

**COMPLEXITIES OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT – VIEWPOINTS OF DEVELOPMENT PRACTITIONER**

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**ABSTRACT**

The sustainable development approach to tourism is based on the idea that the majority of the resources upon which the industry depends are regional and local in nature. Thus, recent approaches to tourism development put local communities at the centre of the development process, using approaches such as participation and consultation to develop regions, clusters and sectors linkages within and between them. At the heart of the process there is an emphasis on self-sufficiency and local control over change with the declared aim of enhancing “positive externalities” for the actors involved. Although, viability of tourism development projects has been questioned if not linked to mainstream industry, with market forces and government allocations determining where the costs and benefits of tourism are directed. Given the asymmetries in the sector, communities need power and resourceful allies to make tourism a real development opportunity, and this is rather a complex task.

**KEY WORDS:** Community tourism, Complex Systems, Local Development, Endogenous development, Sustainable tourism

**RESUMEN**

El enfoque del desarrollo sostenible aplicado al turismo se basa en la idea que la industria depende mayoritaria y naturalmente de recursos regionales y locales. Así, los enfoques más recientes sobre desarrollo turístico ponen en el centro del proceso el ámbito local, utilizando técnicas de participación y consulta para el desarrollo de las regiones y/o la identificación de clústers y nexos entre sectores. En este sentido, el foco se está poniendo sobre la autosuficiencia y el control local del cambio y se persigue explícitamente la mejora de las externalidades positivas por parte de los actores involucrados. A pesar de esto, se ha cuestionado la viabilidad del desarrollo turístico si no esta vinculado a la industria general, con unas fuerzas del mercado y gubernamentales que determinen hacia donde se deben dirigir los costes y los beneficios del turismo. Dadas las asimetrías del sector, las comunidades locales

necesitan el poder, los recursos y las alianzas necesarias para generar un turismo que sea una oportunidad real para el desarrollo, y esta es una tarea compleja.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Turismo comunitario, Sistemas complejos, desarrollo local, desarrollo endógeno, turismo sostenible.

## **RESUM**

L'enfocament del desenvolupament sostenible aplicat al turisme es basa en la idea que la indústria depèn majoritària i naturalment de recursos regionals i locals. Així, els enfocaments més recents sobre desenvolupament turístic posen en el centre del procés l'àmbit local, utilitzant tècniques de participació i consulta pel desenvolupament de les regions i/o la identificació de clústers i nexes entre sectors. En aquest sentit, el focus s'està posant sobre l'autosuficiència i el control local del canvi i es persegueix explícitament la millora de les externalitats positives per part dels actors involucrats. Malgrat això, s'ha qüestionat la viabilitat del desenvolupament turístic si no està vinculat a la indústria general, amb unes forces del mercat i governamentals que determinin cap a on s'han de dirigir els costos i els beneficis del turisme. Donades les asimetries del sector, les comunitats locals necessiten el poder, els recursos i les aliances necessàries per generar un turisme que sigui una oportunitat real per al desenvolupament, i aquesta és una tasca complexa.

**PARAULES CLAU:** Turisme comunitari, sistemes complexos, desenvolupament local, desenvolupament endògen, turisme sostenible.

## 1. Introduction

With the spread of tourism from the developed to the developing countries during the 1960s, the connection between tourism and development was established under an optimistic premise that led to the description of tourism as a 'passport to development' (de Kadt, 1979). In those days tourism was predominantly seen as a source of monetary benefits, job creation and impetus for infrastructural development (Dann, 2002); later, with the lack of substantial economic benefits for the recipient countries and the abundance of socio-cultural and environmental tangible dilemmas, the significance of tourism with respect to development was side-lined (Ibid). More recently, the renewed recognition of tourism as a major global economic force, coupled with the shift of focus in the development discourse towards effective strategies for sustainable and more equitable growth, has led to the expectation of harnessing tourism as a driving force, especially for the alleviation of poverty (UNWTO, 2004). As a result, tourism has definitely entered the debate on growth and is considered a fundamental element of the global development policies. Specifically, recent approaches to tourism development put the community at the centre of the development process through a framework that advocates for local development and micro-entrepreneurial models.

These approaches use methodologies such as participation and consultation to concentrate on income generation. Nonetheless, such methods have been criticized from different perspectives:

1. In spite of an equity component supporting the integration of local people and broader communities into the development process, such claims are made in an instrumental manner since micro-enterprises development projects are being used to legitimate increasing tourism development;
2. By increasing the number of "stakeholders" in tourism development, micro-enterprise projects are helping to institutionalize existing inequalities of gender, class and ethnicity (Ferguson, 2007);
3. Community tourism tends to concentrate tourism development onto local, small-scale projects, rather than locating it within the broader context of the sustainable development of the destination as a whole (Sharpley, 2010).

