

CULTURE, ECO – TOURISM AND WETLANDS IN SRI LANKA: A CASE STUDY IN MADU GANGA ESTUARY

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Estuaries are specific eco–systems that particularly contribute to the ecological balance as well as bio–diversity. Located in the Southern province of Sri Lanka, the Madu Ganga estuary surrounded by strategic tourist attraction sites is that kind of estuary. This estuary-based tourism industry while being embedded in the cultural identity of the area also creates a specific culture which homogenizes the local values. In this background, present study was utilized with the objective of analyzing the eco–social impacts of tourism in the Madu ganga estuary. Ten in–depth interviews, twenty informal discussions, one focus group interview and non–participatory simple observations were administered to collect the primary data for the study. Apart from that secondary data collected from academic documents were also used. The study revealed that tourism has become the main income earning activity of the majority in the community, particularly the new generation of youth. Before this occupational transformation, the community was traditionally bound to the fishing industry inherited from previous generations. The human activities which are based on political economy have negatively impacted the environmental sustainability and vice versa. Natural habitats of animals as well as endemic plants are threatened with the unethical environmental manipulation. The culture that has been created with the popularity of tourism industry has created unexpected social and environmental outcomes. Apart from that, a unique culture of the study area which attracts tourists has to be protected for the future generations. The wetland studied must be conserved for sustaining the environmental as well as the socio–cultural well-being of the country.

Keywords: Culture, Eco–Tourism, Livelihoods, Political Economy