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Rural Tourism for Cultural Preservation: The Case of Hiriwadunna Tourism Village in North Central Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

Over the past few decades, a rapid growth in rural tourism industry was reported and therefore a direct link has been created between this market segment and cultural preservation. Accordingly, it has now been widely promoted as a preservation strategy for rural cultures since it generates multiple positive impacts on destinations. The main objective of this research was to investigate the contribution of rural tourism on cultural preservation of Hiriwadunna village in North Central Sri Lanka. A constructive, qualitative and quantitative research approach with a mixed method of data collection was employed as the methodology of this research. The study was carried applying longitudinal field research techniques and the analytical phase included both qualitative and quantitative analytical methods. The overall findings show that culture has become the central attraction of rural tourism in the study area and many of the cultural elements therein have been remained unchanged since the village has been promoted as a tourist attraction. Rural tourism in the village was able to create a long lasting relationship between rural culture and cultural attractions which caused on the preservation of the village culture. Accordingly, 47 foreign tourists out of the surveyed total has visited this destination the prime purpose of exploring the way of life and experiencing different aspects of tangible village culture. With perusal of the domestic tourists, visiting village environment and sightseeing is the main motivation for a total 15. This background was clearly evident through the types of tourism related local businesses including demonstrations, traditional transport systems and agricultural activities. Respective numbers involved in such businesses that affected on the cultural preservation are 80, 07 and 05 respectively. Thus, tourism related activities in the study area have been able to become a powerful tool to preserve the village culture which effect on bringing forth important preservation mechanisms on the culture of this peripheral rural destination.

KEYWORDS: *Rural tourism, rural culture, cultural aspects, cultural preservation, peripheral rural destination*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism industry, as one of the fastest growing and most resilient socio-economic sectors in the contemporary world, generates impressive impacts on different destinations where unique tourist attractions have been located. These attractions are commonly found in rural areas with rich and diverse cultural heritage. As stated by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (2020), tourism industry has proven to be a tool for economic diversification and a major employment engine with many multiplier effects that contribute for rural development. These multiple effects included the preservation of unique local cultures of different destinations located in rural areas. It is also contributed to make rural regions more accessible and attractive for tourists, both local and international, whose ambitions are to see, experience, explore and engage in traditional village related activities. As many countries of the world have experienced, rural tourism on the other hand generates a concrete foundation for the preservation of local cultures.

Tourism is a diverse economic activity comprises with different market segments. As pointed out by Dolnicar (2008), this market segmentation of tourism industry generates competitive advantages on destinations. Due to this segmentation, a wide range of niche markets have been generated in the contemporary tourism industry. Different terms such as alternative tourism, special interest tourism, adjectival tourism and ethical tourism are commonly being used to describe such niches. These new tourism markets are the fastest growing segments of the world tourism industry which especially operate in unique destinations located in peripheral regions. Niche tourism is also seen as a means of increasing the attractiveness and competitiveness of destinations and allow them to differentiate their tourism products and compete in an increasingly competitive tourism environment (Ursache, 2015). Cultural tourism, ecotourism, heritage tourism, agro-tourism and rural tourism are some of the examples for alternative tourism markets that generate multiple positive impacts on destinations, which include direct, indirect and induced impacts. As accepted worldwide, preservation of local cultures is a significant positive impact generated by tourism industry. Such impacts derived from tourism are most common in the destinations located in peripheral regions that are mostly rural. As such, a direct link has been created between rural tourism and cultural preservation. As a result, most of the developing countries with rich and diverse rural cultures consider rural tourism as a significant tool for cultural preservation and rural development.

Over the last few decades, a rapid growth in rural tourism industry has been reported and it has raised the awareness of governments, local authorities, policy makers and stakeholders about the importance of cultural preservation of remote destinations. This background generated a significant demand for rural tourism and an interest in rural traditions and cultural heritage that positively impact on cultural preservation. Even though, the role of

rural tourism on cultural preservation of peripheral regions is significant, a sufficient, attention has not been given to study this aspect. Instead, all the cultural resources are being just utilized either as attractions or as resources for tourist consumption.

Rural tourism is a unique and significant concept in the contemporary tourism industry. Due this exceptionality, it focuses solely on participating in typical village related activities in rural destinations. As a result, a direct interaction among tourists, local host communities and rural cultures has automatically been generated. Therefore, it has now seen as an influential source which generates positive socio, economic and cultural benefits on peripheral destinations. At present, most of the developing countries have identified rural tourism as an effective means for cultural preservation of such regions. Accordingly, it has now been widely promoted as a preservation strategy of local cultures of different destinations that are located in the peripheries. Thus, rural tourism is closely tied to cultural promotion, increased cultural awareness and the accumulation of resources to be used for cultural preservation. At the same, time it is considered to be a viable livelihood option in many countries.

Research literature on the link between rural tourism, rural culture and cultural preservation is multidimensional. Many scholars have attempted to study different facets of this theme. Irshad (2010), in the report titled "Rural tourism: An overview" emphasizes many aspects of rural tourism including its contribution towards the preservation of rural culture and heritage. This author has further stated that it is a powerful tool for cultural revitalization, promotion of traditional arts and crafts and conservation of rural landscape. These aspects are considered the main themes of heritage protection and conservation of historic built environment (cultural landscape) of rural destinations. Fang (2020) states that preservation of the rural world is significant from an economic, social and cultural point of view. In this regard, the initiation and development of rural tourism will be a strong mechanism that helps to combine different facets of local cultures. Hence, this segment of tourism industry can actively contribute to the preservation of local cultures in different ways, since the cultural resources of rural areas are the foundation of tourist attractions and activities of rural tourism. Thus, the connection between rural culture and rural tourism is twofold. As a result, this new market segment has become an alternative force to preserve local cultures of rural areas.

As proposed by Bramwell and Lane (1994), rural tourism includes different activities related to agriculture, natural environment, adventure, sport, health, education, arts and heritage of rural destinations. Different aspects such as customs and folklore, local and family traditions, values, beliefs and common heritage have been identified as main attractions of rural tourism by Pedford (1995). According to MacDonald and Jolliffe (2003), a distinct rural community with its own traditions, heritage, arts, lifestyles, places and values become

central attraction in rural tourism. In this context, it is clear that rural tourism is primarily centered on rural culture.

