

Sustainable Marine and Coastal Tourism: A Catalyst for Blue Economic Expansion in Sri Lanka

Galdolage B. S¹, Ekanayake E.A², Khaleel Ibrahim Al- Daoud³, Vasudevan A⁴, Chen Wenchang⁵, Mohammad Faleh Ahmmad Hunitie⁶, Suleiman Ibrahim Shelash Mohammad⁷

Abstract

Sri Lanka is concentrating on growing its blue economy, which entails the sustainable use of marine resources to enhance economic advancement, livelihoods, and job opportunities while safeguarding the ocean ecosystem. The major data gathering approach for the qualitative research was key-person interviews, which were then processed using theme analysis. According to the report, the country's geographical location, marine and coastal tourist product diversification, and human resource availability are all potential growth opportunities. Limited infrastructure, lack of sectorial collaboration, and inadequate private sector involvement are some of the obstacles identified in expanding the marine and coastal tourism sector. Public-private partnerships, industry infrastructure development, sectorial collaboration and port development are possible solutions to these challenges. Sri Lanka has a lot of potential for underwater and coastal tourism. The blue economy can significantly contribute to the country's economic growth if it implements the right strategies. Future investments in marine and coastal tourism can be influenced by the findings of this study.

Keywords: *Blue Economy, Marine and Coastal Tourism, Sustainable Tourism, Economic Growth.*

Introduction

The concept of the blue economy has gained significant attention in recent years due to its potential for promoting sustainable economic development while preserving marine ecosystems. Sri Lanka, a country situated on an island in the Indian Ocean, is rich in marine resources and has a long history of international trade. Given its strategic location in the Indian Ocean, Sri Lanka has been a hub of international trade and commerce for centuries. The country's coastline spans approximately 1,585 kilometers, and its marine resources have the potential to contribute significantly to its economic development (Gunatilleke et al., 2008). The blue economy, which includes various economic activities that depend on the sustainable use of ocean resources, can help drive Sri Lanka's economic growth and create job opportunities, particularly in coastal communities.

The blue economy comprises several sectors: fisheries, aquaculture, marine and coastal tourism, boat and shipbuilding, seaports and shipping, renewable energy, offshore hydrocarbons and minerals, and marine biotechnology (European Commission et al., 2017). The marine and coastal tourism sector, in particular, has the potential to contribute significantly to Sri Lanka's economic growth. Sri Lanka's tourism industry has been proliferating in recent years, with over two million tourists in 2019 generating around \$4.5 billion in revenue.

Among the various sectors encompassed by the blue economy, the marine and coastal tourism sector stands out as an area of immense promise for Sri Lanka. With its stunning beaches, rich biodiversity, and historical sites, Sri Lanka has long been recognized as a prime destination for tourists seeking diverse and captivating coastal experiences. The country's tourism industry has been on a steady rise, marked by the arrival of over

¹ University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Email: sandamali@sjp.ac.lk.

² Ministry of Trade, Commerce and Food Security, Email: eraaryanz@gmail.com.

³ Department of accounting, business school Faculties, Al Ahilya Amman University, Amman-Jordan, Email: K.aldaoud@ammanu.edu.jo.

⁴ INTI International University, Wekerle Business School, Budapest, Jázmin u. 10, 1083 Hungary, Email: asokan.vasudevan@newinti.edu.my

⁵ Guizhou Qiannan College of Science and Technology, China, Email: chenwenchang11@outlook.com

⁶ Department of Public Administration, School of Business, University of Jordan, Jordan, Email: Mhunitie57@gmail.com

⁷ Department of Business Administration, Business School, Al al-Bayt University, Jordan, Research follower, INTI International University, 71800 Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia, Email: dr_sliman73@aabu.edu.jo

two million tourists in 2019, generating around \$4.5 billion in revenue (OECD, 2020). However, despite these successes, the marine and coastal tourism sector has challenges. Issues such as sustainable resource management, infrastructure development, and environmental conservation are crucial considerations in ensuring that the sector reaches its full potential.

Research Problem and Objectives

While prior studies have explored the potential of the blue economy, the existing knowledge gap pertaining to the identification of opportunities and challenges in the expansion of Sri Lanka's marine and coastal tourism sector (Ranasighe, 2017; Perera, 2022; Premarathna, 2022) is acknowledged. This research aims to enhance the robustness of the study by incorporating insights from more recent and diverse literature sources. This study is crucial for guiding decision-making processes towards sustainable growth, ensuring benefits for all stakeholders, including coastal communities, investors, and policymakers. Additionally, the study recognizes the need for updated strategies to achieve sustainable growth within the marine and coastal tourism sector, which is integral to Sri Lanka's blue economy. By comprehensively addressing these research gaps with the inclusion of contemporary literature, the research endeavors to make a meaningful contribution to the long-term sustainability of Sri Lanka's marine resources and cultural heritage. Simultaneously, it seeks to promote economic growth and employment opportunities in the region.

This research explores the challenges and opportunities in expanding Sri Lanka's Blue Economy, explicitly focusing on the marine and coastal tourism sector. The research identifies solutions to address the issues hindering sustainable sector growth.

Literature Review

Blue Economy and Its Implications for Coastal Nations

The blue economy or blue growth strategy uses the ocean and coastal ecosystem services as spaces for sustainable economic development while maintaining ecosystem integrity (United Nations, 2014). Many least coastal developing countries and small island developing states have adopted the blue economy to achieve food security and attain decent livelihoods (United Nations, 2014). To fulfill food security, decent livelihoods, and economic growth, the ecosystems of the ocean and coast are to be opened up by their respective coastal nations to public and private investors in a sustainable way through ecosystem integrity (United Nations, 2014).

