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THE ROLE OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL TOURISM IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

Pakistan lacks the use of cultural and educational tourism in its public libraries. Although these institutions were once primarily centered on reading and research, there are new tendencies to show their prospect as heritage sites, community space, and online knowledge portals. In this paper, the Library Tourism Attraction Index System (LTAS) is used to assess the tourism potential of significant public libraries in Pakistan. Those attractions include Humanistic, Service, Social, and Digital attractions. According to literature, governmental reports, media coverage and case studies, (Quaid-e-Azam Library, Khaliq Dina Hall, Bahawalpur Central Library, Khushal Khan Khattak Memorial Library and others), it is proved that libraries of historical architecture, rare collections, genealogical service and active cultural programs can be used to attract both local and international tourists. Some of these challenges are reduced number of visitors, limited funding, and lack of access to digital. Some of the recommendations involved the establishment of Bibliotourism Development Units (BDUs), digitization of collections, encouraging community participation, and involvement of libraries in provincial tourism plans. This paper sets out to investigate the cultural and educational tourism opportunity of the Pakistani public libraries. In particular, it aims at assessing the main libraries in terms of the Library Tourism Attraction Index System (LTAS), determining structural and operational limitations which could impede tourism involvement, and delivering evidence-based sustainable development recommendations. In this study, the researcher aims to develop the strategies of transforming the public libraries in Pakistan into both historical and educational centers thus helping to develop bibliotourism in this country.

Keywords: *public libraries, Pakistan, bibliotourism, cultural tourism, library tourism, LTAS.*

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan Library in Experience Economy.

The public libraries in Pakistan have always been considered as the important educational and cultural hubs. Urbanization, the spread of digital media and lack of outreach efforts has over time helped to reduce the number of people visiting libraries. Large institutions such as the National Library of Pakistan in Islamabad and the Quaid-e-Azam Library in Lahore are currently struggling to ensure their functionality to the immediate community and to the wider population. Libraries in the world are being transformed as part of the

experience economy through this re-invention, which makes libraries destinations of cultural tourists and places of heritage experiences. In Pakistan, libraries hold a lot of potential as far as bibliotourism is concerned especially since they have a colonial era architecture, collection of unique manuscripts and archives. All these make the public libraries appealing destinations in life as professionals can pursue their cultural enrichment and education there.

The definition of Bibliotourism in Pakistan.

The phenomenon of bibliotourism in Pakistan is whereby the intellectual mission of the library meets the demands of modern-day visitors that are experiential-based. This idea entails three main stages. The first stage, pre-visit planning, is related to the access to the relevant information, maps, and online guides in order to prepare the visit. The second stage is on-site exploration, which is aimed at getting acquainted with historical buildings, working with unique collections, and attending the events of libraries. The last stage, post visit engagement, involves the availability of digital archives, virtual reality tours and online exhibitions which are accessible so that the visitors can further their educational and cultural experience beyond the physical library building. Through these steps, libraries would be able to increase their attractiveness as multifunctional tourism resorts, and at the same time, to meet their educational requirements.

Literature Review

Architectural / Humanistic Attraction.

One of the primary sources of attraction that draws people to the Pakistani public libraries has been the architectural beauty (CIEO, 2021). Not only is the Quaid-e-Azam Library in Punjab a heritage site, a Victorian-style halls building and a 141, 000-book library, but it is also a mainstream tourist-photography site (Quaid-e-Azam Library, 2022). A small amount of Neo-Gothic design with Victorian design was placed on the Khaliq Dina Hall in Sindh to make it a major cultural tourist attraction (Khaliq Dina Hall, 2024), and the Bahawalpur Central Library in Punjab combines these two styles, including an element of historical materials, and this knowledge of the area can be gained (Khan et al., 2025). The Pashtun architecture has its influence on Khushal Khan Khattak Memorial Library in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where the visitors come in large numbers to the library and this has provided the visitors with cultural tourism as well as roots tourism (Khushal Khan Khattak Memorial Library, 2024). The modernist utilitarian architecture finds its application in the National Library of Pakistan in Islamabad which is located in the capital and is mostly visited by the research tourists and visiting scholars (Erickson, n.d.). These libraries all demonstrate the different architectural and cultural histories of the public libraries in Pakistan, which contributes to their ability to become one of the primary aspects of bibliotourism (CIEO, 2021).

Local history attraction is the nature of service.

