

CPEC-DRIVEN TOURISM CORRIDORS IN PAKISTAN: A NEW PARADIGM FOR CROSS-BORDER TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND REGIONAL ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

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Abstract:

The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), as a flagship component of China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), has emerged as a transformative framework for infrastructure development, regional connectivity, and economic cooperation in Pakistan. Beyond its traditional focus on trade and transportation, CPEC has created new opportunities for tourism development by facilitating the establishment of integrated tourism corridors across strategically important regions of Pakistan. This study examines the role of CPEC-driven tourism corridors in promoting cross-border tourism development and fostering regional economic integration. The paper explores how enhanced road networks, upgraded transport infrastructure, and improved accessibility to remote tourist destinations such as Gilgit-Baltistan, Hunza, Skardu, Gwadar, and Khunjerab have increased tourism mobility and strengthened Pakistan’s position as a regional tourism hub. By linking Pakistan with China, Central Asia, and South Asia, these corridors enable greater cultural exchange, tourism diversification, and transnational visitor flows. The study adopts a qualitative analytical approach based on secondary data, policy reports, government publications, and existing scholarly literature to evaluate the economic and strategic significance of tourism corridors under CPEC. Findings indicate that CPEC-driven tourism infrastructure contributes significantly to local employment generation, hospitality sector expansion, small business development, and regional income growth. Furthermore, tourism corridors enhance cross-border cooperation by integrating tourism markets and encouraging joint investment opportunities between participating countries. However, several challenges remain, including security concerns, environmental sustainability issues, inadequate tourism services, and regulatory barriers affecting international tourist movement. The paper argues that with effective policy planning, sustainable tourism strategies, and stronger bilateral cooperation, CPEC can redefine Pakistan’s tourism landscape and establish a new paradigm for regional tourism integration. The study concludes that tourism corridors under CPEC represent not only a mechanism for destination development but also a strategic instrument for long-term economic connectivity and regional prosperity in South and Central Asia.

Keywords: China–Pakistan Economic Corridor, Tourism Corridors, Cross-Border Tourism, Regional Economic Integration, Sustainable Tourism Development, Pakistan Tourism Industry, Belt and Road Initiative, Infrastructure Connectivity.

1- Introduction:

Tourism has emerged as one of the fastest growing segments of the global economy, adding value to job creation, foreign exchange income, cultural exchange and development of the region. In the developing world, countries like Pakistan have a tremendous untapped potential since the country has great natural landscapes, historical sites, mountain ranges, religious sites, and various cultural customs [1]. Pakistan on the other hand has been afflicted with issues such as poor infrastructure, inaccessibility to the more remote destinations, poor international connectivity and lack of investment in the facilities that support tourism. In this regard China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has become a revolutionary project that will be able to transform the tourism industry in Pakistan by modernizing infrastructure on a grand scale and improving the connectivity of the region. CPEC is a flagship project under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China, a multidimensional development framework that is aimed at enhancing transport networks, trade routes, energy systems, and economic cooperation between China and Pakistan. Infrastructure connectivity and regional development are deemed by official CPEC planning as key pillars, which directly influence tourist mobility and accessibility of destinations. CPEC is also creating new access to some of the key tourism sites in Gilgit-Baltistan, Hunza, Skardu, Gwadar, and Khunjerab among others, which were

previously hard to reach, through highways, expressways, and modernization of the rail, and development of ports. These advancements are providing the groundwork to the development of tourism corridors integrated travel routes linking two or more destinations both within and across the boundaries. The CPEC tourism corridors are a novel model of developing tourism in Pakistan since they tie the development of infrastructure growth to the benefit of cross-border tourism. Such corridors not only enhance domestic tourism flows, but also facilitate international tourist movement between Pakistan, China, Central Asia and South Asia. The recent study of tourism-development has revealed that the investments made in transport corridors play a critical role in enhancing the competitiveness of the destination as it shortens the time travelers use to arrive at their destinations, increasing the reach of the destination, and attracting investment in hospitality and other related services by the private sector [2]. In this aspect, CPEC can transform Pakistan into a strategic tourism portal linking the regional markets. The idea of cross-border tourism development is becoming more significant in the current globalized regional economies. Cross-border tourism facilitates cultural exchange, enhances diplomatic ties, promotes collaborative tourism projects, and facilitates regional integration by means of mutual economic gains. In the case of Pakistan, the tourism corridors that CPEC will bring in will not only provide the chance of promoting the destinations, but also enhance the cooperation among the region and its neighbors. The Khunjerab Pass, Gwadar Port and the mountainous areas in the north are emerging as the destinations of transnational tourism circuits capable of drawing international tourists to their destinations in search of cultural, adventure, religious and eco tourism. Meanwhile, the effective implementation of tourism corridors involves a number of vital issues. The tourism competitiveness of Pakistan is still impacted by security issues, visa limitations, environmental sustainability threats, absence of tourism branding, and poor quality of services. The entire tourism potential of CPEC might not be fully exploited without proper planning and co-ordination of policies. Thus, the role of CPEC in the development of tourism corridors is crucial to creating sustainable tourism plans that will incorporate economic development, environmental, and social responsibility. This paper seeks to discuss the way CPEC-led tourism corridors are turning the tourism sector in Pakistan and building a new model of tourism development across borders and regional economic integration. The paper examines the strategic importance of the tourism connectivity through corridors, discusses future tourism routes in the context of CPEC, and assesses their role in the long run towards the regional prosperity of Pakistan and the wider world.

2- Major CPEC Tourism Corridors in Pakistan:

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has radically transformed the geographical landscapes of tourism in Pakistan through enhanced transportation infrastructure, easy access to tourism spots, and the connectivity of unexplored tourist destinations to both national and international tourism. CPEC has ensured the development of strategic tourism corridors, which link the mountains, coastal areas, cultural hubs, and border areas through highways, expressways, improved roads, and accessibility of ports. These corridors are not only enhancing the mobility of tourists, but are also opening up new possibilities of cross-boundary tourism, the local economy development and the integration of the region. Some of the most notable tourism corridors under CPEC include the Khunjerab-Hunza-Gilgit Corridor, Skardu Mountain Tourism Corridor, Gwadar Coastal Tourism Corridor and Karachi Gwadar Maritime Tourism Route.

2.1- Khunjerab–Hunza–Gilgit Corridor:

One of the most strategic tourism corridors under CPEC is the Khunjerab–Hunza–Gilgit Corridor that connects Pakistan to China through Khunjerab Pass, the highest paved international border point in the world. The corridor runs along Karakoram Highway which is commonly known as the Eighth Wonder of the World that has been expanded significantly and

modernized by CPEC infrastructure projects [3]. According to the official CPEC transport planning, the upgrade of Karakoram Highway is a major connectivity priority between northern Pakistan and Xinjiang in China. This route can be used to enter and exit Pakistan and China in terms of cross-border tourism as well as linking key tourist sites like Hunza Valley, Attabad Lake, Passu Cones, Karimabad, and Gilgit city. The enhanced road safety, decreased travel durations and enhanced transport reliability has made Hunza one of the most popular tourism destinations in Pakistan. The corridor encourages adventure tourism, mountain tourism, cultural tourism, and eco-tourism and is visited by both local and foreigners. This route is economically beneficial to the local businesses like hotels, guest houses, restaurants, hand crafts, renting of transport, and guided tourism services. People-to-people exchange between Pakistan and China is likely to be boosted by cross-border tourist flow via Khunjerab and grow the revenue of the region.

