Community Capacity Assessment in the Tourism Sector

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Abstract: Community capacity for tourism development is community readiness or the capacity of local people to participate in tourism activities. It is a level of requisite abilities to attain the community objectives. Community development cannot be attained without knowing the abilities and capabilities of the local community. The capital assets available within a community have direct effects on a community. Hence, community capacity has a direct effect on tourism development. Tourism development may bring substantial benefit to local communities through the creation of various opportunities such as employment and financial benefits individually, and nature and cultural protection for the community in general. However, the development of a local tourist industry often fails to deliver significant economic, social, cultural, and environmental benefits. This article attempts to develop the debate on measuring community capacity in tourism sector. The paper describes a framework for measuring community capacity building, based on seven capital assets, which have been generated through the analysis of the literature and research evidence from health, education and agriculture sectors. Moreover, this study utilises the Sustainable Livelihoods (SL) approach, which is people centred and highlights the importance of existing assets in local livelihood strategies (e.g., tourism) and related livelihood outcomes (i.e., income, well-being, environmental sustainability). This information can be used for programme planning, implementation, and evaluation in the process of tourism/community development.

Key words: Community capacity, tourism development, capital assets, sustainable livelihood approach


Introduction

In the reviewed literature, community is mostly described as a group of people who live in a settlement, share same needs and goals to participate in daily life, together with a sense of belonging and are closely related to, in all aspects of life. According to Jafari (2000), community is a combination of social units and systems that afford people's daily access to those broad areas of activity which are necessary in day-to-day living. Indeed, tourists emanate from communities, hence in tourism studies a greater emphasis should be placed on maintenance of the characteristics of host communities and for the changes which their residents, economies, environment, financial and political structures undergo as tourism grows. Consequently, the
host community should encourage taking control of their future by participating and making decisions about tourism development in their home areas.

With rapid growth in tourism, more and more communities have become stakeholders of tourism, either because they are influenced by tourism directly or indirectly, or because they exploit tourism as a tool for development. Jafari (2000) expresses the view that tourism development evokes a variety of both positive and negative perceptions among host community residents. Hence by developing knowledge and awareness of the needs and desires of today's travelers among tourism practitioners and host communities, local people will be able to achieve more positive outcomes with less negative impacts.

Furthermore, many theoretical approaches describe tourism development as an alternative to short-term extractive economic activities and an opportunity for long-term sustainable development in local settings (Bennett, Lemelin, Koster & Budke, 2012; Blackman et al., 2004). However, in reality many communities still continue to face significant challenges and difficulties in terms of unsuccessful impacts of substantial economic, social, cultural, and environmental benefits (Andereck, Valentine, Knopf & Vogt, 2005; Pizam, 1978). It has been suggested that communities could gain more constant positive outcomes by bridging the gap between theory and practice (Moscado, 2008a). Certain approaches are available for assessing and building community capacity with tourism development. However, these approaches are mostly based on the conception that local practitioners lack the necessary information and have not been successful in large part because they are too narrow in scope.

This study highlights the need to identify an approach for assessing community capacity in the tourism sector and proposes a framework for measuring the progress of community capacity building. Community assessment can be seen as the process of assessing and defining needs, opportunities, and resources in a community that constitutes the basis for initiating tourism developmental activities. The product of community assessment is a community profile that includes a community's perspective of itself and its needs and desires, its current resources, readiness and capacities for engaging in tourism activities. Community assessment is an influential tool to increase the awareness and interest of the community decision makers and planners on important issues and to put pressure on them in order to get necessary action initiated. Consequently a community assessment serves in deciding on directions for action. It can provides a range of opportunities for residents as a source of employment in the tourism industry that enhance the living conditions of a local community based on their available and potential resources, and prevent their migration to overcrowded cities.

