A critique of the interface between tourism, sustainable development and sustainable tourism in community-based tourism theory

Prof Albert. J. Strydom and Dinah Mangope
Department of Tourism & Event Management
Faculty of Management Sciences
Central University of Technology
Republic of South Africa

and

Unathi Sonwabile Henama*
Department of Tourism Management
Tshwane University of Technology
Republic of South Africa
Email: HenamaUS@tut.ac.za
ORCID: 0000-0002-1111-0729

Corresponding author*

Abstract

Given the fact that tourism is becoming the largest single sector of world trade, which has potential to substantially contribute to sustainable development from local to global scale. The need to develop tourism sustainably also becomes a primary concern. Human communities represent both a primary resource upon which tourism depends, and their existence in a particular place at a particular time may be used to justify the development of tourism itself. Tourism is supposed to be developmental in nature benefiting the local community by improving the Quality-of-Life and the standard of living for locals and local commerce. Community-based tourism has emerged as means to ensure that the host community benefit from the tourism industry. It is therefore imperative to understand that the community around tourism development is important and has to be involved in the development from the initial planning of the development as the sole beneficiaries of the development. Sustaining the community/particular communities has therefore become an essential element of sustainable tourism. The rationale of sustainable tourism development usually rests on the assurance of renewable economic, social and cultural benefits to the community and its environment. The concepts discussed in this paper show that they have principles that are similar to each other and are intended to deliver the same goals to benefit all stakeholders involved. If implemented well they should be able to preserve the environment, ensure that the sociocultural framework of the community is maintained, and also improves the living standards of the host communities. All these concepts have to fulfil the criteria that make it economically sensible as well as socially, culturally and ecologically compatible with the communities in which the development takes place.

Keywords: Community-based tourism, sustainability, sustainable development, sustainable tourism, pro-poor tourism, Quality-of-Life

Introduction

Tourism has grown in leaps and bounds in the world and is a major economic sector. According to Henama (2019), the rapid growth of tourism has been associated with export promotion by countries from tourism consumption. The consumption of tourism has grown due to the institutionalization of the habit of holidays. As more countries jump on the tourism bandwagon, more destinations are available for tourism consumption, to meet the global demand for tourism consumption. "The role and importance of tourism, as an important

economic sector has been generally recognized, because it affects many aspects of the economy, such as, the increase in Gross National Product, the improvement of balance of payments, the creation of new workplaces, the increase of investments and the promotion of national, regional and local development" (Thano & Kote, 2015: 2). Rusu (2011) noted that tourism not only created jobs in the tertiary sector, it also encourages growth in the primary and secondary sectors of the industry.

"Internationally, the promotion of the tourism sector by government and donor organisations has typically aimed at encouraging private sector investment, macroeconomic growth and foreign exchange earnings" (Mahony & Van Zyl, 2002: 83). "Tourism destinations attract tourism because of the positive economic impacts such as labour intensive jobs, tourism acting as a catalyst for other industries, the attraction of foreign exchamge and foreign direct investment" (Henama, 2016: 1). Dimoska (2006: 1) explains that in recent years tourism has been increasingly recognized for its economic potential to contribute to the reduction of poverty in developing countries. Its geographical expansion and labour intensive nature support a spread of employment and can be particularly relevant in remote and rural areas, where a large proportion of the population live under extreme poverty conditions. "Over the last three decades, tourism has emerged as a major force in the global economy, with most countries, whether developed or developing, having increasing opportunities to participate as both host and guest, in this socio-economic phenomenon" (Lewis & Brown, 2006: 6).

World Travel and Tourism Council (2018) noted that tourism creates jobs (313 million jobs), drives exports and 9.9% of total employment in 2017. "Governments, development agencies and non-governmental organisations have increasingly sought to invest in initiatives that aim to reduce poverty through tourism development. They begin with an assumption that tourism can improve the livelihoods and incomes of the poor" (Spenceley & Meyer, 2012: 291). "One of the reasons that the tourism industry is sought after is to ensure that the standard of living of the locals is raised. This is achieved by ensuring that the locals benefit from the tourism industry by owning companies, especially small, medium and micro enterprises" (Henama, 2013: 232). Reducing poverty has been part of the global agenda, and this has been a matter of interest in the Global South, which is dominated by developing countries with fragile economies. In addition, linking tourism and poverty alleviation initiatives is increasingly being considered by destinations.

