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Insights into the Role of Community Participation as a Tool for Local Support: A Normative Model for Competitive and Sustainable Destination Development

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Abstract
Community participation as an efficient tool for gaining local residents' support for the development of sustainable and competitive tourist destinations has been adequately established in the tourism discourse. However, due to the dynamic nature of the industry and the associated complexities involved, the conceptualization in terms of theory and operationalization of the notion concerning practicalities is still debated. Given that the wrong conceptualization of the phenomenon could lead to wrong operationalization which would translate into unwanted consequences both for the destination developers and destination communities, the issue cannot be ignored. To address the issue, this study proposes a normative model of community participation with an aim to put some of these complexities in a clear perspective. By employing Tosun`s typology, it is argued that community participation in tourism planning and decision-making, operationalization and management, and benefit receiving takes place at different levels based on the degree of control and authority that local residents have over the tourism development process. To ensure meaningful participation in all the major stages of the developmental process, local communities need to be adequately empowered. A high level of empowerment would ensure spontaneous participation which is the most desired level of participation. On the contrary, a lower level of empowerment would result in coercive participation with the least control and benefits reaching the local communities. It would ultimately lead to antagonization and a lack of local support for any destination development strategies that the developers adopt for sustainable and competitive tourism in the locality.
Keywords: Community Participation, Community Support, Destination Competitiveness, Sustainability, Strategy, Tourism

Introduction

Tourist destinations frequently struggle with properly operationalizing the notion of community participation due to its fluid and complex nature, despite its practical importance in sustainable development and competitiveness. Even though there is profound scholarly support regarding its benefits, policymakers and destination managers have been facing serious challenges at the implementation stages because of the dynamic nature of tourism and destinations. Given the complexities involved, the host communities are usually left out of the development process. However, it leads to further antagonization and the development of negative sentiments among the communities regarding all such initiatives. As a result such exclusionary projects usually fail to achieve their goals. With the tremendous growth in support for democratic setups, where everyone has a right to be included and heard, the importance of involving native communities in the tourism development process has become a prime requirement. However, the development of a single operationalization model on which there is a universal agreement still seems to be a far-fetched goal.

There has been a great deal of debate about the very nature of community participation in the context of tourism. One of the most important and interesting literary discourses had been about the common practice of measuring community participation as a dichotomous construct. In line with Arnstein (1969); Pretty (1995); Choguill (1996) citizen participation typologies which presented the concept as a continuum as opposed to a dichotomous construct, Tosun (1999) was the first to propose his typology of community participation levels for tourism based on the degree of power and authority that destination residents have over the tourism process. However, there is a dearth of studies clearly identifying the difference between community participation typologies based on the level of power and control that local residents have over the tourism process, and community participation typologies based on the nature of the activity and how they are related to each other. Given that the wrong conceptualization of concepts could lead to erroneous findings and conclusions, it is important to look into the gap. By presenting the community participation`s normative model based on the nature of activity in the tourism process, this conceptual paper tried to address the issue.

The Community Participation`s Normative Model

Extensive discussions in literature have identified three major categories of community participation i.e. participation in planning and decision-making, participation in management and operations, and participation in benefits receiving (Ahmad & Abu Talib, 2015; Jaafar et al., 2017; Khalid et al., 2019; Marzuki et al., 2012; Nian et al., 2019; Siow et al., 2014; Sirima & Backman, 2013; Tosun, 2000). Based on Thammajinda (2013) and McIntosh, Goeldner, and Ritchie (1995)`s work, this paper presents a modified normative model of community participation in tourism which puts these categories in more clear perspective (See Figure 1).
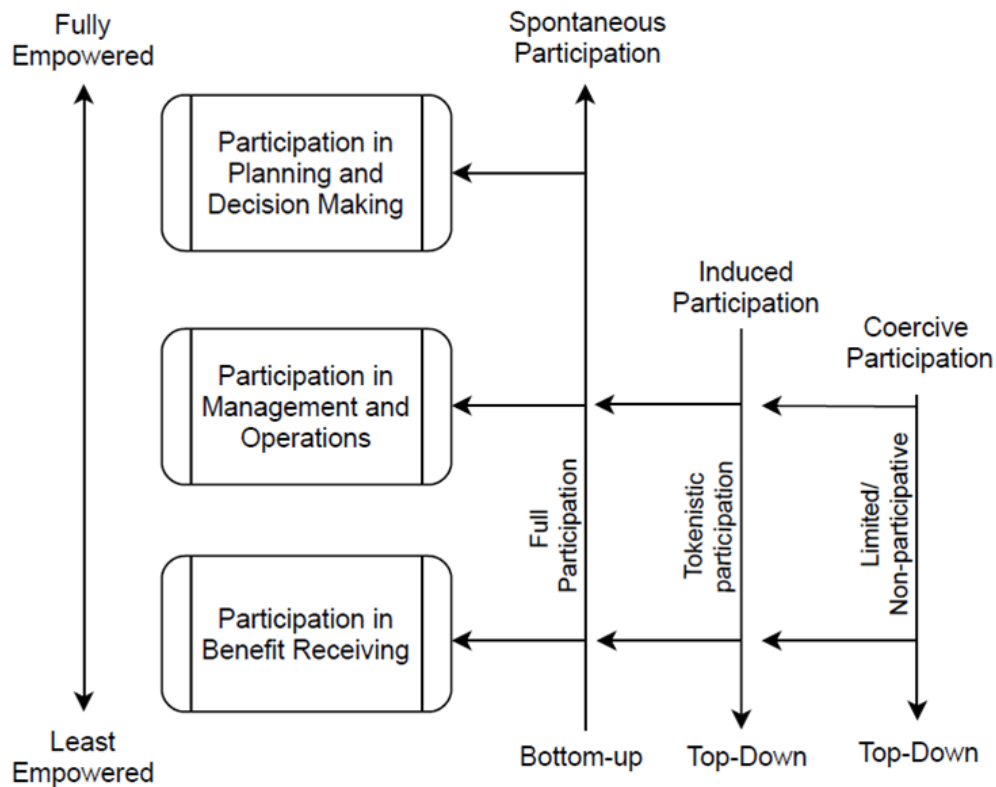
Figure 1 Normative Model of Community Participation levels