Community Capacity

According to Chaskin, Brown, Venkatesh & Vidal (2001),

“Community capacity is the interaction of human capital, organisational resources, and social capital existing within a given community that can be leveraged to solve collective problems and improve or maintain the wellbeing of that community. It may operate through informal social processes and/or organised efforts by individuals, organisations, and social networks that exist among them and between them and the larger systems of which the community is a part.” (p. 7)

In this aspect, Howe, Cleary & Ayres-Wearne (2001) define community capacity as the ability of individuals, organisations and communities to take decisions and action for themselves.
Aref, Redzuan & Gill (2009) explained that community capacity is the characteristics of a community that enable it to mobilise, identify and solve problems. Community capacities are understood as the “qualities of a capable community” (Labonte & Laverack, 2001). Frank & Smith (1999) explain that capital resources (human, environmental, economic, cultural and recreational facilities, programmes and services, financial, political, infrastructure and communication process) in a community should be assessed when considering a community’s assets and capacity. Moscardo (2008b) describes assessing and building community capacity as an important tourism development strategy for sustainable community development. Koutra (2007) mentions that the key ingredient for sustainability is community capacity which refers to human, physical, social and financial capital. The capacity of a group is dependent on the resource opportunities or constraints (ecological, political and environmental), and the conditions in which people and groups live (Gibbon, Labonte & Laverack, 2002). “Community capacity refers to the levels of competence, ability and skills necessary to set and achieve relevant goals” (Balint, 2006: p. 140). According to Lavarack (2005: p. 267) “Community capacity includes the assets and attributes that a community is able to draw upon in order to improve their lives. It is the ability to define, evaluate, analyse and act on . . . concerns of importance.” Assessing community capacity provides opportunities for community involvement in tourism activities. Many studies (Alexander & McKenna, 1998; Blackman & Ritchie, 2008; Hiwasaki, 2006; Murphy & Murphy, 2004; Notzke, 2004; Williams & O’Neil, 2007) have outlined the importance of leadership, training and education, planning and coordination, tourism infrastructure and facilities, positive partnerships and collaborative arrangements between NGOs, the private sector, government agencies and local people, local awareness of tourism and strong connection to local cultural heritage as the key ingredients for building local capacity for tourism development.

**Tourism as a Sustainable Livelihood Strategy**

Tourism rarely happens in isolation. It competes for the employ of resources with other sectors. However, it is vitally important to acknowledge that a balance be maintained between tourism and other existing and potential activities to use the resources (Tao & Wall, 2009). Tourism should be able to engage in other existing activities and act as a tool for development rather than displace it and end in itself (McCool, Moisey, McCool & Moisey, 2008; Tao & Wall, 2009). The sustainable livelihoods approach is people-centred, responsive (Ashley, Carney & Britain, 1999; Bennett et al., 2012; Tao & Wall, 2009), and more practical especially in a situation where communities and individuals sustain themselves by multiple activities rather than discrete jobs. According to Tao & Wall (2009),

“A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims and access) and activities that are required to make a living. A livelihood is sustainable which can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks, maintain or enhance capabilities and assets, and provide sustainable livelihood opportunities for the next generation.” (p. 91)

The sustainable livelihood approach underlines the importance of capitals in local livelihood strategies (e.g., tourism) and related livelihood outcomes (i.e., income, well-being, environmental sustainability) (Bennett et al., 2012).

The Department of Foreign Affairs and International Development’s (DFID) SL framework (see Figure 1), emphasises human, natural, financial/economic, physical/built, social
Figure 1. The Department for Foreign Affairs and International Development’s (DFID) sustainable livelihoods framework (Ashley et al., 1999)
as being important livelihood assets. Other SL frameworks and definitions also stress the importance of cultural capital as well as political capital (Bebbington, 1999; Bennett et al., 2012; Carney, 1998; Haines & Green, 2011; Koutra, 2007; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993; McGehee, Lee, O'Bannon & Perdue, 2010).

Components of Community Capacity Assessment

**Human Capital**

Human capital comprises the skills and education, knowledge and awareness, physical ability and health, and individual attributes that support the development of tourism. According to Becker (2009) different forms of education is needed to build human capital. Moreover, many scholars indicate the importance of leadership, as well as gender roles and their influence on learning (Ashley et al., 1999; DFID, 1999; Flora, 2004).

**Cultural Capital**

People’s level of understanding about the world, and how they are acting within their world as well as language and traditions, is known as cultural capital (Throsby, 1999). According to Bennett et al. (2011), cultural capital includes the practices, traditions, and resources that form people’s identity and the means and processes to maintain them. In respect to tourism development, cultural capital comprises the preservation of local stories, history, art and craft forms, and traditional foods and ways of preparation (Tao & Wall, 2009).

**Built/Physical capital**

Built/Physical capital indicates the physical infrastructure (Flora, 2004) and buildings of a community that enables communities to engage in tourism development, for instance, buildings, road and highway systems, mass transit and public facilities (Bennett et al., 2012; Tao & Wall, 2009).