According to Cooray et al. (2021), The ocean economy refers to strengthening economic systems using ocean-based resources. The blue economy focuses on the sustainable use of these resources while considering ecological considerations for economic development. Efficient and optimal use of marine mineral resources within ecological limits is a crucial aspect of the blue economy, which can be achieved through various approaches. Keen et al. (2018) outlined the five critical components of the blue economy: ecosystem resilience, economic sustainability, community engagement, enabling technology capacity, and enabling institutional arrangements. These components are derived from the sustainable development literature and are considered the blue economy's core components. Each of these significant components has sub-components as ecosystem resilience, economic sustainability, community engagement, enabling technology capacity, enabling institutional arrangements

Marine and Coastal Tourism

Marine and coastal tourism is important sector in the blue economy of Sri Lanka. The country's coastline offers a diverse range of attractions, including beaches, coral reefs, and marine wildlife, which are attractive to both domestic and international tourists (Attri, 2018). Marine and coastal tourism can also contribute to local economies and provide opportunities for employment and income generation (Bhuiyan et al., 2020). By analyzing the challenges and opportunities of marine and coastal tourism, we can identify strategies for sustainable tourism development that balance economic benefits with environmental and social impacts (Sotiriadis & Shen, 2020; Ozturkcan et al., 2024).

Coastal tourism, which encompasses various resources and activities such as beaches and diverse landscapes, has increased in recent decades. Its economic value must be accurately assessed to promote sustainable and responsible tourism practices. Coastal tourism is widely recognized as one of the fastest-growing segments of the tourism industry (Huong et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the evaluation of the tourism industry in its entirety is still a prevailing challenge (UNEP et al., 2012). In the emerging and expanding South Asian region, Coastal tourism is another important economic sector. According to Bari (2017), Sri Lanka, Maldives, and India have coral reefs on the shallow coasts. Pakistan has dry land mangroves consisting of vast floral and faunal species that are excellent tourist destinations (Bari, 2017).

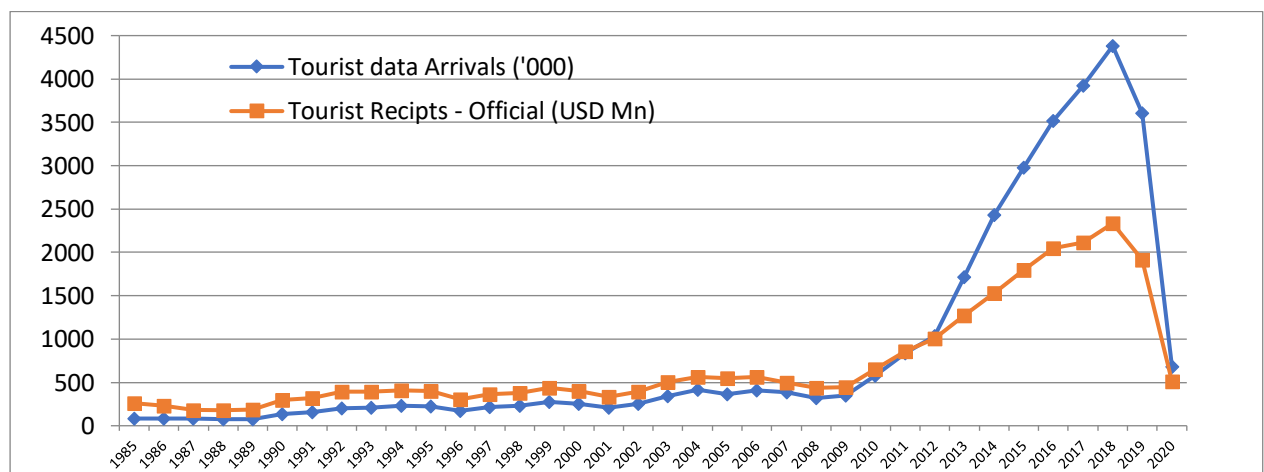
Sri Lanka's Coastal Tourism Industry

According to data from the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA), the majority of tourists (87%) visit Sri Lanka for leisure or vacation purposes, with coastal areas being their preferred destination (SLTDA, Annual Statistical Report, 2020). Many tourists engage in water-based activities, such as beach lounging and swimming (77.2%), surfing (18.6%), snorkeling (15.8%), and whale and dolphin watching (9.8%), which are integral components of the blue economy.

According to the SLTDA (2020), the tourism industry of Sri Lanka has gradually increased over the last couple of decades. Tourism is recognized as a crucial driver of development in the Sri Lankan economy, owing to its natural advantages and unique tourist attractions. It is one of the top six foreign exchange earning sectors in Sri Lanka, contributing significantly to the country's economy. In addition to generating revenue from tourism, the sector also attracts foreign direct investments (FDI), creates new job opportunities, and contributes to the gross domestic product (GDP) of Lanka (Ranasinghe & Sugandhika, 2018). The tourism industry holds the fifth position in terms of its direct and indirect impact on economic growth and is among the top foreign exchange earners in Sri Lanka (Ranasinghe & Sugandhika, 2018). The GDP contributions of this sector in 4.3% in 2018 and 4.9% in 2019, respectively.

The tourism industry of Sri Lanka has gradually increased over the last couple of Decades. See Figure No 1 for details.