Citing the works of Butler and Hall (1998) and the United Nations World Tourism Organization (1994), MacDonald and Jolliffe (2003) have further state that many tourists seek rural destinations which offer unique and uncommon experiences related to the natural environment, historic heritage and unique cultural landscapes. They cite the findings of Jolliffe and Baum (1999) and claim that culture and tourism then become resources for socioeconomic development in rural communities of peripheral regions. Among them, cultural aspect of a destination is of at paramount importance. Dorobantu and Nistoreanu (2012) cite the research findings of Nistoreanu and Marinela (2011) and emphasize that rural areas retain unspoiled traditional and spiritual values, especially ethnographic, socio-economic life and its environment. This background paves a concrete platform for the development of rural tourism with a promising future, being in a direct relationship with other forms of tourism.

Peripheral regions in developing countries with rich cultural diversity are the main destinations for rural tourism. Tourists, both local and foreign who visit these destinations are willing to experience their culture, way of life, agricultural activities, folklore, customs, paddy fields, home gardens, irrigation related landscape, festivals, crafts, and general sightseeing. Therefore, local communities of these villages attempt to maintain a typical village setup to promote different tourism related activities with the intention of being advantaged. Thus, the success in rural tourism has created a concrete foundation for engaging the local community in tourism and utilizing both tangible and intangible resources that contribute for cultural preservation.

With this backdrop, it is evident that culture is the central aspect of tourism that has been promoted in rural destinations. In the context of rural tourism, the presence of tourists both domestic and international is significant to promote and preserve rural culture. According to the findings of previous studies, it is an asset for rural destinations to attract tourists that effect on the preservation of different cultural elements therein. This way, promotion and development of rural tourism generate many positive impacts on the local culture of rural destinations including cultural preservation.

The complexity of the term “rural tourism” has given rise to numerous definitions used by different countries, researchers, policy makers and institutions in different contexts. There is no single definition acceptable to all. Many definitions related to rural tourism have been used over the years and highlight its economic and marketing aspects. There are some definitions that can be applied for varied purposes such as research, policy making, tourism planning and development while other definitions are used for more specific purposes. With this background, Greek National Tourism Organization (2012) cites the general definition developed by Lane (1994) to define rural tourism is. Accordingly, rural tourism is

"tourism located in rural areas, namely areas rural in scale, character and function reflecting the unique patterns of the rural environment, economy, history and location". Citing Lane (1994), Greek National Tourism Organization (2012) has further described that any activity that is not an integral part of the rural fabric and does not employ local resources cannot be considered as rural tourism. Dorobantu and Nistoreanu (2012) quote the definition of Surugiu (2008) and state that rural tourism takes place in rural areas and involved in the utilization of natural and anthropogenic tourism resources to conduct different activities which generate benefits for local communities. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (2017) has defined rural tourism as a segment in which the visitor's experience is related to a wide range of products generally linked to nature-based activities, agriculture, rural lifestyles, culture, angling and sightseeing. This definition specifies rural tourism as a particular set of activities and some of its key features including the relationship among rural culture, tourists and rural destinations. Ivona (2021) has also defined rural tourism as tourist activity in rural areas, structured by an integrated offer of leisure and directed to a reasoned request through contact with the native environment and with a relationship with local society. According to the definition provided by the Indian Ministry of Tourism (2021) rural tourism focuses on travels to rural locations and active participation and experience of rural lifestyles while taking part in the daily activities of the village which cause to provide a chance to imbibe the traditions and culture of the area. At the same time, this institution defined rural tourism as any form of tourism that showcases rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations, thereby benefiting the local community and enabling interaction between tourists and locals for a more enriching tourism experience. Rural areas with rich cultural diversity still retain unspoiled traditional and spiritual values, especially in ethnographic, socioeconomic life and its environment, thus enabling the development of rural tourism. This background provides a concrete foundation and a great potential to develop rural tourism in such destinations which ultimately helps to enhance and preserve rural cultures.

Upon this backdrop, a few major characteristics of rural tourism can be identified. Most of the destinations where rural tourism activities are undertaken have commonly been located in authentic rural setup with rustic environments. Tourist attractions and activities of such destinations are based on unique cultural resources which is the main element of rural tourism. The resource base which generates a multifaceted rural tourism industry include; a) the way of life, b) traditional lifestyles and rituals, c) traditional agriculture and related methods of cultivation, d) traditional livelihoods and e) other related activities such as traditional mode of transport. Most of the destinations located in peripheral regions utilize such resources to promote different tourism activities. As per the definitional characteristics, it is further evident that rural tourism showcases rural life, art, culture and heritage at remote destinations and generates a

wide range of impacts on local communities. It is also apparent that rural tourism is mainly associated with the participation in rural lifestyles, customs, traditions, values, beliefs, folklore, cultural and gastronomic practices, agriculture related activities and appreciation of other community related characteristics of rural regions. As identified by the United Nations World Tourism Organization (2017), rural tourism generally takes place in rural areas/destinations where the land-use is dominated by agriculture and forestry. Traditional social structure and lifestyles are other key features of such destinations. The relationship between tourists and rural destinations is another identical aspect of rural tourism. As summarized by Greek National Tourism Organization (2012), rural tourism provides tourists a personalized contact, a taste of the physical and human environment of the countryside. In addition, it allows them to participate in activities, traditions and lifestyles of local people. At the same time, rural tourism fulfills the need of tourists for experiencing the real life of a rural family and a rural society. With perusal of this discussion, it is clear that rural tourism is a unique segment in special forms of mass tourism which showcases the rural life, art, culture and heritage at rural locations.

Rural tourism in Sri Lanka is a growing niche market with great potential and a wide array of untapped resources which provide multifaceted activities and attractions. Peripheral villages of the country that comprise with rich and diverse cultural backgrounds and typical picturesque landscapes create ideal destinations for rural tourism. Sri Lankan rural tourism is a common phenomenon at different destinations including traditional tank villages of the dry zone, mountain villages in the central highland and fishing villages in the coastal fringe. All these destinations have their own typical cultural identities with great potential to promote rural tourism. Many such villages can commonly be seen in the North Central Dry Zone of the country. The hydraulic tank-based civilization with ancient irrigation systems and colossal man-made tanks, location of few ancient kingdoms, tank based village system along with unique agricultural patterns and their remote/isolated location are some of the factors impacting on the intensification of the existing potential for rural tourism. Tourists who visit these villages can immerse themselves in the lifestyle of the village folk and experience their unique way of life.

