'wade kade' is selling something prepared from dhal. We sometimes get opportunities to talk to locals and we found it is an interesting method to learn the basics of a language. A lot of people in Sri Lanka used to say 'Ayubowan' to us as it is the traditional way of greeting in Sri Lanka..... Finally, to answer your question, I think cycling is admired by a lot of tourists as you can see here now because of the different benefits....”

Environmental Benefits

Traveling by bicycle is a different sort of experience for Travelers. Further, cycling tourists mentioned this is one of the best methods to engage with nature. Because while riding they said they can enjoy the beauty and they can stop anywhere they wish to enjoy. Further, they emphasize the overall tourism product is all about the experience it is just not limited to a place or a product but it also incorporates the

roads, rivers, waterfalls, the beauty of nature, and the local community. And they are also a part of the tourism product that we consume during our stay as stated by School, (2016). Most of the respondents respect the idea of being environmentally friendly and ensuring the long-term sustainability of the destination. Hence, they mentioned especially the virgin destinations should promote cycling, walking, and other possible modes of sustainable transport methods to conserve mother nature. Especially, respondents mentioned that cycling allows them to have a close look at flora and fauna. Another important factor is that cycling is a way to explore the destination without abusing the local resources. Hence, it is an ideal way to promote these types of unspoiled tourism destinations in the hill country. Respondents further elaborate on the importance of promoting cycling in rocky, mountain destinations and suburbs due to the smokeless nature. Promoting automobiles will increase environmental pollution including, air, water, and visual pollution, etc. Further, data revealed that road traffic and loud noise of vehicles are negatively impacting the quality of life of the people and the animals around the Ella area. However, using environmentally friendly accessible modes including cycling will be one of the best solutions to overcome traffic congestion and environmental pollution-related issues.

“I think we have a lot of environmental challenges, as you may know, climate change is one of the biggest challenges before us. Most countries cut down trees and destroy the environment, and nature for construction works. But we should look after nature. Because it is our blood. I am a zoologist. We need to maintain the balance of the environment, it not only human beings, animals, and trees everything is having an equal right to live..... In my country, people mostly use public transport. But in Sri Lanka, I saw many personal automobiles on the roads. If people were encouraged to travel by public transport or environmentally friendly type of vehicles, including, cycles, and battery-driven vehicles I think it is good for the environment. Because it reduces the consumption of oil, and gases and saves the environment without polluting air, noise, animal habitats, and the total environment. Young people like you can impress governments

with new tourism projects like in our countries. Cycling is a good option, as it minimizes negative environmental impacts.....”

Social and Cultural Benefits

Presently, people are living in concrete jungles and have very busy work life people tend to get a vacation at least every 12 months to escape from their busy lifestyles and pressure. As a result, they go in search of unspoiled destinations. Frochot (2005), pointed out that rural areas gain considerable attention and more visitation at present and have become an important element in the tourism industry. Respondents highlight the fact cycling offers plenty of opportunities to get closure with the community. Especially, during tea or repair work they said they will get the chance to engage with locals. Further, they highlight the fact, cycling offers great opportunities for the socialization process while allowing them to learn the key elements of the culture of the village subcultures, and to know about tangible and intangible cultural assets, etc. Therefore, almost all the participants emphasize that cycling is having a positive relationship with Community Based Tourism also.

".....I am a naturalist. So, I know the real value of promoting cycling and so-called smoke-less alternative transport methods in a destination. I believe there should be a top-to-bottom approach in policymaking and everything to conserve nature and culture. I always take great care of the environment and I learn from the places I visit. Travelling allows us to learn and develop self-discipline. Cycling on the other hand provides us with an opportunity to closely work with locals and get to know the unknown culture and societies. So, I believe promoting cycling in these unspoiled destinations would contribute to the sustainable development of the destination."

Challenges to promote cycling tourism at Ella- Exploring the Tourists' Perception

Based on the respondent's feedback tourist perception towards challenges to promoting cycling tourism at the destination was discovered and finally the data were clustered into five main categories as bellows. Safety & security, infrastructure

facilities, process-related issues, product-related issues, and environment and sustainability.