Figure 1-Tourist Arrival Details 1958-2020



Source – Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority, 2020

Based on the data, we can see the trend in tourist arrivals to Sri Lanka over the years. In the early years, there were fluctuations in the number of tourist arrivals, with some years showing an increase and others a decrease. However, from 2010 onwards, there was a significant increase in the number of tourist arrivals, with a peak of over 2 million in 2017 and 2018. However, in 2019, there was a decrease in the number of tourist arrivals, and this trend continued in 2020, which can be attributed to the global COVID-19 pandemic. In terms of US dollars spent by tourists, there was a gradual increase over the years, with a peak

of over 4 billion in 2018. However, this also decreased in 2019 and 2020 due to the pandemic. Overall, the data shows that Sri Lanka has been prosperous in increasing its tourism industry over the years. Still, the pandemic has had a significant impact on the industry in recent years.

Since the climate along the coast is varying, among the various tourism sub-sectors in the world, coastal tourism is getting an enormous place. The tourism sector is very much important to the country's GDP since it's a huge GDP contributor and large employment generator for IOR countries. When considering the Sri Lankan situation, an all-time high of 4,381 million US\$ (Rs. 71,202,730 Million) was recorded in 2018, which is a 4.9% direct contribution to the country's GDP. Snorkeling, sunbathing, scuba diving on coral reefs, surfing, or whale watching are some of the coastal tourism activities which attract tourists more to the coastal areas. More people choose to spend their holidays on this kind of leisure since they are looking for mental freedom. The potential of this sector is continuously increasing as Tourism related authorities of Indian Ocean Rim countries need to strategically plan and innovatively design new sites and activities in this coastal tourism sector. Coastal areas that are suitable for tourism should also be accompanied by supporting infrastructure such as well-connected road networks, transportation options, restaurants, hotels, and other accommodation facilities. Additionally, the presence of museums, cultural centers, and amusement parks can enhance the overall value of the area and attract more tourists. These supporting facilities are crucial in providing a memorable and enjoyable experience for tourists, thereby encouraging repeat visits and positive reviews that can help boost the local economy (Valle et al., 2011).

Methodology

The research paradigm adopted in this study is interpretivism, which involves inductive research approach with the intention of gaining a comprehensive understanding of the opportunities, challenges, and potential solutions related to expanding Sri Lanka's blue economy through the perspectives of key stakeholders. The research is exploratory in nature and used a qualitative research method, conducting semi-structured interviews to explore the subjective experiences and perceptions of the participants. The interpretive paradigm allowed the researchers to delve deeper into the complex issues related to the marine and coastal tourism sector and understand the stakeholders' viewpoints.

The primary data collection method used in this study was key person interviews. The population for this study comprises individuals from diverse organizations, such as government agencies, industry associations, research institutions, and private sector companies involved in tourism, and shipping in Sri Lanka. A sample of 20 key stakeholders were selected, including officials from various government agencies such as the Ministry of Industry (MOI), Sri Lanka Ports Authority (SLPA), Ministry of Tourism (MoT), Sri Lanka Tourism Promotion Bureau (SLTPB), Export Development Board (EDB). The study employed a purposive sampling technique to select key stakeholders with relevant knowledge and experience in the marine and coastal tourism sector of the blue economy of Sri Lanka. The sampling strategy aimed to ensure maximum diversity and representativeness by including participants from different sectors and organizations in Sri Lanka. The sample size was determined by the point of data saturation, where no new information or insights were obtained from the data.

The interviews are in-person, allowing for follow-up questions and probing participant responses. The interview procedure for this study follows a protocol to maintain the consistency and quality of the data collection. Researchers conducted a thematic analysis to identify key themes and patterns within the data. This Analysis involves systematically coding, categorizing, and interpreting the data to comprehensively understand the opportunities and challenges related to the blue economy in Sri Lanka. Researchers used open-ended questions to encourage the key persons to provide detailed information and insights. In conducting thematic analysis, the following steps are taken to analyze the data: transcription, familiarization, coding, collating codes, developing themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and reporting.

The data were presented as a narrative, using direct quotes from the participants to support the findings and illustrate the participants' perspectives. The rigor of the study was ensured through the use of multiple data sources and the triangulation of findings from different sources to ensure the validity and reliability of

the research.

Results

Opportunities of Marine and Coastal Tourism Sector

Geographical locations of the country, diversification of tourism products, skilled human resources of the sector, opportunity to expand are the opportunities of the marine and coastal tourism sector identified in the discussions held.

Geographical Locations of the Country

Based on the interviews conducted, there are several opportunities for the marine and coastal tourism sector in Sri Lanka. Firstly, the country's geographical location and its vast coastline offer immense potential for water-based tourism activities such as boat tours, water sports, and other recreational activities.

"Sri Lanka is a popular tourist destination with beautiful beaches, rivers, and lagoons. Boat tours and water sports are popular activities among tourists, creating a demand for small boats and pleasure crafts." (A key person, EDB)

This can be leveraged to attract more tourists to Sri Lanka and generate more revenue for the country. Sri Lanka's strategic location in the Indian Ocean makes it an important hub for maritime activities.

"Sri Lanka's strategic location in the Indian Ocean makes it an important hub for maritime activities. The country's naval sector requires a variety of boats and ships, including patrol boats, frigates, and submarines." (A key person - EDB)

The country's naval sector requires various boats and ships, including patrol boats, frigates, and submarines. This presents an opportunity for the marine industry in Sri Lanka to cater to the needs of the naval sector, which can generate income and create employment opportunities.