2.2- Skardu Mountain Tourism Corridor:

Skardu Mountain Tourism Corridor has become a key tourism corridor that links the mountainous country of Pakistan to the national and foreign tourist markets. Skardu, a famous tourist destination in Gilgit-Baltistan is internationally known because of its spectacular mountain sceneries, trekking trails, lakes, glaciers and access to famous mountains like K2, Nanga Parbat, Broad Peak among other prominent world-renowned mountains. With the road development and regional infrastructure improvement under CPEC, Skardu has become much accessible with the development of highways connecting it with Gilgit and other parts of the north. Recent research reports that enhanced connectivity under northern corridor investments is boosting tourist numbers to Skardu and aiding the diversification of tourism in high-altitude areas. It is the centre of the adventure tourism sector in Pakistan with climbers, trekkers, photographers and eco-tourists world over visiting the area [4]. Shangrila Resort, Deosai National Park, Satpara Lake, Shigar Valley and Khaplu Valley are some of the main attractions. The corridor has spurred investment in boutique hotels, eco-lodges, tour companies, and transportation services. Sustainable development of mountain tourism is also facilitated by the Skardu corridor as it helps in generating livelihoods to local people who engage in guiding, trekking logistical arrangement, cultural tourism, and handicrafts.

2.3- Gwadar Coastal Tourism Corridor:

Gwadar Coastal Tourism Corridor is the maritime tourism aspect of CPEC that is southward. The flagship port city of CPEC, Gwadar is strategically positioned along the Arabian Sea and has emerged as one of the fastest developing coastal areas in Pakistan. The investments carried out by CPEC in Gwadar Port, Gwadar East Bay Expressway, and coast infrastructure are making the city a tourism and trade center [5]. The development plans of CPEC recognize Gwadar as one of the key regional economic and maritime connections. Gwadar has a good potential of beach tourism, marine tourism, cruise tourism, water sports and coastal eco-tourism. The attractions are majorly Gwadar Beach, Hammerhead Peninsula, Kund Malir Beach, Astola Island, and Makran Coastal Highway scenic route. With the growth in infrastructure, Gwadar is likely to receive domestic tourists and international investors who would love to have a maritime experience [6]. Hotel construction, seafood, transport services, and tourism entrepreneurship are the positive effects of tourism development in Gwadar, which will provide employment to the local population and diversify the economy in the coastal areas.

2.4- Karachi-Gwadar Maritime Tourism Route:

Karachi-Gwadar Maritime Tourism Route is a significant coastal tourism route between the metropolis city of Karachi and the new port city of Gwadar in Pakistan. This is a road that follows Makran Coastal Highway which is considered by far to be the most scenic coastal highway in Pakistan, with access to beaches, fishing villages, desert sceneries and marine tourism attractions. The route incorporates urban tourism in Karachi with the coastal recreation

areas of Hawke’s Bay, Ormara, Pasni, Kund Malir and Gwadar. The transport efficiency along the CPEC routes has increased significantly with the related road development, allowing road-based tourism loops and weekend tours to be developed [7]. The large potential of cruise tourism, yacht tourism, road tourism and heritage coastal tourism is an aspect of this maritime corridor. It also facilitates the growth of hospitality in roadside resorts, eco-lodges, camping and coastal restaurants. This connection between the financial hub of Pakistan and its strategic port city enhances the movement of tourism and economic integration between the region on the coast of the Arabian Sea. Table 1 shows key CPEC tourism corridors and strategic value.

Table 1: Major CPEC Tourism Corridors and Their Strategic Importance

Tourism Corridor	Major Destinations	Tourism Type	Strategic Importance
Khunjerab–Hunza–Gilgit	Khunjerab, Hunza, Gilgit	Cross-border, Eco, Cultural	Pakistan-China tourism gateway
Skardu Mountain Corridor	Skardu, Deosai, Shigar	Adventure, Mountain, Eco	High-altitude tourism hub
Gwadar Coastal Corridor	Gwadar, Kund Malir, Astola	Coastal, Marine, Leisure	Maritime tourism growth center
Karachi–Gwadar Maritime Route	Karachi, Ormara, Pasni, Gwadar	Coastal Road Tourism	National coastal integration corridor

These key CPEC tourism corridors reflect a game changer in the tourism infrastructure and connectivity in Pakistan. They do not only enhance the accessibility to major destinations but also open new prospects to cross-border tourism collaboration, development of local enterprises, as well as sustainable economic integration of the region. Collectively, these routes are making Pakistan an up-and-coming tourism bridge between South Asia, Central Asia, China, and the Middle East.

3- CPEC and Regional Connectivity:

ChinaPakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is arguably a well-known concept in the academic and policy circles as a revolutionary regional connectivity model that connects Pakistan with China and expands to Central Asia, Middle East, and other Belt and Road markets. Being the main avenue of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China, CPEC is not merely a transport and trade route, but a multidimensional development platform that incorporates highways, railways, ports, energy projects, and economic zones. The official CPEC Long-Term Plan (2017/2030) states that transport infrastructure, the development of Gwadar Port, industrial cooperation, social economic development are the key pillars of corridor-based regional transformation being sought. These mutually supporting pillars provide a background to economic and tourism growth in the sense that they lessen disparities in the regions and increase accessibility of the territories. Connectivity in regional development theory is described as a physical and institutional linkage of the territories by means of transport infrastructure that enhances movement, trade, communication and human mobility [8]. In the case of Pakistan, CPEC establishes a continuous axis of development, spanning north to south in a continuous direction of Khunjerab Pass on the border with China to Gwadar Port on the Arabian Sea. This axis merges mountainous north, inland urban areas, industrial areas, and southern coast gateways into a single connectivity system. This form of spatial integration is particularly critical to tourism since most high value tourism attractions in Pakistan are geographically isolated, and have historically been lacking in transport infrastructure. Literature has highlighted that better roads and transport corridors lessen the geographic distance and enhance destination competitiveness. Prior to CPEC, other areas like Hunza, Gilgit, Skardu, and Gwadar had dire infrastructure limitations such as bad roads, inaccessibility during seasons, and deficiency of transport. CPEC has helped to improve access to these destinations greatly through projects like the Karakoram Highway expansion, Gwadar East Bay

Expressway, and national motorway upgrades. The enhanced accessibility shortens the travel time, enhances the safety of tourists, and boosts investment in hotels, transport services, restaurants, and tourism business. The transport infrastructure is critical to tourism destinations as it affects the tourist decision making, the appeal of the destination and the market accessibility directly. Domestic and foreign visitors are also flocking to Northern areas like Hunza and Skardu as they have been getting better access through road development projects under CPEC. On the same note, the modernization of Gwadar as a port city is opening up opportunities in the areas of coastal tourism, marine tourism and international leisure travel. All the key infrastructure components of tourism connectivity in CPEC are captured in Table 2, which underscores the role of transport modernization in tourism growth in the key tourism zones in Pakistan.

Table 2: Major Connectivity Components of CPEC and Their Regional Tourism Significance

CPEC Connectivity Component	Infrastructure Role	Tourism Relevance	Key Beneficiary Regions
Karakoram Highway Expansion	Cross-border land transport	Enhances China-Pakistan tourism mobility	Hunza, Gilgit, Khunjerab
Gwadar Port Development	Maritime gateway connectivity	Supports coastal and cruise tourism	Gwadar, Makran Coast
Gwadar East Bay Expressway	Urban-port transport linkage	Improves tourist access to Gwadar attractions	Gwadar City
National Motorway Networks	Domestic corridor integration	Faster intercity tourism travel	Punjab, Sindh, KP
Rail Modernization Projects	Long-distance transport efficiency	Potential rail tourism expansion	Major urban tourism nodes
Border Gateway Upgrades	Cross-border transit facilitation	Increases international visitor inflow	Khunjerab Border Region

Besides domestic integration, CPEC also promotes strategic positioning of Pakistan in transnational networks of tourism. Khunjerab Pass serves as an equal international entry/exit point to Pakistan-China tourist interactions and Gwadar Port offers seafarers to Gulf nations, Africa, and Middle East. These two gateways form a dual-corridor model whereby Pakistan is a destination hub and transit hub in the regional flows of tourism. The wider regional connectivity system that was formed by CPEC can be theoretically explained using Figure 1, which shows how the northern and southern gateways have been connected via an integrated tourism mobility system.

