



Current issues

Sustainable community tourism development revisited

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Efforts to make tourism a more sustainable option have been focusing increasingly on a community development approach, but an analysis of the differences between traditional community economic development and community tourism development clearly shows that tourism continues to be driven by levels of government rather than community interests. A closer look at the interests that influence decision making, or for that matter non-decision making, with respect to tourism development also points out the level of rhetoric that surrounds 'community involvement' in the process, while perpetuating many of the biases found in the system. There is a great need to evaluate the implementation of so-called community-driven tourism development plans to determine to what extent the local residents truly share in the benefits supposedly derived from increased visitation, since it is quite clear that they support the majority of the costs associated with tourism. Copyright © 1996 Elsevier Science Ltd

The terms 'sustainable tourism' and 'community development', increasingly seen in various combinations, have become the buzzwords of tourism development of the 1990s. Yet the concept of 'community development' did not really enter the vocabulary of academics and other professionals in the tourism industry until the latter part of the 1970s; the term 'sustainable' was added even later than that, having been popularized by the Brundtland Commission.

A definition of 'community' is important to understanding community development: For the most part, 'community' is self-defining in that it is based on a sense of shared purpose and common goals. It may be geographical in nature or a community of interest, built on heritage and cultural values shared among community members. 'Community' defined in this way is not always synonymous with 'municipality'. In some cases, communities may cluster together beyond their municipal boundaries, based on their assessment of the value in working together. Dealing with one municipality presents already

many challenges but multi-jurisdictional communities, often with strong political rivalries among the individual municipalities or regions, pose a whole different set of challenges; yet there are very few case studies that actually deal with these realities. In either case, the broad participation of all community members is an important prerequisite; the process should be driven by those for whom it is designed with ownership remaining in the hands of the members of the community.¹ Yet it has been argued that:

... the notion of a community is always something of a myth. A community implies a coherent entity with a clear identity and a commonality of purpose. The reality is that communities, more often than not, are made up of an agglomeration of factions and interest groups often locked in competitive relationships.²

Before looking at community *tourism* development, the concept of community development, its objectives and players, needs to be reviewed. According to

the United Nations, community development is a 'process designed to create conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community with its active participation' (3 p 81).

Specialists working in the field of community development have long considered that at the heart of the process is the emphasis on self-sufficiency and local control over change,⁴ making the process actually more important than the outcome. Community development has proven to be especially effective in responding to the needs of disadvantaged populations and marginalized communities by creating jobs and improving their social circumstances.

Community *economic* development or CED is an integral part of the broader concept of community development. In perusing the extensive literature of an organization such as the Centre for Community Enterprise, it becomes quickly apparent that CED agencies and enterprises, both in North America and Europe, are locally driven rather than the result of top-down strategies, and virtually all develop through independent, not-for-profit entities. The CED literature is particularly concerned with alternative developments dominated by the third sector of social economy, strategic planning and capacity building, and organizational development in a volunteer context. Without being flippant, the focus of CED business opportunities can be summarized as 'small, green and social'. Indeed, there are five basic principles that underlie CED: economic self-reliance, ecological sustainability, community control, meeting individual needs and building a community culture.⁵

Yet even in the initiatives that can be considered successful, there is often a feeling that community groups do not really have the power to choose how they should be involved since the participation initiatives are introduced by government or external agencies; that funding agencies will deploy repressive and cooptive measures (usually by controlling the availability of funding) in order to ensure that private business development is promoted and supported with training and job creation that allows for the integration of workers into the traditional labour market; that the community is rarely resourced sufficiently to allow it to become an equal partner at the table; and that, even when resources are made available, citizen participation rarely has an important effect on decision making.^{2,6,7,8}

A fundamental difference between CED and the more traditional approach to economic development, pursued by many municipalities and regions, needs to be pointed out. With respect to the community, the focus of CED is *inward*; the objective is to help consumers become producers, users become providers, and employees become owners of enterprise. However, by 'putting social needs forward as a component of economic development, . . . profit-

ability as the basic value underlying investment [is being questioned]' (8 p 2) and increasingly funders impose structures on CED organizations that bring together the 'four pillars of society' – government, business, labour and community representatives – to ensure that these 'partners' will seek a consensus that does not disturb basic power relations.

The focus of more traditional economic development is *outward*, with the objective of attracting new factories and businesses to the community. Only recently are economic development officers becoming interested in developing tourism within the community; previously, it was seen as a responsibility of the Chamber of Commerce or whatever other organization was charged with promotion.

As regards tourism as a business opportunity, there is a real dearth of information coming out of the CED community. Perhaps this is because so many of the CED practitioners consider it to be part of 'a wider struggle for a society that has an empowered population and is committed to collective provision of those things necessary for meeting basic needs'.⁸ Although an integrated approach to development that encompasses social, cultural and economic goals can be adopted by tourism development, catering to tourists – 'non-community members' – is a for-profit activity whose product is not for community consumption, but which will somehow require the community to be part of what is consumed.

