



COMMUNITY BASED TOURISM: IS THIS PROGRESS?

TURISMO COMUNITARIO: ¿ES PROGRESO?

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Abstract

Key words

Community Based Tourism, Sustainable Tourism - Eliminating Poverty (ST-EP) initiative, Usme, Bogotá, Colombia

Since the creation of the Sustainable Tourism - Eliminating Poverty (ST-EP) initiative, tourism has been presented to the world as an effective tool to eliminate poverty and to promote sustainable human development. One of the forms of tourism included in the scope of the ST-EP initiative is Community Based Tourism (CBT). This paper, which is based on the case study of Usme in Bogotá – Colombia, supports the idea that Community Based Tourism can no longer be approached as a paternalistic activity to support development through cooperation and donation. Contrarily, it should be considered as any other international business initiative. Furthermore, the paternalistic cooperation approach, as currently considered, leads to misunderstand the purpose of the community-based tourism initiatives and drives the communities into a vicious circle of undeveloped in order to attract tourists.

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Resumen

Palabras clave

Turismo comunitario, Usme, Bogotá, Colombia
Turismo Comunitario: ¿Es Progreso?

Desde la creación de la iniciativa Sustainable Tourism Eliminating Poverty (ST-EP), el turismo ha sido presentado como una herramienta efectiva en la eliminación de pobreza y promover el desarrollo humano sostenible. Una de las formas de turismo incluidas en la iniciativa ST-EP es el Turismo Comunitario. Basado en el estudio de caso realizado en la iniciativa de turismo comunitario en el barrio Usme en Bogotá, Colombia, este artículo argumenta que el turismo comunitario no puede ser una actividad paternalista a través de la cooperación y donación. Si no, se debe considerar como cualquier otra iniciativa de negocios internacionales. El paternalismo, como actualmente realizado, conlleva al malentendimiento del propósito de las iniciativas de turismo comunitario y conduce a las comunidades a un círculo vicioso de subdesarrollo.

TURISMO COMUNITÁRIO: É PROGRESSO?

Resumo

Palavras chave

Turismo comunitário, Usme, Bogotá, Colômbia

Desde a criação da iniciativa Sustainable Tourism Eliminating Poverty (ST-EP), o turismo foi apresentado como uma ferramenta efetiva na eliminação de pobreza e promover o desenvolvimento humano sustentável. Uma das formas de turismo incluídas na iniciativa ST-EP é o Turismo Comunitário. Baseado no estudo de caso realizado na iniciativa de turismo comunitário no bairro Usme em Bogotá, Colômbia, este artigo argumenta que o turismo comunitário não pode ser uma atividade paternalista através da cooperação e doação. Se não, deve-se considerar como qualquer outra iniciativa de negócios internacionais. O paternalismo, como atualmente realizado, implica ao mal entendimento do propósito das iniciativas de turismo comunitário e conduz às comunidades a um círculo vicioso de subdesenvolvimento.

Introduction

Scholars have been approaching Community Based Tourism activities to study the consequences for the host communities when tourism is developed in their territories, whether endo- or exo-initiated. It has been found that this approach to tourism has low economic impact with inconsistent and uneven distribution of low incomes (Steinicke & Neuburger, 2012), as well as low life expectancy of the initiatives once external funding ceases. Additionally, lack of business skills to make the proposals operational contributes to its failure (Zapata, Hall, & Lindo, 2011). Considering those characteristics, community based tourism is unlikely to eliminate poverty and generate human development. Indeed, since its first appearance it has reported to have achieved little (Sakata & Prideux, 2013).

The present paper is based on the results of a case study held between July 2012 and May 2013 in a Community-Based Tourism initiative situated in the Usme neighborhood of Bogotá-Colombia, with the aim of contributing to the study of tourism as a tool for promoting sustainable human development and eliminating poverty.

Data collection was made from direct observation and interaction with the community, as well as by open interviews conducted with local leaders, local governmental actors, and tourism scholars with expertise in the development of international Community-Based Tourism related projects.

