

Factors for the analysis of community-based tourism initiatives in Latin America

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Abstract

There are plenty of regions and localities in Latin America that present exceptional attributes in both natural and social resources. Nevertheless, many of these regions have not managed to achieve sustainable development. The dilemma consists then in how to generate income for communities and how to develop sustainable strategies that take advantage of the touristic opportunities these regions provide. There are many types of tourism and not all of them aim to support and find a balance in between the social, economic and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. In this paper community-based tourism (CBT) is shown to be as a solution for this type of communities who want to develop an alternative tourism strategies. This type of tourism allows a deeper contact with the local communities and more authentic experiences. The growing impetus of CBT as a means of achieving sustainable tourism and a strategy for social development forces academia to seek a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. This paper seeks to fill in this gap by analyzing four cases of CBT in Chile, Mexico, Brazil and Bolivia. to find factors of success and lessons that serve to ensure that CBT truly enhances community development, while still protecting the environment and cultural traditions. This study identifies five variables that are a pre-requisite for the success of CBT: cohesion grade of the community, the existence of public policies that favor and strengthen the regional or local development of the community, the importance of cultural affirmation, the involvement of external actors in the implementation of the project, and the education. Based on these factors, a better understanding of CBT can be achieved, and they can be used to evaluate the social viability of CBT projects.

Introduction:

There are regions and localities in Latin America that have exceptional natural and social attributes with great tourist potential that have not managed to develop touristic projects in a sustainable way. The community-based tourism (CBT) can be understood as a combination of i) the transformation of a community to improve its quality of life and ii) the ability of the community to use its own natural and human resources. Even if those points are positive for the community, it is necessary to bear in mind that if the tourist activity is successful, there is a high risk that contact with external actors endangers the cultural and natural resources of the community. This is very important since these capitals are the main essence and tourist attraction of these types of communities.

There are many types of tourism, and not all of them aim to balance the social, economic and environmental development of the communities. According to the World Wide Fund for Nature and as Orgaz (2013, 38) says the community-based tourism refers to that type of tourism in which the local community has a substantial control of, and takes part in its own development. The community has the tools to manage tourism and an important proportion of the benefits of this tourism remain in it. Scheyvens (1999, 245-249) suggests that the term community based tourism should be used only for the cases where the members of the local population have a high control over the activities and the benefits. In comparison with those that are controlled principally by external tour

operators or the government (Trejos 2009, 6). There are as many types of tourism that appeal to different motivations, but there is a general classification developed by Cobo (2012, 419-442) from which we can extract: rural tourism with its multiple variants, eco-tourism, cultural tourism, tourism of adventure, exclusive tourism, or massive tourism. This last concept has based on the volume of generated income and the type of relationship established with the territory and the population.

Garcia, Figueiró and Degrandi (2013, 130-152) define some important points on the concept of CBT. The authors state that CBT concept must integrate the theories of sustainable development and sustainable tourism, the improvement of quality of life of the population, the local recognition of invaluable factors, and the interaction and exchange of experiences between tourists and communities. This concept also contemplates patrimonial and environmental education, cooperation and social transformation, and the reconstruction of cultural roots with local identities. This type of tourism must try to prioritize living conditions over the economic development in places where the government is not present, and contribute this way to the reduction of poverty (Mielke 2013, 170). According to Cruz Blazco (2012, 127-145), this form of tourism is seen as an opportunity to fill the gap between the economic profitability, the conservation of the environment and the sociocultural respect.

A new wave of tourists are increasingly informed about the environmental and social impacts that tourism activity causes, which has opened a discussion of what the conditions are that would allow the development of sustainable tourism. This type of tourism encourages the communities and their own forms of organization to manage and interact with the visitors and to gain profits without losing their own cultural wealth.