Research Methodology

The research method used was a literature review, which is an analysis of data already collected by someone else for a primary purpose. "Conducting a literature review is a means of demonstrating an author's knowledge about a particular field of study" (Randolph, 2009: 2). Van Wee and Banister (2015) noted that literature review papers are helpful for researchers, as they make research gap more explicit. "Secondary data analysis is an empirical exercise that applies the same basic principles as studies utilizing primary data" (Johnston, 2014: 619). "The primary purpose is to provide the reader with a comprehensive background for understanding current knowledge and highlighting the significance of new research" (Cronin et al., 2008: 38). "Unlike original articles, literature reviews do not present new data but intend to assess what is already published, and to provide the best currently available evidence'' (Ferrari, 2015: 230). A literature review looks at surveys published articles, and other literature sources related to the topic of interest. "A literature review is an objective, thorough summary and critical analysis of the relevant available research" (Cronin et al., 2008:38). Secondary data research was required to fill a gap in the scientific body of knowledge with reference to Tourism, Sustainable Development and Sustainable Tourism in Community- Based Tourism Theory.

Community Based Tourism

The concept of CBT emerged in the mid-1990s. CBT is generally small scale and involves interactions between the visitor and host community, and is particularly suited to rural and regional areas. It is commonly understood to be managed and owned by the community, for the community. It is a form of 'local tourism' favouring local service providers and suppliers and focused on interpreting and communicating local culture and environment. It has been pursued and supported by communities, local government agencies and non-government organisations (NGOs) (Engström & Leffler, 2012: 2). Wehkamp (2007: 9) mentioned that there are a number of different models for CBT projects. Some are run and operated by one or more entrepreneurial families who employ other community members and in this way spread economic benefits to the community at large. Others may be managed and operated by a village cooperative or community group, and perhaps with the support of a donor agency or NGO. Often CBT projects develop a system for redistributing tourism income to the community through education or health projects. According to Ånstrand (2006: 26-28), CBT is not simply business that aims at maximizing profits for investors. Rather, it is more concerned with the impact on the community and environmental resources. It is far from a perfect, pre-packaged solution to community problems. Nor is it a miracle cure that will come to save the community. CBT needs to be carefully applied to avoid problems and disasters. This means that those communities that are appropriate for development must be chosen carefully and adequately prepared before implementing CBT. CBT aims to ensure that communities are empowered to participate meaningfully in tourism development.

Community-based tourism (CBT) is always considered to be a tool that integrates the goals of the general concept of sustainable development. This means that CBT has to fulfil the criteria that makes it economically sensible as well as socially, culturally and ecologically compatible with the communities in which it takes place. It is of little use to implement CBT projects if they are not sustainable. This implies that the implementation of CBT projects must happen in such a way that communities and/or projects, where initial financial investments take place, must be managed in such a way, that the projects can eventually be maintained without the investment support (Tango International, 2009: 8). Although the term CBT is commonly used in South Africa, the definition is contested and means different things to different people. The lack of consensus seems to stem from whether the community owns and/or manages the tourism venture or facilities and whether the focus is on provision of jobs for local people, or on issues of community involvement in decision-making and sustainability of those projects (Ndlovu & Rogerson, 2004: 8). Leballo, as in Ndlovu and Rogerson (2003: 125), argued that several authors accept a broad definition of community-based tourism, as that in which a number of local people are involved in providing services to tourists and the tourism industry, and which local people have meaningful ownership, power and participation in the various tourism and related enterprises'.

Kiss (2004: 234) postulates that development organizations see CBT as a potential source of economic development and poverty alleviation, particularly in marginal rural areas. The major concern lies in the sustainability and delivery of some aspects of sustainable community development, such as:

- Long term socio-economic conditions of the community in question (does it totally eradicate or alleviate poverty long after funding dries up?). Tourism is often driven by foreign, private sector interests which have limited potential to contribute much to poverty elimination in developing countries. It is also noted for high level of revenue leakage, and of the revenue that is retained in the destination country, much is captured by rich or middle-income groups - not the poor (Khanya and Roe 2001: 1).
- Skills acquisition: Training is required since the change from agriculture to service activities is difficult for rural people. They lack the knowledge and experience to successfully develop tourism activities. Some training needs to be executed directly by

government and/or by other organizations that can be contacted for the purpose of bringing training to rural communities. Training should be tailored specifically for the community's tourism needs.