It is proposed that this form of tourism should not be approached as paternalistic development to eliminate poverty, like ST-EP suggests, but rather, as an international business in order to effectively reach sustainable human development, and consequently social and economic progress. By definition, an international business is that which involves two or more countries, supposes a correspondence between demand and supply, and operates within a legal, financial and market context to which it must adapt. (Hurtado & Pereira-Villa, 2012).

Education in tourism related competences, surrounding infrastructure, financial investors who would lend to the local communities, and governmental support are needed in order to achieve holistic results. The model followed by ST-EP is that of funding short to medium term projects inside of the communities, but no intervention is made in the surrounding areas or in the other elements that make up the value chain of tourism.

Background

In the year 2000 the United Nations (UN) declared the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) as milestones that should be accomplished by the year 2015. Consequently, the UN proposed the implementation of tourism related activities in developing, least developed, and small island states as a tool to, not alleviate, but eliminate poverty. Henceforth, calls have been made from the UN itself asking stakeholders to indiscriminately support activities such as ecotourism, community-based tourism, rural tourism and sport-related forms of tourism, despite the ineffectiveness demonstrated by those forms of tourism when developed in vulnerable communities without a minimum of requirements being considered.

ST-EP is the name given to the supportive initiative conceived by the UNWTO in collaboration with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) at the World Summit for Sustainable Development in 2002. (ST-EP Foundation, 2008).

Among the studied experiences, Ecuador, for example, has understood that in order to have effective CBT, a cohesive community is first required (Ruiz, Hernández, Coca, Cantero, & Del Campo, 2008). Thus, it is required that the people who develop and manage the initiative must share certain interests, a territory, and a sense of belonging to that territory. In Nicaragua, CBT is understood as a response to the travelers' demands; and it is known that a higher

formalization is demanding and that education in tourism is needed. Also, a greater support from stakeholder entities is required. (López-Guzmán & Sánchez Cañizares, 2009) Among other scholarly findings is the understanding that CBT can have limitations as an instrument for cooperation, for development, and for poverty reduction because of increasing differentiation within the communities, social conflicts, problems with local decision-making, lack of local tourism business knowledge and training, pseudo participation, and work-time restructuring. (Gascon, 2013). As a must, it is identified that the CBT initiatives essentially need to be under full control of community members to avoid domination by the elite or external actors (Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2013). However, not only such internal characteristics are needed; fortunate geographical conditions, external support, and transformational leadership (Kontogeorgopoulos, Churyen, & Duangsaeng, 2013) represent the most important determinants of success for CBT initiatives around the world.

These reference examples also affirm that tourism is still an accessory activity instead of a primary occupation. The reason for this is that tourism itself does not provide sufficient income and an acceptable quality of living according to community expectations.

The Multilateral and the National Institutions

The approach taken by multilateral institutions is optimistic. The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) assured, in 2010, that by financing a tourism project to boost this sector in Bolivia, a 50 percent increase in the number of tourism operators would occur, and that the community members employed in tourism would triple ranging from 800 to 2.500 (Inter-American Development Bank, 2010). The World Bank (WB) confirms that despite disbanding their tourism department over thirty years ago, they still believe that tourism should be actively used as a tool for development (World

Bank, 1998). The International Monetary Fund (IMF) declares that even though growth in most Caribbean countries has been disappointing since the early 1990s, tourism has been a significant contributor to a higher growth. (Thacker, Acevedo Mejia, & Perrelli, 2012). Meanwhile, the UNWTO supports the idea of development through tourism, thanks to donor countries and a more effective assistance (UNWTO, 2011). This model has given community-based tourism a high dependency on external donor funding. Furthermore, this method does little to empower the local communities; instead it often becomes an imbroglio of detachment and involvement, of paternalistic protection and mutual exploitation, of generosity and hospitality, and also of corruption and self-interest (Sin & Minca, 2014). It might well be considered that current CBT is only separated from "pro poor" tourism by a very thin line. Both of them, by definition, are developed in the heart of a vulnerable community which finds in tourism an opportunity to generate development. These two concepts of tourism are considered as vacation options for those seeking new experiences and for those who seek philanthropic recreation. By definition, pro-poor tourism needs the community to stay poor in order to be attractive. It is even suggested that pro-poor tourism can be an over-complication of a common sense development approach that any responsible government should promote. (Butler, Curran, & O'Gorman, 2013)

These considerations lead to questioning of the multilateral institutions' basic assumptions and actions and if a new model for CBT is to be considered.

