



### Impact of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) on Tourism and Tourist Destinations

Fatima Anis Naqvi<sup>1</sup> Dr. Muhammad Kamran<sup>2</sup> Badar Kamal Habib<sup>3</sup> Ali Hamza<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Tourism and Hospitality Management, College of Earth and Environmental Sciences, The University of Punjab, Pakistan.

<sup>2</sup> Assistant Professor, College of Earth and Environmental Sciences, The University of Punjab, Pakistan.

**Email:** [muhammadkamran.cees@pu.edu.pk](mailto:muhammadkamran.cees@pu.edu.pk)

<sup>3</sup> Tourism and Hospitality Management College of Earth and Environmental Sciences, The University of Punjab, Pakistan.

**Email:** [badarkamalhabib@gmail.com](mailto:badarkamalhabib@gmail.com)

<sup>4</sup> Tourism and Hospitality Management, College of Earth and Environmental Sciences, The University of Punjab, Pakistan.

**Email:** [dralimehar786@gmail.com](mailto:dralimehar786@gmail.com)

*Corresponding Author:* [faanaqvi@gmail.com](mailto:faanaqvi@gmail.com)

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#### ABSTRACT

This research examines the effect of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) on tourism and tourist sites in Pakistan. CPEC has brought with it huge improvements in infrastructure, such as improved roads, transport, and communication systems, which have opened up far-flung and underdeveloped regions. The study examines both the favorable impacts, e.g., economic development, employment generation, and creation of new tourist attractions, as well as the negative impacts, e.g., degradation of the environment, cultural transformation, and overburdening of local resources. Through Quantitative approach (survey), the research intends to gain an in-depth perspective of how CPEC is reshaping tourism in Pakistan and provide recommendations for sustainable development so that the benefits of this growth are maximized and the harmful effects are lessened.

**Keywords:** CPEC, Arabian Sea, Tourism Development, Economic Growth, Community-based tourism, Infrastructure Improvement, Environmental effects of CPEC Projects, Sustainable Tourism, China Pakistan Economic Corridor.

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## 1. Introduction

The CPEC can clearly be termed as “The gateway to the unexplored wonders of Pakistan through the journey into Pakistan's tourism landscape.” Geographically Pakistan is blessed with all type of landscapes ranging from highest mountain ranges in the North and West to the sea in South, with lush green lands to beautiful pearls found in the sand. Pakistan’s landscapes are source of attraction for tourists from all over the world. The number of tourists will increase in Pakistan due to better road development under CPEC in Pakistan and will become a reason to flourish tourism industry in remote areas, particularly the ones that come around the CPEC’s route. With the concentration of tourists in Pakistan the economic condition of local people will become improve. Other than economic factor the tourists will also enjoy the local culture and hospitality. (Qayyum, U., & Javed,M, 2015) (After nine years, it has been observed that a sizeable number of tourism as well as investors from within and outside has accelerated to a great extent).

Pakistan has high potential for tourism because of its culture, geographic and bio-logical diversities, and historical background. Which will surely be explored by those who are interested in this. (Arshad, M.I., Iqbal,M.I., and Shahbaz, M., 2017).

### 1.1. Background of China Pakistan Economic Corridor

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) stands as one of the most ambitious and transformative development projects in South Asia, designed to deepen economic and strategic ties between Pakistan and China. Although discussions around economic cooperation between the two countries had been ongoing for years, it was in April 2015 that CPEC was formally launched with the signing of a landmark agreement. This multi-billion-dollar initiative aims to connect Gwadar Port in Balochistan to China’s Xinjiang region through a vast network of roads, railways, and energy projects (Wolf, 2019). The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is not only an important part of China’s wider Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) but also a project that has the potential to reshape Pakistan’s economy. Since the beginning, CPEC has been seen as a hope for Pakistan’s economy. It has added new

highways, power plants, and special economic zones, which opened jobs and made travel and trade easier. Still, the project also faced problems. Issues like security, politics, and debt have caused worries both inside the country and outside. As Sial (2014) explains, CPEC has brought progress, but people also raise questions about openness, financial risks, and safety.

### 1.2. Significance of this study.

This study matters because it views CPEC not only as a trade and infrastructure project but also as a way to promote tourism in Pakistan. New roads, improved transport, and investment have made remote places like Gilgit-Baltistan, Hunza, Skardu, and Gwadar easier to visit. These regions, known for their beauty and culture, are now drawing more tourists, creating jobs, and helping local economies grow (Ali et al., 2021). But along with these opportunities come challenges, such as protecting the environment and traditions, and making sure that local communities are benefitted in fair way.