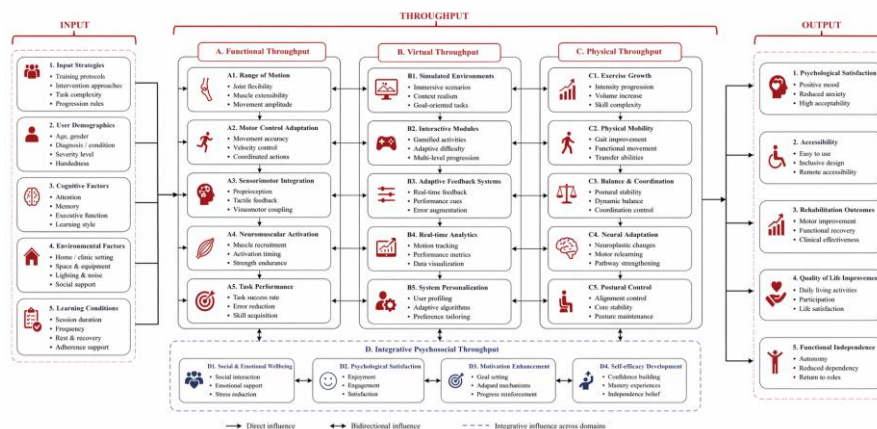


Figure 1: Conceptual Model of CPEC Regional Connectivity Framework for Tourism Development

Strategically, this connectivity network makes Pakistan into a bridge between South Asia, China, Central Asia, and maritime trade areas. It also promotes resilience to tourism by diversifying the travel routes, enhancing access throughout the year, and decreasing reliance on the few transport routes in vulnerable mountain regions. The literature substantiates the fact that CPEC is not just an infrastructure investment initiative but a regional connectivity tool that has the potential to change the tourism geography in Pakistan. The connection of the remote destinations to the domestic and international tourism markets is a structural basis of the sustainable tourism corridors development, cross-border visitor exchange, and a long-term integration of the region economically, which is provided by CPEC. The future gains of the tourism industry will however, be based on how well the policy coordination, the environmental sustainability planning and tourism governance reforms complement physical infrastructure growth.

4- Cross-Border Tourism and Economic Integration:

The concept of cross-border tourism as a useful tool of regional collaboration, economic exchange and spatial integration has gained momentum in international literature. In contrast to traditional tourism that is limited within the borders of the countries, cross-border tourism establishes interdependent tourism systems linking neighboring nations via common attractions, co-ordinated movement channels, joint destination branding and co-ordinated service markets. Tourism has been termed as a soft mechanism of integration in the context of regional studies as it facilitates people-to-people interaction, cultural diplomacy, local exchange of trade and the development of trust even in a region where political integration is still weak [9]. This renders tourism especially significant in the geopolitical corridors like the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), where the infrastructure connectivity overlaps with regional economic and strategic interests. The cross border tourism under the CPEC is of particular importance in the case of Pakistan since the corridor will provide a direct linkage between Pakistan and China via Khunjerab Pass and an indirect linkage between Central Asia, Middle East and South Asia via transport and maritime gateways. The geographical location of Pakistan is strategic such that it can serve as a tourism bridge between various blocs in the region. The transnational visitor flows between Xinjiang (China) and Gilgit-Baltistan, Hunza, and northern Pakistan via border tourism routes allow new possibilities of transnational visitor movement, joint tourism packages, and transnational tourism relations [10]. European and Central Asian research shows that cross-border tourism enhances regional integration in a number of ways: by enhancing cross-boundary mobility, enhancing common heritage destinations, joint investments in tourism, and small businesses in border economies. The same tendencies are gradually being applied to Pakistan under CPEC in which better highways, border infrastructure, and modernization of gateways minimize geographical impediments to cross-border movement. Within this context, tourism is no longer a recreation activity, but a means of economic interdependence, growth of a regional market and diplomacy. Regional economic integration theory goes further to state that only in the case of physical transport systems being coordinated through institutional organization, facilitation of borders and harmonization of policies do infrastructure corridors create sustainable integration. The Belt and Road regional connectivity analysis by World Bank highlights that roads and ports will not produce the greatest benefits of corridors without complementary reforms in visa systems, customs performance, trade facilitation, and cross-border governance processes. In the context of CPEC, this implies that tourism integration is not limited to highways and ports, but also to bilateral tourism agreements, streamlined visa regimes, coordinated tourism promotion and security cooperation by the countries involved. In the case of Pakistan, CPEC opens a special

chance to rebrand tourism as a sector of economic integration in the region [11]. Pakistan can use the development of tourism around the corridor to integrate the mountain tourism in the north, cultural tourism in the central areas, and coastal tourism in the south into transnational tourism circuits to the Chinese, Central Asian, Gulf, and South Asian markets. This integration increases tourism demand, as well as reinforces the trade-tourism nexuses of hospitality supply chains, transport logistics and border retail trade. The key literature themes which characterize the association between tourism and regional integration are summarised in Table 3, which indicates the use of past researches in underpinning the conceptual background of this study.

Table 3: Summary of Literature Themes Relevant to Cross-Border Tourism and Economic Integration

Literature Theme	Main Focus in Previous Studies	Relevance to This Paper
CPEC and infrastructure development	Roads, ports, connectivity, regional development	Explains how CPEC improves access to tourist regions
Tourism corridor theory	Routes, gateways, destination networks, corridor planning	Provides conceptual basis for identifying CPEC tourism corridors
Cross-border tourism models	Border mobility, cooperation, joint destination development	Supports analysis of Pakistan–China and wider regional tourism flows
Regional economic integration	Infrastructure plus policy coordination	Helps explain tourism as part of wider corridor-based integration
BRI tourism impacts	Connectivity, heritage, sustainability, transnational tourism	Positions CPEC within the broader Belt and Road tourism debate

The fact that cross-border tourism has a multiplier impact on the economies of the regions is an important feature of the tourism. Movement of tourism across borders spurs local business ecosystems such as hotels, restaurants, transportation businesses, handicraft manufacturers, tour guides, retail markets, and cultural enterprises. Transit gateways (e.g. Sost, Khunjerab, Gwadar and Gilgit) are increasingly becoming tourism-commercial hubs where tourism and commercial activities intersect. This establishes corridor economies whereby tourism is a mobility sector and an economic development motor. Moreover, cross-border tourism also leads to social and cultural integration. Pakistan and China tourism routes enhance cultural exchange and interaction, inter language interaction, heritage knowledge and market of destinations together [12]. The symbolic meaning of tourism as a bridge between civilizations is further reinforced in the stories of Shared Silk Road heritage within the Belt and Road paradigm. Value addition to CPEC with respect to turning transport infrastructure into a regional tourism integration can be conceptualized in terms of Figure 2, which offers a conceptual pathway that connects connectivity investments with economic integration outcomes.