- The dominance of mass tourism operators: Trejos, Chiang and Huang (2008: 2) showed that past research has found that power relations are prevalent features of emerging CBT settings, which result in the domination of community-based projects by local elites who monopolize the benefits of tourism.

- Low employment and income: Although tourism often promises community members, improved livelihoods and a source of employment, the advent of fledgling tourism industries often fail to benefit communities equitably. High salary jobs in tourism are often scarce and require high levels of education (languages, administration, and accounting). The remainder of the jobs are generally low income, and low skill in nature (cleaning, security, waitering tables and cooking).

- Financial returns that are not up to the expectations of the people involved: Due to high development costs, tourism projects often take time to generate the profits expected by local people. However, tourism depends on the numbers of tourists visiting the destination, which means that in order to gain expected financial returns, there has to be an extensive marketing strategy to attract targeted clientele numbers (Trejos et al., 2008: 17).

- Women and youth empowerment: The development of rural women is an important consideration in the development of rural areas. According to a communication by Ki-moon (2012: 1), the challenge includes finding concrete ways to address the plight of rural women, the inequality between men and women, boys and girls, as well as giving women access to basic services towards reducing poverty. Despite government commitment to rural development, there is little sign of empowerment especially for women and youth. It is the women who always have to shoulder the burden of poverty.

Communities incur costs when they engage in CBT projects so they too have an interest in knowing how successful such initiatives are before engaging with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and others to realise the aspiration of CBT. There is evidence that a large majority of international CBT initiatives enjoy little success. Goodwin and Santilli (2009: 4) reported research by the Rainforest Alliance and Conservation International 200 CBT projects across America were reviewed, revealing that many accommodation providers had only 5% occupancy. They concluded from their review that "the most likely outcome for CBT initiatives is collapsing after funding dries up". The mentioned authors reported that the main causes of collapse were poor market access and poor governance. There is growing skepticism of the value of CBT in delivering poverty reduction because of the inability of most schemes to achieve their most fundamental goal of directing sustainable and meaningful benefit flows to poor communities. The profusion of unsustainable, supply side of CBT projects attests to this as well as the many donor-funded projects that "disappear" after funding cycles end (Mitchell & Ashley, 2010: 55). Ruhiu (2007: 2) notes that CBT, though facing many challenges, has an enormous potential to generate economic growth to the local people and make the tourism sector more sustainable. Environmentalists view it as an important strategy of enhance biodiversity conservation as it advocates responsible tourism and generates income for the local poor and marginalized people who though living in close proximity with wildlife receive the brunt of wildlife.

Sustainable Development

This section provides an overview of three concepts, namely sustainable development (SD), sustainable tourism (ST) and community-based tourism (CBT). It reviews how the principles of sustainable tourism have special relevance to the development of CBT. Sustainable CBT aims to reconcile the tensions between the three partners in the development triangle, and maintain the equilibrium in the long term. It highlights the aims of sustainable CBT, namely, to minimise environmental and cultural damage, optimise visitor satisfaction, and maximise long-

term economic growth for the region. Sustainable development originated from the modern-day environmental movement whose origin stems in part from 19th-century Europe where the traditional philosophy that humans have dominion over nature was replaced with a 'preservation ethic' (Hall & Lew, 1998: 375-376). Influential publications in the 1960s and 70s made the world aware of the detrimental effects that human activities were having on the environment (Mearns, 2012: 2). According to Telfer and Sharpley (2008: 121), sustainable development is economic growth and stability brought about by good and reliable jobs and businesses. Choi and Sirakaya (2006: 275) further state that sustainable development in the context of community tourism should aim to improve the residents' quality of life by optimising local economic benefits through protecting the natural and built environments and providing a high quality experience for visitors.

Another definition of sustainable development states that, "humanity must take no more from nature than nature can replenish" and yet another that sustainable development is "achieving economic and social development in ways that do not exhaust a country's natural resources" (Peacock, 2008: 1). Sustainable development was popularized by the Brundtland Report (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987: 43), which emphasized that, "sustainable development is one that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." The report calls for three levels of sustainability, namely, environmental responsibility, social equity and economic sustainability. In other tourism studies, there has been a concern with the sustainability of the resources upon which tourism is based (Saarinen, 2006: 2). This is because of the uneven and imbalanced nature of tourism development; in particular, the questions of power, which inspire the way in which tourism is owned and controlled (Mowforth & Munt, 2003: 141). Ceron and Dubois (2003: 59) point out that although there is in reality a general agreement that sustainable development is 'a good thing', there is actually much disagreement as to what it actually means. Within this disagreement are disputes concerning the science of environmental change, the economics of resource management, the environmental impact of different technologies, and the effectiveness of different policy instruments.