Hiriwadunna, located in close proximity to the main touristic city of Habarana in the North Central Dry Zone, is a village that comprise a wide array of rural tourist attractions and activities (Figure 01). These include different facets such as old-style village houses made out of wattle and daub, traditional domestic items and kitchen utensils, paddy fields and chenas (slash and burn or shifting cultivation), traditional dry zone agricultural activities with old-style implements, village tracks with bullock carts, tank with boats and traditional fishing activities and other various aspects of rural culture in respect to authentic village cuisines, clothing, initiation rites and arts and

crafts. Being located as a typical tank village, if offers other activities such as bird and butterfly watching, village safaris and activities with traditional cultural significance. Rural tourism in Hiriwadunna can be considered, therefore, as a means that can be utilized to promote and preserve authentic rural culture. In this way, the current status of the village provides an ideal setup for this study which aimed to investigate the contribution of rural tourism industry towards cultural preservation.

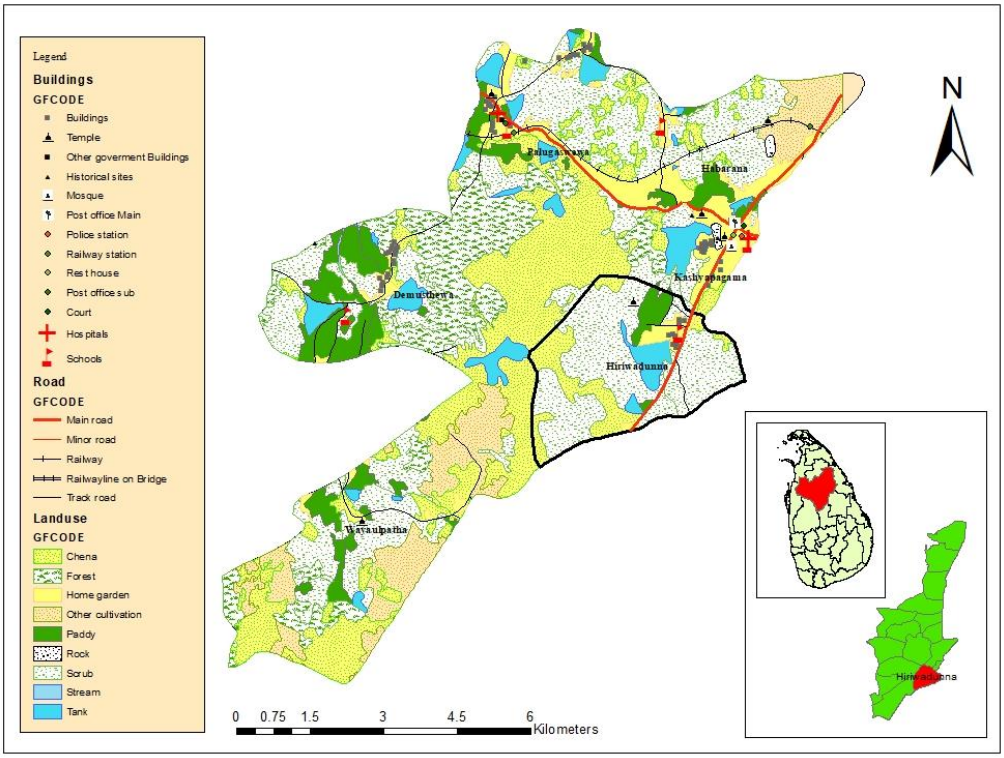

Figure 01 - The study area

Source: Adopted from Various Sources, 2023

Accordingly, the main objective of this research was to examine the contribution of rural tourism towards the preservation of rural culture with special reference to Hiriwaduuna tourism village in the North Central Sri Lanka. Other specific objectives of the research were to examine the contribution of present nature and types of tourism activities for cultural preservation, analyze the contribution of tourist arrivals on cultural preservation, study the contribution of tourism related service and facilities on cultural preservation, investigate the contribution of local businesses in tourism for cultural preservation and review the perceptional views of tourists, tour guides and local community on cultural preservation.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

A constructive, qualitative and quantitative research approach which involves a mixed method of data collection, including a questionnaire survey, interviews both semi structured and in depth, and direct observations was, utilized in this research. After the preliminary survey was conducted to select the study area and to recognize the content and coverage of rural tourism activities, the sample of the research was designed. In this regard,

judgment and purposive sampling methods were employed to select a representative sample comprising a series of categories *viz.* tourists both domestic (65) and foreign (130), village stakeholders who cater tourist needs (12), residents from the community who engage in traditional agriculture, inland fishing and bullock cart operating (16) and local tour guides (04). Consequently, the study was conducted over a period of two years since the mid-2019, applying longitudinal field research techniques. Quantitative data used in this study were mainly gathered through the questionnaire survey and qualitative information was derived from a series of interviews, long-term observations and informal discussions with selected target groups such as villagers, tour guides, business personnel and tourists. The analytical phase which included both qualitative and quantitative methods was carried out as the final step of the methodology. Data collected through the questionnaire survey were converted into percentages and collated in the form of tables, graphs and figures to make the data analysis and presentation more meaningful. Among the qualitative analytical methods applied, photo interpretation, summarizing information and conversion of important facts into themes are most prominent.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to analyze the results, the overall findings of the study were structured within rural tourism and its contribution on cultural preservation of the study area. With perusal of this objective, this section which discusses the results is divided into several sub headings. These include several aspects such as the present nature and the types of tourism activities, nature and purpose of tourist arrivals, tourism related services and facilities and different constraints related to tourism activities. Accordingly, the main objective of this study, the contribution of rural tourism industry on cultural preservation of Hiriwadunna, could be achieved.