Thammajinda (2013) contends that greater community participation in tourism planning and decision-making results in more equitable benefit distribution in host communities and, as a result, shapes the forms and styles of tourism development to be more in harmony with traditional lifestyles and the local environment. A detailed discussion of the proposed community participation normative model is done in the following sections.

Community Participation in Planning and Decision Making
Encouragement of true community participation in planning and decision-making is one of the important principles of sustainable development (Gani, Awang, Mohamad, & Samdin, 2015). However, in developing countries, public participation in the planning and decision-making stage is far more complicated and rarely exists (Tosun, 2006). Community participation has often created issues for the power holders as the decision makers, ultimately leading to the incongruity of community participation in decision-making (Arif et al., 2019; Foley & Martin, 2000; Prabhakaran et al., 2014; Presenza et al., 2013). Because of this, the planners at the national and regional levels tend to ignore the importance of community engagement, therefore hampering the integration of community interest in the decisions (Maidin, 2011). One of the primary reasons for the inconsistencies in involving the community in tourism is the potential cost associated with the inclusive participatory process (Gani et al., 2015; Maginn, 2007; Marzuki et al., 2012). Zanudin et al (2019) are of the view that it happens when the decisions involve large-scale developments or major biasness that ultimately leads to a conflict of interest among the government, community, and interested groups. Given engagement at this level requires the highest level of empowerment, usually spontaneous participation in the tourism process occurs at this stage.

According to Inskeep (1994), allowing the local communities to participate in the planning and development process will increase their support for tourism development. However, factors like interest, perceptions, culture, capacity, social capital, financial conditions, and power disparities can become a major hurdle in successful community participation in tourism at tourist destinations (Alrwajfah et al., 2020; Aman et al., 2019; Jaafar et al., 2017; Kala & Bagri, 2018; Marzuki et al., 2012; Sood et al., 2017). That's why, the degree to which participation can provide the community with a legitimate chance to integrate their interests in planning decisions is debatable (Zanudin et al., 2019). Scholars, on the other hand, largely agree on the beneficial role of community participation in enhancing and achieving the goal of sustainable tourism development, provided that the factors that influence local tourism participation are addressed (Arachchi, 2018; Bramwell & Sharman, 2000; Lee & Jan, 2019; Nyaupane et al., 2006; Simmons, 1994).

Community Participation in Management and Operations
The literature is unanimous in its conclusion that including local communities in the management process helps in the creation of more sustainable types of tourism (Bello et al., 2017; Iqbal et al., 2022; Kilipiris, 2005; Lee & Jan, 2019; Swarbrooke, 1999). It leads to an increase in a sense of ownership and better preservation of resources on which the tourism industry is based. Olivieri (2018) in his study found that when local communities are empowered and given the responsibility of management, those sites are much better protected even in the face of severe threats. Another reason for the encouragement of management by the local community is the rationale that they are the people who are directly impacted by tourism-related activities (Scheyvens, 2003), and by engaging them we can drastically reduce these negative impacts because they are the ones who own the traditional wisdom and knowledge about the destination, which is required for mitigation. Community participation in management and operation occurs at spontaneous, induced, and coercive levels, though the degree of empowerment may vary from full to least empowered based on the level.

According to Park et al (2012), the local population is more likely to be supportive and collaborative in the development process, if they gain more personal benefits from tourism. It can be done by integrating the native communities into tourism management and operations, rather than merely employing them in low-wage and unsatisfactory employment. Khalid et al (2019) in their study in the northern parts of Pakistan found that when local inhabitants participate in tourism management, they are supportive of tourism activities and have a more favorable attitude towards tourism development. Exclusion from the management process leads to the development of negative perceptions and feelings of resentment among the local communities. Wondirad and Ewnetu (2019) in their study reported the occasions when local communities resorted to the destruction of natural resources in their localities because of the exclusionary approach by the authorities. Therefore, it is critical to engage the local community at every stage of the development process to ensure the destination's long-term sustainability and equitable economic growth. Ashley and Roe (1998) posed that the community should be enabled to active participation through empowerment with knowledge and the choices they have concerning resource management and tourism development. These empowered communities can then take decisions on their own regarding the options they have and the way they want to peruse them. However, in developing countries like Pakistan, the process of community engagement in management and operations is far more complicated and slow due to a number of hurdles

including low capacity, lack of trained human resources, elite domination, structural issues, and centralization of administration (Haroon, 2002; Marzuki et al., 2012; Sebele, 2010; Thammajinda, 2013; Tosun, 2006).