Yet tourism practitioners have, as yet, not really explored the adaptation of financing approaches or tools, developed for CED, to the market realities of tourism either, even though concepts such as cooperatives, community bonds, community futures programs, etc may have much to offer. The example of the Finnish islands of Åland, where all tourism activities are either community owned/controlled or owned by local entrepreneurs, presents a very interesting case study.⁹ France, with its strong third-sector economy, has also developed and implemented many interesting tools. Some of these have even been adapted to the North American context in Quebec, Canada. Unfortunately, the English-speaking research community all but ignores the existence of work done in French-speaking regions of the world.

In reviewing the literature that focuses specifically on tourism as the thrust of community development, there are some significant differences between the more general community development discussed previously and community *tourism* development. First of all, much of the research is produced by people who have specialized in tourism or have chosen tourism as a large focus of their research interest. Second, and in spite of the terminology, many of the initiatives have been driven not by a community, however defined, but by a given level of government.

For instance, the federal government in Canada and many of the provinces are actively encouraging various aspects of community tourism development, or have done so. Probably the most extensive program of its kind was undertaken in Alberta, where some 400 community tourism action plans were developed as a result of technical and facilitation assistance made available by the provincial government in the late 1980s. This activity represents also a third difference between more traditional CED and community *tourism* development: Whereas CED initiatives frequently emerge from crisis situations, such as a plant closure, that affect the livelihood of community members, community *tourism* development is often a response to an opportunity that presents itself, in the form of government assistance or development priority.

Getz's 1983 review of the federal and provincial/territorial tourism policies¹⁰ led to the conclusion that they emphasize 'the promotion and development of an industry. Planning has been, with a few exceptions, top-down. It treats communities as resources to be developed or exploited for their tourism potential. . . . Residents are often noted as being in need of education in order to prepare them for tourism, or boost their interest in tourism'. This notion of the community as a commodity is confirmed by other authors.^{11,12} Indeed, Haywood¹³ even went so far as to talk about the naturalness of communities, their way of life, their institutions and their culture being bought and sold, with some communities being intentionally planned and constructed for 'consumption' by tourists.

Little has changed in the years since Getz's original assessment, in spite of the community tourism development programs initiated by various provinces and territories, as mentioned earlier. Concerned with reducing the travel deficit and creating jobs, upper-tier governments see the economic potential of tourism. The move to transfer marketing – and to some extent research and development – to the private sector, as seen in an increasing number of countries, will only serve to reinforce this approach. There is almost universal acceptance by governments that tourism's job- and wealth-creation potential is a good thing, and this belief underlies the development of policies to expand the industry. The relatively labour-intensive nature of the tourism industry, and the limited scope for capital substitution in the production of tourism services, leads many lesser developed countries and regions to look upon tourism as the economic vehicle of choice in their revitalization and development efforts.

Government at the national and/or regional levels can foster or hinder the development, and can influence the way in which it is developed, but the effects of its actions will be felt most clearly at the local level. Getz's 1983 research found, however, that tourism in Canada was generally ignored by

municipal governments, even though its components – hotels, convention centres, retailing, attractions – were covered, usually in land-use categories such as 'commercial'. Indeed, huge investments are made, including by the public sector, in some of these facilities, and the future economic benefits to be derived from tourism are invoked to justify the expenditure. However, in many instances the primary motivation for the investment is the creation or repositioning of an image.^{14–17} For example, in the last couple of years, hundreds of millions of dollars have been invested or committed to Toronto's Central Waterfront: a new trade centre and a basketball franchise, an expanded convention centre and a forum at Ontario Place, etc. all of which have been lauded as doing wonders for Toronto's tourism industry. However, what is needed more than anything else in the Central Waterfront is some sort of people-mover system between the multitude of attractions in the area, many of which attract 2–3 million visitors a year. The residents of the area as well as the various attractions are adamant in their demands, yet the funding for this aspect of tourism is nowhere on the horizon.¹⁸

Similarly, many cities have tried to use hallmark events to enhance their image, but 'the creation of urban leisure spaces and the hosting of hallmark events in order to establish new images for cities . . . have substantial implications for the interests of groups within urban areas, especially the inner city areas which are most susceptible to re-imagining strategies'.¹⁹ The financial and political importance and prestige attached to these developments by governments is frequently used as an excuse for autocratic urban planning;²⁰ it is not unusual for the political powers to ally themselves with those interest groups that are supportive of the development in order to claim 'community support' or even 'community consultation'. This is a fourth difference with CED: no attempt is made to bring the disenfranchised into the community participation process; indeed, 'community' is defined at best as business interests and mainstream historical, cultural and environmental groups. The involvement of these groups does not just allow for the term 'community' to be tacked onto 'tourism development', but also warrants all too often the label 'sustainable'.