The tourism literature often paints a depressing picture of tourism impacts (e.g. Gossling and Hall 2005). Specifically, it has been noted that the economic arguments do not appear to be as sound as claimed (e.g. ODI, 2008; Mowforth and Munt, 2003) and tourism can differentially affect development outcomes by increasing inequality of wealth and social stratification in countries which already experience great levels of

inequality (Crick, 1989; Ferguson, 2007; Scheyvens, 2009). Tosun and co-workers (2003) highlight spatial and social inequalities particularly from the perspective of balanced regional development related to tourism, advocated as an alternative growth strategy but shaped and directed without considering many fundamental developmental issues. From the material reviewed, it is clear that tourism is not an easy 'passport to development'.

## 2. Complexity

Undoubtedly, tourism is a global process that is consumed locally, for this reason a key issue is the way in which tourism expansion, development and in some cases retraction, can influence local economies. The economic geographers Milne and Ateljevic (2001, 371) argue that "it is essential to look at how interactions between the global and the local shape development outcomes for individuals, households, communities and regions". Tourism is a transaction process which is driven by the global interests of multinational corporations, geo-political forces and broader forces of economic change which at the same time involves the complexities of the local, "where residents, visitors, workers, governments and entrepreneurs interact at the industry coal-face" (Ibid, 372). Such complex mix of processes, act simultaneously in a multifaceted way on more than one scale making the analysis of tourism in relation to development issues difficult. For instance, Steiner (2006, 1) on poverty reduction, argues that there is "a missing nexus between micro- and macro-perspectives" resulting in deficient consideration of local socio-political structures and their influence on development problems. Moreover, given that development is inevitably a multidisciplinary field where anthropology, ecology, economics, politics, psychology and sociology interweave, promoting collaboration and integration across of all these and other related subjects becomes vital if major advancements in tourism related development policies are to be devised and implemented.

Some progresses in this direction have been accomplished thanks to the mounting evidence and awareness of the danger of seriously straining the ecological and social capacity of tourism destinations in parallel with the emergence of alternative development practices to tourism particularly centred on the concern for eco-sustainability and local participation (McLaren, 2003). In particular there has been great expectation from ecotourism products and community-based tourism development, which often have been coupled together because the community level is considered a key factor in influencing positive outcomes for both the industry and the community involved. Therefore, it has been argued that governments should place communities at the centre of their development strategies in an attempt to "create economic regeneration and remedy social ills, challenging the atomizing nature of free

market liberal economics and its detrimental consequences for socio-economic wellbeing” (Milne and Ateljevic, 2001, 374).

However, “meaningful participation necessitates a systematic local autonomy” (Tosun, 2000, 628), but too often development projects focus only on the visible aspects of the processes. Even if one of the assumptions of these models is that all parties must have an equal opportunity to participate in the policy process, it ignores broader issues such as the real spread of costs and benefits of tourism development (Joppe, 1996). Moreover, Tosun (1998 and 2000), analysed the limitations of community participation in the tourism development process highlighting three groups of causes: those related to the operational level; structural limitations; and cultural limitations. These limitations ultimately, severely compromise the livelihoods and wellbeing of local people in the tourist destinations (e.g. Mowforth and Munt, 2003).

Therefore, even if tourism embodies a great potential for sustainable development by supporting growth and conservation activities through participatory approaches, it is reasonable to assume that there is a lack of glue to bind these approaches together and coherently drive the various disparate efforts to move beyond the ‘business as usual’. Although, it would be easier to carry on with conventional strategic and competitive approaches, this may jeopardize any chance of successfully improving conditions in tourism destinations in developing as well as developed countries through the industry itself, undermining its own future.

In theory, it should be possible for almost every tourist attraction or product to strive towards sustainable tourism objectives through the application of different strategies for local development, such as pro-poor, participation, conservation, education and ethical codes of conduct (e.g. Lodge, 2003; Hewitt, 2002; Vaughan, 2000). In practice however, agreement on strategies and demonstrable examples of real and long-term benefits are rare (ODI 2008; Ashley and Goodwin, 2007; Ferguson, 2007; Milne and Ateljevic, 2001; Tosun, 2000).

Most advanced approaches to tourism development are using the analysis of value chains to maximize linkages and therefore unleash economic and social benefits. This tool is very useful but it still suffers some limitations: i.it is a linear approach ii. which is often used to provide a static “snapshot” of the current situation. However, there is a potential to use this tool focusing on the dynamic nature of value chains, combining it with clusters or regional development approaches and strategically use them in combination. This raises the complexity of tourism management requiring considerable skills.