"Sri Lanka has a vast coastline of around 1600 km and abundant marine resources, making it an ideal destination for marine and coastal tourism. However, the sector is still in its early stages of development, and there is much potential for growth. The government has identified marine and coastal tourism as a priority sector, and there are ongoing initiatives to promote this sector." (A key person -SLTDA)

Sri Lanka's unique combination of cultural heritage, natural beauty, and biodiversity makes it a unique destination for marine and coastal tourism. The country can leverage this uniqueness to differentiate itself from other South Asian and Asian countries and attract more tourists.

"Sri Lanka has a unique combination of cultural heritage, natural beauty, and biodiversity, making it a unique destination for marine and coastal tourism. The country can leverage this uniqueness to differentiate itself from other South Asian and Asian countries. Additionally, by promoting sustainable tourism practices, Sri Lanka can attract environmentally conscious travelers who are looking for authentic and responsible travel experiences." (A key person-SLTPB)

Additionally, by promoting sustainable tourism practices, Sri Lanka can attract environmentally conscious travelers who are looking for authentic and responsible travel experiences. The marine and coastal tourism sector in Sri Lanka has several opportunities that can be leveraged to promote growth and development in the sector.

Diversification of Tourism Products

The thematic Analysis suggests that marine and coastal tourism offers significant opportunities for Sri Lanka to diversify its tourism products and attract a wide range of tourists interested in various activities related to the ocean.

"Sri Lanka can diversify its tourism products by offering a range of marine and coastal activities such as scuba diving,

snorkeling, whale watching, dolphin watching, fishing, and surfing. This will attract a wide range of tourists with different interests." (A key person- SLPA)

By developing infrastructure and services that support these activities, such as marinas, boat and shipbuilding facilities, and tour operators, Sri Lanka can tap into the potential of marine and coastal tourism and boost its tourism industry.

"Marine and coastal tourism involved the use of the ocean for recreational purposes and involved sectors such as boat and shipbuilding, cruising, recreational boating, yachting and sailing, whale, and dolphin watching, speed boating, beach sports, marina operations, living on board of vessels among others." (A key person- EDB)

By promoting sustainable tourism practices and leveraging the country's unique combination of cultural heritage, natural beauty, and biodiversity, Sri Lanka can differentiate itself from other destinations and attract a wide range of tourists with different interests.

"Marine and coastal tourism involves activities such as diving, snorkeling, surfing, and beach tourism that are specific to the coastal and marine environment. This sector requires specialized equipment and expertise, and the activities are often weather-dependent. Unlike normal tourism, marine and coastal tourism involve a closer connection with nature and marine life, making it a unique experience for visitors." (A key person-SLTDA)

Skilled Human Resources of the Sector

The thematic analysis suggests that skilled human resources are essential for the successful development and operation of the marine and coastal tourism industry. Without skilled boat builders and repair technicians, for example, it would be challenging to maintain and repair boats and vessels used for various recreational activities. Similarly, seafarers, certified boat skippers, engineers, and electricians are necessary for the safe and efficient operation of boats and vessels, while hospitality experts and workers are crucial for providing excellent customer service to tourists.

"skilled human resources in the sector (boat builders and repair technicians, seafarers, hospitality experts, and workers, certified boat skippers, engineers, electricians among others" (A key person-EDB Advisory Committee)

The Chairman of the EDB Advisory Committee identifies several key roles that require specialized knowledge and expertise, including boat builders and repair technicians, seafarers, hospitality experts and workers, certified boat skippers, engineers, and electricians.

Opportunity To Expand Water-Based Activities

The excerpts highlight the potential for expanding the boat and shipbuilding industry, as well as various water-based tourism activities such as whale and dolphin watching, yacht chartering, and beach sports.

"We have the boat building and shipbuilding industry which is improving its contribution to the economy."

"Also, we have the whale and dolphin watching sector, yacht chartering and sailing, speed boating, beach sports, and occasional cruise tourism events. However, there are irregular activities that can be sustainably developed." (A key person- EDB)

However, these activities need to be sustainably developed.

"The development of coastal infrastructure such as marinas, jetties, and piers will encourage yachting and boating enthusiasts to visit Sri Lanka. It will also provide more opportunities for fishing and other water-based activities." (A key person- SLPA)

The development of coastal infrastructure like marinas, jetties, and piers can encourage more visitors and provide more opportunities for fishing and water-based activities.

Challenges Of Marine and Coastal Tourism Sector

As per the industry professionals and experts, lack of infrastructure and finance, not having a proper strategy to develop the nautical tourism/ blue economy industry in Sri Lanka, lack of policy, and environmental degradation are the challenges for the marine and coastal tourism sector.

Lack of Infrastructure

The lack of infrastructure is a significant challenge to the development of the marine and coastal tourism industry in Sri Lanka.

"Lack of marinas and boat parks for the recreational boating industry, lack of boat and yacht launching facilities for larger yachts and recreational boats are issues of this sector" (A key person- EDB Advisory Committee)

The lack of marinas, boat parks, and launching facilities for recreational boating, larger yachts, and boats can restrict access to remote coastal areas and make it challenging for businesses to operate effectively.

"lack of much-needed infrastructure facilities such as boat and yachts launching, servicing and repairs, beachfront land boat and shipbuilding and operation of marinas and boat parks" (a key person, EDB)

"Lack of proper launching facilities for boat builders, specially Negombo and Beruwela" (A key person- EDB)

The lack of proper launching facilities, particularly in Negombo and Beruwela, is a particular concern that needs to be addressed.

"Sri Lanka's coastal areas currently lack sufficient infrastructure to support a thriving tourism industry, including facilities such as marinas, ports, and transport links. This can make it difficult for tourists to access some of the more remote coastal areas and for businesses to operate effectively." (A key person- SLPA)

The development of infrastructure, including marinas, ports, and transport links, will require significant investment.