This typology of tourism offers services that value the cultural identity and promote existential cultural and environmental exchanges that give the tourist the opportunity to enjoy unique experiences. The problem many of these communities face is that they have restrictions regarding access to the market since many of them do not possess access to productive resources or public services. This situation shows, as Bohorquez (2013, 180) argues, the paradox of poverty, where many communities, even those potentially rich in attractions, can not transform their resources into products that have value on the market. Community-based tourism in Latin America is a phenomenon that has grown in the last decades and that is accompanied with economic challenges, social and political changes, and new paradigms like that of sustainable development and corporate social responsibility.

For all these reasons, it is important to analyze experiences of CBT to find factors of success that serve to develop these types of projects in other communities of Latin America. This paper seeks to underline the necessary elements to develop projects that achieve economic development with the participation of the local community, reduce the negative impacts, and reinforce the positive impacts of community-based tourism. This will be achieved by analyzing four cases in South America in Brazil, Mexico, Chile and Bolivia.

Dilemma:

Traditional tourism activities do not bear in mind a long-term vision of sustainable development for the local communities. Many tourism projects implemented in territories where there is a vulnerable community do not take into consideration the fair distribution of the gains generated by this activity with the base communities, instead giving the benefits to external agents. This is because, to implement this kind of activities, they need investments and specific skills to develop the tourist infrastructure and to handle the operation. The communities often do not have these assets and, therefore, the companies invest and develop models of massive tourism or exclusive tourism. The need to generate income result in serious consequences such as: overexploitation of the

natural environment, lower standards of living or loss of traditional uses of land and trades. The communities receive seasonal jobs of low quality given their low qualification. As Berenguer (1997, 225-252) says the activation of tourism generates conflicts that demonstrate an unequal distribution of the benefits.

Five elements for the project design of community-based tourism:

Based on the analysis of the cases in Brazil, Mexico, Chile and Bolivia, five elements are revealed main factors to take to consideration to create and implement a CBT project. The first analyzed element is the degree of cohesion within the community, defined as the degree of social cohesion or the level of consensus of the members of a social group, or the perception of belonging to a project or common situation. The example for this category is the case of Jericoacoara and Praia do Canto Verde (PVC) in Brasil. The community of PVC wagered on a model of exploitation controlled by the community that left part of the benefits of the activity to the community. The presence of a leading businessman with the ideal of a "way of life", encouraged the progressive empowerment of the local community. Another influential factor was the information given to the community in regards to the regulatory certifications needed to protect their own endogenous development model.

Jericoacoara despite having the identical departure of PVC did not have the same results. The fragility of the social cohesion of the community left the development in the hands of external agents who led the community to a model of massive exploitation tourism that wasn't beneficial to the local inhabitants. The precarious conditions of subsistence of the community in Jericoacoara led them to perceive the tourism activities promoted by external agents as an opportunity instead of a threat. In the other hand, PVC saw the invasion of foreigners as a threat to the stability and the development of the village. Jericoacoara also had the problem of an individualistic response that fragmented the social mass into small private interests. The leading model of a businessman was an important fact for the project since in this case he was interested in gaining profits without taking in consideration other variables. The businessman came with a certain vision of development, and that, added to a lack of community speech, created the vision for the political institutions that resulted in implementing an exogenous model. This model was designed "top down" with a massive entry of external investors and experts. This situation left most of the local businesses confronted with stronger competition, but without access to specialized tools to improve their own competitiveness. Even if there were some actors who wanted the endogenous model in Jericoacoara, the way the model was conceived forced them to be included in the hegemonic vision of an exogenous model. This suggests the importance of cohesion in the process selecting one model over another.

The organization model of PVC produces benefits in terms of development that contrast with the expectations generated by the massive tourism model. The benefits of Jericoacoara's most commercial vision are economically clearer, than in PVC, because provided occasions that the local businessmen could perceive as positive. However, the benefits of these occasions are often un equally distributed and ignore the impacts for future generations.