### 1.3. Research Objectives

The aim of this research is to evaluate the impacts of CPEC-related tourism on local communities, focusing on tourism growth, employment generation, and the socio-economic development of tourist destinations.

To achieve this aim, the study is guided by the following objectives:

- To evaluate the challenges and opportunities associated with CPEC-related tourism growth, such as environmental sustainability, infrastructure development, local stakeholder engagement.
- To analyze how CPEC has affected tourism and tourist destinations in Pakistan.

### 1.4. Research Questions (will focus on)

- i. What are the key environmental and sustainability challenges emerging from CPEC-driven tourism development, and how are they being addressed?
- ii. How has CPEC impacted local communities and tourism-related economic activities?

## 1.5. Structure of this paper

This paper is organized into five key sections to examine the impact of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) on tourism and tourist destinations in Pakistan.

- **Introduction**-This section provides background information on CPEC, explains the significance of the study, and outlines the research aim, objectives, and questions.
- **Literature Review**- This part reviews existing studies related to tourism development, tourism's economic impacts, and the influence of large-scale infrastructure projects on the growth of tourist destinations.
- **Methodology**- This section describes the research design, which is based on a quantitative approach using first-hand primary data collected through surveys. It explains the sampling process and the methods used for data analysis.
- **Results and Discussions** - This section presents the main findings of the study, focusing on changes in tourism patterns, development of tourist destinations, employment growth, and other economic impacts related to CPEC.
- **Conclusion**-The paper concludes by summarizing the key findings, acknowledging the limitations of the study, and suggesting directions for future research.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. The Global Perception of CPEC and Its Influence on Tourism

In today's interconnected world, the way a country is perceived globally can shape its economic future, attract visitors, and open doors to new opportunities. From a global perspective, mega-projects like CPEC signal stability, progress, and openness attributes that are essential for attracting international tourists and positioning a country as a welcoming destination (Ali & Fatima, 2021). The construction of modern highways, upgraded airports, and enhanced border facilities under CPEC has made remote regions such as Gilgit-Baltistan, Gwadar, and Skardu more accessible to both domestic and foreign visitors. These developments not only physically open up tourism zones but also psychologically shift perceptions, enabling

Pakistan to market itself as a land of natural beauty, rich culture, and adventure tourism rather than conflict and insecurity (Hassan et al., 2020).

Furthermore, scholars (Sharif & Butt, 2021) highlight that CPEC contributes to what is often termed "nation branding" the shaping of a country's reputation on the global stage. Improved infrastructure coupled with enhanced media visibility can help reposition Pakistan as part of an interconnected Asia, with CPEC functioning as both a literal and symbolic bridge between South, Central, and East Asia.

In this sense, CPEC is more than an economic pathway; it is also a narrative tool that offers Pakistan an opportunity to rebuild its image, increase international goodwill, and project itself as a safe, modern, and desirable destination for travelers. However, the literature also cautions that to fully capitalize on this image shift, Pakistan must ensure political stability, environmental sustainability, and consistent tourism marketing strategies that highlight these positive changes (Bano & Iqbal, 2020).

### 2.2. China's approach to CPEC as soft-power

For China, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is more than just a project focused on trade and infrastructure. Chinese policymakers, researchers, and media often stress that CPEC is not only about economic growth but also about building closer ties between the people of China and Pakistan, which is an important goal of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Zhang & Wu, 2019).

In the Chinese media, CPEC is often presented as a sign of strong friendship and cooperation between the two countries. It is described as a project that goes beyond building infrastructure, as it also improves Pakistan's international image shifting it from being seen mainly through the lens of instability to being recognized as a trusted partner in regional development (Wang & Zhang, 2018).

Chinese research further highlights the important role of tourism in this transformation. Tourism creates opportunities for cultural interaction, attracts more visitors, and encourages tolerance between different communities (Zhang & Wu, 2019). Still, Chinese experts stress that these benefits will only last if both sides invest in

transparency, fairness, and mutual respect. Without these, the positive image created by CPEC could fade over time (Li & Song, 2020).

