

From fashion to ‘tangible-intangible’ action: local communities ‘culturizing’ new tourism development

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Abstract

Within the last two decades it has become fashionable to apply the buzz phrases ‘local participation’ and ‘local communities’ in sustainable tourism development, which promotes, among other things, a ‘bottom-up’ rather than a ‘top-down’ approach to development. This approach has, however, remained largely idealistic and marginal action has complemented the literature surrounding people-centred development. The research therefore seeks to contribute to the imminent transformation of the role of communities in tourism, focusing on the growing socio-economic force of cultural heritage tourism. A salient factor that is not sufficiently contemplated in the literature is that cultural heritage - embracing both tangible and intangible assets - has positioned local communities as powerful stakeholders in tourism. Drawing on cases from Asia and the Caribbean we are reminded that a significant number of our culture bearers and heritage sites originate in local enclaves, which are a growing attraction among cultural tourists. This paper explores key participatory typologies and management frameworks, which are propelling the involvement of local communities in ‘new’ tourism development. It concludes that cultural heritage can advance the participation of local communities in tourism while facilitating their socio-cultural and economic empowerment.

Keywords: local communities, cultural heritage, tangible-intangible assets, new tourism, participation.



1 Introduction

“Although tourism is increasingly recognized as a potentially powerful developing tool, situations frequently arise where local communities are side-lined and benefit little from the tourism in their area. Properly managed, the tourism and travel industry can bring substantial benefits on both a macro and local level” [1].

There has been a long history of tourism development that has been deleterious to local communities in Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Mass tourism in the Caribbean, for example, is hinged on the all-inclusive concept described as an “enclave industry where tourists only occasionally venture beyond the bounds of their hotel compounds” [2]. This practice precludes equal control and benefits for locals in tourism, and the literature is suggesting a continuing trend in new tourism development despite claims offering an “ethical and practical response to development” [2]. While power transcends “all levels and all scales”, in tourism [3] power-sharing has remained a one-sided affair in favour of global and macro-level stakeholders. This paper calls for a paradigm shift in tourism power-sharing to include local communities that have been consistently side-lined and under-utilized in tourism, an issue which is perpetuated by many governments and political systems throughout the world which discourage this form of community-based tourism that encourage local participation in planning and development [4].

New tourism concepts such as sustainable tourism, pro-poor tourism, fair trade tourism, and community-based tourism, are demonstrating in some regions of the world that a development shift in tourism - from government/industry control to community control - is possible and sustainable. Admittedly, attempts to involve locals in tourism development is “floundering due to imprecise and nebulous perceptions of community” [5], however, as ‘objects’ of tourism, “local communities are the basic reason for tourists to travel, to experience the way of life and material products of different communities” [6]. It is reasoned therefore that as “masters *of* and *over* their heritage” [1] local communities are strategically positioned to lead the development of one of the most vibrant and economically successful niche markets in tourism, cultural heritage, thereby becoming ‘controllers’ of (new) tourism [2]. As a direct challenge to the “top-down” approach that has long defined tourism development, the paper considers whether cultural heritage as the ‘life-blood’ [7] of new tourism is being responsibly and sufficiently explored as a ‘development tool’ likely to propel local presence in tourism development.

This discussion forms part of qualitative research which examines management strategies for sustainable heritage tourism in SIDS. The research reflects Post-modernist and Neopopulist theories rooted in the recognition that locals are not at all passive participants in tourism, but can instead be positive change agents. The author’s outlook on sustainable development is guided by Bartelmus’ Ecocentrism theory which denounces control in the hands of the powerful elite and favours local communities as decision makers.



2 Evolving synergy: cultural heritage, local communities and tourism

Twenty years ago Valene Smith [8] introduced a tourism formula which she noted would 'be prophetic for tourism in the future'. The elements of the equation: Tourism = leisure time + discretionary income + positive local sanctions, will be discussed here in the context of new tourism development and specifically the burgeoning cultural heritage tourism niche. Smith has suggested that sustainable tourism cannot occur if these elements are not functionally connected and that significant changes occurring with each element of the equation has resulted in the phenomenal growth that has been taking place in tourism. Leisure time, for example, is increasing in many societies with the work week decreased to allow for lengthened paid vacations" [8]. Early retirement and increased life span of vacationers were also cited as factors which impact present-day tourism activity.

Coupled with increased leisure time, individuals and families are putting aside more discretionary income for tourism activity, "as the money once saved for home, car, or a 'rainy day' becomes the means to travel" [8]. This feeds directly into what Smith refers to as the motivations or sanctions for travel, which vary greatly depending on an individual's state of mind, personal needs and desires, interests, leisure time and disposable income.