### 3. Duality between mass and community tourism

Following the discussion, sustainable tourism emerged as a response to multiple critiques to the so called “mass tourism”. A specific antipode is endogenous tourism that focuses on wellbeing of the hosting community (Table 1). However, an isolated bottom-up approach to tourism, following the endogenous development paradigm, could achieve no more than a niche position.

TABLE 1. POLARITY MAP OF MASS AND COMMUNITY TOURISM

Mass tourism	Community tourism
Relevant income source for developing countries Helps to diversify developing economies Turns natural resources and beauties in economic value Trickle-down effect for local communities	Community benefit directly and more from tourism income flows Provides a more authentic and culturally and environmental sensitive form of tourism Could be the base of broader development processes
Profits stay with external tourism operators Dependency, marginalization and exploitation of local communities Ruin landscapes, destroy communities, pollute air and water, trivialize cultures, Bring about uniformity, and generally contribute to the continuing degradation of life on our planet.	Local community lack understanding of (international) tourist needs Lack of technical capabilities of local communities to develop and sustain successful tourism strategies Isolation from main tourist markets makes community tourism irrelevant for broader development goals

Source: Own elaboration

Local communities usually lack the capabilities to understand and connect with different segments of the differentiated tourism market. Therefore, local communities need certain level of collaboration with the mainstream tourism industry to obtain relevance. The challenge for sustainable tourism is to overcome the polarity of either mass or community tourism and look for a positive interaction of both. The dominant operators of the tourist industry could benefit from this collaboration by getting more authentic tourism experiences and possibly being recognized as a responsible enterprise. The advantage for the local community to collaborate with large tour operators or hotel corporations is to link to a large number of clients. Nevertheless there is a huge risk for the local community to be “dominated” by large players. Therefore, for the development of a local community the challenge is to find an appropriate balance between endogenous approaches and the integration in the global tourism value chains.

The enormous asymmetry in resources and knowledge between lead actors in the tourism industry and local communities is an obstacle to reach a fair bargain.

Therefore, local communities need allies to strengthen their information base and negotiation power. The role of support institutions from the public or NGO-sector is crucial, but at the same time, it increases the number of actors and the complexity of locally anchored tourism development.

#### **4. Combined examples**

From a purely tourism perspective, the willingness to develop tourism tends to be associated to specific and sometimes superficial claims such as “we don’t have much else”, “we are not particularly competitive in producing anything” or on in contrast, “this place is unique”, “our people is very welcoming”. This is how tourism development is often seen and somehow legitimated by national and local decision-makers and/or tourism stakeholders who have certain degree of influence on institutionalizing to “go for tourism”.

Therefore, the first misconception is that developing a competitive tourism product is easier than shaping a competitive advantage in manufacturing, agriculture or other service sectors. There is no doubt that in some cases (such as starting a business to serve the tourists), tourism can have low barriers to entry resulting in a relatively easy start-up phase. For example, converting a residential building into holiday apartments is not inherently difficult, and starting a bistro is not rocket science. Examples can be numerous, combining differential levels of skills, investments and innovation. Yet, this does not mean that these initiatives will be successful in the medium and long run.

In fact, the “packaging” of an internationally competitive tourism product or destination involves much more: i. resources (tangible and intangible) with the potential to become attractions; ii. attractions that go beyond the natural beauties and the nice climate (as mentioned many claim to have unique tangible and intangible beauties often erroneously identified as comparative advantages); iii. diversified hospitality with a good value for money ratio; iv. tour operators (especially reliable incoming tour operator with a network of contacts outside the tourism destination and with the capacity to effectively organize the supply side); v. and finally, complementary services that could facilitate the tourism experience.

General and specific infrastructure is essential to access and experience the tourism destinations and their products. This links to the second misconception, which falls into the idea that territorial development initiatives around tourism are easier to implement than in other sectors. In fact, this is quite the opposite. There are more actors in tourism value chains (T-VC) than in any other initiative. Furthermore, complexity increases when T-VC need to be linked to other value chains when the

objective for tourism become also to deliver development outcomes such as the case in many developing countries (Mitchell and Faal, 2008).