"The development of marine and coastal tourism requires significant investment, but access to financing can be limited in Sri Lanka. This can make it difficult for small and medium-sized enterprises to enter the market and for existing businesses to expand." (GM/Mkt, SLPA)

Access to financing can also be limited, which can make it difficult for small and medium-sized enterprises to enter the market or expand.

"We need to Expedite the process of establishing launching facilities in Beruwela Harbor and develop Beruwela Fishery Harbor as a fully-fledged marina to facilitate/ serve local boat manufacturers." (A key person- EDB Advisory Committee)

The development of Beruwela Fishery Harbor as a fully-fledged marina has been identified as a potential solution to serve local boat manufacturers.

"Foreign buyers cannot launch the boat. The current system they do not accept" (A key person, Ministry of Industries)

"There are several challenges that need to be addressed to promote the sustainable development of marine and coastal tourism. These include the lack of infrastructure, such as marinas and jetties..." (A key person-SLTDA)

It is essential to address these challenges to promote the sustainable development of marine and coastal tourism in Sri Lanka.

Not Having a Proper Strategy

The lack of a proper strategy to develop nautical tourism and the blue economy industry in Sri Lanka is a significant challenge.

"Since we do not have a formulation of the overall country strategy action plan and organizational structure for the nautical tourism sector development in Sri Lanka and we should simplify and adopt tourist/investor friendly mechanism for approval of tourist leisure boat services (day and multi-day cruises) in Sri Lankan coastal waters." (a key person- EDB)

There is a need for a country strategy action plan and organizational structure for the sector's development, along with a simplified and tourist/investor-friendly mechanism for approval of tourist leisure boat services.

"Sector consultation committee should develop a common development plan" (A key person- Ministry of Industries)

A common development plan should be developed by the sector consultation committee.

Lack of Policy

The lack of policy and regulation in the recreational boating and nautical tourism industry is a significant issue, with many organizations contributing to its non-user-friendly nature.

"Non-implementation of the regulatory framework developed for recreational boating and nautical tourism industry by DGMS and Absence of a national strategy for Nautical tourism and marine and coastal tourism sector is an issue."

"15+ organizations regulating this industry by way of regulations governing land, coast conservation, wildlife, marine pollution, land and marine environment issues, certification, defense and security, telecommunication, customs, immigration, health, excise, fisheries, tourism, among others, contributing to the non-user-friendly investor policy. (A key person- EDB Advisory Committee)

In addition, there is a lack of solid waste management, which further affects the quality of coastal waters and beaches.

"Lack of solid waste management affects the quality of coastal waters and beaches. Disposal sites are usually unregulated open dumps, located in low-lying marshes of coastal areas." (A key person- MoT)

"Not having a proper strategy to develop the Nautical Tourism/ Blue Economy industry in Sri Lanka" (A key person- EDB)

"Sri Lanka has experienced political instability in recent years, which can impact tourism demand and investor confidence. This can also lead to changes in regulations and policies that can affect the industry." (A key person- SLPA)

Finally, political instability in recent years has impacted investor confidence and can lead to changes in regulations and policies, further affecting the industry.

Environmental Degradation

The excerpt highlights the issue of environmental degradation in Sri Lanka's marine and coastal ecosystems due to various factors such as coastal erosion, upstream pollution, unplanned development, and unregulated tourism activities.

"Coastal erosion results in a significant loss of sensitive areas and impacts large strips of beaches, spits, and Upstream Pollution" (A key person- MoT)

These factors can harm sensitive areas, impact beaches, spits, and coral reefs, and result in overfishing.

"These poorly treated discharges occur largely upstream and enter the rivers that eventually discharge at the coast. They diminish the value of coastal resources and the ecosystem services that they provide"(A key person-, EDB)

Such degradation can diminish the value of coastal resources and the ecosystem services they provide, ultimately reducing their appeal to tourists.

"Unplanned development and unregulated tourism activities can lead to environmental degradation, including pollution, coral reef destruction, and overfishing. This can harm the marine and coastal ecosystems that are essential to tourism activities and reduce their appeal to tourists." (A key person- SLPA)

The Analysis emphasizes the importance of sustainable development practices and effective pollution control measures to protect the marine and coastal ecosystems and ensure their viability for future generations.

Solutions To Overcome the Above Challenges in Marine and Coastal Tourism

For the above-mentioned challenges, we recognized solutions such as Public-Private Partnerships (PPP), development of the industry infrastructure, and sectorial collaboration and port development.

Public-Private Partnerships (PPP)

The solution proposed to overcome challenges in the boat and shipbuilding sector is the adoption of PPP to attract potential investments and opportunities for shipbuilding, repairs, maintenance, port development, and other related projects.

"There are lots of potential investment opportunities such as ship building, repairing and maintenance as Colombo dockyard PLC do,"

"Design of all types of boats for exports, nautical tourism and related projects, maritime training, repairs, renovations and servicing facilities for boats and super yachts and shops, port development and development of fully-fledged marina infrastructure are opportunities for PPP." (A key person- EDB Advisory Committee)

"Sri Lanka needs to invest in the development of necessary infrastructure such as marinas, jetties, and other facilities. This can be achieved through public-private partnerships and foreign investment." (A key person-SLTPB)

This approach aims to leverage private sector expertise and resources to enhance infrastructure and services in the sector.

Development of the Industry Infrastructure

The development of industrial infrastructure is a crucial solution to overcoming the challenges in the boat and shipbuilding sector, including the lack of proper launching facilities and limited funds for international promotions.

