

Community Engagement, Rural Institutions and Rural Tourism Business in Developing Countries

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Learning objectives

- Explain a complex approach to the phenomenon of rural community involvement in the creation of tourism products within developing countries
- Describe current opportunities and risks related to the involvement of local communities within tourism development in rural areas of developing countries
- Identify emerging segments of the tourism development in developing countries Examine the theoretical and practical state of the art

Introduction

Exploring rural tourism and communities' involvement in developing countries means, primarily, understanding the context and the current challenges of these regions of the World. By definition a developing country is one with an underdeveloped industrial base and a low Human Development Index (HDI) relative to other countries (Sullivan & Steven, 2003, p. 471). In particular, the HDI is an indicator of macroeconomic development used, alongside with the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), considered by the United Nations since 1993 to assess the quality of life in the member countries. This indicator takes into account different factors in addition to the GDP per capita, such as literacy and life expectancy. Based on this indicator, countries are clustered into four human development categories: Very High Human Development, High Human Development, Medium Human Development and Low Human Development. In general, there is no universal, agreed-upon standard for what makes a country developing versus developed and which countries fit within these two categories. For instance, about two thirds of the World Trade Organization (almost 150 members) are considered as Developing Countries, but the organization has no definitions of "developed" and "developing" countries, and Members are allowed to announce whether they are "developed" or "developing" countries. However, it is worth to mention the existence of 48 least developed countries in the world (UNCTAD, 2015), where nearly half the population – some 400 million people – remain in extreme poverty, compared with less than a quarter in any other developing country. At the same time, it is worth to remember there are no fixed and "fast" criteria to define developed and developing countries. Different organizations set different standards, and countries like Turkey, for instance, stand in the grey area between developed and developing countries. Turkey is indeed mentioned in the the CIA World Fact book as a developed nation, while Dow Jones, Morgan Stanley Capital International (MSCI) and other provider of investment decision support tools still consider the country developing.

In this scenario, an issue that is even more complex is the one concerning the rural areas of developing countries. In particular, regarding the issue of rural life, community interaction and Tourism Business, the relationship is very intricate where various links between the different components of rurality, institutional involvement and the tourism phenomenon have to be considered. In the case of developed countries, the multiformity of rural tourism contains an accentuating pitch rise followed by a transition from the pioneering phase to the current sustained growth phase. But a different state of evolution characterizes rural development and tourism businesses in developing countries. So, the latter must be analysed in a complex way according to the actual situation of these areas, in order to understand their future challenges within the process of rural tourism development and, in particular, to be able to facilitate the full involvement of the local community in practice.

Another important issue in this regard is the fact that the environmental, socioeconomic and cultural conditions of these territories put them in front of a double challenge. That is on the one hand these countries are trying - usually with the support of more developed countries - to find their own dimension of development, based on their own natural, cultural specificities. On the other hand, they urgently need to find their own place and role within the process of social changes of these last decades, in a post-capitalist society and multipolar international system. Nevertheless, these challenges and strategic perspectives still coexist with some dramatic issues such as illiteracy and malnutrition, sometimes juxtaposed to more or less

short periods of armed conflict or famines. If these problems represent a scourge in urban areas, we must consider that this situation is worsening dramatically in rural ones, where three quarters of the entire world famished live, especially in the villages in Asia and Africa. Just to give some dramatic examples, according to UNICEF (2012), it is estimated that 200 million children, in developing countries, suffer from some form of malnutrition, and about 50 percent of pregnant women suffer from iron deficiency, reason why 315,000 women die each year from bleeding during delivery. However, it is our belief that the tourism activity and businesses, if implemented in an integrated and sustainable way, with a proper involvement of the local communities, can significantly improve the current situation in the rural areas of these countries. In this context, it is also necessary to recall the clear commitment assumed by the World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO, 2010) in order to create strategies and guidelines so that tourism development and businesses could actively contribute to the achievement of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)¹.

Nevertheless, particularly regarding the rural tourism development in developing country, it is necessary to be aware of the existing difficulties in satisfying the macro environmental factors influencing the development of rural tourism, as classified by Barkauskas, Barkauskienė, and Jasinskas (2015) in five category of 1) economic, 2) socio-cultural, 3) natural-environmental, 4) political-legal, and 5) technological factors. These obstacles to tourism development must be identified and analysed in order to facilitate proper growth, mainly through institutional and collaborative programmes aimed at rural enterprise development.