Community Participation in Benefits Receiving

A primary purpose of developing sustainable development is to transfer the socioeconomic benefits of tourism activities to the local communities. Even though communities can benefit from participation despite not having any direct ownership or control but these are limited to only low-level jobs mostly(Airey, 2015; Li, 2006). In conventional forms of tourism, mostly the stakeholders who hold power or the local elite engaged in the tourism business benefit from the tourism, while the less empowered sections of the communities are left behind at the destinations. This unequal distribution of benefits has been one of the major reasons for negative perceptions among the residents. Usually, this is the most sought type of activity that the local community is interested in. Local communities spontaneously participating can get more benefits as compared to coercive participation wherein, they don't have any sort of control over the process.

Contrary to that tourism activities that are initiated and managed by the local communities are more likely to have the maximum social and economic outcomes that are desired (Cole, 2006; Tosun, 2006). The goal of the government's initiatives to boost tourism in places like Swat Valley, Pakistan is to help reduce poverty and improve local populations by improving their socio-economic conditions. However, despite these efforts, the goal has not been achieved due to poor community participation in benefit receiving. And that is one of the reasons that a greater part of the population of Swat Valley is reliant on other forms of income generation instead of tapping the potential opportunities that tourism can provide in the first place. Even though the area receives hundreds of thousands of tourists each year, the local population has been unable to reap the benefits of tourism. The benefits of tourism are not just limited to the economic aspect; it also brings many non-economic benefits with it. However, research done in the northern areas of Pakistan discovered that local stakeholders are exclusively interested in the economic advantages of tourism, but owing to a lack of coordination, stakeholders and inhabitants are excluded from dialogue and profit sharing (Imran, 2013). Only a meager amount of economic benefit is received by the destination and its local communities, while the major portion of the benefits goes to the government authorities in the form of different royalties, permits, and fees (Imran, 2013). There is a consensus among the among the different stakeholders that without giving benefits to the local communities sustainable tourism seems impossible at these tourist destinations (Kunasekaran et al., 2017; Prabhakaran et al., 2014), but so far there is no comprehensive strategy to achieve the goal of inclusive engagement local communities in the tourism benefit receiving.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study shows that community participation in tourism development during different stages including planning and decision making, operations and management, and benefits receiving have its own perquisites. Participation at planning and decision making stage requires the local communities to be not only adequate empowered, but also requires adequate knowhow of the whole process to be able of making informed decisions at the tourist destinations. Being a fairly complicated and demanding stage, local communities despite of high desirability prefer to spontaneously participate in other stage including

management, and benefits receiving. Moreover, the findings show that community participation in tourism operations and management stage at destination could range from coercive participation at lowest level to spontaneous participation at highest level. Competitive tourist destinations not only protect and promote, but also smartly utilize the available resources for the benefit of both the people and industry. The localization of supply chain, and hiring and training of local workforce helps the destination managers and investors with reducing the risk, while at the same time increasing their revenues. Thus, creating a win-win situation for the local community, industry, tourists and authorities. Lastly, findings show that participation for benefit receiving from tourism in the desired end goal of nearly all the stakeholders. However, local communities usually with less control over the process and being engaged at coercive levels, reduces their ability to fully benefit from financial gains of tourism. Ensuring they receive their fair share of the benefits of tourism activities in their locality requires the policy makers and practitioners to devise and implement more inclusive policies.

In line with the findings, if the goal is to develop a sustainable and competitive tourist industry, the local community must be included in tourism planning, decision-making, management, and benefits received from the beginning to the conclusion of the destination life cycle.. However, given that communities might not have full control over the tourism development process, it is important for destination planners and developers to enhance their abilities, followed by the designation of a certain degree of authority over the process. Given the highest degree of power and control results in Spontaneous community participation, which is the most desired level of participation for sustainable and competitive tourist destinations, there is a need for empowering the destination communities in social-cultural, economic and political spheres. Moreover, it is important to note that local communities might not be necessarily interested in the destination planning and decision making at the highest levels due to a number of issues including negative, perception, social capital, and collective efficacy, therefore, there is a need for addressing these issues. As illustrated by the suggested model, coercive participation, as the least empowered level, would result in engagement at the implementation stage but would also limit local communities' capacity to receive the optimum benefits of tourism development, diminishing their support for any development plan implemented. Since the importance of community participation in engaging all levels of tourism process i.e. planning, decision making, operations, management and benefits receiving cannot be ignored if local residents support is desired for developing competitive and sustainable tourist destinations, policies and processes for encouraging spontaneous participation should be developed.

Acknowledgement

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