Safety and Security

Participants highlighted that they had to face difficulties because of their luggage. In Particular, the respondents mentioned they had different kinds of unpleasant experiences with the traffic police. Further, tourists stated that these types of cases are not very frequent in their countries. Additionally, many cycling tourists have mentioned that the congestion of other vehicles makes cycling feel less safe of their unethical driving behaviors. Especially, the smog, Carbon Monoxide, and other toxins emitted by motor vehicles are life-threatening to human health. Thus, breathing polluted air and frequent road accidents are some of the major concerns that cycling tourists were having in terms of their safety and security. Additionally, respondents mentioned that unethical behaviors of the people will also damage the image of the destination. Thus, it is important to maintain a healthy relationship with the host and the guest community.

"Sometimes police stopping us and asking a lot of questions. It might be their duty. But it takes a lot of time and in our country, there is no such system. Other than that, smokes by motor vehicles are a big problem for us. Sometimes even you may have seen that lorries and long vehicles heavily discharged gases, oil, toxins, etc., which are not good for human health. At least there should be time limitations for such types of vehicles....."

Infrastructure facilities

Participants mentioned that they have met challenges due to poor different infrastructural facilities. They further emphasize especially the lack of safe parking stations, repair stations, and comfort centers in the destination area. All most all the respondents have mentioned guiding services, including proper road maps, etc., and lack of internet signal are mainly negatively impacting their tour as they are depending on web-based information most of the time. Cycling travelers are often independent, and they are discovering new destinations by themselves. Therefore,

they use up Google Maps and other road maps for that, and they have to have a strong internet supply. According to cycling tourists' perception, since Ella is located in the hill country, there is a lack of telecommunication and internet facilities. Cyclists rely on signs for crucial information. This is especially true for women, who exhibit a higher level of navigation anxiety and a preference for the route wayfinding technique when visiting new places.

Additionally, participants highlight the fact of inadequate facilities in the washrooms and sanitary facilities. Europe and North America are still considered some of the developed destinations in terms of cycling infrastructure, including mountain riding, day trip trail cycling, and city cycling, etc. because infrastructure facilities and tourist services are playing a vital role in promoting cycling tourism at destinations. (Lamont, 2009; Probstl-Haider et al., 2018).

"Oh! I think the destination needs a lot of infrastructure developments in the future including roads and tourist facilities. Sanitary facilities and repair centers are not at a satisfactory level for me. One day I had a bad experience. Because during the middle of one of my cycle tours I had a tired punch. So, I searched for a repair center. But there was no single repair center close to me. Then some locals helped me to get rid of the problem. Of course, people in Sri Lanka are very hospitable and they care for and they helped everyone... Thanks to God I saved my life finally because of them...And I think good route maps and Apps for destination sites should be developed. It makes our journey very comfortable and easy....."

Product and Process related issues

Most cycling tourists tend to rent a bicycle in Ella. However, obtaining a cycle that process is not very convenient for the tourist. Because they have to keep their passport with the cycle renters until they return the cycle and they said a lot of documentation work. Further, respondents mentioned that lack of technical assistance is the biggest problem they encounter. According to the respondent's view, this is a manual system and it is time-consuming with lots of documentation work. If they can make it faster with the technology, they said it would great for

both parties. Some of the respondents suggested creating an App with relevant details including a list of cycle rental centers, fees, and other rules, etc., so it will be easy for people to search for information and get the purpose done.

Participants suggested that it is always better to provide a general guideline booklet of road traffic rules etc., and a kind of educational awareness program to the cycle of hiring people as international tourists are unknown to this society, culture, nature, and the environment. And participants mentioned it is better to keep a picture of the vehicle all the time. Because if something went wrong that picture is also an evidence kind of a document.

“You Know! The cycle renting process is a bit difficult sometimes. Because they ask for a lot of details and photocopies documents etc. This is very difficult during a Poya Day or holiday because a lot of shops/ communication centers are closed. So, I would recommend you to have a new system incorporate with the technology. Then it is easy for all.....!”