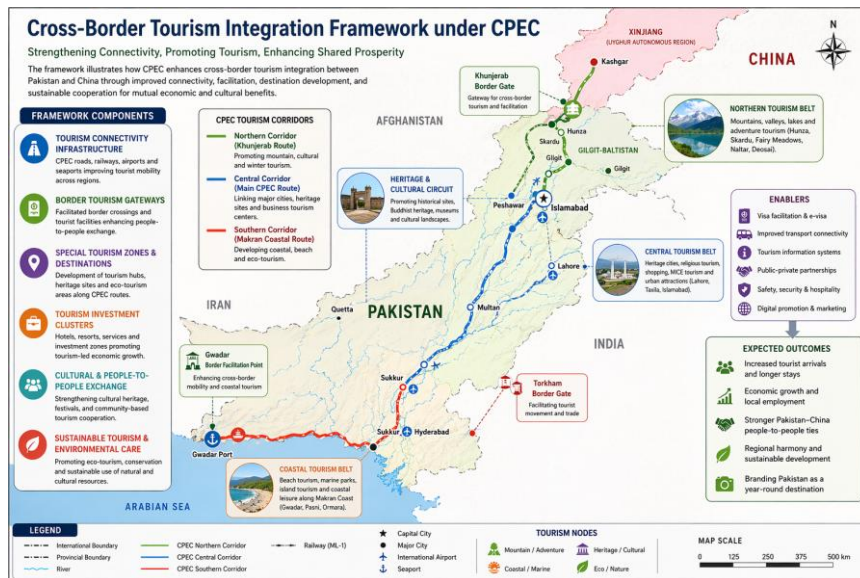


Figure 2: Cross-Border Tourism Integration Framework under CPEC

Although these opportunities exist, some major obstacles still exist. Tourism integration under CPEC is still limited by visa restrictions, poor border tourism facilitation mechanisms, inconsistent tourism standards, environmental hazards in delicate tourism areas, and security issues. Moreover, institutional division among tourism authorities, transport ministries, and border agencies tend to lower the effectiveness of policies. Though other studies in the past also recognize that CPEC can facilitate tourism by enhancing connectivity, the majority of these studies have been confined to general arguments about infrastructure access and economic potential. There is a paucity of research studies that examine specific tourism corridors in Pakistan as a tool of cross-border tourism development and regional economic integration [13]. This paper fills that gap by looking at CPEC as a transport project, but rather as a corridor-based tourism model that has the potential to redefine the role of tourism in Pakistan. Cross-border tourism under CPEC is a strategic initiative towards enhancing regional integration. Linking infrastructure development with the free movement of tourism, market development, and bilateral relations, CPEC sets the environment where tourism can play the role of being a source of the economy and a bridge between countries. The success of such integration in the long run, however, will be hinged on harmonization of policies, border facilitation reforms, and sustainable tourism governance in line with regional cooperation objectives.

5- Research Methodology:

This paper uses qualitative and analytical research design to explore the role of CPEC-led tourism corridors in the development of cross-border tourism and integration of the regional economy in Pakistan. Tourism systems, policy implications, and patterns of development of corridors at the regional level make the qualitative approach best suited to the interpretation of strategic patterns, policy effects, and corridor-specific trends of development. The research methodology mainly relies on the analysis of secondary data, policy evaluation, the comparative analysis of the corridors, and the conceptual analysis of the tourism corridor development under CPEC. This methodological framework is aimed at systematically assessing the connection between infrastructure connectivity and tourism growth, by analyzing key tourism corridors that are developing as a result of CPEC. The paper incorporates the academic literature, policy reports, transport planning documents, and tourism development data to form a holistic analytical perspective of the emerging tourism corridor system in Pakistan.

5.1- Research Design:

The current research takes the form of descriptive qualitative research design with analytical case-based evaluation since this method is best applicable in studying emerging and multidimensional phenomena like CPEC-driven tourism corridors in Pakistan. Because the development of the tourism corridor using CPEC is still in its early stages and is currently not adequately studied in the academic tourism literature, the exploratory approach to qualitative research enables further conceptual insight into the way in which infrastructural investments transform the geography of tourism, accessibility of destinations, and integration of regions. The qualitative research design is suitable since the key focus of this research does not involve testing numerical hypotheses but making sense of the structural, spatial, and policy nexus between transport connectivity and tourism development. In contrast to quantitative models that are highly dependent on measurable variables, the descriptive qualitative inquiry allows a rich contextual analysis of the transformation of the tourism corridors in terms of meanings, patterns, relationships, and processes of development [14]. The impacts of tourism in the CPEC case study are usually indirect, interdependent and policy-based and thus, can only be explored with interpretative as opposed to purely statistical investigation. The descriptive aspect of the research design enables the study to record and describe the nature of key tourism corridors that are coming up under CPEC in a systematic way. These are physical infrastructure transformations, route accessibility, integration of tourism destinations, and spillover effects of tourism activities in adjacent areas. The research uses descriptive analysis to determine the impact of corridor development on destinations, including Hunza, Gilgit, Skardu, Gwadar, and Karachi, by connecting them to tourist destinations more efficiently into both the national and global tourism systems. The exploratory aspect of this study is also important by the fact that CPEC tourism corridors are a comparatively novel field of research. The available literature has focused mostly on the logistics of trade, financing of infrastructures, geopolitics and energy investment under CPEC, with little literature exploring tourism corridors as a strategic tool of cross border tourism development. Thus, the purpose of this research design is not just to examine the current trends, but also to come up with new academic knowledge about the new relationship between infrastructure-led connectivity and tourism integration. The case-based evaluation element is analytical and empowers the research design, as it allows comparing the chosen tourism corridors as distinct but interrelated instances [15]. The tourism corridors are considered as a case unit where they can be assessed in detail and the study can compare the differences in their accessibility, tourism potential, strategic importance and outcomes of regional integration. This case-based vision enhances the interpretive richness and strengthens thematic inferences. The article is organized based on thematic analysis of patterns of development of corridors. Thematic analysis will entail the identification of the common themes of concepts in policy documents, infrastructure reports, tourism studies and evidence in the case of corridors. The significant analysis themes in this study are:

- Infrastructure connectivity enhancement
- Accessibility improvement to remote tourism destinations
- Cross-border tourist mobility expansion
- Regional tourism market integration
- Economic spillover effects on local communities

These themes inform the interpretation of the role of transport investments under CPEC on tourism flows and mechanisms of regional cooperation. The other significant characteristic of the research design is the policy-oriented analytical perspective. Because CPEC is a bilaterally planned state-led strategic initiative that is developing between Pakistan and China, to comprehend tourism corridor development, it is essential to consider policy frameworks, infrastructure plans, and regional development strategies [16]. The design thus incorporates the infrastructure policy interpretation with tourism analysis, and thus it is interdisciplinary in

nature. This design is conceptually founded on the idea that tourism corridors are developed and evolve in a process where transport infrastructural investment creates a better mobility that triggers destination development, visitor movement and economic integration. The study does not measure independent variables separately but examines these interrelated relationships as a whole. The general reasoning of the research design is presented in Table 4 that gives the main structural characteristics of the research design, and their applicability to the research goals.

Table 4: Structural Components of the Research Design

Research Design Component	Description	Relevance to Study
Research Type	Descriptive Qualitative	Enables in-depth interpretation of tourism corridor dynamics
Nature of Study	Exploratory	Suitable for emerging under-researched topic
Analytical Method	Case-Based Evaluation	Allows comparative corridor-level analysis
Research Orientation	Policy and Conceptual Analysis	Examines infrastructure-tourism policy relationships
Data Interpretation Style	Thematic Analysis	Identifies recurring corridor development patterns
Research Focus	Infrastructure and Tourism Linkages	Explains CPEC's role in tourism transformation

As can be seen in Table 4, the chosen research design is designed in a manner that will allow the researcher to grasp both conceptual and policy relevance. The research establishes a robust methodology in investigating new tourism destinations in Pakistan by integrating exploratory research with descriptive explanation. Figure 3 below demonstrates the flow of operations of the research design and how the descriptive qualitative framework leads to an analytical interpretation.