Community engagement and Rural Tourism development: the complexity of a necessary journey

At this time of global economic challenges, rural areas in developing countries are face with emergent issues such as infrastructure development, agricultural productivity, sustainable poverty eradication, and the ongoing climate changes over time. On the other hand, these countries also deal with issues such as the patterns of rural economic diversification, for instance community's motivations for engagement in non-farm activities as well as the gender dimension of rural poverty and employment. Therefore, several contradictions exist between needs and opportunities linked to rural economic diversification and rural tourism appear in this context as a strategic choice for the integrated planning at both local and national level of developing countries.

Tourism, since the Second World War, is perceived as an increasingly important resource for many rural areas in developed countries, particularly for those that have delays and obstacles in the process of agricultural modernization and development of the secondary sector activities. Indeed, a large number of studies exist regarding the dynamics underlying rural tourism for such countries. For instance, among the more recent studies carried out in southern Europe, there is the analyses of the inter-relationship between rural and mass tourism (Hernández, Suárez-Vega, & Santana-Jiménez, 2016) as well as on the relationship between rural tourism and national identity (Malek & Costa, 2014; Silva & Leal, 2015). While an important issue such as the management and development of tourism (related policies and implications) in rural areas of developing countries is a phenomenon less studied. In particular, as Ertuna and Kirbas (2012, p. 23) highlight, researches on how to achieve broad stakeholder and community involvement in the planning and rural tourism management are limited. Some contributions come from scholars such as Hoefle (2016), who focused on rural and eco-tourism (concepts often associated) in the Central Amazon and, particularly, the possibility of combining tourism with farming in a multi-functional way focusing on the socio-economic implications for local communities. Generally, evidences already exist about the favourable role of tourism as a viable green solution reducing deforestation and promoting social inclusion within poor and environmentally problematic regions.

¹ The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – which range from halving extreme poverty rates to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and providing universal primary education, all by the target date of 2015 – form a blueprint agreed to by all the world's countries and all the world's leading development institutions (to learn more: <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>). The MDGs were established within the Millennium Summit of the United Nations in 2000, following the adoption of the United Nations Millennium Declaration. The eight MDGs were replaced by the "The 17 Sustainable Development Goals" since 2015.

Moreover, the process of creating value through rural tourism is based on the combination of natural, cultural and socio-economic resources which are promoted and managed by a plurality of actors, through the implementation of activities of production and sale of tourism and recreational services. There are several examples of how art, tradition, history and rurality mingle in developing countries, offering the possibility of wonderful tourism experiences. The Angkor Complex (Cambodia) gives a great example of this, where the monuments and the surrounding jungle provide unlimited tourism opportunities in which rurality has the most important role. There has been a substantial diversification of destinations, and many developing countries have seen their tourist arrivals increase significantly. Arrivals to developing countries accounted for 46% of the total international arrivals in 2011 (UNWTO, retired from "<http://step.unwto.org/content/tourism-and-poverty-alleviation-1>", accessed on February 10 2016).

Tourism has become a major player in the economy of developing countries. However, even if rural tourism could potentially grow faster in developing countries, due to the presence of increasing groups of tourists looking for new destinations and experience of nature and culture in remote and essentially poorly visited places, this potential is not fully tapped yet. If we take as example another rural area of Cambodia, the Kampong Chhnang province, where 85% of the population is composed by farmers and 7% by fishermen, we can notice that the official tourism guides only mention the village as a place with "small hotels and guesthouses that tourists can easily reach" (to learn more: <http://www.tourismcambodia.com/>). In such situations, the rural population has just marginal benefits, accruing from the participation in recreational activities (buffalo rides, horse walks), some homestay activities involving few Khmer families, and the production of agricultural products and handicrafts. Nevertheless, one cannot define this as a sustainable involvement of the local population, and even less a local community "empowerment". As Ertuna and Kirbas (2012, p. 20) highlight, the literature is consensual about the fact that rural tourism development, in general, should be community based and involve a multidimensional sustainability strategy widely supported by all the stakeholders. Nevertheless, it is always necessary to keep in mind the existing gap between theories and practices.

Current challenges for community engagement and rural tourism business in developing countries

The development of rural tourism businesses in developing countries, in particular with regard to the involvement of local populations, is indeed a complex and delicate process, given the inherent fragility of the territorial environmental, socio-economic and cultural balances. In this context, we have to consider many factors that complicate a systematic development of rural tourism. Among these, and with specific regards to the local community engagement, it is necessary to consider the rural communities' extremely high illiteracy rate. This condition poses serious impediments to the creation of the environmental and sociocultural awareness, on the one hand, and on the other hand, the necessary entrepreneurial skills to look at the natural and cultural resources as a marketable resource or an attractive tourism potential. This is just one of the major limitations - at the present - to the (desirable) involvement of the local community in the development process of rural tourism in developing countries.