"Allocate a dedicated area in the existing fishery harbors for leisure boating activities and select the most suitable harbors for recreational activities and release a few selected fishery harbors for recreational activities." (a key person-, EDB)

"Allocate seafront lands to establish marinas, boat repairs, and related facilities to facilitate the development of the boat and nautical tourism sectors." (A key person- EDB Advisory Committee)

We can establish dedicated areas for marine recreational activities and nautical tourism. It will help to improve the industry infrastructure.

"We need to expedite the process of establishing launching facilities in Beruwela harbor and develop Beruwela fishery harbor as a fully-fledged marina to facilitate/serve local boat manufacturers." (A key person- EDB Advisory Committee)

This is necessary to support local boat manufacturers and promote the growth of the industry. This approach could have significant benefits for the economy and the development of the region.

"The government can promote tourism financing schemes for small and medium-sized enterprises, provide guarantees to support private sector investments, and encourage commercial banks to lend to the tourism industry." (A key person-SLTDA)

"Sri Lanka needs to invest in the development of necessary infrastructure such as marinas, jetties, and other facilities. This can be achieved through public-private partnerships and foreign investment." (A key person-SLTPB)

Suggestions include dedicating areas in existing fishery harbors for leisure boating, allocating seafront lands for marinas, and developing fully-fledged marinas to serve local boat manufacturers through PPP.

Sectorial Collaboration

The quotes suggest the potential for sectorial collaboration in Sri Lanka's marine and coastal tourism sector. The Galle Port symposium and conversion of the pilot station into a tourism hotel indicate efforts to promote tourism and fishing. The plan to double the volume in 2025 highlights the need for collaboration between stakeholders in the sector to achieve growth targets.

"So now they promote it as Galle port symposium. Pilot station (Queen Opened building) converted to tourism Hotel. We can promote fishing there. Based on that, we can do Boat Port Tour with commentary (like Hamburg port – approximately 27 USD per person). (A key person- SLPA)

The excerpt highlights the need for collaboration among government ministries and authorities to promote sustainable tourism and protect marine resources. It suggests that the MoF and Aquaculture, Urban Development Authority, Ministry of Environment, and Central Environmental Authority should work together to provide technical and financial support, facilitate private sector investment, and improve pollution control measures.

"For example, the MoF and Aquaculture can provide technical and financial support for sustainable tourism around marine resources; the Urban Development Authority can facilitate increased private sector investment in infrastructure such as hotels and roads. The Ministry of Environment and the Central Environmental Authority should focus on improving control of pollution by tackling discharge of pollution loads with effluents and drainage, preventing pollution incidents related to water transport, and augmenting the capacity of spill response teams." (A key person- MoT)

this collaborative approach is crucial for promoting sustainable tourism practices that protect the environment while promoting economic growth in the industry.

"If we want to develop this sector, we must complement the marine and coastal tourism activities in and around South Asia and Asia. (Maldives, Seychelles, India, Bangladesh, Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, and China) we need to focus on a joint strategy for this sector." (A key person- EDB Advisory Committee)

This is a wise approach as it will not only promote tourism in Sri Lanka but also increase the overall attractiveness of the region for tourists. By working together, countries can also share best practices, resources, and expertise, which could lead to tremendous success in developing the sector.

"Sri Lanka, Tourism Development Authority, is working closely with other government agencies, private sector stakeholders, and local communities to promote marine and coastal tourism. We are also working to establish regulatory frameworks that promote sustainable and responsible tourism practices. Additionally, we are investing in training and capacity building for the tourism industry workforce to ensure the delivery of high-quality services to tourists." (A key person-SLTDA)

these measures are essential for promoting responsible tourism practices that benefit tourists and local communities while preserving the natural beauty and resources of Sri Lanka's marine and coastal areas.

Port Development

The discussions had with the VC and marketing manager of SLPA highlight the potential for port development in Sri Lanka and the current progress in expanding and modernizing the Colombo Port for

expanding the marine and coastal tourism sector in Sri Lanka.

"Trincomalee port can be developed as Industrial Port. Symposium may be called. South port development – ADB funded project. North port development in Colombo. Can be developed up to Negombo." (A key person- SLPA)

"Port of Colombo. (SLPA- JCT, CICT, SAGT, ECT, WCT – Adani) SLPA is included there. Sri Lanka owns 02 terminals as, JCT and ECT. The other 03 are BOT. WCT 30 years BOT. Phase one has only been completed. 2021 highest. 7.2 Million TEUs." (a key person-SLPA)

The country's strategic location and deep-water terminals offer a competitive advantage over other ports in the region.

"RFP has been called for Galle Fort to develop it as a fully-fledged tourism port, and three bidders are submitted their bids. It has been finalized. Yowch Marina cruise terminal is included there. 170 – 200 USD Million Project. The feasibility ports authority does feasibility reports and environment feasibility reports, and BOT (Build Operation Transfer) Method is utilized. Can be developed as Monaco."

The Galle Fort can be developed into a fully-fledged tourism port.

"The Colombo Port is currently undergoing expansion, which includes the construction of a new terminal and deepening the harbor to accommodate larger vessels. This expansion will increase the capacity of the port and attract more shipping lines to use Colombo as a transshipment hub."