3.1 Contribution of present nature and types of tourism activities for cultural preservation

As one of the prominent rural tourist destinations of the country, Hiriwadunna attracts a large number of tourists both domestic and foreign, annually. It is mainly due to the village being in a close proximity to Habarana local tourist transit which is centrally located to the main tourist destinations such as Dambulla, Seegirya, Polonnaruwa, Anuradhapura, Mihinthale, Kandy, Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Minneriya. Given this locational advantage, favorable geographical characteristics, natural and cultural resources and authentic village setup, Hiriwadunna has now become a world-famous rural tourist destination and it is considered to be very unique. At the same time, the rich, diverse and authentic cultural background of the village generates a vast potential for a successful rural tourism industry. Being a traditional dry zone tank village, it offers a wide array of attractions and activities for tourists who visit the village. Such attractions and activities include a) village tracking with traditional bollock carts riding, b) enjoying the rural atmosphere and its local

attractions such as village tank and the vista, c) participation in traditional agricultural activities, d) boat riding and enjoying traditional fishing activities such as angling and e) experiencing other various aspects of rural culture in respect to authentic village cuisine, housing, clothing, initiation rites and arts and crafts.

Rural tourism in Hiriwadunna is a form of exploring an authentic dry zone tank village of Sri Lanka. Therefore, tourism therein can be considered as an alternative form operated by villagers to promote their own culture, nature and the way of life. Tourists both domestic and foreign can participate in different activities during a tour in the village. This diversity has also been studied buy different authors based on other countries. Summarizing the multiplicity of rural tourism, Holland et al. (2003) state that it takes many different forms and is pursued for different reasons. Ayazlar and Ayazlar (2015) have also reviewed different types of rural tourism activities and resources with reference to the research findings of Nair et al. (2015). In the same work, they have further cited the model of Nulty (2004) and classify the main attributes of rural tourism. Based on this point of view and the information collected from the field survey, rural tourism activities of the study area can be classified according to the resource base (Figure 02).

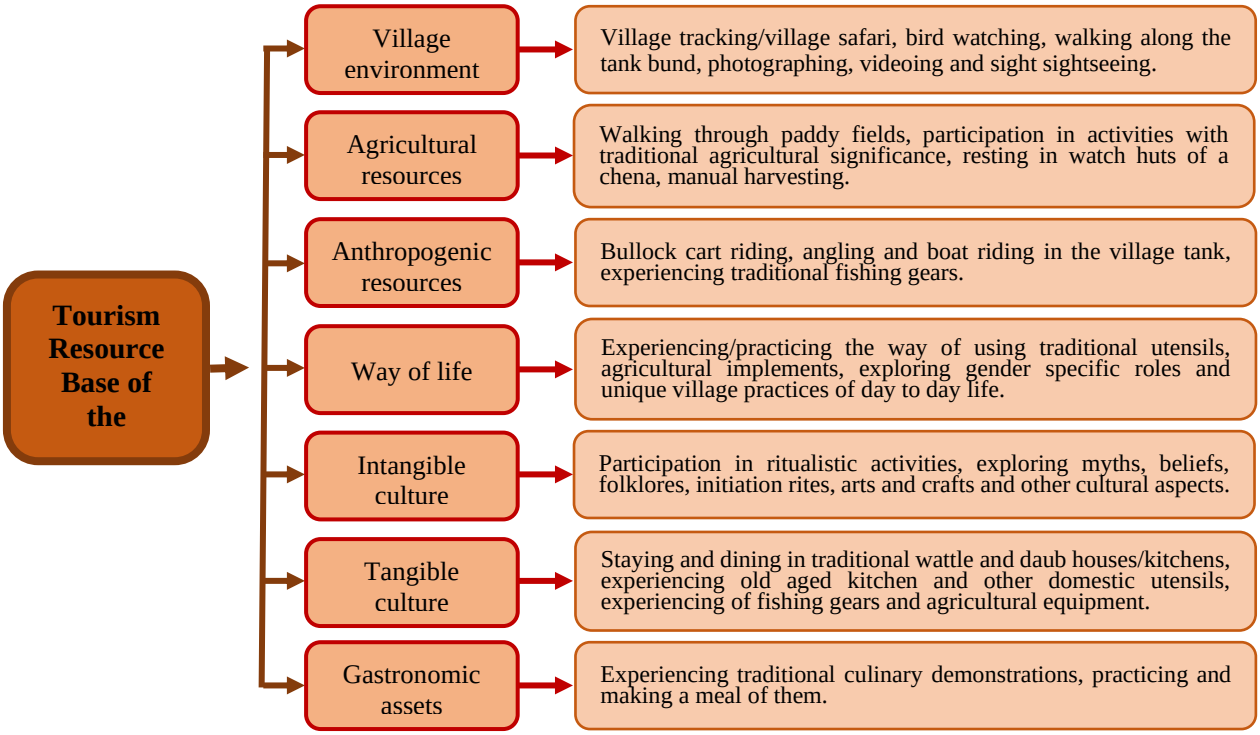

Figure 02. Classification of tourist activities in Hiriwadunna based on the resource base

Source: Field Survey, 2019-2021

With perusal of the resource base and related tourist activities depicted in Figure 02, it is evident that the culture is the foundation of the rural tourism industry of Hiriwadunna village. The field survey further reveals that a vast variety of cultural resources both tangible and intangible are being used for different tourism activities. This further includes different

aspects related to the village environment, paddy fields and home gardens, anthropogenic resources, way of life and culinary related practices. All of these aspects denote its own attractiveness with a significant cultural value. Since the village has been developed as a touristic destination, local community therein is benefited in different ways and means. Consequently, it has now become a major source of income for a large majority of the villagers. The ultimate result of this process is the rapid development of rural tourism in Hiriwadunna. Even though there is much potential, a major challenge is that many of the cultural aspects which have been promoted either as attractions or activities in tourism are getting deteriorated. After careful planning and with consideration to the opinions tourism experts, the villagers have now extended their involvement to revitalize some of the disappearing aspects of their culture and carried out some improvements.