Conclusion and Recommendations

Findings revealed that Ella is one of the well-famous tourism hot spots in the hill country despite of age gender and nationality. Further, findings elaborate that environmental factors are the most dominant aspect of sustainable destination promotion. Especially, at present, themes like ‘going green, ecofriendly’ ‘save the planet’ etc., have become buzzwords in society and many scholars have also shown a huge interest in researching the field of sustainability, eco-tourism, environmental conservation, etc. With the rapid boom in the above areas, sustainable transportation and sustainable accessibility methods have also gained significant attention in society. Thus, cycling is having lots of opportunities to promote itself as one of the best sustainable modes of transportation due to its zero-emission, smoke-less nature, and low-cost and environmentally friendly accessibility in the mobility industry. As a result, in the future cycling tours are expected to become a significant element in destination promotion, conservation, and minimizing social, cultural, and environmental issues. (Bielinski et al., 2019; Han et al., 2019; Verbeek et al., 2011).

Accordingly, findings are evident that cycling is an alternative and effective way to maintain the health and well-being of people as it provides mental and physical exercise with fun and enjoyment. Not only that results elaborate that cycling opens doors for sustainable and green destination promotion with available resources. Thus, targeting green cycling practices for individual and small-group tourists would be ideal for sustainable destination promotion (Han and Yoon, 2015; Gazzola et al., 2018; Bielinski et al., 2019). Further, a lot of tourists admire the fact, cycling is a great opportunity to network with local communities and socialization process during a very short stay. In summary, the findings of the study conclude that environmental, social-cultural, economic, health, and other benefits are very significant and unique for cycle tourists compared to mass and other travelers who frequently use automobile services during their vacations.

In reviewing the perception of cycling tourists towards the challenges their main concern was safety and security issues. Specially they mentioned carrying luggage. Hence, designing or importing special cycles with luggage racks, and lockers and ensuring the safety of the rider with some additional functions would be great terms for ensuring rider safety. Further, these types of applications would be helpful for the long-term sustainability of the destination. Moreover, establishing a visitor-friendly environment with visitor comfort centers, and other basic infrastructure facilities such as sanitary and water, electricity for destination sites, medical centers, parking areas, repair centers, observation points, road maps, and enabling free WIFI zones, and telecommunication services without interruption, and developing Apps for destinations, enabling location finding services via google maps and enabling language translation services and establishing guiding services and Information Centers and other supportive services, etc., would be highly essential in promoting these types of lesser-known semi-urban locations which are located far-away from the main capital city of a country. To make such a visitor-friendly environment for cycle tourists it is highly essential to network with local authorities, government policymakers, tourism industry-related stakeholder groups, and academia in the area to bring the required level of change and development.

In addition to that, government involvement in minimizing illegal activities and misbehaviors, etc., area tourist Police, and other local authorities should involve. Moreover, fair trade policies, rules, and regulations should encourage every business to retain local and international tourists. Because having huge differences between prices, processes, etc., for locals and Internationals will not be an appropriate way to address the long-term sustainability of a destination.

Apart from that, educating the tourists and the residents in the area is also very important in the sustainable planning and development process. Thus, the tourist service providers, as well as the customers, should make aware of the local rules and regulations that are important for them in their short stay and educate them about the local cultural values, products, available resources, attractions, and providing them a small guide booklet would also very useful for them to familiarize with the unknown destination. The best way to initiate such programs is to have collaborative awareness / educational programs with Sri Lanka Tourism and the tourism accommodation providers, area Hotel Association, area Tourist Guide Association, tourism SMEs and other stakeholder groups in the area. Because in a way it provides an opportunity to promote local businesses and also contributes to the social and cultural well-being of society. Further, employing well-trained tourist guides and establishing digital road maps with proper directions, ensuring visitor capacity management systems and marketing destination uniqueness in the international arena are some of the crucial points in promoting Ella as a sustainable tourism destination.

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