Chapter 7

The Benefits of Applying GIS in Spiritual Tourism Management and Promotion

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ABSTRACT

The main contribution of this chapter is to critically discuss the benefits of applying geographic information systems (GIS) as a tool for management and promotion of spiritual tourism circuits (STC) and ST destinations. This research-based chapter also examines the extent to which GIS can be used in spiritual tourism management and promotion, proposes a model for the use and benefits of GIS in spiritual tourism management and promotion in India and Pakistan, and proposes GIS connected STC. This chapter identifies the socio-economic and business benefits of applying GIS to spiritual tourism circuits (STC). In this research, the spiritual tourism product is exclusively based on spiritual place, sites, or destinations, which is also called spatial or geographical data.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is one of the fastest growing service sectors of today’s global economy. Tourism contributes with over 10% to global GDP and is one of the highest employment generators around the world (UNEP, 2016). Modern economies are
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depending upon effective information technology (IT) and tourism as the most powerful engine of economic development. Nowadays, tourism and IT are providing strategic opportunities and tactical instruments for economic growth, environmental awareness, redistribution of wealth and cross-cultural harmony. Since tourism involves people travelling by road, rail or air to distance geographical locations, the use of inter-active web-based Geographical Information System (GIS), geo-portals and digital maps on mobile phone and GPS can ease the navigation process. GIS has recently being used for decision making in tourism for collecting, storing, managing, promotion, and inventory mapping of spatial geographical data efficiently (Thecla & Chigozie, 2012; Fajuvigbe, Balogun & Obembe, 2007).

The GIS has been defined by (Grimshaw, 1993, p. 206) as: “is at its simplest level a technology that enables decision-makers to explore the geographical dimension of data”. GIS is a database tool which will help in sustainable development of tourism locations, resource planning (Bunruamkaew & Murayama, 2012) and attractions by meeting the competing socio-economic and environmental objectives in a virtual manner. The GIS operations are based on spatial and non-spatial or attribute data, where spatial or geographical data refers to a known location on the Earth’s surface (Masron, Mohamed & Marzuki, 2015; Jovanivic’ & Negus, 2008), which can also be applied to spiritual locations.

Spiritual Tourism (ST) has been recognized as an emerging type of tourism niche segment that attracts tourists from all social, cultural and geographical human segments (Haq & Medhekar, 2016; Haq, 2015). The ST product and service is based on people, places and events while the social and commercial success of this emerging segment of spiritual tourism depends on planning, development, management and promotion (Haq, 2015; Matheson, Rimmer & Tinsley, 2014). With an increase in per-capita income, ease of travel and ageing population, more and more people are travelling overseas for various types of tourism including spiritual tourism (Bowler, 2014).

This paper identifies the socio-economic and business benefits of applying GIS to Spiritual Tourism Circuits (STC) (Medhekar & Haq, 2012). In this research the spiritual tourism product will be exclusively based on spiritual place, sites or destinations, which is also called as spatial or geographical data. Since it could be better aligned with GIS, rather people or events, which is a part of non-spatial or attribute data. This can be illustrated by (i) creating a spatial GIS locational map of major spiritual destinations, (ii) inventory of heritage and spiritual tourism places, and (iii) providing interactive information on internet and mobile devices regarding access to these spiritual and heritage places by various means of transportation, availability of accommodation, tourists information centres, hospitals, restaurants, shopping, recreation and other local attractions.
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