As for the local panorama, Colombia first began talking about tourism in the late 90's when the General Law of Tourism, the Law 300 of 1996, came into the scope as a way of regulating the interactions within the tourism industry in a comprehensive way. In its first article, the General Law of Tourism states that tourism should be recognized as an important industry for the country's development; and therefore, it would be subject to special protection from the government. After that first law, the Tourism Sector Plan

2003-2006 "Tourism for a new country", set as an objective the empowerment and stronger participation of the local communities in the development of the industry. Later, in 2005, a CONPES (National Council of Economic and Social Policy) document was written. The CONPES 3397 policy for the tourism sector stated that tourism was not only an economic activity but also a tool for social development. Afterwards, in year 2008, came the Tourism Sector Plan 2008-2010 denominated "Colombia: world class tourism destination", where for the first time it was considered as a strategy the development of community based tourism activities in order to diversify the offer, and the Tourism Sector Plan 2011-2014 "Tourism, a prosperity factor for Colombia" outlined the need of having a specific Community Based Tourism policy. The last Tourism Sector Plan "Tourism for peace building" was publicly presented the last week of august 2014, and it sets the strategies to be developed in the next four years, one of which is granting microcredits for the poor and indigenous communities which present touristic potential contributing in this way to the poverty reduction.

Panorama for Community Based Tourism

International human mobility is a natural singularity within the tourism activity. Without tourists, the purpose of conceiving tourism as a social, cultural and economic phenomenon (World Tourism Organization UNWTO, 2007) is impossible. The consumer is, necessarily, brought to the tourism product or service, and the consumption is made through the enjoyment of the scenery and culture and through the activities conducted by the host community (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2006).

When people have the opportunity to see, live, and taste that, which is different from the norm, satisfaction levels are heightened and drawn to broader dimensions increasingly harder to satisfy. This characteristic leads to ever more demanding tourists who will want to novelty in every

trip made. Authors say Community-Based Tourism is a response to the need for new forms of tourism and different alternatives. (López-Guzmán Guzmán & Sánchez Canizares, 2009) (Guzmán-López, Borges, & Castillo Canalejo., 2011). This approach to tourism responds to market dynamics of supply and demand. The success of the activity depends on effective marketplace value and quality of the products developed. (Manyara & Jones, 2007). This means that the community-based tourism initiatives are in the same basket as adventure travel, sun and beach tourism, cultural tourism and in general, all other forms of mass tourism-with the difference that those who develop Community-Based Tourism are congregations of vulnerable people who start to work in tourism because somebody else told them they could. In the other forms of tourism, a group of investors come together to exploit a territory or a tourism related business such as hotel, restaurant, and any other travel related activity.

This sole comparison manifests the disadvantage with which the CBT initiatives are started and hardly ever overcome. The reason why an international business point of view is needed, is because only through this perspective, can competitive advantage be developed. If the community had the tools needed to properly interact with the visitors, an intermediate would be superfluous and higher benefits would accrue directly to the community. It is understood that not every member of the community would have the qualities or characteristics needed to lead such an enterprise, but leadership attitudes combined with a sense of worldly knowledge is what Iorio and Wall call the "cosmopolitan locals"--those residents who play key roles in the development of their communities (Iorio & Wall, 2012). Understanding the nature of CBT gives the possibility of understanding that the international business approach does not disrupt with the principles of CBT. Discussions are constantly held around the true meaning of the CBT term. Some authors propose that this type of tourism is where the community has a participatory role (Lindberg & Hawkings, 1993), (Tosun, 2000) while others assure that the community

is to be the one and only actor controlling and profiting from the activity (Nault & Stapleton, 2011). As Murphy stated, if tourism is to become successful, it needs to be planned and managed as a renewable resource industry, based on local capacities and community decision making, and with emphasis on the interrelated nature of tourism development in terms of its component parts: physical, economic and social considerations, accessibility, routing, intervening opportunities, development stage and competitiveness (Murphy, 1985). Moreover, tourism has been considered as an industry capable of balancing economic development and environmental protection in rural areas in a more effective way than other industries such as mining and manufacturing (Zeng & Ryan, 2012). However, the community cannot work alone; a strong institutional backstage is needed to support the activities (Li, 2006).