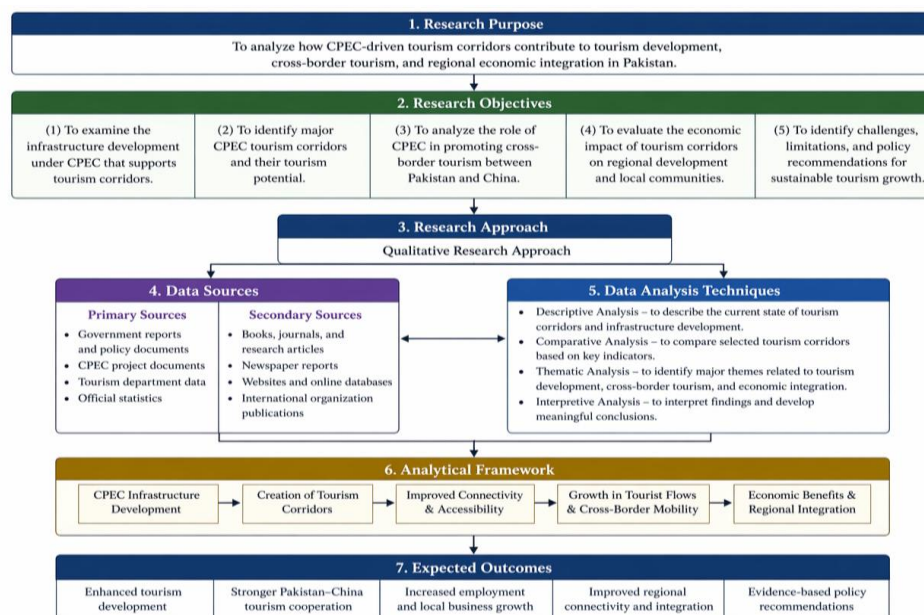


Figure 3: Research Design Framework for CPEC Tourism Corridor Analysis

Another advantage of this design is its flexibility to multidisciplinary analysis. Since CPEC tourism corridors overlap infrastructure planning, regional economics, tourism studies and

international collaboration, a strict quantitative model would not be able to model the interactions. The descriptive qualitative framework enables the flexible synthesis of spatial, economic, institutional and tourism dimensions into a single analytical model. Also, the design enhances the contextual sensitivity. The development of tourism under CPEC differs in the geographical zones including mountain corridors in the north, inland transport routes, and marine corridors along the coast. The research design is not constrained by standardized numerical assumptions, which allows it to be responsive to local geographical, infrastructure, and tourism potential variations [18]. The most appropriate methodological framework that this study is based on is the descriptive qualitative and case-based research design since it reflects the unfolding, multifaceted and policy-driven nature of CPEC tourism corridor development. It can allow to understand in detail how infrastructure-mediated connectivity alters tourism systems, facilitates cross-border movement, and adds to regional economic integration without reducing these multidimensional processes to individual quantitative measures.

5.2- Data Collection Method:

The methodology of data collection in this study is the review and synthesis of literature, which is relevant to qualitative research that aims at analyzing policy and infrastructures. As this study focuses on CPEC-based tourism corridors based on the preexisting knowledge sources as opposed to conducting surveys in the field, secondary data sources are relevant and full of information to be analyzed. Appropriate sources were identified and used to collect relevant materials such as official reports by CPEC, government policy reports, articles in academic journals, publications by the World Bank, studies on tourism development and reports on infrastructures in the region. These documents were carefully screened so as to be able to come up with recurring themes that would be related to the study objectives [19]. The primary themes that were explored in the process of data collection are:

- Tourism corridor development
- Cross-border tourism mobility
- Infrastructure accessibility improvements
- Regional economic integration
- Border gateway tourism expansion

The choice of documents was based on definite criteria to guarantee the quality of research. The sources were limited to those that had high academic credibility, relevance to policies, and direct relation to CPEC tourism and regional connectivity. Recent publications and official institutional reports were prioritized to ensure that there is accuracy and relevancy. This approach enables the research to acquire general and comparative information on various views and at the same time maintain consistency in the analysis. The study creates a solid conceptual knowledge of the role of CPEC infrastructure in the creation of tourism corridors in Pakistan through synthesis of the results of various trustworthy sources. Table 5 summarizes the key sources of data collection used in this study and contains the categories of documents that will be reviewed in this paper.

Table 5: Sources of Data Collection Used in the Study

Source Type	Examples	Purpose in Study
Official CPEC Documents	CPEC Long-Term Plan, Government Reports	Infrastructure and policy analysis
Academic Journal Articles	Tourism and regional integration studies	Theoretical and scholarly support
Government Publications	Pakistan tourism ministry reports	National tourism policy insights

International Reports	World Bank, BRI studies	Regional integration framework analysis
Tourism Development Studies	Destination-specific research papers	Corridor tourism impact evaluation

Document review and literature synthesis method offers a good basis in gathering pertinent information in this research. It facilitates methodical study of what already exists besides facilitating profound research of tourism corridors, cross-border movement as well as regional economic integration within CPEC.

5.3- Comparative Corridor Analysis Method:

The present research paper will use a comparative approach based on a corridor analysis technique to analyse and compare the key CPEC-driven tourism corridors in Pakistan. This approach is suitable since the tourism corridors chosen vary enormously in terms of geography, tourism nature, and infrastructure capacity, as well as strategic regional relevance. Because tourism development within CPEC is a spatially uneven process and dependent on the location factors, comparative analysis offers a systematic means of discovering similarities, differences, strengths, and limitations of various corridors. This approach will not only study each corridor separately, but will develop an integrated framework upon which all the chosen corridors can be evaluated based on the same analytical criteria. The comparative analysis of the tourism corridors is made to four leading tourism corridors influenced by CPEC infrastructure development, namely: the Khunjerab-Hunza-Gilgit Corridor, the Skardu Mountain Tourism Corridor, the Gwadar Coastal Tourism Corridor, and the Karachi-Gwadar Maritime Tourism Route. These four corridors were chosen since they are the most strategically important tourism corridors that are being developed as part of CPEC, and they are also indicative of the variety of tourism geography in Pakistan, such as mountain tourism, border tourism, coastal tourism, and maritime tourism systems [20]. Cumulatively, these give a wholesome overview of how CPEC infrastructure is revolutionizing the accessibility of tourism and integration of regions in various regions of the country. This analytical framework assesses every corridor based on five typical indicators of connectivity improvements, gains in tourism accessibility, cross border relevance, economic tourism potential and strategic regional significance. Connectivity improvements quantify the degree to which CPEC projects have improved transport infrastructure like highways, roads, ports, and gateway routes in each corridor. Tourism accessibility measures the extent to which these enhancements have facilitated the destinations to be accessible by both domestic and international tourists. Cross-border relevance looks at the capability of the corridor to facilitate international tourist flows particularly concerning the exchange of Pakistan-China and regional tourism. The potential of economic tourism is a measure of the ability of the individual corridors to produce tourism revenue, business development, hotel investment, employment, and the development of local enterprises. Strategic regional significance gauges the overall contribution of the corridor to the regional tourism positioning of Pakistan in South Asia, Central Asia and the Belt and Road networks. Comparison is more systematized and balanced with the help of common evaluation criteria. It allows the research to determine the performance of each corridor in comparison to the rest based on the same criteria. To give an illustration, mountain corridors like KhunjerabHunzaGilgit to the north and Gwadar Coastal Corridor to the south exhibit highly high cross-border tourism relevance and potential maritime and international tourism, respectively, owing to the direct connectivity with China or strategic port location, respectively [21]. Through this, comparative analysis will not only aid in understanding the most developed corridors, but will also give an explanation of why the tourism functions vary in respect to geographic and infrastructural conditions. The results of this comparative analysis are

summarized in Table 6, which indicates the performance of the chosen tourism corridors in terms of the five indicators of analysis.