### **2.3. Gaps in Current Research on CPEC and Tourism**

Although research on CPEC has expanded, but there are still important areas that remain underexplored, especially regarding tourism. Most studies have focused on infrastructure development and the broader economy, but little attention has been given to tourist behavior and decision-making. For example, questions such as how easier access influences traveler's choices, satisfaction, or travel patterns are not often addressed (Hassan et al., 2020). Without these insights, tourism authorities cannot design targeted marketing campaigns or provide services that match new tourist expectations.

Another area that is rarely studied is the impact of risk perception on tourism. Many of the destinations connected through CPEC are located in sensitive or fragile areas, where political tensions, safety concerns, or natural hazards may influence travel decisions. Yet, there is limited research on how these risks shape tourists' choices or how the tourism sector can prepare for crises and disruptions (Sharif & Butt, 2021). This gap reduces the resilience of tourism in CPEC-linked regions.

### **2.4. Overlooking Youth Involvement in CPEC Tourism**

One of the most significant but neglected areas is the role of young people in CPEC driven tourism. Youth are important for the sector because they make up a large part of the workforce and are often the most innovative, especially in adopting new technologies. However, very few studies have explored how CPEC influences young people's career goals, migration decisions, skill development, or entrepreneurship in tourism-related businesses (Bano & Iqbal, 2020).

This gap is particularly important since young people are not only the future employees of the tourism industry but also the ones most likely to shape its digital transformation. Their use of tools like e-tourism, social media marketing, and online payment systems is becoming essential for modern tourism. Ignoring their role risks missing a major driver of sustainable tourism

development under CPEC.

Moreover, the exclusion of youth voices in policy discussions and tourism planning may lead to a disconnect between tourism development strategies and the actual needs, expectations, and talents of younger generations. CPEC is creating new opportunities in hospitality, transport, and services, but without targeted efforts to engage and empower youth especially in rural and marginalized regions the potential human capital benefits may remain underutilized (Sharif & Butt, 2021). Additionally, the lack of youth-focused studies ignores important social dynamics, such as how increased tourism could influence youth migration patterns, urbanization, and aspirations for entrepreneurship in areas along the corridor.

## **3. Research Methodology**

### **3.1 Research Design and Approach**

This paper uses a quantitative research design to explore the impact of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) on tourism and tourist destinations. This method was selected because it helps collect clear, measurable data. This way, it's easier to see patterns, understand relationships, and get an overall picture of how people think across a wider group.

### **3.2. Collection of data**

To collect the needed information, a questionnaire was made and distributed to people who were directly or indirectly connected with CPEC projects via survey. In total, 100 people took part in the survey. They included local residents, tourism operators, CPEC workers, government staff, and private sector people. This mix was important so that the study could show different opinions from all those linked to CPEC. Because a quantitative method was used, the data helped in comparing views, and understanding the social, economic, environmental, and tourism impacts of CPEC in a clear way.

### **3.3. Analysis of data through Chi-square test**

To study the possible links between different factors, the Chi-Square Test of Independence was used in SPSS. This test was helpful for checking relationships between groups such as gender, occupation, and education, and how each group viewed the effects of CPEC on tourism and

development. It showed whether the differences in opinions were real and meaningful or just by chance. A significance level of  $p < 0.05$  was set to make sure the results were reliable.

### 3.4. Tools and Software Used

For the survey data, SPSS was the main software used. It helped organize responses, run tests, and find patterns in factors like age, gender, and opinions about CPEC's role in tourism. The Chi-Square Test in SPSS made it clear whether views were different between groups. Before moving

the data to SPSS, Microsoft Excel was used for basic work like cleaning the data, arranging it, and making simple charts. Using both Excel and SPSS together made the analysis easier and turned the raw numbers into clear findings that supported the study.

### 4. Results & Discussion

Here, the results were carefully examined to understand and find out how people see the impact of CPEC on tourism.

**Table 4.1:** Gender-wise Responses on Perceived Infrastructure Development under CPEC

|                            |               | Have there been changes in infrastructure like hotels, restaurants, transportation, or public facilities due to CPEC ? |    |      |       |
|----------------------------|---------------|--|----|------|-------|
|                            |               | Yes  | No | Some | Total |
| Please Specify your Gender | <b>Male</b>   | 34   | 11 | 11   | 56    |
|                            | <b>Female</b> | 10   | 13 | 21   | 44    |
| <b>Total</b>               |               | 44   | 24 | 32   | 100   |

**Table 4.2:** Chi-Square Test Results for the Association between Gender and Perceptions of Infrastructure Development under CPEC

| Chi-Square Tests   |                     |    |                        |
|--------------------|---------------------|----|------------------------|
|                    | Value               | df | Significance (2-sided) |
| Pearson Chi-Square | 15.161 <sup>a</sup> | 2  | .001                   |
| Likelihood Ratio   | 15.734              | 2  | .000                   |
| N of Valid Cases   | 100                 |    |                        |

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 10.56.