Besides no-planned architecture, the Pakistani public libraries are significant because they involve the roots tourism and academic studies (Ibrahim, 2021). The Khushal Khan Khattak Memorial Library provides genealogy services and local manuscripts that attract researchers and cultural tourists to learn more about the Pashtun heritage (Khushal Khan Khattak Memorial Library, 2024). Similarly, the Library of the National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research (NIHCR) has rare texts in Persian, Arabic and Urdu so it is also a prominent site of academic and heritage tourism (NIHCR, 2022). Sandhi Provinces Sindh: Sindh Government has provincial libraries, which are not only educational, but also research oriented through e-library portals, which can help in the research of the local history (Sindh Government, 2024). Moreover, the scholars working on the educational tourism can also use such libraries as the Bahawalpur Central Library containing the collection of the state documents and archives (Punjab Archives, n.d.). These services prove that the Pakistani public libraries preserve the cultural heritage in addition to facilitating research based tourism (Ibrahim, 2021).

Social / Programming Attraction.

The tourism attractiveness is also enhanced through social and programmatic activities in the public libraries (Hameed, 2023). To illustrate,

Karachi-based Kitab Ghar has book clubs, discussion groups and reading salons, that are also attracting urban youth, and literary tourists (Kitab Ghar, 2022). Another library, Lahore, Quaid-e-Azam Library also conducts lectures and workshops to the population, which has contributed to the growth of cultural tourism due to provision of such an educational experience and opportunities to unite with others (Quaid-e-Azam Library, 2024). Similarly, exhibitions, music, and cultural events are also hosted in Khaliq Dina Hall, which reinforces the belief that the latter is a cultural tourism center (Dawn, 2024). These efforts demonstrate that libraries can be useful venues of cultural action, offering participatory experience that adds to their architectural and archival impact (Hameed, 2023).

Digital / Virtual Attraction

The Pakistani libraries are enhancing their tourism potentials by adopting online resources and virtual services in the digital age (HEC, n.d.). The web-based database and e-books include Sindh e-Library Network that will allow access to the collections of the region remotely (Sindh Culture Department, 2024). Some of the manuscripts have also been digitized in Quaid-e-Azam Library that are currently not just preserved but also accessible everywhere in the world (Quaid-e-Azam Library, 2022). Meanwhile, the NIHCR Library also has virtual exhibits, and this is particularly appealing to Generation Z researchers and tourists who desire to have the digital world feel more real (NIHCR, 2022). The online services would aid the Pakistani libraries to expand beyond the physical borders to support the national and international bibliotourism endeavors (HEC, n.d.).

Methodology

This paper uses a case study design to identify tourism potential of the chosen public libraries in Pakistan. The major ones are the Quaid-e-Azam Library in Lahore, Khaliq Dina Hall in Karachi, Bahawalpur Central Library, Khushal Khan Khattak Memorial Library in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and the National Institute of Historical and Cultural Research (NIHCR) Library in Islamabad. These libraries were chosen based on their historical, architectural and collections and services diversity. The study sources of data were various whereby government reports, scholarly literature, media news articles, and official library data were used. The paper uses the Library Tourism Attraction Index System (LTAS) to assess the tourism potential of the libraries in a systematic manner by offering a framework of evaluation on how libraries serve as cultural and educational tourism attractions.

Pakistan Library Tourism Attraction Index System (LTAS) 3.2.

This study uses the Library Tourism Attraction Index System (LTAS) modified to suit the Pakistani setting as the analytical system. The LTAS is used in assessing libraries in four major dimensions: Humanistic, Service, Social, and Digital. The Humanistic aspect takes into consideration the architectural attractiveness and heritage such as historic buildings, cultural significance, and aesthetics. Service dimension is aimed at research and local history, including such services as rare manuscripts, genealogical services, and access to local archives. The Social dimension evaluates community involvement by actions such as literary events, workshops and guided tours. Lastly, the Digital dimension reviews the level of distance access and virtual services, such as e-resources, virtual collections, and virtual exhibitions. Using LTAS, this study is able to capture in a systematic way both the tangible and intangible factors that make the libraries attractive to cultural and educational tourism in Pakistan.