In Colombia, the General Law of Tourism (Ley General de Turismo, 1996), published in 1996, amended in 2006 and again in 2012, includes a paragraph concerning the participation of the community in tourism development. Nevertheless, the participation is conceived as a consultancy. According to the Article 2 of the law 1558, *"the communities are constituted as part and subject of consultancy in decision making processes, in the circumstances that require it so, for which a previous consent will be made, in a free and informed way, as a legal instrument adjusted to the international framework of the United Nations"* (Colombian Congress, 2012). By the definition of the law, Colombian communities do not benefit from protagonist participation but, rather, are identified as consultancy subjects.

Colombia

As many other Latin American countries, Colombia has started a transformation towards market opening and liberalization in the need to be a player in the globalized economy. In the 1990s, Colombia first experienced economic liberalization, and in that same decade was written the first tourism law.

The General Law of Tourism proposed the creation of the country's trademark; and, for the first time, tourism marketing campaigns were launched. By the late 2000s, Colombia had identified tourism as the third most contributing activity to the country's economy, after nickel and petroleum, and consequently proposed that tourism should be approached as a "World Class" sector.

Following the government data, between 2005 and 2012, Colombia had an increased variation of inbound tourism, ranging from 933.000 visitors to 1.693.000 travelers (Proexport, 2013), which represented an income for the country of 2 million dollars for the first term and of 3.2 million dollars by the end of 2012. With these positive results, the government began a quest to find out what would make the country a more competitive destination. As a result, seven strategies were identified: 1) Quality improvement of destinations and of the touristic products, 2) Improvement of tourism infrastructure, 3) Better marketing, promotion, and commercialization, 4) Creation of a tourist information system, 5) Increase in air transportation connections, 6) Incentives for investors in the tourism related offer, and 7) Education for sensitization towards tourism (MinCIT, 2008). The characteristics that detain tourism development in the country and that need to be approached through the strategies proposed by the central government reflect the micro situation lived by the community in Usme. For this reason, similar strategies are to be considered.

Based on the fact that education is the strategy directly related to the work of a university, a proposal was made to make a case study of a community-based tourism initiative situated in Bogotá, while educating the community in tourism related themes. In this way, a closer relationship would be developed and thorough analysis would be feasible. The main purpose was evaluating their human development achievements through tourism related activities and in this way contributing to the study of CBT as a tool for eliminating poverty.

The Case

The place is Agroparque Los Soches, situated in the peripheral area of urban Bogotá, in the rural locality of Usme. A proposal to develop tourism related training to CBT engaged communities was made to the mayor of the locality. This area is an emerging touristic destination and one of the first places to encounter community based tourism as an alternative way of work in the rural area of Bogotá.

Demographically, Usme is home to approximately 300.000 people. It has an extension of 16 hectares, and 85% of the soil is classified as rural (Bogotá City Hall, 2013). The inhabitants of Usme are known for their vulnerable characteristics, and the neighborhood itself is perceived as an insecure destination within Bogotá. Displaced victims of the violence in Colombia end up living in the poorest areas of the city. The localities of Usme, Soacha, and Ciudad Bolívar have an estimated 40 percent of their residents living in extreme poverty (Kirk, 1993). Between year 2012 and 2013, 1.052 declarations of displaced families were reported in the local City Hall of Usme. Among the other localities that have this same situation, Usme accounted for the highest number of declared displaced families in Colombia. (Alta consejería para los derechos de las víctimas, la paz y la reconciliación, 2013). This vulnerable population shares the territory with peasants and with descendants of indigenous tribes. The primary source of living is agriculture.