A few related examples were noticeable during the field visit. Among them, the renovation of village tank, operation of a fleet of traditional boats, re-employment of ancient fishing methods and gears, introduction of a herd of new bullock carts, construction of village houses with traditional raw materials, proper maintenance of chena lands with watch huts are worthy of mention (Figure 03). Further the reproduction of traditional utensils and agricultural implements, cultivation of home gardens and paddy fields with traditional farming methods and crops, promotion of authentic village recipes in demonstrational kitchens, adaptation of rural way of life with traditional attires and unique village practices and demonstration of different gender roles in day-to-day life are among the other example

	A watch hut built on branches of a tall tree is one of the main elements and an integral part of the chena cultivation of the North Central Dry Zone of Sri Lanka. Farmers use the watch hut to watch over the chena and chase away harmful wild animals to protect the cultivation. The watch hut which was an iconic feature of the dry zone chena cultivation is very rare today. Villagers of Hiriwadunna have been encouraged to erect and preserve such watch huts since it is popular attraction among foreign tourists.
	Traditional houses of the tank villages in the dry zone of Sri Lanka are symbolic icons of the rural village culture. The roof of such houses are thatched with woven palm leaves, the walls are made of wattle and daub, and the floors are done with a mixture of cow dung and soil of termite hills. Today such houses are very rare. But there are several houses of this kind that have been rebuilt and preserved in Hiriwadunna for promotional purposes.

Figure 03. Improvement and reintroduction of traditional elements of village culture and cultural landscape

Source: Field Survey, 2019-2021 and Hiriwadunna Village and Jeep Safari (n.d.)

The elements discussed above and shown in Figure 03 are some of the deteriorating aspects of traditional village culture in the North Central Sri Lanka. But those have now been revivified since there is a greater demand from tourists both foreign and domestic. At the same

time, villagers are financially benefited from such aspects. As a result, the elements such as watch huts and houses made of wattle and daub have come back into existence. Apart from the features shown in Figure 03, there are many other elements of traditional rural village culture that have been revivified with the aim of providing novel tourist experiences. With perusal of this background, it is evident that rural tourism industry in Hiriwadunna village provides a concrete foundation for cultural preservation. It is a mechanism that is used to maintain existing cultural aspects while contributing to revitalize some of the disappearing elements of rural culture therein.

3.2 Contribution of tourist arrivals on cultural preservation

When the tourist arrivals to Hiriwadunna village is taken into account, some special features could easily be identified. Since this village is located close to a few prominent tourist attractions of the country, the yearly increasing number of tourist arrivals is especially evident. Tourists are attracted to this area from different corners of the country as well as of the world. During the field survey, a total number of 195 tourists both domestic and foreign were interviewed. As stated by the villagers, tour guides and business community interviewed, there is a positive increase in tourist arrivals. Respectively, 130 foreign tourists and 65 domestic tourists have visited Hiriwadunna with the prime purpose of enjoying different aspects of the village. Since tourists visit a particular destination with multiple ambitions, the choice or the purpose of engagement in different activities can be prioritized. Accordingly, several specific characteristics could be identified when the tourists were interviewed based on their main purpose of engagement in different activities (Figure 04)

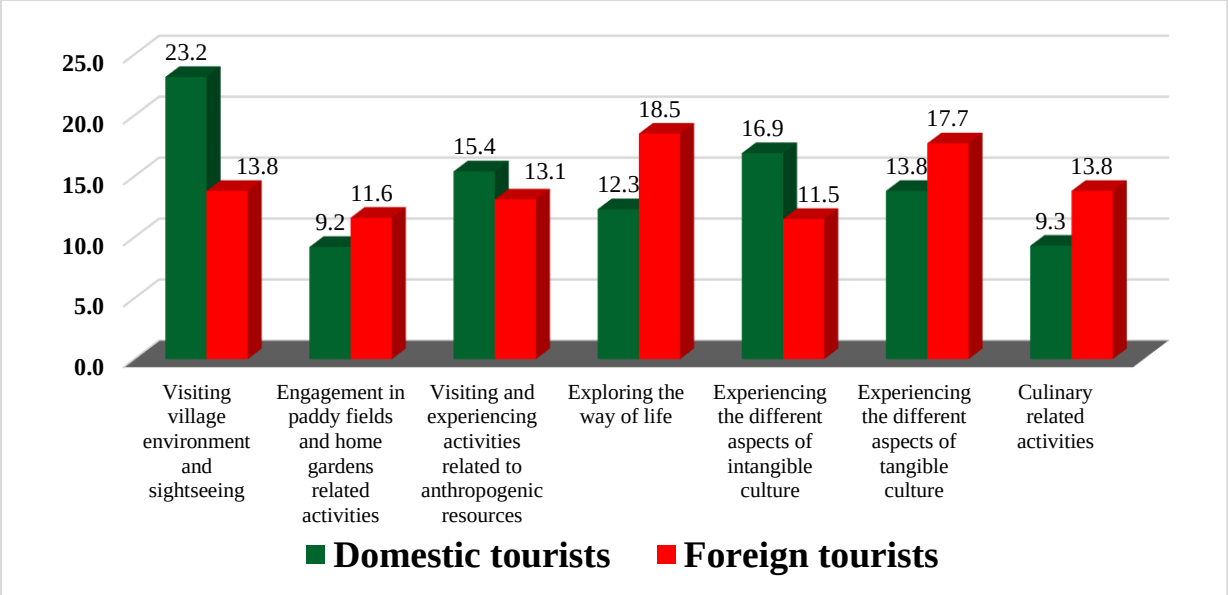

Figure 04. Percentages of tourists with respect of the main purpose of engagement in different activities

Source: Field Survey, 2019-2021.

As presented in Figure 04, the highest percentages of foreign tourists have been motivated to visit Hiriwadunna with the purposes of exploring the way of life and experiencing different aspects of tangible village culture. Respective percentages of tourists that belong to above categories are 18.5% and 17.7%. With reference to the main motivational factors of domestic tourists, it is noticeable that the highest percentage of them have been motivated by the purposes of visiting village environment and sightseeing (23.2%) and experiencing the different aspects of intangible culture (16.9%). When the overall motivational purposes depict in Figure 04 are considered as whole, a few important features could be identified. Each of the purposes of engagement in different activities depicts its own cultural attractiveness and value. Since there is an increasing demand from tourists to visit and engage in such activities, the villagers urge to protect and promote different cultural aspect which effect on increasing the potential of cultural preservation. Therefore, it can be concluded that tourist arrivals to Hiriwadunna is of paramount importance for cultural preservation.