Findings

Figure 1

Demography and Annual Visitors of Public Libraries in Pakistan

Province / Region	Number of Public Libraries	Estimated Annual Visitors
Punjab	89	1,200,000
Sindh	42	600,000
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP)	19	150,000
Islamabad (ICT)	11	300,000
Baluchistan	8–10	50,000
Total	262	2,300,000

The table 1. Demography and Annual Visitors of Public Libraries in Pakistan gives the picture of distribution and utilization of the public libraries in the country. There are most public libraries (89) located in Punjab, but few are actually operating with visitors to the libraries being concentrated in the big urban libraries. The 42 libraries of Sindh exhibit a state of well-developed network, and the contacts are actively present in Karachi and Hyderabad, which led to the calculation of approximately 600,000 people visiting libraries every year. With an approximate of 19 libraries mostly in urban areas the rural population has limited access to this library and the major visits are made in Peshawar Public Library which makes about 150,000 visits every year. The capital saw the 11 libraries in Islamabad being used by approximately 300,000 visitors annually, which is concentrated in the capital. Baluchistan has been the least served area in Iran with 8-10 public libraries and minimal annual attendance of about 50,000. In general, the number of visits to the public libraries of Pakistan is estimated at 2.3 million/year, but the effective access is uneven, since there are specific differences in the provincial access, implying the issues of underfunding, insufficient digital infrastructure, and uneven geographic distribution.

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Figure 2

Punjab Public Libraries with Annual Visitors

Library / Metric	Value / Estimated Annual Visitors
Number of Public Libraries	89
Active / Functioning Libraries	11
Daily Visitors (all active libraries)	3,300
Estimated Annual Visitors	1,200,000
E-Libraries / Digital Initiatives	100

The table 2. Punjab Public Libraries with Annual Visitors brings out the status and the use of the public libraries in Punjab. Although there are a total of 89 public libraries in the province, 11 of these are actively operating meaning that most of the network is not in use or dormant. There are about 3 300 visitors of all active libraries every day, so annual visits are estimated at 1.2 million. Such a figure shows that the large libraries in Punjab are major centers of cultural, education and research despite the general inactivity of the smaller libraries. Also, the availability of 100 e-library/digital programs demonstrates the continuous attempts to make access and services more accessible and modern, but it is possible that these programs all are concentrated in urban centers, leaving the rural population with limited chances of access to digital services.

Figure 3
Sindh Public Libraries with Annual Visitors

Library / Metric	Value / Estimated Annual Visitors
Number of Public Libraries	42
Daily Visitors (all active libraries)	1,640
Estimated Annual Visitors	600,000
Notable Libraries	Khaliq Dina Hall, Karachi; Sindh Provincial Library Network

The table 3. Sindh Public Libraries with Annual Visitors contains the data about the situation and utilization of the libraries in Sindh. There are 42 public libraries in the province, with an overall estimated number of 42 libraries of about 1,640 visitors daily; a figure that is approximated to 600,000 in a year. It means this is medium usage and most of the activity is found in big city libraries like Khaliq Dina Hall in Karachi, and the Sindh Provincial Library Network. These institutions are central centers of cultural, educational and heritage activities and draw the attention of the local people and tourists who visit such places to see historical and literary collections. This information highlights the importance of the libraries in Sindh as a source of cultural tourism, but slightly smaller libraries situated outside of the largest cities may have less active participation.

Figure 4
Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Public Libraries with Annual Visitors

Library / Metric	Value / Estimated Annual Visitors
Number of Public Libraries	19
Daily Visitors	410
Estimated Annual Visitors	150,000
Notable Library	Peshawar Public Library & Archives (140,000 books, 600,000 archived newspapers)

The table 4. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Public Libraries with Annual Visitors gives an idea of the library infrastructure and how it is used in the province. There are about 19 public libraries in KP, with the number of visitors of about 410 in a day, and the estimated number of visitors is 150,000 per year. Most of these visits are focused on major institutions, especially the Peshawar Public Library & Archives which contains approximately 140,000 books and 600,000 archived newspapers, and it is the major research and heritage tourism center in the province. The information suggests that although urban libraries are important cultural and educational centers, smaller libraries in the province do not engage greatly, and there is a difference in access and resources representing regional disparities. This highlights the importance of a specific investment and digital efforts to reach more visitors to the public libraries of KP.

Figure 5
Islamabad (ICT) Public Libraries with Annual Visitors

Library / Metric	Value / Estimated Annual Visitors
Number of Public Libraries	11
Daily Visitors	820
Estimated Annual Visitors	300,000
Notable Library	National Library of Pakistan

The table 5. Islamabad (ICT) Public Libraries with Annual Visitors is the summary of the overall state of the public libraries in the federal capital. The number of public libraries in Islamabad is 11 with a total number of visitors of about 820 every day which is equivalent to about 300,000 visits per year. The library is the epicenter of research, cultural and educational activities, and a large percentage of those visits are done at the National Library of Pakistan. Accessibility coupled with administrative and academic importance of the capital has also led to a relatively high level of engagement in libraries and resources, as the concentration of these resources in the capital guarantees the relative level of participation as compared to other regions. But the smaller libraries in ICT make little contribution to total visitation, which points to the concentration of library use in major institutions.