To find out whether gender had an influence on how people viewed infrastructure development under CPEC, a Chi-Square Test of Independence was carried out. The test produced a Chi-Square value of 15.161 with 2 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.001. Since this value is far below the 0.05 significance level, it confirms that there is a meaningful relationship between gender and perceptions of infrastructure changes. In other words, the way respondents judged the impact of CPEC on infrastructure varied depending on whether they were male or female.

Gender often shapes how people experience

development projects, including those related to tourism, because men and women tend to have different levels of mobility, exposure, and social participation (UNWTO, 2019). The crosstab results showed that male respondents were more likely to agree that CPEC has improved infrastructure such as hotels, restaurants, transport, and public facilities. Women, on the other hand, expressed either mixed opinions or less recognition of these changes. This difference may be linked to social and cultural roles, limited mobility, or varying levels of interaction with public spaces, which can affect how development is observed and experienced.

**Table 4.3:** *Regional Responses on Employment Opportunities Generated by CPEC*

|                      |                     | <b>Has there been an increase in employment opportunities in your area due to CPEC-related tourism?</b> |           |             |              |
|----------------------|---------------------|---|-----------|-------------|--------------|
|                      |                     | <b>Yes</b>  | <b>No</b> | <b>Some</b> | <b>Total</b> |
| State Your Residence | Punjab              | 18  | 24        | 26          | 68           |
|                      | Sindh               | 1   | 1         | 0           | 2            |
|                      | Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa | 1   | 1         | 0           | 2            |
|                      | Gilgit Baltistan    | 4   | 3         | 5           | 12           |
|                      | Islamabad           | 1   | 7         | 8           | 16           |
| <b>Total</b>         |                     | <b>25</b>   | <b>36</b> | <b>39</b>   | <b>100</b>   |

**Table 4.4:** *Chi-Square Test Results for the Association between Place of Residence and Perceptions of Employment Opportunities*

| <b>Chi-Square Tests</b> |                    |           |  |
|-------------------------|--------------------|-----------|--|
|                         | <b>Value</b>       | <b>df</b> | <b>Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)</b> |
| Pearson Chi-Square      | 6.628 <sup>a</sup> | 8         | .577                                     |
| Likelihood Ratio        | 8.871              | 8         | .353                                     |
| N of Valid Cases        | 100                |           |  |

a. 10 cells (66.7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .50.

The Chi-Square Test indicated that views on employment generation through CPEC were independent of the respondents' residence. The result showed no statistically significant association between these two variables,  $\chi^2 (8, N = 100) = 6.628, p = 0.577$ . This indicates that the belief about whether CPEC has created employment opportunities does not appear to be influenced by the respondents' residential location within the sample. Additionally, since several cells had low expected counts, the reliability of this test may be limited.

The descriptive results show mixed opinions across different regions. In Punjab ( $n = 68$ ), 18 respondents said "Yes", while others were divided between "No" and "Some." In Gilgit-Baltistan, views were also mixed, with a few

recognizing employment gains. Most people from Islamabad did not see clear employment benefits from CPEC. Overall, perceptions varied but showed no strong pattern based on residence.

The descriptive results showed that a greater number of respondents from Punjab believed that CPEC-related tourism has increased employment opportunities in their area. One possible reason for this positive perception is that Punjab is home to several key CPEC routes and development projects, including improvements in road infrastructure, industrial zones, and hospitality services along these routes. These developments have led to the creation of direct and indirect job opportunities, particularly in sectors such as transportation, construction, hotels, restaurants, and local tourism businesses.