The second element is centered on the public policies that strengthen the regional or local development. An exemplification of this aspect is the case of a CBT project in the Puna Chilena zone, where the culture of the Quechua and Atacamenian population was a part of the "human alive landscape, which remained agrarian and pastoral and they also had handcrafted practices. In this case, the intervention of the government was

decisive in favoring the integration of diverse populations, some of them indigenous, urban or industrialized.

The Quechua and Atacamenian populations have entered late the dynamics of the production of exotic activities as a new tourist attraction. This new attraction adds the environmental and patrimonial values that conform to the same tourist attraction to the experience of the tourist. This project benefited from the design and implementation of a legislation that was protecting the rights of the indigenous culture. Thanks to the Indigenous Law that was promulgated in 1993, the settlers felt empowered and recognized their rights, thus them to accede their own land for tourist exploitation.

The third identified element is the cultural affirmation and the respect of the preexisting activities and traditions of the territory. In the case of PCV in Brazil, not respecting the culture and traditions of the community might have had a negative long-term consequence because that might have resulted in losing values, culture and tradition. Jericoacoara is a good example of how not respecting the culture, puts the community in risk due to the massive tourism model that descharacterized the community. There is a very different result in the case of La Ventanilla in Mexico, where the institutional support and the model of management empowered the community. In La Ventanilla, the community limited the entry and the power of external agents. More specifically, the community did not allow the tour operators to decide and control the percentages of the benefits for the community and the quantity of tourists that entered the village. The control, facilitated the conservation of certain cultural and traditional activities among the population.

It is important to highlight that CBT stands on a cultural exchange in between different people, not negatively affecting the native way of life, this means that its cultural manifestations, environments and beliefs are preserved and respected by the visitors. The intercultural contact promotes the understanding of differences, overcoming prejudices, promoting tolerance and strengthening the bonds between tourists and residents (Sampaio, Alves and Falk 2008, 244-262).

The fourth argument seeks to analyze to what degree the quantity of actors involved in the implementation of a CBT project may benefit from its attainment or not. The intervention of external and internal agents accompanied by specific laws and regulations can make a difference in the development and the implementation of these kinds of projects. An example of this argument is based in the legislation that protects the rights of the ownership of land. This difference often supposes the ability to buy land and control the processes of implementing tourism activities in it. Both the cases of PVC in Brazil or "La Ventanilla" in México are good examples of the fourth argument because they exemplify how the model of supervision and management by community organizations in the sales of houses and land allowed them to choose on the model of development they wanted to implement.

Another important aspect of this argument and a strong example of collaboration is the case of Chalalán in rural Bolivia, where the intervention of external actors was very beneficial for the project. A local leader named Ginsberg, the NGO North American Environmentalist, and Conservation International, combined with the community's organization with a great territorial organization implement the project with a huge focus on the conservation of the environment. All of this was accomplished thanks to the important investment of the Inter American Development Bank as a multilateral agent. In this case, the combination between different actors made possible to develop the necessary synergies that favored the implementation of the project.

Finally, the fifth element centers the attention on training or education as a decisive factor that helps and allows the empowerment of the community. A good example of this is the case of Chalalán in Bolivia, where Conservation International (the execution entity over

five years) started training the community. During this period, they approached several topics with the community such as: environmental education, business management, accounting, first aid, marketing, how to interpret their nature and culture or design of eco-tourist services. And thanks to the training system, four young women learned to speak English, there was a barman trained to make 'cocktails', and cooks trained to prepare both national and international meals for the clients. Also, one trained waitresses for the maintenance of the cabins (Freddy Limaco 2013:168). The team of Chalalán was not only trained in its territory, but also many of them travelled to different parts of the world to spread the experience of success and continue their education.