Figure 6
Baluchistan Public Libraries with Annual Visitors

Library / Metric	Value / Estimated Annual Visitors
Number of Public Libraries	8–10
Daily Visitors	200
Estimated Annual Visitors	50,000
Key Issue	Severely under-served; limited access and resources

The table 6. Baluchistan Public Libraries with Annual Visitors" shows the poor library infrastructure and usage in the province. The number of public libraries in the country is just about 810 and therefore, there is an average of 200 visitors a day which leads to estimated 50,000 visits every year. This poor showing is indicative of the extreme under-service in terms of access to public libraries in the province with many rural locations having no functioning facilities. The lack of funding, understaffing, and little digital infrastructure also reduce the possibilities of these libraries to attract and accommodate visitors. Subsequently, the promotion of the educational and cultural tourism in Baluchistan has serious problems in terms of the public libraries, so it is important to invest in the development and calculate the capacity-building programs.

Discussion

The evaluation of the Pakistan public libraries using demographic, visitation and functional measures indicates that there are major regional differences in access, use and facilities that may have an implication on cultural and educative tourism. The demographic table indicates that Punjab has the highest number of libraries (89) but 11 are in operation indicating there is a significant disparity between the potential and actual service provision. Sindh, which has 42 libraries, is more coherent in its usage especially in the urban centers such as Karachi and Hyderabad suggesting that population density and urbanization have a strong impact on the use of libraries. The utilization is uneven, with Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Islamabad (ICT), and Baluchistan having some of the lowest usage rates, except in large cities, where KP and Baluchistan are both

characterized by a relatively limited access to facilities, whereas Islamabad has some of the most effective central facilities, i.e., the National Library.

The number of visitors visiting the libraries annually gives a better understanding of the utility of the libraries. In active libraries in Punjab, app. 1.2 million people visit libraries each year, which emphasizes the role of a tiny group of libraries as cultural and educative hubs. The libraries in Sindh have an average audience of 600,000 visitors every year, which is average in the sense of being highly focused on historically important institutions like Khaliq Dina Hall and Sindh Provincial Library Network. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan are less engaged (150,000 and 50,000 annual visitors, respectively) with the overarching emphasis on geographic, infrastructural, and socio-economic factors hindering the library access. Islamabad being one of the centralized federal capital areas demonstrates high use with about 300,000 visitors every year, which is expected to correlate with the control of administrative importance, concentration of resources, and engagement with the population.

The provincial tables also indicate the critical role of the outstanding libraries to influence the number of visitors. To illustrate, the Peshawar Public Library in KP and the National Library of Pakistan in Islamabad are the main epicenters of research tourism as well as the cultural tourism. Historical or architectural libraries like the Quaid-e-Azam Library or Khaliq Dina Hall, serve as a historic landmark and a place of learning in Punjab and Sindh. This trend reveals that the infrastructure, architectural heritage, and collection distinctiveness are the major factors that influence visitor attraction, in line with the humanistic and service aspects of the Library Tourism Attraction Index System (LTAS).

These patterns of visitation are further contextualized in the challenges table that depicts systemic problems that limit the utilization of libraries nationwide. Declining tourist numbers, inadequate funding, inadequate online connectivity, and imbalance in the geographical placement all disadvantage the rural regions and under-prioritized provinces like Baluchistan and KP. Such issues do not only decrease the degree of physical activity but also restrict the possibility of libraries serving as cultural and educational tourism platforms. The statistics indicate that concentrated resources in urban centers favor the libraries whereas the peripheral areas are under served leading to unequal access of knowledge and heritage as well as cultural experiences.

Drawing up the findings, there are several important insights that can be drawn up. First, an obvious urban-rural disparity in the access and use of libraries exists. Most cultural tourism visitors are drawn to urban libraries, which are frequently historically built, and whose collections allow cultural tourism to take off. Second, the infrastructure and collection worth of libraries have great predictive power on the involvement of the visitors: libraries that contain unique manuscripts, archives, and buildings are always more visited each year. Third, the digital integration is not highly developed, especially in the rural community, which restricts the opportunities of local and remote engagement. Lastly, underfunding, digital access, and outreach expansion is to be done with policy interventions and strategic investments that would make libraries in every province play an important role in cultural and educational tourism.