Smith's tourism equation and its 'prophesied' impact is most evident in the cultural heritage tourism niche market which has been cited by both travel and tourism stakeholders as a growing and profitable market attributed to cultural (heritage) tourists profiled as "frequent travellers who tend to stay longer at a destination, spend more while there and join in more activities than other tourists" [9]. The profile reflects Smith's model which calls for time, income and motivation to work well together for tourism activity to be meaningful and beneficial to both host and guest. The cultural tourists' desire to learn about things beyond ones own backyard and to experience different things is directly related to educational levels, therefore as education levels rise, so too should demand for cultural tourism activities [9]. Even whilst cultural tourists are most likely to travel outside their home countries, internal travel is becoming popular especially in developing countries where there is also evidence of increased leisure time and disposable income available to the average vacationer.

This move towards inbound tourism caters to and propels community-based tourism activities which are known to motivate and interest both local and international travellers chief among them is a deep-seated interest in cultural heritage themes. This is especially true when one further dissects the profile of the cultural tourist to include five typologies [9]: the incidental, casual and sightseeing cultural tourist deemed to place less significance on the experience - and the serendipitous and purposeful cultural tourist who are often more deliberate in their choices as they seek an authentic and more fulfilling visitor experience. The latter groups are likely to allocate more time and money [10] on their vacations in an effort to solicit the experiential value of the holiday. An increasing number of Small Island Developing States are moving away from a



‘service’ industry, as predominantly seen with the all-inclusive concept perfected in the Caribbean, to an ‘experience’ economy where there is, “a changing relationship between hosts and guests as people seek genuine experiences rather than staged ones” [10].

In keeping with the “recognition that communities can have some influence over the development of tourism” [6], advocates of community-based tourism are of the view that the experience economy is better facilitated through sharing of cultural heritage assets within communities. The experience economy is shaped by an ‘evolving’ synergy of cultural heritage, local communities and tourism activity that result in sustainable local economies. The synergy shapes a development model in which each ‘element’ feeds off the other for survival, relevance, continuity and impact. Cultural heritage assets, in particular intangible heritage, require the local communities from where emanate culture bearers and custodians of heritage – to shape authentic products that can be shared with the discerning cultural tourist. Importantly, cultural heritage provides local communities the unique opportunity to direct tourism development because as ‘owners’ of the assets they are inadvertently powerful stakeholders in the host-guest interplay as, “the local community lives and breathes the heritage every day. Who is better suited than residents to communicate that heritage and experience to visitors?” [4]. As ‘enablers’ of the experience economy, local communities are strategically positioned to influence sustainable development of ‘new’ tourism.

2.1 The local community and ‘new’ tourism development

Our understanding of what constitutes the local community continues to impact the successful implementation of community-based tourism initiatives. Communities may be viewed as, “homogeneous, static and harmonious units within which people share common interests and needs” [2]. However, this articulation of ‘community’ conceals power relations within communities and further masks biases in interests and needs based on, for example, age, class, ethnicity, religion and gender” [2]. Scheyvens [11] agrees that problems in defining the community are as much about scale as diversity, while Mowforth and Munt [2] posit that the term is ‘amorphous’ and as such community is to be seen as, “something locational within which there are divisions of differing degrees of contrast according to many criteria.” In Small Island Developing States where tourism is often the chief service sector, it is this industry that continues to heavily impact how communities are developed over time. In the Caribbean tourism context the community is defined as, “a group of local people living together in a location attracting tourists; a group of local people living together and sharing common ownership of a tourist attraction; or people of a large resort city” [12].

Community-based tourism is therefore cited as a means of achieving sustainable tourism development [6, 13], wherein initiatives must be run by and for the local community [14]. The first real attempt at enhancing local participation in tourism was developed around eco-tourism, however, “the shift from theory to practice remains a major issue” [14]. The niche has been