3.3 Contribution of tourism related services and facilities towards cultural preservation

Both tangible and intangible resources have also been used to produce similar aspects of tourism related products in Hiriwadunna. Based on this background, the contribution of rural tourism towards cultural preservation of the study area can further be explained through the existing services and facilities therein. The influence of urbanization and the diffusion of urban culture, technological encroachments, changing farming/cultivation systems and land fragmentation have led to the extinction of some of the traditional aspects of the village. Being promoted as a tourist attraction, Hiriwadunna has undergone several noticeable alterations which are required for a successful rural tourism industry. Among them, the introduction of tourism related services and facilities is an observable aspect. Due to the rapid development of tourism activities, village community has carried out some improvements to the village's cultural elements. This background can be further explained with a few examples. The village tank is one of the main elements of rural tourism in Sri Lankan destinations. Villagers of Hiriwaduuna have added some impressive but traditional elements into the village tank to offer unique activities for tourists. Among them the introduction of traditional outriggers, employment of fishermen with age-old fishing gears such as cast-nets, 'karaka' (a tool made from dried wooden sticks used in inland fishing) and fishing rods are noticeable. Impressive traditional fishing techniques such as angling have also come back into existence due to this process. At the same time, irrigated paddy cultivation associated with the village tank has also been re-introduced. Accordingly, walking through village paddy fields is also a popular tourist activity in Hiriwadunna. Tourists, especially foreigners, are eager to visit these fertile paddy lands and engage in different activities such as ploughing, manual transplanting and harvesting. Chena, a compulsory element of a traditional tank village

in the dry zone of Sri Lanka is also very common in the village. Due to different reasons, chena cultivation has also declined in rural settlements. The villagers have re-started to cultivate their dilapidated chena lands for the purpose of dry zone chena cultivation and its elements such as watch hut and fence. The efforts mentioned above have been instrumental in the conservation of traditional landscape in Hiriwadunna along with its associated cultural elements. Therefore, tourism industry in this village can be considered as an effective tool to conserve the landscape elements as well as the different cultural aspects in the village (Figure 05).

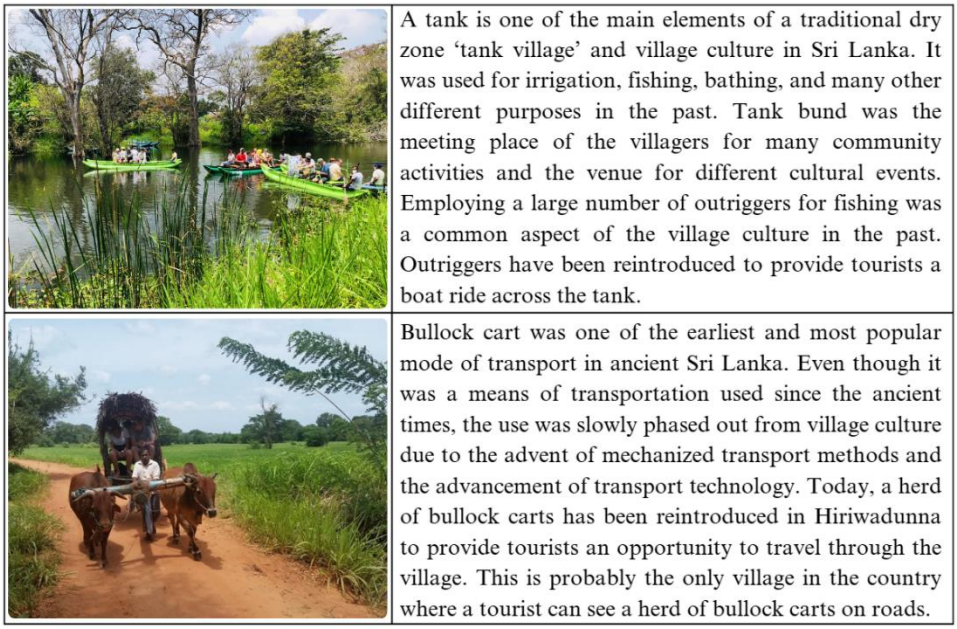

Figure 05. Contribution of tourism related service and facilities for cultural preservation

Source: Field Survey, 2019-2021 and Hiriwadunna Village and Jeep Safari (n.d.)

3.4 Re-introduction of traditional equipment

Use of traditional equipment in daily life was a distinctive feature of many rural societies of the world. Although it is rapidly decreasing from modern rural societies due to different reasons, attention has now been paid by many countries to revitalize such declining aspects as a means of cultural preservation. Accordingly, employment of rural tourism as a strategy for cultural revitalization has now become a new trend. Even though it is not commonly used in present-day rural societies, use of age-old traditional equipment was very common in Sri Lankan village culture too. Villagers of Hiriwadunna also use a variety of such equipment in their day-to-day life. These include traditional agricultural implements used in paddy and chena cultivations, fishing gear used in inland fishing, utensils used in kitchen, items used in domestic life, objects used in traditional medicine and various paraphernalia used in ritualistic activities and initiation rites. Reintroduction and reuse of these equipment is a noticeable aspect of the village life of Hiriwadunna. The primary purpose of the reproduction of such traditional items is to display them and demonstrate their uses to tourists (Figure 06).

	The use of many traditional utensils in cooking is a prominent feature of village food culture. Before the advent of electrical kitchen appliances, the mortar and pestle were used to thresh paddy, rice, and other grains. Eventually, usage of these devices gradually became obsolete and today they are not used anymore. The reintroduction of such traditional kitchen utensils helps the preservation of the elements of food and food related culture.
	A kitchen, with a range of traditional appliances, is an important part of a village house. Often, it was built as an adjacent part to the main house with a separate entrance. This is a traditional village kitchen with a collection of old-style kitchen appliances. A tourist can get a complete understanding and an experience about equipment such as the coconut scraper, winnowing fan, quern, sieve, reed tray, and other clay items.

Figure 06. Re-introduction of traditional equipment

Source: Field Survey, 2019-2021

As per the description in Figure 06, rural tourism of the study area can be considered as a strategy to bring forth above elements to the present era. It is thus important to investigate how these initiatives impact on the preservation of both tangible and intangible elements of village culture. Demonstration methods that they utilize with these implements directly impact on the conservation and the sustainability of such cultural elements.