Table 6: Comparative Evaluation of Major CPEC Tourism Corridors

Tourism Corridor	Connectivity Improvements	Tourism Accessibility Gains	Cross-Border Relevance	Economic Tourism Potential	Strategic Regional Importance
Khunjerab–Hunza–Gilgit Corridor	High	High	Very High	High	Very High
Skardu Mountain Tourism Corridor	Moderate to High	High	Moderate	High	High
Gwadar Coastal Tourism Corridor	High	Moderate	High	Very High	Very High
Karachi–Gwadar Maritime Route	High	High	Moderate	High	High

The comparative approach further brings to the fore, the role of corridor diversity in enhancing national tourism resilience. A diversified tourism corridor system lowers excessive reliance on a single type of destination and diversifies tourism in a variety of locations. The attraction of mountain corridors by trekkers, eco-tourists and cultural travellers, and coastal corridors by leisure tourists, beach tourists and maritime recreation markets, are the market offers. This diversification increases the capability of Pakistan to appeal to a broader tourism market and increases the sustainability of the tourism planning in the long term. The analytical connection between the comparison of the corridors and the national tourism integration is displayed in Figure 4 that provides the framework according to which the assessment of corridors level can help to comprehend the whole tourism economy of Pakistan under CPEC.

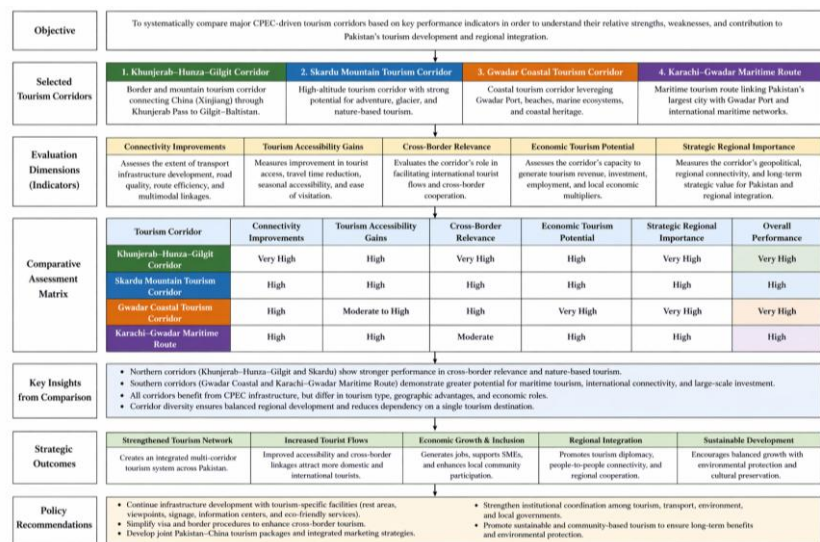


Figure 4: Comparative Corridor Analysis Framework under CPEC

Relevance of policies is another significant benefit of using this approach. The comparative results can guide the policymakers to focus on the interventions, which are specific to the corridors. An example is that stronger accessibility corridors with high tourism potential can be enhanced by additional transport upgrades and destinations with low accessibility can be enhanced with more robust branding, hospitality investment, and destination management strategies. Therefore, the comparative corridor analysis offers useful value to both the academic interpretation and evidence-based tourism planning in the context of CPEC. The approach of corridor analysis offers a dependable and systematic approach to learning the unique contributions of the various CPEC tourism corridors towards the Pakistan tourism economy [22]. It shows that every corridor has a different role to play depending on its strength of infrastructure, tourism role and strategic value of the region. By doing so, this study will be able to form a clearer understanding of the role of multiple tourism corridors to the overall growth of cross-border tourism, national destination integration and long term regional economic development in Pakistan.

6- Cross-Border Tourism Development under CPEC:

One of the most important strategic aspects of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has become the development of cross-border tourism, turning Pakistan into a country of domestic tourism, but, at the same time, a gateway to China, Central Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East. Being one of the flagship projects of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), CPEC is not only enhancing infrastructure connectivity, but also making transnational tourism cooperation a possibility. In border transport modernization, the development of the gateway, and the collaboration of institutions, CPEC is slowly creating conditions of integrated tourism flows across the borders of Pakistan to the neighboring countries, particularly China. The emerging tourism nexus between China and Pakistan is the key ingredient of cross-border tourism through CPEC. Pakistan and China have a special geographic relation by the Khunjerab Pass which is the highest international crossing in the international border and a major tourist entrance between the two nations. Enhanced road infrastructure along the Karakoram Highway under CPEC has greatly increased the level of efficiency in traveling between Xinjiang and northern Pakistan, and destinations like Hunza, Gilgit, Skardu and Khunjerab are more easily reachable by Chinese tourists. Similarly, Pakistani tourists are also enjoying better border connectivity to tourism travel to western China [23]. Cultural complementarities and increasing bilateral collaboration in the promotion of tourism enhance Pakistan-China tourism exchange. The mountain scenery, Buddhist heritage sites, the history of the Silk Road, and adventure tourism are becoming more and more appealing to Chinese tourists. In the meantime, the tourism authorities of Pakistan consider Chinese outbound tourism as a significant growth market, which can lead to high foreign tourist arrivals and tourism revenues. Since China continues to be one of the biggest outbound tourism markets in the world, CPEC offers a strategic avenue through which Pakistan can fit into this growing tourism market. The other important consideration that determines the growth of cross-border tourism in CPEC is visa facilitation. Transport connectivity is not enough in the tourism corridor theory without facilitated by simplified travel processes and effective management of borders. In recent years, Pakistan has initiated some visa reforms such as the introduction of e-visa systems, visa-on-arrival of some countries, which enhance the ease of access by foreigners visiting the country including Chinese. Faster visa application decreases bureaucracy, inspires tourist trust and raises unplanned travel demand [24]. Although these have been made, visa facilitation between China and Pakistan is yet to be further improved to ensure that the potential in terms of tourism is fully realized. Streamlined bilateral tourist visa schemes, multiple entry tourism visas and special corridor travel permits of organized tour groups might greatly reinforce the cross border visitor flows. The success of border tourism under CPEC relies not just on the physical roads,

but also on the administrative facilitation, efficiency of customs, and facilitation to the travelers through border systems. The other potential area of development is the development of joint tourism between Pakistan and China. Joint tourism packages entail jointly coordinated travel products which have been jointly developed by tour operators, tourism boards and hospitality networks within the two countries. The packages can be a combination of destinations in Xinjiang and north Pakistan tourism routes to give the international traveler a combined experience of the Silk Road tourism. As an illustration, a Pakistan-China mountain heritage package might have Kashgar, Khunjerab Pass, Hunza Valley, and Gilgit in a single itinerary of tourism. Joint tourism packaging has several economic benefits. It enhances the length of stay of tourists, higher spending on multiple destinations, promotes joint marketing of tourism services, and reinforces bilateral ties of the private sector. Adventure tourists, cultural travelers, heritage tourists and the eco-tourists in particular are particularly interested in such packages as they seek transnational travel experiences over bridged regions. The institutional cooperation in border tourism as a part of CPEC also involves cooperation between border officials, transport authorities, tourism ministries, and local governments [25]. Customs services, tourist facilitation centres, transport checkpoints, and hospitality services meet at border tourism gateways that are becoming more and more collaborative tourism nodes including Khunjerab, Sost and Gilgit. Enhanced integration between these institutions enhances tourist movement, security, border controls, and tourism. Table 7 summarizes the major dimensions of the cross-border tourism cooperation under CPEC, and it shows the strategic elements behind the tourism integration of Pakistan and China.