described as a new form of ecological imperialism in which western cultural values override local cultural values, thereby opposing the principles of sustainability [2]. There has, however, been some encouraging movements in heritage tourism initiatives at the community level and indigenous tourism in particular [4], as increasingly industry players recognise that “the goal of heritage tourism is not to develop tourism, but to develop culture and preserve diversity” [1]. The concept adds value to the adage that ‘there is a magic to discover in the local’ [3] spurring the notion of locals ‘culturizing’ tourism and in part reflects the “localisation movement” [3] in developing countries. The outlook is further cemented in Fair trade tourism which, “seeks to create social, cultural and economics for local people at the destination end and minimise leakages” [2]. Fair trade tourism is a key aspect of sustainable tourism and facilitates the core objectives of other key tourism concepts including pro-poor tourism defined as tourism that generates net benefits for the poor [15]. These concepts overlap in their general focus and if collectively captured in a management framework can advance sustainable development which recognizes locals as principal and active stakeholders in community-based heritage tourism. The development of the heritage industry has resulted in greater efforts to involve local communities and their stories as a critical element of heritage education and sustainable heritage tourism. Their stories are often “tamed”, sometimes blatantly avoided – as often seen in the case of indigenous groups - when compared to the legacies of the elite which are held in high esteem and showcased as the representative heritage of a country, “especially apparent in developing countries where it is customary for places associated with royalty or other upper- class elites to be shown to tourists, at the expense of artefacts that depict the life of peasants” [4].

This outlook is changing with the phenomenal growth in cultural heritage tourism that calls for an authentic experience of local culture which often emanates from these local enclaves. The demand for ‘the authentic’ allows for the greatest level of local participation, and significantly lessens divisions in communities which are by nature heterogeneous. Empirical data suggests that among the poorest in communities are older persons who are generally marginalised and voiceless, but who are the culture bearers needed to participate in and pass on traditions to sustain heritage tourism. It is important to recognise that the local community *is the product*, and, “people are not only *objects* of cultural preservation but also *subjects*. They are not only cultural carriers and transmitters, but also agents in the heritage enterprise” [16]. The following case study, Case 1, demonstrates that while communities are heterogeneous precincts, cultural heritage is increasingly becoming the common factor that propels socio-economic sustainability within local enclaves.

2.1.1 Case 1: building community resilience through cultural heritage tourism

The Jamaican Parliament is now considering (2009) Charter of Rights Bill for the dilution of power amongst politicians, thereby allowing for a more active voice of locals in guiding the development of their communities [17]. This



initiative may help create a necessary shift in tourism management and ownership in the country. Currently, foreign investors control 60% of Jamaica's tourism assets, while 40% is locally owned. Of the latter percentage, minority ownership is evidenced at the grassroots or within local communities. It is also note-worthy that of the four poorest parishes in Jamaica, two – St. Ann and St. James - are home to the country's leading tourist resorts, an issue which Economists argue is as a result of the growth in the all-inclusive hotel business impinging on the distribution of economic benefits to local businesses, as visitors are not encouraged to leave the hotels [18].

Community-based tourism is an element of community development that is not yet fully developed, and is predominantly in evidence along Jamaica's south coast. The country's cultural communities namely maroon settlements are more defined and sustained. The most recent community to launch its heritage tourism programme is Flagstaff in St. James. The community's maroon heritage was resurrected by the Local Forest Management Committee in Flagstaff, a wholly operated community group. The group, working in conjunction with the over 1,200 residents conceptualized the Flagstaff Maroon Village Heritage Tour and Trail. The community sought and received technical and financial support from tourism and heritage state agencies. From this technical collaboration, some 300 residents have been trained to offer services at the Heritage Trail. The community members have also opened their homes to visitors for the Flagstaff bed-and-breakfast programme as part of the visitor's heritage experience.

As noted by Chairman of the community group Michael Grizzle, "the need to preserve the maroon heritage in Flagstaff arose from the community, who saw the need to rekindle the historical factors of the area as Flagstaff was little known to readers of history" [19].

Agreeably, as demonstrated in the afore-mentioned case study, there is no 'one model-fits-all' [13] application for community tourism, however, cultural heritage tourism offers an encompassing 'experience' model that foremost builds community pride in heritage and preserves local traditions and culture. The model captures the dynamism of the niche which has the capacity to: re-define power dynamics in tourism; propel full participation among locals to include their involvement in basic conservation; develop and sustain a richer, more diverse tourism experience; facilitate fair trade and ethical tourism; alleviate poverty among a wide cross section of local communities; complement other economic activities in local communities such as agriculture, manufacturing, cultural industries; reduce economic leakage of tourism revenue; and extend revenue intake in national economies.