Matarrita-Cascantea, Brennanb and Luloff (2010: 738-739) furthermore state that there are deliberations of a more basic philosophical, ethical and socio-political nature, as indicated by the following quotation: "As a social goal, sustainability is fraught with unresolved questions. Sustainable for how long: a generation, one century, a millennium, ten millennia? Sustainable at what level of human appropriation: individual households, local villages, major cities, entire nations, global economies? Sustainable for whom: all humans alive now, all humans that will ever live, all living beings at this time, all living beings that will ever live? Sustainable under what conditions: for contemporary transnational capitalism, for low-impact Neolithic hunters and gatherers, for some space-faring global empire?"

Sustainable development for what: personal income, social complexity, gross national product, material frugality, individual consumption, ecological biodiversity?". The three aspects of sustainability shown in Figure 1 below have been launched by the Sustainable Tourism for Eliminating Poverty (STEP) programme. The programmed is aimed at promoting socially, economically and ecologically sustainable tourism as a gateway to development and reduction of poverty among the world's least developed countries, and inspired by the Vision and Innovative work of Pro-poor Tourism Partnership (UNWTO, 2002: 6).
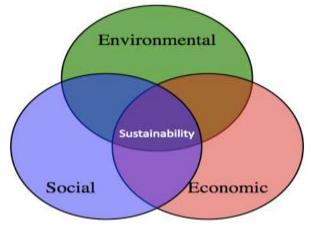
Figure 1. Aspects of sustainability

Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable tourism is tourism that does not deplete economic, social/cultural and environmental resources. The ultimate goal is to provide high-quality experiences for visitors, strengthen host communities and cultures, and develop tourism-related livelihoods while preserving the surrounding environments (Pongponrat, 2011: 2). Over the past decades, sustainability has become a focal point for tourism development around the world. Moreover, Matarrita-Cascantea, Brennanb and Luloff (2010: 9) state that ST is not just about controlling and managing the negative impacts of the industry. ST development aims to benefit local communities, economically and socially, and to raise awareness and support for conservation of the environment. Furthermore, Kauppila, Saarinen and Leinonen (2009: 2) pointed out that governments and regional development bodies have always been interested in tourism development linked with the positive economic impacts of the industry, namely: employment, source of income and the diversification of economy. However, in addition to economic perspectives, there are several different traditions in sustainable tourism and planning.

As with other industrial sectors and fields of academic study, tourism research has also responded to the popularization of the concept of sustainable development in the wake of the World Commission on Environment and Development's Report, Our Common Future (WCED, 1987: 63). Hence, a growing proportion of the academic and policy orientated tourism literature is now devoted to examining the theory and practice of ST. According to Lottig (2007: 12), ST studies simply ignore other sectors while some studies have a distinctly confrontational tone, where the potential for competition between tourism and other sectors for access to natural resources is highlighted. The consumption of natural resources by one sector reduces the quality of resources. Hence, a need for ST to constantly maintain and extend the tourism resource base and tourism activity in all areas, then it becomes possible to see tourism as under threat from sustainable development policies (Briassoulis, 2006: 6). According to Misra and Sadual (2008: 200), the characteristics of ST are as follows:

ST cares to maintain the importance of local culture and tradition:

- It is educational because it encourages cross-cultural understanding;
- It is aimed at conservation of resources of the destinations;
- Seeks active involvement of locals, which provides local people with an opportunity to make their living, and
- Above all, it focuses primarily on the integrity of the tourist places.