However, ignoring interest groups, such as rate-payers or resident action organizations, can ultimately upstage the governmental efforts. Two examples of this are Toronto losing the bid to host the 1996 Summer Olympics, due in large part to the 'Bread not Circuses' group which argued that government funds should be directed towards meeting the needs of the local population and convinced the International Olympic Committee that the community was not behind the bid; and opponents of the Quebec City bid to host the 2002 Winter Olympics calling for a referendum on the subject, for fear that

this city will face a similar debt load to that of Montreal.

It has been said that local government policy, especially in tourism and leisure provision, has responded to the changing regime of capital accumulation with an emphasis on an economic rationale for tourism and leisure policy in the public sector compared to the former concern with the public good.²¹ The research undertaken on community tourism development has all but ignored the broader political dimension of tourism development, the power structure in decision making, the implications of excluding certain interest groups from decision-making processes, and why non-decisions occur.

'The study of power arrangements is a vital part of the analysis of tourism policy because power governs the interaction of individuals, organisations and agencies influencing, or trying to influence, the formulation of tourism policy and the manner in which it is implemented' (19 p 52). Although there exist a number of excellent prescriptive community tourism planning models, that is to say step-by-step approaches to what *should* happen, they only focus on the visible and, to some extent, measurable aspects of the process. These models posit a pluralistic approach to tourism development: there is an assumption that all parties have an equal opportunity to participate in the political process of community development; that decision making is the result of concrete, observable behaviour; and that interests are equivalent to policy preferences. There is no recognition or acceptance in the pluralist approach to power and decision making that '... interests might be unarticulated or unobservable, and ... that people might actually be mistaken about, or unaware of, their own interests' (22 p 14).

This approach inadvertently ignores broader issues, such as the real spread of costs and benefits of tourism development, and which interests are excluded by the rules set up for the community tourism development process. Any decision-making process has its own rules of the game:

... a set of predominant values, beliefs, rituals, and institutional procedures ... that operate systematically and consistently to the benefit of certain persons and groups at the expense of others. Those who benefit are placed in a preferred position to defend and promote their vested interests. More often than not, the 'status quo defenders' are a minority or elite group within the population in question (23 p 43).

By following the types of consultation prescribed by the pluralists in their models or studied by various observers of community processes, only the important, concrete decisions in the community will be dealt with, thus reproducing the bias that exists in the system.

Power or control can be exercised in much subtler

ways, and result either in non-decision making,* a shutting out of issues or interests from the process, or a subordination by certain interests to the prevailing or dominant perception of the world. One example that might illustrate this point is the 'political correctness' that surrounds issues depending on the political leanings of the party in power: while welfare recipients and environmental protection may not get much of a hearing with a strong conservative government, socialist governments dismiss any suggestion that strong social and environmental stances may cloud the business climate. Another example relates to the ethnocentrism found in the planning of recreation facilities, certainly in North America. Recreation Departments tend to assess the need for additional facilities based on the size of the local population (eg x number of tennis courts/1000 inhabitants), without any concern as to whether different ethnic groups might prefer different recreational opportunities (eg cricket instead of baseball) or practices (eg gender-specific hours of operation at swimming pools with no glass windows for observation). As Lukes²² states:

To assume that the absence of grievance equals genuine consensus is simply to rule out the possibility of false or manipulated consensus by definitional fiat. (p 24)

Aside from some of the more prescriptive models, relatively little analysis has been undertaken to determine the critical success factors in a community tourism development process.^{24,25} Researchers could provide both the political and the community leaders with much more insight into the trials, tribulations, joys and benefits of undertaking a process that shifts, to a large extent, control from the local level of government to the community at large. Too often politicians feel threatened by such a process, in spite of all the public pronouncements regarding community participation, with the result that the so-called 'public involvement' in tourism planning is often no more than 'a form of tokenism in which decisions or the direction of decisions have already been prescribed by government ... communities rarely have the opportunity to say no' (19 p 169).

Another area where little research has been done is in the evaluation of the actual implementation of a community tourism development process. Going back to a community three or five years after the original process was completed and determining how much has been accomplished, what changes in the power structure have occurred and what influence has been exerted by community representatives in

*According to Bacharach and Baratz²³ a non-decision is 'a decision that results in suppression or thwarting of a latent or manifest challenge to the values or interests of the decision-maker' (p 44).

the decision-making process, whether non-decisions have occurred and shedding some light on the reasons for them would be vastly beneficial to those communities considering undertaking a similar process. Few tools have been developed by researchers to enable communities to monitor the effects of implementation themselves. Indicators such as increased numbers of visitors, preferably by origin and accompanied by a demographic profile, increased employment opportunities, increased revenues for businesses and the community from tourism, impacts on the environment, social costs, etc are often difficult to come by and very costly. Unless the positive and negative effects can be better monitored in communities, it will be very difficult to determine whether tourism development is the appropriate alternative to other types of economic development.

As Greenwood observed in his study of the impacts of tourism on the Spanish Basque municipality of Fuenterrabia, 'only the local people have learned about the "costs" of tourism. The outside investors and the government have been reaping huge profits and are well satisfied.'²⁶

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