Table 7: Key Components of Cross-Border Tourism Development under CPEC

Development Area	Description	Tourism Impact
Pakistan-China Tourism Exchange	Increased tourist flows between both countries	Expands bilateral visitor arrivals
Visa Facilitation	Easier visa systems and border travel procedures	Reduces travel barriers
Joint Tourism Packages	Combined multi-country travel itineraries	Encourages longer stays and shared marketing
Border Tourism Cooperation	Coordination among border institutions	Improves traveler experience and safety
Gateway Infrastructure Upgrades	Improved Khunjerab and border transport facilities	Enhances tourism accessibility

The dynamic interaction of these elements can be depicted in Figure 5, which describes the way CPEC infrastructure converts into cross-border tourism development products. Other direct benefits of cross-border tourism under CPEC include hotel investment and transport demand, border retail markets, handicraft industry, food services and tourism employment in the gateway areas. Increasing numbers of communities along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border are enjoying the benefits of commercial activity that is directly related to tourism, especially in regions where tourism creates demand among the local population. Nevertheless, there are a number of challenges [26]. The weather-related seasonal border closures, lack of multilingual tourism services, uneven tourism standards, security issues, and lack of promotion of the border tourism all remain limiting tourism development. The full potential of tourism in the Pakistan-China corridor integration might not be fully used without a long-term policy planning.

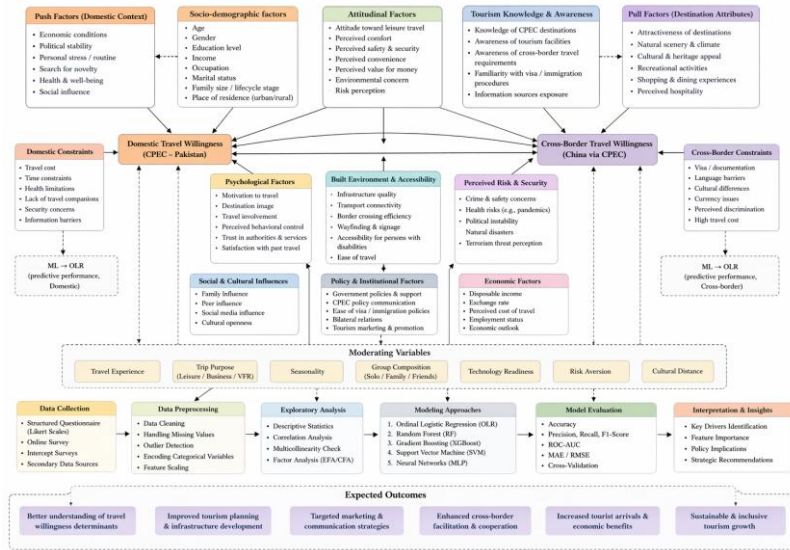


Figure 5: Cross-Border Tourism Development Model under CPEC

The development of the CPEC under cross-border tourism is a transformative opportunity in the future of tourism in Pakistan. Through enhanced tourism exchange between Pakistan and China, streamlined visa, joint tourism package promotion and enhanced cooperation between the two countries in regard to border tourism, CPEC builds the basis of a new regional tourism model founded on connectivity, collaboration, and common economic development. These developments may over time make Pakistan a tourist bridge between China and South Asia, Central Asia and more.

7- Economic Impact and Regional Integration Analysis:

The economic importance of CPEC-based tourism corridors can be explained by the outcomes of their influence on employment, small business operation, hospitality growth, development of local enterprises, and broader trade-tourism connections. Tourism already plays significant weight in the national economy of Pakistan. According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics data, the value added of Accommodation and Food Services (Hotels and Restaurants) increased by increasing the value of the same by Rs. The previous series amounting to 148,301 million as indicated in the national accounts table were converted to Rs. The latest year of listing is 405,596 million, whereas the total GDP increased since Rs. 15,807,077 million to Rs. 29,314,628 million over the same table. With those published values, the share of GDP used by the sector rose to 1.38 percent as compared to 0.94 percent and the nominal value added of the sector increased by approximately 173.5 percent throughout the period indicated [27]. One of the key impacts of tourism corridors on the economy is employment. Tourism is labor-intensive in that it not only generates jobs in hotels and restaurants, but also in transportation, guiding, retailing, catering, handicrafting and local services. The Economic Census 2023 of Pakistan lists 272,147 establishments and 1,150,525 workers in Accommodation and Food Service Activities alone and indicates that the service base in tourism provision is already substantial even before the consideration of transport, retail or work related to informal tourism. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa tourism program by the World Bank provides restaurants and suppliers as sources of direct and indirect employment at the project level, and the design is linked between improved access to tourist attractions and increased visitor spread and local economic development. CPEC corridors also facilitate SME tourism development by reducing the barriers of access by small operators in mountain, border and coastal destinations. The tourism project of the World Bank in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa directly involves market strengthening through collective marketing of tourism and food-and-beverage MSMEs, which is directly applicable to the development of tourism through corridors [28]. This is important

since small businesses are the first beneficiaries of the increasing tourist arrivals: guesthouses, cafes, local means of transport, tour services, craft vendors and food establishments. These businesses are more viable as better roads and a larger number of people on the street increase the customer reach and minimize logistics frictions. It is also important to the hospitality industry. The increase in tourist movement increases the demand in accommodation, restaurants, rest areas, booking services and destination facilities. The World Bank tourism project in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had an end goal of growing tourist expenses to US\$71million to US\$90million and growing tourism facilities and services in project regions to 6 and 20 respectively [29]. That is a significant combination to your paper, as it demonstrates the logic of development quite well: better access will lead to more spending, and more spending will justify more investment in hospitality.

Corridor tourism also has a multiplier effect on communities at the local level of development of the business. The advantages are to border towns, mountain valleys, and coastal settlements as the demand of visitors spreads to the food supply, retail purchases, vehicle rental, local construction, cultural events, and handicraft sales. The World Bank project in the same article points out that better accessibility is meant to spread out visitors better throughout the province, and that increased tourism performance will result in new sources of income to both the government and the business sector [30]. This is particularly so with regard to CPEC since the development of the corridor will not only be focused to bring the benefits to the major metropolises; it can also redistribute the expenditure on the outskirts destinations like Hunza, Skardu, Sost, and Gwadar. One of the strongest reasons as to why CPEC should be examined as a transport scheme or otherwise is the broader regional trade-tourism linkage. Tourism and trade support each other through roads, border gate ways and ports. Border tourism needs the reliability of transport, coordination of customs, food chains, access to fuels, and local trade. Both the CPEC literature and World Bank analysis of the corridor indicate that the economic impact of infrastructure is greatest when it is combined with facilitation reforms and involvement of the private sector [31]. This, in terms of tourism, implies that the same corridors used to facilitate freight and trade can be used to facilitate hotels, restaurants, retail markets, tourism logistics and cross-border package travel. Table 8 indicates that service activity, which is related to tourism is already economically significant at the national level. Applying only the narrow category of PBS of accommodation and food services, the industry is featuring a huge establishment base, a labor force of over one million and a growing contribution in the national accounts (nominal).

Table 8: Selected Economic Indicators Relevant to Tourism Expansion in Pakistan

Indicator	Reported Value	Source relevance
Accommodation & food service establishments	272,147	Shows size of tourism-supporting business base
Workforce in accommodation & food services	1,150,525	Indicates direct employment footprint
Accommodation & food services value added, earlier year in PBS table	Rs. 148,301 million	Baseline sector scale in national accounts
Accommodation & food services value added, latest year in PBS table	Rs. 405,596 million	Latest listed sector scale in national accounts
Approx. growth in listed value added across the PBS table period	173.5%	Indicates strong nominal expansion
Approx. GDP share of accommodation & food services, earlier listed year	0.94%	Sector share at start of period

Approx. GDP share of accommodation & food services, latest listed year	1.38%	Sector share at end of period
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Table 9 elaborates on the channels of transmission whereby the development of infrastructure-based tourism can be translated into a wider integration of the region economy. It is not just the economic benefits of the tourism core which are transferred to transport, food supply, retail, and border trade; hence the interest of corridor tourism to regional development plans.