Based on the literature previously discussed the paradigm of sustainable development of tourism in developing and emerging countries has embraced poverty alleviation, shaping the development agenda of many localities. Pro-Poor Tourism (PPT) is an approach that involves tourism development and management. The strategies of pro-poor approach can be clustered in three main groups: economic, livelihood and participation strategies, and the focus and scale of PPT interventions vary from case to case (PPT Partnership, 2006). Therefore, simplistic approaches to tourism could cause many disappointments and tourism related literature repeatedly noted that tourism can differentially affect development outcomes. However, it seems important to stress the potential of tourism in relation to economic and social inclusion. In fact, if this is the objective, it undoubtedly requires strong management skills that are not always supported by the given institutional frameworks when we come to local (but in some cases also national) tourism management structures.

In particular, the analyses of three examples from Mexico, Brazil and Colombia reveals that institutional capacity is a key factor to influence tourism competitiveness and its capacity to deliver development outcomes. Most of the diagnostics undertaken showed that tourism institutions are not included on broader economic and social development agendas. Their functions are limited to tourism promotion (sometimes with very limited budgets) and to control regulatory and quality-related aspects of tourism. This brings to the fact that tourism institutions are inevitably unable to facilitate linkages within tourism itself and other sectors of the local or global economy, missing also the market perspective. Although a detailed description of the characteristics of the cases is beyond the scope of this article, it is interesting to note that they provide examples of regional development, product development and clusters development facing almost the same range of problems.

From a regional perspective and by looking at the tourism development in the west coast of Chiapas it has been noted that important differences exist in terms of distributions of tasks and responsibilities as well as capacities between local and regional institutions responsible for tourism. This has conducted to a work in isolation, hindering the capacity of creating added-value by integrating regional tourism resources and therefore effectively influencing broader development process and outcomes (Gomez et al. 2012).

From an integrated tourism product perspective, the “Rota das Grutas de Lund” in Minas Gerais (Brazil), provides an example of how infrastructure for tourism development was put in place in first step, without considering who was going to



benefit and how. The participatory process allowed a re-alignment of policies, projects and actions among the various State Departments involved, Municipalities and Associations. This alignment was extremely important to avoid overlapping of activities, ensuring efficiency and resource optimization. It was noted that when the planning and decision-making processes occur in consultation, the execution of actions occurs immediately and with less distortion (Pimenta et al. 2012).

In Leticia and Puerto Nariño, in the Colombian Amazon, ecotourism clusters were identified and designed with the deliberate idea to include certain level of participation and empowerment for the indigenous communities. A strong focus was given to the creation of tourism institutions that could manage tourism in a comprehensive and integrated way combining economic, social and environmental concerns and therefore the integration of broader development issues (UNWTO, 2010). All the interventions above involved a great level of complexity and evolution from the existing “state of the art” if pro-poor or broader benefits had to be delivered.

Therefore, institutions are important and they offer the place for empowerment and participation. They are also important from a market perspective because the capacity to add-value to tourism products and experiences is central and it takes place through planning, coordination and market intelligence. The potential is to combine those approaches that generate value (such as product, cluster or regional development) with the capacity to access the targeted value chain/s at the higher possible level, creating more economic and possibly social benefits. This is undoubtedly a very complex task that cannot be conducted and delivered in isolation.

There are important strategic implications and the issue of power asymmetries can provide an example. In fact, the idea of creating value to access the targeted value chain/s at the highest possible level could help balancing power relations allowing the actors in the destination (including the most remote community-based initiatives) to access the market at a more advantageous bargain position versus other global players. The authors believe that tourism institutions should be designed to play a central role (not a marginal one) if tourism is to deliver what many believe it should.

## **5. Conclusions**

Several links can be developed along the tourism value chain to enhance competitiveness and spread economic benefits among different stakeholders (not only tourism stakeholders). However, create added-value and target local and global opportunities require high level of management skills. It has been argued that tourism institutions have limited capacity to tackle complex situations because they were not designed to do so. Yet, they are fundamental drivers for participation and

empowerment. The article brings examples from Latin America but it wish to show that tourism can be a complex phenomenon not only in developing or emerging countries. From excessive leakages to insufficient linkages, tourism is still far from bringing prosperity to scale, but tourism as such cannot be blamed. If tourism is to deliver development outcome, the environmental, economic, social, cultural, and ethical domains affected by tourism would all deserve equal attention.

The great potential is to be found in the chance to drive attention to the importance of the relational component and in the multidisciplinary formation of professional personnel to place at the complex interface of tourism development and management. To fasten together the numerous approaches with valid development goals, consideration and use of the notion of sustainability would allow for protection from the mere exploitation of the historical, natural and cultural resources targeted by touristic consumption. Creating unique tourist products, rich in history and tradition is desirable only if the capacity to foster positive relations between host and guests and the quality of life of the entire recipient community can be guaranteed and possibly enhanced in relation to sustainable development objectives.

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