Another example of the fifth can be observed in the Chilean case where the government, with the collaboration of an NGO, created a project to form and train the community. This helped the community to have develop ecological conscience, civic formation and civil control. These educational processes were implemented in centers of elementary education, schools and associations, and helped to create business plans managed by the community, resulting in a community-based tourism project that was a new form of indigenous development. Thanks to this education, the community received a new source of income conceived out of the classic model of indigenous development, thus promoting a "way of life" tourism that strengthens and stimulates activities closely related to their cultural and natural inheritance.

Recommendations:

To implement a project of CBT, it is important to bear in mind the next elements: infrastructure, the community's right towards land possession must be clear, an inventory of resources and instances to manage the natural and patrimonial resources existing and the previous existing activities and the characteristics of the community. Each of these variables guides the design and help pick a model of tourism in each specific context and community.

It is necessary to understand that the implementation of these kinds of activities might bring sociocultural impacts to the community. Though the cultural exchange is a positive value associated with the tourist activity, this also can bring a series of negative externalities such as the alteration of customs, changes in the way of life, or deforestation and desertification. An example of this negative externalities might be observed in the Jericoacoaras's case, in which the tourism development agenda was dominated by sectorial interests and the rapid growth of the massive tourism started bringing evident negative consequences such as drugs, traffic congestion, noise pollution, prostitution, and gentrification due to the rise of the living costs (Brohman, 1996; Greiner, 1998).

To mitigate these negative externalities, it is recommended to have a strong component of education and awareness of the consequences of tourism and how to implement sustainable tourism both for the tourist and the community. In this respect, it is necessary to stimulate actions of protection and economic use of the environment as part of sustainable development, and to design a product specifically for this segment of the market. It is important not to forget that before the development of the project, it is necessary to analyse the community, the context and the type of client and access to the market of these services.

To successfully develop these kinds of projects, it is important to consider the infrastructure since if it exists they can connect near by localities developed that can derive offers for the projects in development. It is necessary to bear in mind that this situation can be a positive and a negative aspect since being near other urban cores can help to develop the new offer, but at the same time, negatively affect the cohesion of the community due to the pressure of the entry of external actors. For all these reasons, it is suitable that the tourist activity is framed as part of the development strategy of a region or locality, since it is positive that the synergies generated between the diverse

organisms, such as government organisms, local authorities, organizations of the civil society and companies, are compromised by the same objective of a sustainable tourism development model.

These types of projects should be developed by the community since it is the only way in which the local population assumes a participative role in the decision making with other entities in regards to the model of development of the community. Furthermore, it is important to rely on the support of a NGO or multilateral organism that can make capital investment, as well as give education and technical specialized accompaniment. The implication of several actors in the design and implementation of these projects, promotes an equitable distribution of the benefits and costs between all the implied actors. All these recommendations must be accompanied with a detailed chronogram of the plan of activities, a clear definition of the role and responsibility of all the involved actors, and monitored and controlled to make the activities a reality.

Conclusions:

Tourism can turn into an intercultural, respectful and healthy ecosystem where groups of people can find common interests. According to Vera (2017, 14) this type of tourism can contribute to the diffusion of cultures that live in marginalized or isolated conditions. In this sense, tourism emerges out of its traditional role as a simple revitalizing agent of the local economies and into a possible alternative to revalue the culture of local communities that have had problems with the hegemonic power of governments or companies.

The appropriation of important resources views therefore the utilization of the environment as an economic complementary alternative to the productive traditional activities of the community. Equality economic growth can join social, as well as the protection of the environment if the actors who implement CBT projects have the elements developed from the beginning. The benefits for the communities are unquestionable when the project respects the ecology and the ethnicity of the territory. The tourist activity is then constituted, as Maldonado (2009) expresses, as an alternative way that results from the activation of patrimonial resources by CBT that preserves the way of life and the territories of the communities.

This paper explored diverse experiences of development of CBT in Latin America. The underlined elements constitute an array of experiences that might advantage the

implementation of these kinds of projects. Since as Aldous Huxley said " The experience is not what happens to you, but what you do with what happens to you ".

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