**Table 4.5: Age-wise Responses on the Environmental Impact of CPEC Tourism**

|                            | What impact has CPEC-related tourism development had on the natural environment? |                         |           |       | Total |
|----------------------------|--|-------------------------|-----------|-------|-------|
|                            | Eco-Friendly   | Environment degradation | No impact | Maybe |       |
| Your Age Group 18-24 years | 10   | 14                      | 7         | 10    | 41    |
| 25-34 years                | 15   | 11                      | 4         | 7     | 37    |
| 35-44 years                | 11   | 3                       | 2         | 2     | 18    |
| 45-54 years                | 3  | 0                       | 0         | 0     | 3     |
| 55-64 years                | 1  | 0                       | 0         | 0     | 1     |
| Total                      | 40   | 28                      | 13        | 19    | 100   |

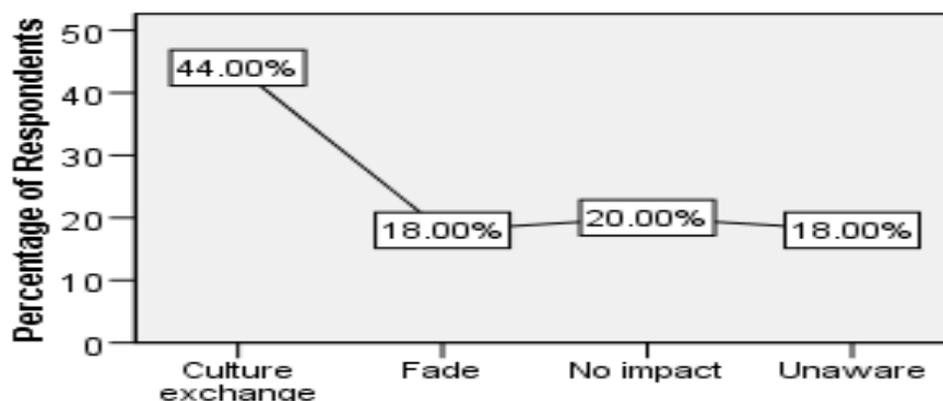
**Table 4.6: Chi-Square Results for the Relationship between Age and Perceptions of Environmental Impact from CPEC Tourism**

| Chi-Square Tests   |                     |    |                                   |
|--------------------|---------------------|----|-----------------------------------|
|                    | Value               | df | Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) |
| Pearson Chi-Square | 13.850 <sup>a</sup> | 12 | .310                              |
| Likelihood Ratio   | 15.427              | 12 | .219                              |
| N of Valid Cases   | 100                 |    |                                   |

a. 11 cells (55.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .13.

Most responses came from younger individuals, especially those aged 18–34, who had mixed opinions some believed it led to eco-friendly progress, while others felt it caused environmental damage. Interestingly, the older age groups (45 and above) had very few responses, and they mostly saw no major impact. The Chi-Square test results ( $p = 0.310$ ) suggest

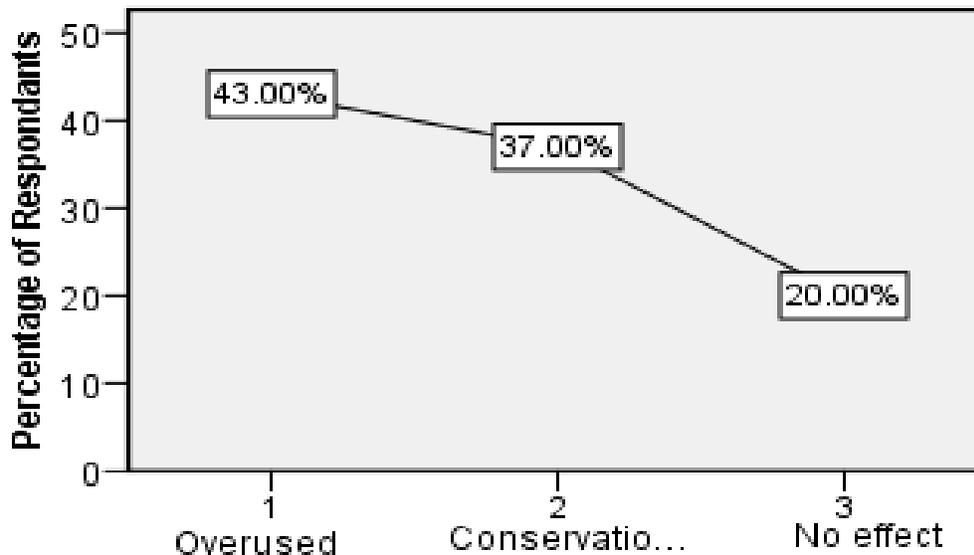
there is no strong or significant relationship between age and perception of environmental impact. This means people of different ages don't differ much in their views statistically. However, the large number of cells with very low expected counts indicates that more balanced responses across age groups would be helpful to draw firmer conclusions.