Many destinations are now pursuing strategies which aim to ensure a sensitive approach when dealing with tourism. Many of these strategies are based on a formal expression of principles for sustainable tourism. The principles as outlined by The United Nations (2003:14-15) include:

- Participation – residents of a community must maintain control of tourism development by setting a community tourism vision, identifying the resources to be maintained and enhanced, and developing goals and strategies for tourism development and management. Residents must participate in the implementation of strategies and the operation of the tourism infrastructure, services and facilities.
- Stakeholder involvement–tourism development must provide quality employment for community residents. The provision of fulfilling jobs has to be seen to be an integral part of any tourism development at the local level.
- Establishing local business linkages – linkages must be established among local businesses in the tourism industry in order to ensure that tourism expenditures stay within the destination rather than leak out to purchase imported goods and services for tourists.
- Sustainability of the resource base – equitable distribution of costs and benefits of tourism development must take place among present and future generations.
- Community goals – there has to be harmony amongst all stakeholders in order to satisfy the needs of the visitor. This is facilitated by broader community support with a proper balance between economic, social, cultural and human objectives as well as recognition of the importance of cooperation.
- Cooperation – cooperation between all businesses within a destination as the performance of one business affects the other. Models of partnership must be explored in the areas of planning, management, marketing and funding for tourism ventures.
- Carrying capacity – there is a need for the impact assessment of tourism development proposals to distinguish plans which encourage mass, versus quality tourism.
- Monitoring and evaluation – protection and monitoring strategies are essential if communities are to protect the very resources that form the basis of their tourism product to protect the environment (the tourism resource base) on which it depends.
- Accountability – the management and use of public goods such as water, air and common lands should ensure accountability on behalf of users to ensure these resources are not abused.
- Training – ST development requires the establishment of education and training programmes to improve public understanding and enhance business, vocational and professional skills especially for the poor and women.
- Positioning – ST development involves promoting appropriate use and activities to reduce poverty, and draw from and reinforce the landscape character, sense of place, community identity and site opportunities. These activities and uses should aim to provide a quality tourism experience that satisfies visitors while adhering to other principles of ST.

The relationship between sustainable development and CBT

According to Burns and Novelli (2008: 246-247) the definition of CBT is not quite clear. In development co-operation CBT is always considered a tool that integrates the goals of the general concept of sustainable development. This means that CBT has to fulfil the criteria that make it economically sensible as well as socially, culturally and ecologically compatible with the communities in which it takes place. The active participation of the population in CBT plays an essential role in successful improvement of living conditions. According to Frunza and Carmen (2005: 293), sustainable development and CBT are inherently connected because they share the same natural and cultural resource. Culture and social norms determine not only resource use but also structure internal and external relationships.

Conclusions

Tracing the progress of sustainable tourism and community-based tourism, two parallel domains of research and practice, is a challenging endeavour. Two rich knowledge domains have been evolving along parallel pathways in tourism studies: sustainable tourism (ST) and community-based tourism (CBT). Within both lie diverse definitions, principles, criteria, critical success factors and benefits sought or outcomes desired, advocated by different stakeholders ranging from quasi-governmental and non-profit organizations to public-private sector and academic interests. This poses significant challenges to those interested in theory building, research and practice in the sustainable development and management of tourism. The paper discussed in-depth, the relationship between the concepts of sustainable tourism and development, it also revealed not just common ground and differences that might be anticipated, but also important sustainability dimensions that ensure the success of tourism development, such as equity, cooperation, partnership, sustainability of resource base, monitoring and evaluation, accountability, training and development establishment of local business linkages and stakeholder involvement. Marketing is an important incorporation into CBT projects to ensure they appeal to the wider market, attract a perennial supply of guests and ensure the financial viability and sustainability of the CBT project.

Whether there is a unanimity in the sustainable tourism concept or not, in most of the research there seems to be agreement that it is a 'positive approach that anticipates to decrease tensions and resistance created by the multifaceted interface between the tourism industry, visitors, the environment and the communities which are host to visitors' (Bramwell & Lane, 1993 in Liu, 2010: 460). It is primarily agreed upon, that the concept should harmonize and include, at least, the three pillars of sustainable development. The researchers believe that sustainable tourism should be 'ecologically responsible, socially compatible, culturally appropriate, politically equitable, technologically supportive, and finally economically viable for the host community' (Choi & Sirakaya, 2005: 382). Human indicators of developments are important in understanding the impact of development of host communities. Tourism whose growth has been perennial wherever tourism has been developed, has a history of being anti-development in past decades. As a means of reducing the negative impacts of tourism on the host community, special interest tourism has emerged as a means to create more local ownership, and community control of the tourism industry. The interface places community-based tourism within the doctrines of sustainable development and sustainable tourism. The intention is that tourism must be a tool for development especially in developing countries with their fragile economies.

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