The above framework suggests a paradigm shift in small island tourism development, as it embraces tourism that is community controlled, with strategic collaborations taking place with industry players in both heritage and tourism. The model envisions tourism that encourages cultural communities as 'enablers' of the experience economy and importantly positions individuals and groups within these precincts as managers and owners of the heritage tourism product. Admittedly, communities will have to be guided by an encompassing development framework that embraces cultural heritage conservation and



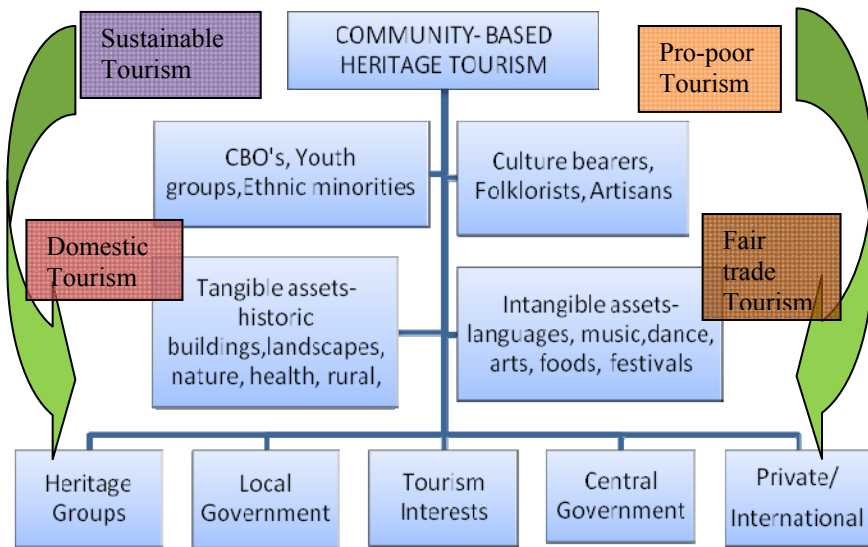


Figure 1: The ‘experience’ model uses community-based heritage tourism to effectively operationalize emerging tourism concepts, allowing for greater local equity and ‘power-sharing’ in tourism. It embraces partnerships at all levels of society to ensure sustainability of the ‘experience’ economy.

tourism management strategies. With the growth in heritage tourism there is an emergence of conservation and management frameworks, however, not many are shaped with local communities in mind. In Asia, for example, the threats to sustainable heritage are “symptomatic of the greatest danger to long term safeguarding of heritage in the region – the inadequate public understanding of the need to conserve heritage and inadequate localization of stewardship responsibility over heritage resources” [20]. A decade prior to the development of the Hoi An Protocols for Best Conservation Practice in Asia, UNESCO developed the Local Effort and Preservation Programme (LEAP) and the model for sustainable Cultural Heritage Management and Tourism (CHMT) to guide communities in how best to conserve and safeguard their cultural heritage assets, even while sharing their unique legacies with local and international visitors.

3 LEAP and CHMT: facilitating local capacities in heritage tourism

UNESCO’s effort to bring local community action to heritage conservation was launched in Asia-Pacific region under the auspices of ‘Integrated Community Development and Cultural Heritage Preservation in Asia and the Pacific through Local Effort’ (LEAP), “to transform heritage conservation into a grassroots movement, which will return the heritage to the communities that created it and

who rely on it as the foundation for their future development” [21]. LEAP is specifically developed to empower local communities in heritage conservation to ensure participation of indigenous populations and other local groups in conservation and management of heritage resources. Importantly, the end result of these activities seeks to ensure that the socio-economic benefits accrue to local communities, while safeguarding and maintaining social and cultural traditions. The cultural tourism element of the programme - the Cultural Heritage Management and Tourism (CHMT) framework - recognizes that a pervasive problem is that, ‘the packaging and presentation of heritage is carried out by the tourism industry for the benefit of its members and not by those responsible for the safeguarding of cultural heritage’. As a result, both the physical fabric of a heritage property and its intangible aspects are trivialized and compromised [20] when exposed to the tourist.

Active participation is therefore the strongest component of the LEAP programme. The programme does call for collaboration across a wide cross section of stakeholders such as local government, Non-government organisations and community-based organisations; however, the local people are critical to the sustainability of the programme.

Jules Pretty’s Participation Typology speaks to seven participatory practices including passive participation in which people are told what is to happen; participation by consultation sees individuals answering questionnaires posed by outsiders; interactive participation facilitates collaborated discussions, development of action plans and strengthening of local groups; while self-mobilization and connectedness allows people to participate by taking initiatives independently of external institutions. Self mobilization indicates that initiatives are borne directly from locals, and are developed and managed by them. However, communities network and seek to develop contacts with external institutions specifically for technical guidance [21]. This aspect of the participatory typology recognizes that practical collaborations should not be taken for granted particularly when each stakeholder brings a necessary development element which would otherwise be unattainable.