"Apart from Colombo, Sri Lanka has several other ports that can be developed to cater to the region's growing demand for shipping services. For example, the Hambantota Port in the southern part of the country has the potential to become a major hub for the transshipment of vehicles, machinery, and oil." (A key person-SLPA)

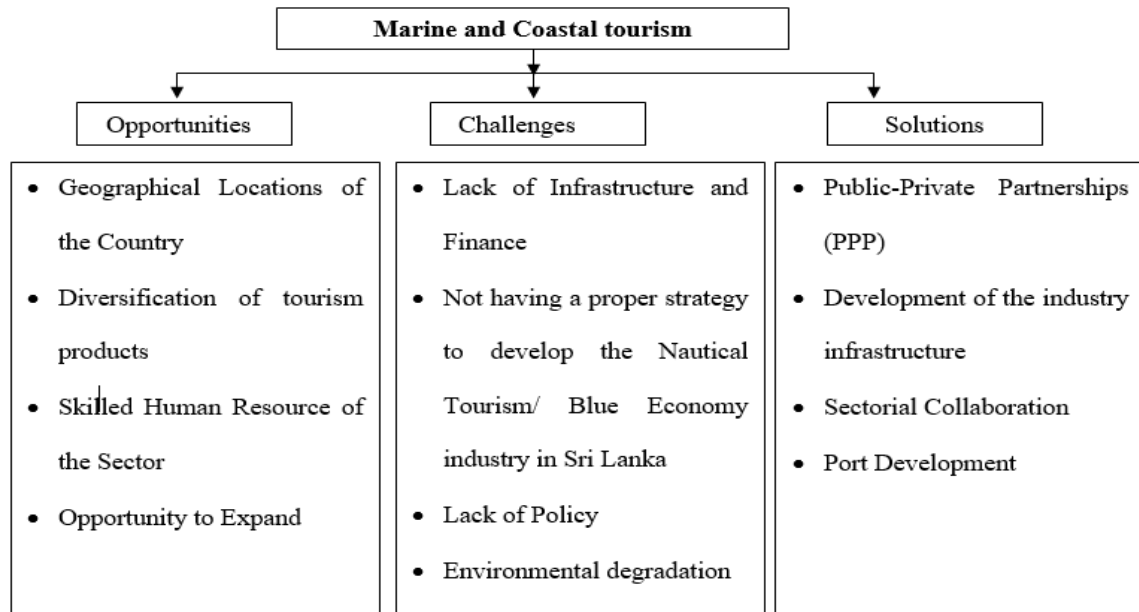
The Hambantota Port has the potential to cater to the growing demand for transshipment services for vehicles, machinery, and oil.

"ECT phase 1 400M completed and expected to develop to 1.3 km with access to 04 Berthing terminals. ECT is a deep-water terminal 18 M deep. We can get more business with deep water terminal. ECT, CICT, and WCT are developing deep-water terminals. Discussions with Bangladesh Chittagong port (01 million TEUs with them). Efficient more than Singapore. 1 to 1 ½ days efficient to Sri Lanka rather than Singapore from Chittagong."

The Colombo Port expansion, including the ECT and WCT, will increase its capacity and attract more shipping lines.

"Terminal Agreement (TSA). MSE covers 50% shipping line and is our main customer. Their head office is located in Geneva. 10 TSA are there with us. (ECT+ JCT). Open port forum most efficient public own terminal from 2020. World rank is 22 -23 (Lloyd). Connectivity is 10th in rank. World highest recognized port. Box terminal. After the barrier removal of SAGT and ECT. Natural advantage. Both big and small ships can be operated." (a key person-SLPA)

The TSAs, with the leading shipping lines and the efficient public-owned terminals, position Sri Lanka as a recognized and efficient box terminal.

Summary of the Findings**Discussion**

Based on the analysis of the discussions had with the officials, there are significant opportunities for expanding marine and coastal tourism in Sri Lanka. The country's strategic location, deep-water terminals, and ongoing port developments provide a competitive advantage over other ports in the region. The Galle Fort, Trincomalee Port, and Hambantota Port have the potential to cater to the growing demand for transshipment services and tourism. The Colombo Port expansion, including the ECT and WCT, will increase its capacity and attract more shipping lines, making it a recognized and efficient box terminal.

However, several challenges need to be addressed to realize these opportunities fully. One of the primary challenges is environmental sustainability, as tourism can negatively impact marine and coastal ecosystems. Therefore, developing and implementing sustainable tourism practices and policies to minimize these impacts is crucial. Another challenge is the need to improve infrastructure and facilities to accommodate the growing demand for tourism services. This includes improved transportation networks, better accommodation, and other supporting services.

Globally, the literature suggests that sustainable tourism practices and policies are crucial for the success of marine and coastal tourism. This includes the implementation of eco-friendly measures and the promotion of responsible tourism practices. In addition, collaboration between the tourism industry, government, and local communities is essential for sustainable tourism development. Locally, studies have emphasized the importance of infrastructure development and the need to create a favorable investment climate to attract private sector investment in the tourism industry. The Sri Lankan government has already taken steps to promote tourism through initiatives such as the Tourism Strategic Plan 2025, which aims to develop sustainable tourism and increase the number of tourist arrivals.

The analysis highlights the potential for expanding the marine and coastal tourism sector in Sri Lanka through port development, mainly through the modernization and expansion of the Colombo Port and other ports such as Hambantota and Galle. This aligns with existing literature emphasizing the importance of developing ports and infrastructure to support tourism growth in coastal destinations (Gunawardena et al., 2017). Sri Lanka's ports' strategic location and deep-water terminals offer a competitive advantage in attracting shipping lines and transshipment services. This can further boost tourism by improving connectivity and accessibility (Gunawardena et al., 2017).