3.5 Promotion of traditional culinary activities

Village culinary traditions of Sri Lanka depict a diverse cultural aspect that is intertwined with unique systems and elements continued from several thousands of years. The traditional and trans-generational knowledge, practices, equipment, recipes and methods of preparations in food culture now can only be seen in a limited number of villages. These limited existing practices are also preserved due to some special reasons such as the promotion of tourism related activities. Tourists who visit Hiriwadunna are able to experience traditional Sri Lankan cooking demonstrations with age-old utensils and methods. Based on the demand, they can even participate in these demonstrations or make their own food by themselves. Thus, they are able to experience exceptionally delicious meal served in a classic Sri Lankan style. This experience becomes more authentic since the whole setup has been arranged in a kitchen of a wattle and daub house. At the same time, they are able to see/experience some of the traditional cooking tools such as clay pots, grinding stone, pestle and mortar, winnowing fan, quern and reed trays (Figure 07). This practice has also contributed to bring forth old traditions into contemporary village setup and it can therefore be considered as a significant mechanism for the preservation of village culinary traditions of Hiriwadunna.

Sri Lankan village food culture has a long history and a unique tradition inherent in it. Traditional foods, ingredients, flavoring agents, utensils used in the process of preparation and methods of serving are considered as the elements of village culture that are continued from several thousands of years. Many of the aspects of the village food culture cannot be seen today due to different reasons such as the influence of modernity and technological advancement. A few old-style kitchens along with traditional kitchen utensils and recipes have been reestablished by the villagers of Hiriwadunna since it is a profitable business. Tourists who visit the village can experience an array of traditional Sri Lankan village meals cooked by village women which ultimately provide them a unique and unforgettable village life experience. The demonstration kitchen which is a main element of the tour itinerary of Hiriwadunna reflects a diverse culinary tradition which a tourist can participate.

Figure 07. Traditional culinary related activities and demonstrations

Source: Field Survey, 2019-2021 and Hiriwadunna Village and Jeep Safari (n.d.).

As discussed above, rural tourism industry in *Hiriwadunna* is an authentic encounter with local village folk, lifestyles, culture, way of life and hospitality. Based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that rural tourism industry therein is of at utmost importance which brings a significant contribution on cultural preservation and cultural landscape sustainability.

3.6 Contribution of local businesses in tourism for cultural preservation

Rural tourism involves various stakeholders including local communities (Wardana et al. 2020) and a number of community owned businesses. As further described by Paresishvili, et al. (2017), rural tourism mainly targets using natural, cultural-historical and other resources of rural settlements for complex tourist product development. It is often a stimulating economic sector for rural destinations with diverse resource base that can be utilized to initiate local businesses. By its unique nature, tourism businesses in rural areas are small in scale, based on local resources and handled by local communities. These businesses offer different services to tourists and fulfill their needs during the tour therein. As revealed by the field survey there is a wide variety of tourism related local businesses in Hiriwadunna (Table 01).

Table 01. Percentage values of the type of tourism related local businesses located in *Hiriwadunna*

Nature of the business	Percentage
Demonstration activities (traditional cooking)	28.6
Traditional transport services (bullock carts)	25.0
Agriculture-related activities	17.9
Traditional cuisines related businesses	14.3
Tank based activities (boat riding/fishing)	14.3
Total	**100.0**

Source: Field Survey, 2019-2021

As shown in Table 01, tourism related local businesses in Hiriwadunna can be categorized into five main groups. Out of which demonstration activities (traditional kitchen, equipment and cooking methods) constituted

the highest percentage, i.e., 28.6%. Tourists visit the village can see, experience or participate in these demonstrations which include the ways and means of using traditional kitchen utensils and their utilities. Persons who operate the businesses in this category have their own wattle and daub house with an old-style kitchen. Traditional time-honored utensils such as mortar and pestle, quern, earthenware pots, lids and plates, winnowing fan, wooden coconut scraper, handmade spoons from coconut shells, two-stone grinder, items made out from wood, cane and bamboo, and punnets, trays and baskets woven from palm leaves or reeds have been placed and are used in these kitchens. Such items, which are a core element in Sri Lankan village culture, are not frequently used in contemporary village cooking. Local people in Hiriwadunna have been motivated and encouraged to re-utilize these equipment in their kitchens as a part of their businesses since it generates more financial benefits. This aspect has directly influenced on the preservation of main cultural elements of Hiriwadunna village.

Bullock cart is one of the major transportation systems that has been rooted in Sri Lankan culture for centuries. It has largely disappeared from use at present due to different reasons. Accompanying tourists to the village by bullock carts is a unique feature of the tourism industry in Hiriwadunna. Tourists who visit the village can experience traditional Sri Lankan transport system while viewing green paddy fields located at the vicinity and the splendid grandeur of a tank village. There are seven carters who provide transport services for tourists. This aspect is also a way that contribute to preserve the element of traditional village culture in Hiriwadunna. Table 01 further illustrates several other important aspects such as local businesses related to agricultural activities (05), traditional cuisine (04) and tank-based activities (04). According to the observations carried out during the field survey, it was clearly discernible that these businesses have directly contributed to the cultural preservation of the study area. Evidences form the observation have been described in the form of photo interpretations shown in the images above.

Agriculture is the main livelihood of a large majority of the villagers in Hiriwadunna. Due to the influence of technological encroachment, agricultural activities of this village have undergone some modern changes. However, there is a limited number of paddy lands, chena and home gardens where traditional labor-intensive agricultural activities can still be seen. Employment of buffalos in ploughing and threshing, manual transplanting, weeding and harvesting, use of traditional equipment such as hoes, ploughs and sickles are some examples in this regard. At the same time, some eye-catching elements of the traditional chena cultivation are also prominent. Traditional fishing methods and boats that provide unique experience to tourists have also been re-introduced to the village tank. All these aspect impact on bringing forth important preservation mechanisms to the traditional culture of Hiriwadunna.