There are ten steps in the LEAP programme and each demonstrates varying levels of interactive participation. Step one encourages activities which engender a stewardship ethic and community participation in historic conservation. Communities are actively involved in “visioning” by identifying their needs and expectations of the future and how heritage might contribute to community development. Further, there are workshops that are held to expose participants to the challenges involved in conservation. On-site visits to heritage sites follow these sessions to allow locals to “identify for themselves maintenance and conservation issues and to come up with possible and practical solutions to problems” [21]. Gavern Tate in an email to the author notes that the immediate challenge cited in relation to local communities and heritage conservation is their lack of technical experience [22]. However, as noted by Russell Staiff [23], ‘the public should not be seen as a consumer/hunter of experiences, rather they should be seen as frontline partners in the conservation and preservation of cultural heritage.’ Russell therefore advocates for both the host community and



visitors to experience and understand a community's heritage and culture at first hand – through conservation. This outlook continues to attract support from a wider cross section of international and national stakeholders in heritage and is especially captured in the core objectives of UNESCO's LEAP programme.

Steps two through ten reflect similar levels of activities which allow for full participation of locals, but acknowledge and provide external support where necessary. These include mobilization of local government bodies to provide training for locals in heritage conservation; developing training programmes in traditional artisan skills and other intangible cultural activities; and curriculum development for both formal and informal education in history, heritage conservation and small business management skills in cultural industries.

There is a slow but steady movement among local communities, in building technical competencies in heritage conservation and management, a move which is facilitating a needed "return of the heritage to the communities that created it" [21]. A number of initiatives undertaken by UNESCO, have propelled this action including the Hoi An Protocols for Best Conservation Practice in Asia and the Pacific; the production of Heritage Homeowners' Manuals designed as a practical tool to guide individuals and families in the care, renovation and adaptive re-use of their historic houses and the development of the Cultural Heritage Management and Tourism: Models for Cooperation among Stakeholders (CHMT) workbook. The CHMT workbook sets out in detail guidelines for the effective development of cultural heritage tourism programmes within communities. The core elements of the programme include: model for fiscal management; model for sustainable cultural heritage tourism and heritage resource base; model for community education and skills training; and a model for building community consensus.

The CHMT was first implemented as a pilot project in eight World Heritage towns in the Asia-Pacific region, and according to UNESCO, "the project's development focus placed it within the category of poverty alleviating 'pro-poor tourism'" [24]. Each project presented different dynamics for implementation, and as such varying degrees of successes have been documented by UNESCO and its partner organisation on the project Nordic World Heritage Foundation.

4 Conclusion

The literature [1, 2, 4, 10, 11, 13] alludes to the fact that local communities continue to be excluded from development models despite movements towards sustainable development which calls for "bottom-up" instead of a "top-down" approach to development. There is power play taking place among stakeholders in a bid to eke out the greatest benefits from the industry. This interface is being tested extensively as the industry continues to witness the phenomenal growth of cultural heritage niche in tourism.

With these contentious issues there are three factors that must be addressed as the way forward particularly within Small Island Developing States open to a range of social and economic vulnerabilities:



- Conserving and safeguarding cultural heritage assets to ensure increased levels of sustainability
- Utilizing cultural heritage assets for the socio-economic empowerment of locals
- Managing these assets as a business to lessen economic leakage, diversify tourism revenue intake in societies and contributing to assets proper management

These three factors address the over-arching concern that must be acknowledged by all stakeholders that, “tourism can only save itself by a major paradigm shift whereby tourism’s purpose becomes the conservation of culture” as noted by Richard Engelhardt in an email to the author. This shift in tourism development is a notion that is foreign to the psyche of many, particularly those who have held the strings of management and control for centuries. The shift calls for a tourism that is “community controlled” rather than “industry controlled” and this in itself adequately supports the thinking that tourism should be used as a tool or vehicle for “reinforcing local culture and adding to its asset value, not as a means of extracting cultural resources and alienating them from the community”.

The concept of sustainable (tourism) development, with local communities at the centre of development initiatives, is moving away from being simply a ‘fashionable’ terminology in the literature, to an actionable concept. Economies are witnessing strident movements towards ‘tangible and intangible’ action as local communities move to ‘culturize’ the tourism industry utilising those inherent attributes that make them a unique part of society – their diverse and rich cultural heritage. The emphasis on local participation is also propelled based on movements taking place within the heritage industry itself, which has been calling for sustainable linkage of tangible and intangible heritage assets in tourism. These trends have not only extended participation among local communities involved in tourism, but have re-defined the nature of their participation to reflect commonality of purpose, and is importantly managing to conserve and safeguard cultural heritage assets in a sustainable manner.

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