However, several challenges must be addressed for sustainable and inclusive tourism development. Environmental concerns, such as pollution and degradation of marine ecosystems, can negatively impact the attractiveness and viability of coastal destinations (Kaldeen & Hassan, 2019). Furthermore, the benefits of tourism growth may not necessarily trickle down to local communities and may instead exacerbate social and economic inequalities (Kaldeen & Hassan, 2019). Evidence of severe neglect of the coastal environment, which initially attracted tourists to Sri Lanka, can be seen through past tourism development experiences in the country. Addressing these challenges requires a holistic and integrated approach to tourism planning and management, involving stakeholders from different sectors and levels (Herath & Ratnayake, 2015).

Drawing lessons from successful international models can further enrich our understanding of the potential pathways for sustainable marine and coastal tourism development. Countries like New Zealand and the Maldives serve as compelling examples of how strategic planning and effective policies can balance tourism growth with environmental preservation (Mariyam & Carlsen, 2011; Gumede et al., 2022). New Zealand's Fiordland, for instance, has implemented stringent conservation measures alongside tourism development to protect its pristine landscapes (Kohler, 2023). Similarly, the Maldives has pioneered sustainable tourism practices, incorporating eco-friendly initiatives and community engagement to safeguard its delicate coral reefs (Sofwan, 2023). These cases underscore the importance of incorporating best practices from around the world into Sri Lanka's tourism strategy. By adopting proven approaches, Sri Lanka can not only overcome challenges but also position itself as a global leader in responsible marine and coastal tourism, setting a benchmark for others to follow.

In summary, while the port development in Sri Lanka offers significant opportunities for expanding the marine and coastal tourism sector, it also poses several challenges that must be addressed through sustainable and inclusive tourism planning and management.

Theoretical Implications

The theoretical significance of this study lies in its potential to contribute to the existing literature on the blue economy and marine and coastal tourism sector. This research will add to the growing body of knowledge on the blue economy and help fill the literature gap concerning the marine and coastal tourism sector in Sri Lanka. The findings of this study provide a theoretical basis for policymakers, investors, and other stakeholders to develop more effective policies and programs to promote the sector's sustainable growth. Additionally, the study contributes to the theory of the Blue Economy by providing empirical evidence of the potential for economic development through the sustainable use of marine resources. This research also highlights the importance of taking a holistic approach to utilize marine resources, considering economic, social, and environmental factors.

Managerial Implications

Based on the analysis of opportunities and challenges associated with expanding marine and coastal tourism in Sri Lanka, several crucial managerial implications come to the forefront. Firstly, the development of essential infrastructure such as ports, marinas, and cruise terminals are of paramount importance, as it serves as a cornerstone for the growth of this sector, attracting more tourists and generating substantial revenue. Secondly, ensuring sustainability in this industry is imperative due to its potential environmental impact. Managers should prioritize implementing sustainable practices, which encompass promoting responsible tourism, waste reduction, pollution control, and the preservation of delicate marine ecosystems. Moreover, fostering collaboration between the private sector, government, local communities, and stakeholders is a key driver for sustainable development. Effective marketing and promotion strategies are equally vital, as they create an enticing appeal for tourists, emphasizing Sri Lanka's unique natural beauty and rich cultural heritage. Lastly, the quality of service offered to tourists plays a pivotal role in the success of marine and coastal tourism. Thus, managers should focus on enhancing the skills and knowledge of their workforce to ensure a high-quality experience for visitors, thereby contributing to the industry's overall growth and responsible development. In conclusion, while marine and coastal tourism in Sri Lanka offers substantial growth and revenue opportunities, effective management strategies are essential to ensure its sustainable

and responsible development.

Future Research Directions

Sri Lanka's coastal areas are popular tourist destinations, but sustainable tourism practices are essential to preserve the marine ecosystem and benefit the local economy. Future research could focus on developing sustainable tourism practices that protect the marine ecosystem while promoting tourism growth, developing new and innovative tourism products, such as marine wildlife watching, diving, and surfing, to attract more tourists and assessing the economic impact of marine and coastal tourism on the local communities and economy.

Conclusion

The marine and coastal tourism sector is integral to the blue economy. It has the potential to contribute to the increasing foreign exchange revenue from the blue economy and to create sustainable employment opportunities. The global demand for this sector is growing, and Sri Lanka can gain a competitive advantage by devising joint strategies with other South Asian and Asian countries. Marine and coastal tourism in Sri Lanka offers significant potential for diversifying tourism products, creating job opportunities, and generating foreign exchange. However, to fully capitalize on this potential, Sri Lanka must improve infrastructure and services, develop a collaborative mechanism among government authorities, and ensure sustainable development practices. In addition, access to financing needs to be improved, and policies and regulations need to be made more user-friendly for businesses. Finally, effective pollution control measures must be implemented to protect marine and coastal ecosystems and ensure their viability for future generations.

In conclusion, Sri Lanka has significant potential for developing marine and coastal tourism. The country's strategic location and deep-water terminals offer a competitive advantage over other regional ports. The expansion and modernization of the Colombo Port, including the ECT and WCT, will increase its capacity and attract more shipping lines. At the same time, other ports like Hambantota and Trincomalee have the potential to cater to specific needs like transshipment and industrial development. Developing Galle Fort as a fully-fledged tourism port will further boost the tourism industry.

However, expanding marine and coastal tourism in Sri Lanka also poses several challenges, including the need for sustainable and environmentally friendly practices, proper infrastructure, and skilled labor. The government and relevant authorities must address these challenges and provide the necessary support to the industry for its sustainable growth.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank all the respondents from the leather industry who provided valuable responses and support for the survey. They offer special gratitude to INTI International for publishing the research work and, in particular, to INTI International University for funding its publication.

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