**How has the increase in tourism affected the local culture in your region?****Figure 4.1: Impact of Tourism Growth on Local Culture**

The descriptive results suggest that most respondents believe tourism under CPEC has led to positive cultural exchange in their region, with 44% selecting this option. However, opinions remain varied, as 18% felt that local culture is fading due to external influence, while 20% saw no noticeable impact. Interestingly, another 18% were unsure or unaware of how tourism has

responses reflect how people experience cultural change differently based on exposure, awareness, or local context. Tourism can promote cross-cultural learning, but it may also challenge traditional practices when not managed thoughtfully. As previous studies suggest, sustainable tourism must protect cultural heritage while encouraging openness (Richards, 2018).

***Do you think that the local natural resources been affected by the rise in tourism due to CPEC?***



**Figure 4.2:** *Impact of tourism due to CPEC on local natural resources*

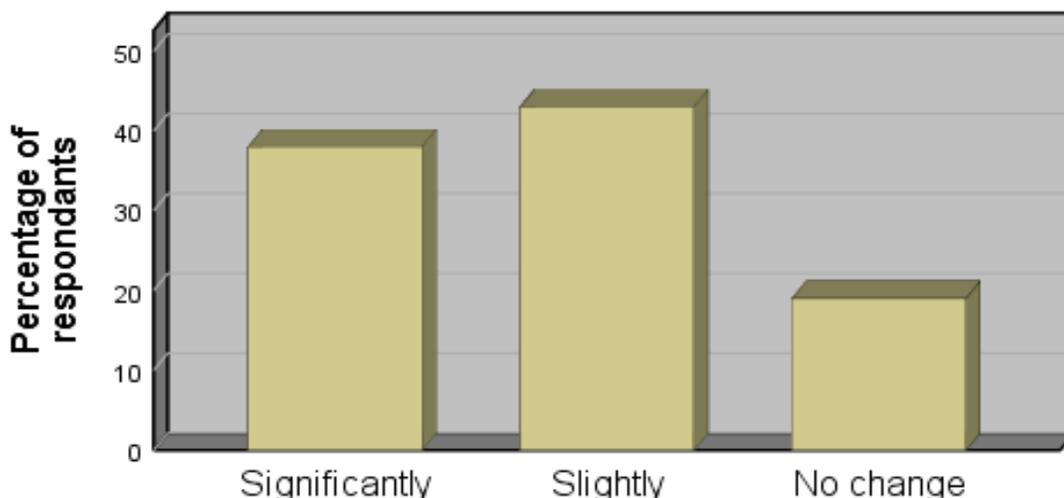
In CPEC-affected tourist regions, natural resources like **freshwater, forests, land, and energy** are often stretched beyond sustainable limits due to:

- **Increased hotel and resort construction** in scenic valleys
- **Higher water usage** by tourists for leisure (e.g., long showers, swimming pools)
- **Unregulated traffic and transportation**, which strain roads and air quality
- **Overcrowding at fragile ecosystems** (lakes, forests, and meadows)

This rise in demand can cause deforestation,

pollution, and waste accumulation, especially in areas like Gilgit-Baltistan and Skardu, which already have limited resource capacity. Also the results reveal that a significant number of respondents feel tourism under CPEC is putting pressure on local natural resources, with 43% believing these resources are being overused. On the other hand, 37% think tourism has encouraged conservation efforts, suggesting some positive awareness and action. A smaller group, 20%, reported no noticeable effect on local resources. These responses highlight the dual nature of tourism: it can both strain natural environments and raise awareness for protection, depending on how it is planned and managed.