This situation - marked by strong contradictions and overlapping of emergencies - is particularly evident in countries such as Tanzania, where about 32% of the land (303,316 square kilometers) is considered as protected natural area, but at the same time the country is one of the poorest in the world with 60% of the population live without electricity and 40% without drinking water. It is thus evident that in a country where the economy depends largely on agriculture (about 60% of the GDP) capable of employing 80% of the workforce, due to the geographical and climatic conditions, the cultivated fields are limited to 5% of the territory. Therefore, while rural tourism would represent a great chance to diversify the rural production, the socio-economic situation of the rural population does not always guarantee their effective involvement and empowerment to the process of rural tourism development. Without the implementation of proper policies, presently the development of rural tourism in countries such as Tanzania and Ecuador is potentially relegated to the exclusive exploration of socio-economic elite of urban areas or, even worse, the operators from developed countries, feeding the trend to suffocate what could be the entrepreneurial initiative of the indigenous communities. In turn, the loss of the involvement of rural communities, would

inevitably lead to the loss of much or all of the authenticity of the rural and cultural tourism product. Although the developing countries present a high potential and are setting programs to develop their productive structure, the trend in rural areas (not much different from that of developed countries' rural areas) is the migration of communities towards the cities, looking for more reliable employment opportunities.

Vitasurya (2016) proposes a model of conservation of nature-based tourism villages by citizen participation to be implemented for the development of rural tourism in the future considering community participation as the local wisdom and the foundation of sustainable development in rural areas. According to him, community participation in the process of tourism development of rural areas has to involve locals in educational programs that teach business-based skills and support the craft industry as well as skills of waste management and environmental preservation to avoid unsustainable development of rural areas. In this regard, it is necessary to discern theory from practice, since at the present and with few exceptions, the lack of involvement and empowerment of the rural communities represents a weakness for the quality of the tourism products and for the sustainability of positive tourism impacts on the territory. However, it is also necessary to be aware that rural populations in developing countries are not able, at the present, to assume responsibility for sustainable development of tourism in their territories, for a variety of reasons listed above, including illiteracy and lack of education.

Another important issue that should not be neglected here is the negative social impact of tourism development on local communities in the process of rural engagement in development of tourism businesses where there is always a chance that local community may not be prepared to withstand the social and economic impact of new tourism activities. This phenomenon has become a well-established concept in the tourism literature as the demonstration effect or the emulation of visitors' consumption patterns and has been frequently reported as a consequence of development of tourism in rural areas. The study of Monterrubio and Mendoza-Ontiveros (2014) provide empirical evidences on the fact that tourist behaviours, attitudes, and certain ways of thinking can be and have been actually adopted by local women, for instance. Nevertheless, it also shows that local social groups do not copy tourist behaviour blindly; instead, residents are also critical in the demonstration effect processes. They observe, analyse, compare, evaluate and decide on what and how tourists specific behaviours are adopted (Monterrubio & Mendoza-Ontiveros, 2014). Nevertheless, this phenomena should be listed among the negative social effects of tourism activities, for which it is necessary to implement education and training policies aiming at the strengthening of the self-esteem and self-knowledge/local identities on the part of the local population, as preventive policies and preparation for the tourism activity itself (Carbone, Oosterbeek, & Costa, 2012).

Key considerations for planning institutional and collaborative programmes for rural communities

The key issues and the main inhibiting factors for the development of rural community development presented above, therefore, requires a determined, consistent and strategic intervention by local and national public institutions towards the rural tourism development and the delicate task of empowering local communities in this process. To do so, it is necessary to define legislative and legal framework for rural tourism activities as well as the homologation and classification of tourism development structures from each national rural tourism boarding system. On the other hand, it is fundamental to promote training programmes for rural communities, in order to increase, on the medium/long term, the rate of literacy and professionalization. Moreover, in order to integrate each developing country, the guidelines suggested by the supranational and global institutions should be followed in a coherent global effort. The latter, moreover have the task of supervising these long-term processes of development and the degree of involvement of the local communities. Finally, a joint effort (at local, national and supranational level) should be done to identify the factors that facilitate the participation of local stakeholders and communities in rural tourism product development of developing countries.