3.7 Views of tourists, tour guides and local community on cultural preservation

Perceptions of stakeholders, their cooperation and support are crucial for the sustainability of rural tourism (Wardana et al., 2020). Relevant tourism literature reveals that the views of different stakeholders and tourists are a most important source to realize the impact of tourism related activities on the culture of a destination. Following this argument, the contribution of rural tourism for cultural preservation of the study area can further be elaborated through perceptional viewpoints of different individuals included into the sample. A total of 18 individuals who had a wide range of experience in tourism related activities were selected to conduct the interviews. Accordingly, perceptional viewpoints of local community, tourists both domestic and foreign and tour guides were categorized into two general themes such as the factors associated with positive contribution on cultural preservation and those associated with cultural subtraction. Most interviewees often identified multiple factors in relation to the impact of tourism related activities on cultural preservation of the village (Table 02).

Table 02. Perceptional viewpoints of participants on the impacts of rural tourism on cultural preservation

Factors associated with positive contribution	Factors associated with cultural subtraction
• Preservation of the elements of traditional cultural landscape	• Commercialization/valorization and commodification of cultural elements
• Intensification of traditional social structure and lifestyles of the village	• Exposure of village population to western cultures through tourism related activities
• Positive impacts on customs, traditions and rural way of life of the villagers	• Tensions between traditional and contemporary lifestyles
• Restoration of traditional livelihoods since tourists prefer to experience different aspects in it	• Competition between re-introduced traditional farming practices and contemporary methods
• Stimulation of cultural pride	• Alteration of traditional cultural landscape
• Rejuvenation of traditional cultural events and elements	• Creation of pseudo-cultural elements, events and items
• Bringing forth traditional utensils/equipment to the present society	• Misuse of traditional utensils and the elements of traditional cultural landscape

Note: Listed in order of the frequency with which each factor was cited.

Source: Field Survey, 2019-2021.

A few important conclusions can be drawn based on the factors associated with positive contribution of rural tourism on cultural preservation shown in Table 02. Accordingly, preservation of the elements of traditional cultural landscape emerged as the most cited theme. It was also apparent that rural tourism in Hiriwadunna has positively been contributed on the intensification of traditional social structure and lifestyles therein. Many participants stated that the impact on the customs, traditions and rural way of life is also a prominent positive contribution. Restoration of old livelihoods, stimulation of cultural pride,

rejuvenation of traditional cultural elements and bringing forth of traditional utensils/equipment are among other remaining positive impacts. These findings are supported by the opinion of Wardana et al. (2020) who states that village tourism which is beneficial for the emergence of alternative tourism can be used for cultural preservation. Emphasizing the adverse impacts of rural tourism, Stetic (2012) states that rural destinations face a number of challenges due to the development of tourism related activities. Similarly, Egbali et al. (2010) highlight that rural tourism, like other forms of tourism generates both negative and positive impacts. Accordingly, the adverse impacts generated through rural tourism activities in rural areas should not be neglected. Following are the perceptional viewpoints shown in Table 02, several negative aspects could also be identified as subtractive factors. Accordingly, participants commonly complained about some negative aspects that adversely impact on the culture of the village. Among the subtractive factors, commercialization/valorization and commodification of cultural events was cited by a majority of interviewees. As per the perception of many participants, the exposure of the village population to western cultures is also a noticeable adverse impact. Themes identified as other remaining adverse impacts included: tensions between traditional and contemporary lifestyles, competition between reintroduced traditional and contemporary farming systems, alteration of traditional cultural landscape, creation of pseudo-cultural elements, events and items and misuse of the elements of traditional cultural landscape. Apart from the aforesaid adverse impacts, there is a tendency to generate other complications with the expansion of tourism related activities therein. Such negative effects include; over dependency of the village community on tourism related income, non-prioritization of agricultural occupations, additional pressure on local resources such as village tank, fluctuations of tourism income due the seasonality of the industry, absence of local government involvement and lack of community knowledge. Accordingly, it could be concluded that these negative impacts could adversely be impact to limit the substantial contribution of rural tourism on cultural preservation of Hiriwadunna village. It was also noticeable that though rural tourism is a main livelihood for a large majority of the community therein, the nature of the tourism was promoted could even damage tourism itself.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this study was to examine the impact of rural tourism on cultural preservation of Hiriwadunna tourism village in North Central Sri Lanka. As one of the popular rural destinations of the country, this village provides tourists an all-inclusive authentic encounter with local village folk, experiencing rural lifestyles, culture, way of life and hospitality. The overall findings of this study show that different resources such as cultural elements both tangible and intangible, village landscape, components of the village including the tank, paddy fields and chenas, gastronomic

traditions, way of life and anthropogenic resources have been used to promote tourism. Accordingly, culture has become the central attraction of the rural tourism industry in the study area. The engulfment of rurality by the diffusion of urban culture, technological encroachments, changing farming systems and land fragmentation are the main reasons that impact on the deterioration of many of the traditional aspects of rural settlements of the region. This background has also adversely impacted on the culture of Hiriwadunna. But, many of the aspects of the village culture have remained unchanged since the village has been promoted as a tourist destination. Tourist arrivals to Hiriwadunna is increasing rapidly, since it offers a wide range of attractions and activities which are very unique in nature. Tourist attractions and activities of this village are based on a variety of resources including the village environment, paddy fields and home gardens, anthropogenic resources, way of life, tangible and intangible culture and culinary practices which are the main aspects that have even been included into the definitional contexts. Based on this diverse resource base, a number of tourist attractions and activities have been introduced and those have been linked with each other. Having established the village as a tourist site, the village community has reintroduced different aspects of their culture with the support of different stakeholders. Hence, rural tourism in the village creates an awareness among them about the importance of cultural preservation which generates many advantages. Consequently, a long lasting relationship was generated among village community, tourists and related stakeholders. Therefore, the link between rural tourism and cultural preservation of Hiriwadunna can be considered as a multifaceted agreement and a mutual contribution of different groups. Thus, rural tourism industry in the village has made an immense contribution to build a strong relationship between rural culture and cultural attractions which effect on the assurance of cultural preservation. Even though the positive impacts represent such an impressive background, some constraints have also been emerged due to the rapid popularity and development of the tourism industry. Therefore, there is pressing need to introduce effective mechanisms for sound management of the issues identified. In conclusion, as the comprehensive strategically ultimatum, it is just and fair to bring effective and timely measures to develop cultural tourism and to manage the constraints to have long term sustainable development of the rural tourism industry of the country.

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