**Do you think CPEC has contributed to overcrowding or over-tourism at popular destinations?**

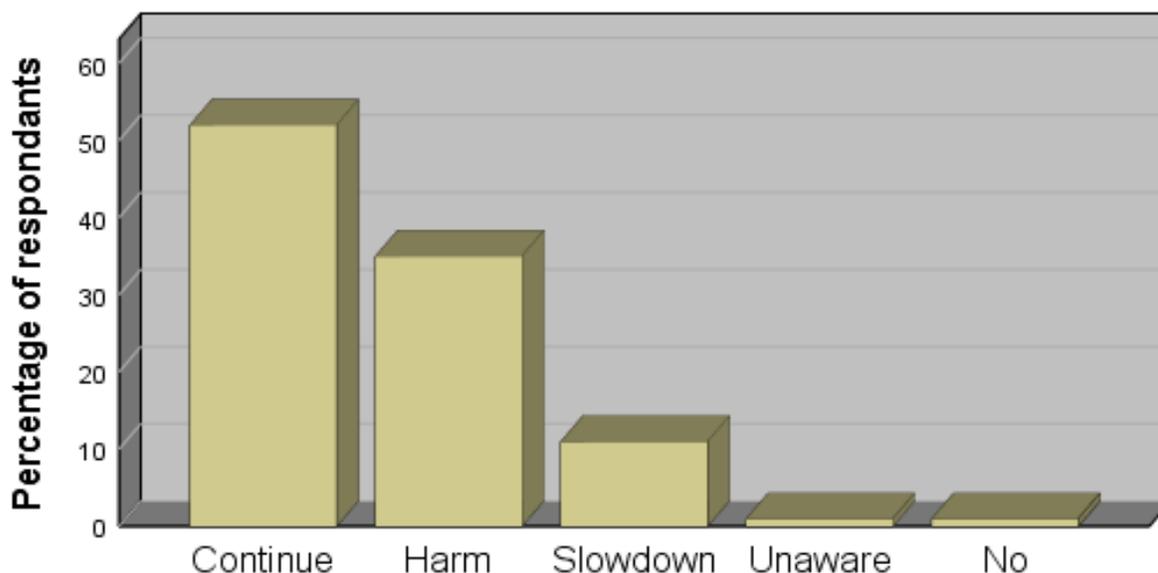


**Figure 4.3:** *Perceived contribution of CPEC to overcrowding at popular destinations*

The findings show that many people believe CPEC has contributed to issues of over-tourism and crowding at popular tourist spots. Around 45% of respondents felt that CPEC has led to a slight rise in overcrowding, while 40% thought the increase has been quite significant. This reflects a growing concern about the side effects of rapid tourism growth. With new infrastructure

making remote areas easier to reach, more visitors are arriving than these destinations can comfortably or sustainably accommodate. These results point to the importance of stronger tourism planning and crowd management strategies to avoid environmental damage and to safeguard the cultural identity of places that are now receiving high tourist traffic.

**Do you foresee the long-term sustainability of tourism in your region due to CPEC?**



**Figure 4.4:** *Perceptions of long-term sustainability with CPEC in the region*

The results suggest that people see both opportunities and challenges in tourism growth under CPEC. On one hand, many respondents feel that better roads and improved infrastructure will keep attracting more visitors and help their regions grow, while on the other hand, some people expressed concerns that if tourism grows too quickly without proper planning, it could harm the environment, put pressure on local resources, and even cause difficulties for nearby communities. A few participants were also unsure, saying they did not really know what the future of tourism under CPEC would look like. These mixed opinions highlight that, while there is a lot of hope for progress, it is just as important to make sure that development is managed in a way that is sustainable, fair, and truly beneficial for everyone in the long run.

### **Conclusion**

This research looked at how the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is affecting tourism and different tourist sites in the country. The findings showed that CPEC has helped tourism by improving infrastructure and making it easier to reach areas that were once very remote.

Quantitative analysis, done through chi-square tests, showed that people's views on CPEC were linked to their gender and the region they belonged to. Male respondents generally agreed

more than females, as they noticed changes like better infrastructure. In Punjab, many participants also pointed out an increase in job opportunities compared to other regions.

Respondents shared both positive and negative opinions about CPEC. Some saw it as a way to encourage cultural exchange and believed it could support tourism in the long run. Others were more concerned, mentioning problems such as harm to the environment, pressure on natural resources, and the risks of overcrowding at popular tourist spots.

Looking ahead, CPEC has the potential to transform Pakistan into a major regional hub for tourism. With careful planning, sustainable practices, and inclusive policies, CPEC can make the way for a brighter future where tourism not only boosts the economy but also protects the country's natural and cultural treasures. CPEC is clearly reshaping the tourism landscape of Pakistan opening up new possibilities for growth, connectivity, and regional integration. However, to ensure that these benefits are sustainable, there is a need for inclusive tourism planning that considers gender, environmental safeguards, and community participation. By balancing development with preservation, Pakistan can leverage CPEC not only as an economic project but as a pathway toward sustainable and responsible tourism.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors showed no conflict of interest.

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