It is also important to mention, with regard to the institutional aspect, the role of associations and NGOs, as a bridge between the public and private sectors. Supporting the creation and

development of an NGO network should be thus one of the tasks of governmental sector. There are various associations around the world such as the Tanzania Association of Cultural Tourism Organizers (TACTO), Zanzibar Association of Tourism Investors and, overall, the Intra-African Travel and Tourism Association (IATTA) aiming the promotion of rural entrepreneurs' participation and domestic tourism development as a sustainable pathway leading to poverty alleviation. However, unlike what happens in developed countries, these association initiatives are still very tied to the economic aspect of tourism activity, while there are still few NGOs that are dedicated to the needs of local populations. From this point of view, global partnerships could represent a great resource regarding the knowledge sharing and benchmarking. Finally, associations (and not official tour operators) from developing countries, are usually responsible for the activities of "Voluntourism" in rural areas, that is, a combination of international volunteering and tourism, also called variously "volunteer tourism", "volunteer holidays" and "volunteer travel". In this type of experience the involvement of the population becomes fundamental prerogative through the homestay option for tourists and the daily contact with the local population with which "Voluntourists" actively contributes. However, this type of tourism is still poorly organized and it has sometimes even described by critics as naive business.

Case Study – Tourism and rural Ecuadorian community: opportunity or threat?

The Republic of Ecuador is a South American country belonging to the G20, that is a union of developing nations created on August 20, 2003. The official and intercultural language of the country is Spanish, but the 2010 constitution officially recognizes also Amerindian languages such as Quechua, Shuar, the Tsafiki and other, used within indigenous groups. The capital city is Quito, declared as the World Heritage Site since 1970 for having the best preserved and the least altered historical centre of Latin America. While cities such as Guayaquil and Cuenca are the most populous cities with 61% of population being non-indigenous. In these cities with recognised World Heritage sites as great examples of cities planned in the Spanish colonial style tourism industry is on the rise.

On the other side, rural areas of Ecuador are continuously faced with severe socio-economic problems. Poverty is extremely high among indigenous peoples, especially among the rural population of the Sierra, where 96% of the population are indigenous people (Ecuador has three broad geographic areas: the coast, the *sierra* (mountains), and the jungle lowlands). The rural area of Sierra has huge tourism potentialities with incalculable variety of natural and cultural resources. At the same time, there are several important tourism businesses involving rural communities of Sierra. Among them, the Tsuirim Viajes, a small but dynamic tour operator offering a range of tourism activities such as jungle tours, the Shuar community visits, Shamanic rituals, canyoning, rafting, tubing and jungle- trekking. The Tsuirim Viajes company is based in Macas, a city located in the southeast of Ecuador on the edge of the Amazon River and has been created and is managed by Leo Salgado, who grew up in a Shuar community even though he is not a native Shuar. This company is well known and is linked to various national and international tourism distribution channels. Tourist activities include the involvement of the populations and the enhancement of indigenous cultures. Visitors are able to get engaged in the daily life of indigenous and their quotidian tasks. The involved local population show big pride in transmitting elements of their culture to the visitors and in this way create an authentic link with visitors. Nevertheless, these activities take place always under the direct supervision of the manager, because he is aware of the negative impacts that a predatory tourist activity could bring to such a fragile community like that of the Shuar and to environment.

This case, by the way, is a success story that does not reflect the reality of rural areas of Ecuador, where Shuar and other indigenous communities, without training and appropriate knowledge, improvise themselves entrepreneurs of tourism. The lack of training of these individuals inevitably leads them not to take into consideration the socio-economic and cultural negative effects of the tourism activity, especially in community as fragile as the Amazon.

Conclusion

It is thus important to be aware that rural tourism is certainly not a panacea capable of solving economic and social exclusion problems of rural areas in developing countries, where the theme of economic, social and environmental dimensions of rural tourism development arises largely. There are a number of priorities in the definition of an agenda of research on sustainability and rural tourism in developing countries, and in this chapter, we have addressed the issue of the involvement of the local population. Rural tourism represents just an integrated and coordinated component within integrated rural development models, which in turn are specific to each territory. Such strategies must ensure a balance between consumption and reproduction of rural collective resources based on the active participation of various agents, at local, national and international level. Nevertheless, a particular role should be given to the resident and communities, in order to ensure social sustainability. The process that leads to these results also includes the creation of a series of supportive policies, economic, legal, cultural and social but even before, with the aim of increasing the population from the social point of view, preparing a empowerment process.

Questions

Example:

Describe how information technology has influence business environment in any rural location of your choice. This location must be in the developing country.

Further reading

<http://www.tanzaniatouristboard.com/>

<http://www.tourismcambodia.com/>

<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>

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