Table 9: Corridor-Based Channels of Economic Impact under CPEC

Economic dimension	Main mechanism under CPEC tourism corridors	Likely beneficiaries
Employment generation	More tourist arrivals increase jobs in hotels, restaurants, transport, guiding, and retail	Local workers, youth, women entrepreneurs
SME tourism growth	Better access and collective marketing improve viability of guesthouses, cafés, tour operators, and craft sellers	MSMEs in Hunza, Skardu, Sost, Gwadar and along route towns
Hospitality expansion	Rising visitor demand encourages hotels, food services, rest areas, and destination facilities	Hospitality investors and local service providers
Local business development	Tourist spending multiplies into food supply, transport rentals, handicrafts, and informal commerce	Border and peripheral communities
Trade-tourism linkage	Roads, ports, and gateways support both freight movement and visitor mobility	Corridor towns, logistics-linked tourism businesses

This argument is backed by the economic facts that CPEC-led tourism corridors may serve as development multipliers, not merely as travel channels. They are probably capable of contributing the most through their association of infrastructure improvement with visitor spending, SME involvement, hospitality investment, and services to support trade. The important policy implication is that Pakistan will reap greater benefits where there is a combination of the infrastructure of the corridors and destination planning, business facilitation and the support of local enterprises, particularly in destinations to the north border and coastal gateways.

8- Challenges and Limitations:

Although the CPEC-led tourism corridors have a great potential to change the tourism economy of Pakistan and enhance the integration of the region, a number of structural, institutional, and operational issues still restrain their complete potential. These issues do not only impact tourism development, but also the sustainability, inclusiveness, and resiliency of the tourism development of the corridor. These obstacles need to be understood to develop realistic policy interventions and balanced development policies. Security issues in sensitive tourism areas are one of the greatest challenges. Some of the key tourism corridors in CPEC lie on remote border areas, mountainous regions and politically volatile regions where the lack of security can deter international tourist flows. Pakistan is perceived by foreign tourists, particularly first-time travelers as a high-risk destination because of geopolitical tensions in the region, media frames, and unreliable travel advisories [32]. Despite the improvement of security conditions in most tourist destinations, the perception gaps still impact on the competitiveness of tourism in Pakistan in the global markets. The other significant issue is the lack of tourism infrastructure other than transport connectivity. Although CPEC has significantly enhanced highways, roads and access to ports, provision of tourist amenities like hotels, rest areas, multilingual tourist information centers, emergency medical services, toiletries and tourism digital platforms are still a shortage in most areas along the corridors. In places like Skardu, Hunza, and Gwadar,

better accessibility by road has boosted the numbers of visitors, yet local tourism infrastructure is usually not able to keep up with the rising demand. Such imbalance will decrease the quality of services and restrict the satisfaction of tourists [33]. Barriers of visa and border facilitation are also a crucial constraint in developing cross-border tourism. Even though Pakistan has made e-visa reforms and made entry procedures of selected countries more simplified, visa procedures of cross-border tourism between Pakistan and China still need to be simplified further. The long documentation, limited border crossing licenses, and seasonal border closures in Khunjerab Pass pose barriers to free movement of tourists. Effective tourism corridors must not only be physically connected but also have smooth administrative travelling systems.

Environmental sustainability is another pressing concern. Most of the CPEC tourism zones traverse ecologically sensitive mountain ecosystem, glaciers, forests, coastal regions, and conserved biodiversity regions. The high rate of tourism development without adequate environmental planning may result in waste disposal, habitat destruction, excessive use of natural resources, traffic jams, and degradation of ecosystem. Northern tourist attraction sites like Hunza, Skardu, and Deosai are particularly prone to environmental stress due to unregulated development of the tourism sector [34]. The effectiveness of corridors is also curtailed by institutional coordination issues. The implementation of tourism under CPEC involves the collaboration of various stakeholders such as federal ministries, provincial governments, tourism ministries, transport authorities, border agencies, environmental regulators and local governments. The disjointed system of governance and poor inter-agency responses in most instances hinder project implementation, lower policy consistency, and cause inefficiencies in tourism planning [35]. Another problem is the absence of coordinated tourism branding and global marketing plan. Pakistan has not been able to fully establish a concerted international branding campaign that would establish CPEC tourism corridors as international travel destinations. In the absence of good destination branding, most potential tourists lack awareness of the tourism opportunities that Pakistan has to offer in spite of the improved infrastructure. Marketing gaps minimize international visibility of tourism corridors which otherwise would draw great flows of foreign tourists. There is also the challenge of limited participation of the local community [36]. Local populations in certain areas (corridors) are less benefited by the tourism investments because the communities are not well integrated in the planning processes, the communities are not offered training opportunities and they do not get access to tourism financing. Without communities sharing in tourism benefits, social inequality has possibilities of rising and long term sustainability on the development of tourism may erode. Besides the development issues, the limitations to research in this study are also present. This study relies more on secondary sources of data, policy documents and the available literature as opposed to primary field surveys and face to face interviews with stakeholders. This restricts access to real-time local perceptions, and corridor-specific empirical tourism behavior data. Moreover, due to the fact that most of the CPEC tourism projects are still in the developmental stages, not all of the long-term tourism effects can be measured yet. There are limited and fragmented reliable corridor specific tourism statistics, particularly regarding cross-border visitor flows, limiting effective quantitative analysis [37]. All these issues point to the fact that infrastructure development, on its own, is not a sufficient condition to ensure positive tourism corridor results. Although CPEC offers the physical basis of enhanced tourism connectivity, enhancing the success in the long term requires concurrent advancement in governance reform, environmental protection, tourism services, policy coordination, and international destination marketing.

Conclusion:

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) has turned out to be a significant element in changing the tourism industry in Pakistan through enhanced connectivity, greater access to

remote areas as well as regional collaboration. This paper demonstrates that CPEC is not merely a trade and infrastructure initiative, but also a powerful tourist corridors development platform which links Pakistan to China and other neighboring states. CPEC has provided new tourism development opportunities in mountain, border, and coastal destinations through the development of highways, border gateways, and ports. The key tourism corridors that are discussed in this paper, Khunjerab-Hunza-Gilgit, Skardu Mountain Corridor, Gwadar Coastal Corridor, and Karachi-Gwadar Maritime Route indicate how better transport infrastructure can facilitate tourism growth in various regions of Pakistan. Northern corridors enhance mountain tourism and Pakistan-China tourism exchange whereas the southern corridors facilitate the development of coastal and maritime tourism. These corridors combined form a diversified tourism network that promotes balanced growth of the regions. The most promising results of the development of the corridor are cross-border tourism under CPEC. The improved linkage between China and Pakistan promotes tourist exchange, cultural interaction and joint tourism opportunities. Better visa schemes, cooperation on the border and tourism packages can further boost the number of international visitors and enhance bilateral tourism relations. CPEC tourism corridors help in the creation of employment opportunities, development of SMEs, expansion of the hospitality industry, and development of local businesses, economically. Hotels, restaurants, transport services, handicrafts, and retail business are some of the beneficiaries of the movement of tourists. These economic gains are particularly desirable to remote areas where tourism opens up new sources of income to local communities. In spite of these advantages, there are still a number of issues such as security concerns, visa barriers, lack of tourism facilities, environmental risks, and poor institutional coordination. Pakistan needs to enhance tourism planning, governance, sustainable tourism practices, and international marketing of its tourism destinations in order to succeed in the long term.

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