**Natural Capital**

According to Bennett et al. (2012), natural capital refers to the natural resource and beauty, geographic isolation, weather, and amenities categorised as natural assets that form the basis of tourism products and the level of protection provided to these resources. Tao & Wall (2009) describe the diversity of plant and animal life, opportunities for interaction with nature, and high quality of air and water as natural capital.

**Financial/Economic Capital**

Financial capital refers to the available individual/community financial resources that provide them with the opportunity to support and develop tourism. Financial capital includes remittances, savings especially by increasing management efficiency, credit (Siles, Hanson & Robison, 1994), improving worker’s skills, use of technology and better regulations, users fees, tax exemptions, taxes, investments, business earning and income generation by increasing social capital through more integrated value chains and human capital through skills (Möllering, 2002).
Social Capital

The connections among individuals or organisations as a social glue that make things happen in a positive or negative way is considered as social capital (Coleman, 1988; Portes, 2000). Community cohesion is built based on bonding social capital. The formal and informal social resources, including networks, partnerships, and memberships, relationships of trust and reciprocity, and collective norms that support the development of tourism are known as social capital (Bennett et al., 2012).

Political Capital

These are the policies and legislations, political supports, governance processes, and formalised institutions that facilitate the transformation of the other capital assets into tourism development (Bennett et al., 2012). High level political capital in a community gives people the collective

### Table 1. Capital base framework for assessing community capacity for tourism (Bennett et al., 2012)

<table>
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<th>Components of community capacity assessment</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
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| Human capital                               | • Extent of the skilled and educated local population who are able to contribute to tourism industry.  
• Levels of knowledge and awareness of tourism industry  
• Extent of local population who are healthy and able to work in tourism sector  
• Levels of individual participation and leadership |
| Cultural capital                            | • Levels of local engagement in practices, traditions  
• Level of access to cultural resources  
• Level of cultural maintenance |
| Built/Physical capital                      | • Tourist infrastructure to supply services and experience |
| Nature capital                              | • Level of attractiveness of natural resources  
• Levels of protection and preservation of natural resources |
| Financial/Economic capital                  | • Adequate levels of individual financial resources  
• Adequate levels of community financial resources  
• Adequate levels of external financial resources |
| Social capital                              | • Levels of networks and partnerships between NGOs, private, public and governmental departments within community  
• Levels of relationships of trust and reciprocity within community  
• Level of collective norms |
| Political capital                           | • Local community policies and legislations that support and maintain local economic and tourism development  
• Level of political support for tourism development in community  
• Governance processes  
• Formalised institutions |
ability to have their voice heard and be involved in action and make a contribution to the community well-being (Flora, 2004)

Assessing Community Capacity for Tourism

Frank and Smith (1999) mentioned that capital resources in a community should be assessed when considering a community's capacity. Bebbington (1999) holds the view that assets are not simply resources that people use in building livelihoods; they also give individuals the capability to decide and to act. The combination and exploitation of different capital provides a community with the capabilities and capacities to grow successfully (Sen, 1997). According to Bennett et al. (2012) and Tao & Wall (2009), capital-based and/or assets-based approach is an integrated approach for defining, evaluating and building a community's capacity in the tourism sector. According to Koutra (2007),

“The social capital refers to institutions, networks/partnerships, the importance of community participation and the extent of social responsibility exercised by the institutions to the local communities; the human capital refers not only to the education and training but also the awareness needed about the tourism industry; the mentality and culture of local people and the involvement of women in the tourism activity; the physical capital which refers to capacity through infrastructure, and safety and security; and finally the financial capital refers to the capacity created through investments and availability of micro-credit mechanisms, financial linkages and partnerships.” (p. 14)

Conclusion

Although tourism as a dynamic economic sector is capable of improving the living conditions of local people, sustainable development still represents a major issue for tourism. Successful implementation of tourism development activities in a community depends highly on accurate assessment and understanding of factors related to the community and its members. Community assessment is a comprehensive process that can be exploited to provide the required information to assess reliably the needs, resources and potential for change related to tourism development activities. Applying the presented framework for measuring community capacity may provide an easier understanding of the weaknesses and strengths of a community in terms of its involvement in tourism activities. Such an understanding may help to address the issues of community capacity building for tourism development, as well as its barriers.

References


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