To summarize, the information above shows that although Pakistan has massive potential in the areas of cultural and educational tourism, and its public libraries are considered as the key sites, such opportunities are limited by the lack of accessibility, infrastructure, and online services. Localized activities in heritage conservation, growth of online assets, and enhanced access of libraries are critical towards ensuring that maximum participation of locals and visitors are achieved, thus making the public libraries dynamic players in the national experience economy.

Conclusion

The discussion of the state of the public libraries in Pakistan suggests that they play a pivotal role in terms of their cultural, educational, and potential tourism venues, as well as points to significant regional differences in the levels of access, use, and infrastructure. The largest library collection is Punjab with the largest number of libraries and Sindh which has an urban-based network which

teaches that the best libraries to visit have good architectural appeal, historic collections, and strategically located libraries. Unlike in other provinces, e.g. in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan, the lack of infrastructure, geographic position, and resources create limited engagement and reflects the urban-rural gap in the access to libraries.

The research affirms that certain libraries, e.g.: the Quaid-e-Azam Library, Khaliq Dina Hall, Peshawar Public Library and the National Library of Pakistan, serve to act as cultural and educational tourism anchors. The humanistic, service and social aspects of the Library Tourism Attraction Index System (LTAS) are portrayed by their mix of historical buildings, exclusive collections and programmatic service offerings. The annual visitation statistics highlight the imbalanced contribution of large libraries to total activities, showing that these organizations have the potential to become initiators of local economic activity and heritage marketing.

Regardless of these strengths, the study has also established some key issues that hinder the realization of the maximum tourism potential of libraries. Reducing foot traffic, chronic under-investment, lack of digital resources, and unequal access are what are limiting libraries in their capacity to attract both local and tourist patrons. The absence of immersive online experiences, including virtual reality tours or 360 degree displays, also constrains the experiences of the remote and younger demographics, especially Generation Z, which are growing to demand high-quality online experiences in addition to physical ones.

To sum up, the public libraries of Pakistan have a great cultural and educational worth and have a high potential of becoming the facilitator of bibliotourism. Nonetheless, it is necessary to conduct strategic interventions to close the gaps between the regions, modernize the infrastructure, and increase access to digital. Heritage conservation and digital programs, as well as programmatic growth, along with focused policy to enhance outreach to under-served communities, will make sure that libraries are not only stewards of cultural learning but also agents of action in the national tourism and experience economy. By overcoming these issues, the public libraries will be able to ensure sustainability in their relevance as versatile institutions, which combine cultural, educational, and economic goals towards the benefit of both the local communities and tourists coming there.

Recommendations

According to the examination of the Pakistani public libraries and their contribution to the cultural and educational tourism, the following strategic recommendations are suggested to facilitate the most out of them and overcome the current challenges:

1. Enhance Library Building and Renovation.

Focus on the restoration and preservation of the historically and architecturally important libraries, including Quaid-e-Azam Library, Khaliq Dina Hall and Peshawar Public Library.

Make sure that the libraries that are underutilized in Punjab, Sindh, KP, and Baluchistan are functionalized, with basic facilities, human resources and maintenance to enhance visitor experience.

2. Grow the Digital and E-Library Services.

Create strong digital collections, such as the digitization of rare manuscripts, archival records, and local history.

Launch virtual reality (VR) tours, 360-degree displays, and online experiences to lure remote customers and younger generations, especially Generation Z tourists.

It should also set up e-library networks in rural locations to guarantee the provision of equal access to all provinces.

3. Improve Programmed and Cultural Services.

Conduct cultural events, literary workshops, exhibitions and tours regularly to enhance social and programmatic activity.

Market heritage and roots tourism with the help of genealogy research, local history and access to special collections.

4. Funding and Allocation of Resources.

Lobby government and non-government funding to maintain, digitize, staff, and develop programs.

Promote the use of public-private partnerships in library modernization and integration of tourism.

5. Marketing Libraries as Tourist Destinations.

Combine library visitation data in municipal tourism plans to draw economic benefits and market libraries as a hot cultural destination.

Establish marketing campaigns to show the architectural, cultural, and educational worthiness of libraries to both domestic and foreign tourists.

6. Institutionalize Capacity-Building Programs.

Train library members should be trained in heritage management, digital services, and tourism facilitation as a way of enhancing visitor experience.

Implement professional development opportunities based on library tourism, community participation, and digital literacy.

7. Measure and Assess Library Performance.

Install a normalized monitoring system to understand the number of visitors, digital usage, and program attendance.

Use the information to make strategic decisions, resource optimization and enhance the tourism services of the libraries.

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