Usme also has the characteristic of being strategically situated as a connection between the capital city of Colombia and the south east of the country, and it is known as Bogotá's pantry (Bogotá City Hall, 2013). It is also the home of the largest high moor of the world, Sumapaz, (Instituto de Investigación de Recursos Biológicos Alexander Von Humboldt, Colombia, 2013) and, therefore, hosts a unique variety of fauna and flora. Bird watching is one of the preferred activities carried out by foreign visitors, and, because of its rural environment, agricultural activities are also offered for the visitors' experience and enjoyment. The indigenous

heritage of the local people is also attractive because of the story telling that accompanies the ecological paths traced by the inhabitants.

The Agro Park has the peculiarity of beginning activities 20 years ago, as a response to undermine the urban expansion of Bogotá. The 200 families that inhabited the settlement known as *Soches* understood that constituting an enterprise that involved a better use of the land, as well as having the opportunity to preserve its identity and indigenous and peasant origins, would be the only way to maintain their territory the way they wanted. The enterprise was then thought of as a tourism related activity, and the financial benefits were to be re-invested for the community's progress. Currently, the Agro-Park offers tourists the chance to "live one day as a peasant", so agricultural activities are offered for the visitors to carry out. Also, two ecological paths had been traced, and the visitors have the chance to take guided walks on which they can learn about the endemic flora while listening to legendary stories of Usme. Food services are provided by the local families who offer the visitors home-cooked meals. Yogurt, *arepas*, cheese, and potato preparations compose the menu.

The fieldwork in the Agroparque Los Soches was undertaken between July 2012 and May 2013. Throughout this period of time, weekly visits were made to the Agro-park initially to make contact with the local players which then led us to direct contact with the inhabitants. After the first encounters, a chronogram for the tourism related trainings was made and the classes began.

Of the 200 families that live in *Soches*, 90 of them are linked to tourist related activities by working as tour guides, preparing food to sell to the tourists, guiding the agricultural activities, or just letting the walking paths transverse their private property. Initially, 40 members of the community directly involved with tourism activities enrolled in the courses. The first day of class, only women with their children attended. This characteristic carried on for the next encounters. The women

explained that the men believed tourism was “woman’s work” while men to work the land.

In this way, tourism has given the women an opportunity toward empowerment. However, the fact that only they are responsible for household and childcare duties does not allow for the time, energy, and commitment to further develop tourism related business activities.

Likewise, the surrounding territory is hardly ideal. Though the natural resources may be attractive to some, the transportation inadequacies, insecure conditions, lack of entrepreneurial initiative, and lack of tourism-specific knowledge provide for an uncompetitive destination. Additionally, the local institutional support is guided by only temporary interests.

Approach to Other Sources

Data collected *in situ* with the community is completed by interviews made to local government representatives, scholars, and community members.

A broader aspect of human development was considered so to include not only the three components proposed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)-- the Human Development Index (HDI) of health (life expectancy at birth indicator), education (mean years and expected years of schooling indicator) and living standards (gross national income per capita indicator) (United Nations Development Programme, 2013)--but also women empowerment, broadening of living options, accessibility to the place where the initiatives operate, and feeling of satisfaction experienced by the people of the communities.

With those indicators in mind, the following conclusions were made:

- Even though the people living and working in the tourism initiative, report satisfaction with the initiative, they have manifested that tourism does not permit them live decently because the incomes are low and temporal. This affirmation coincides with statistical evidence that the standard of living within by the community is lower than the standard of living of the country as a whole. According to the HDI classification made by the UNDP in 2012 where countries are divided into low, medium, high and very high HDI, Colombia was classified as “high” (United Nations Development Programme, 2013). After 20 years of operation, agriculture still provides their main source of living.
- Women empowerment is perhaps the most outstanding fact. However, the empowerment perceived cannot be considered as a decent job. Even though the women have found a productive and enjoyable occupation outside of their households, they do not receive the legally required labor benefits.
- Support given by governmental institutions such as the city hall and the district’s tourism institute is only temporary.
- Through the years, the support given to the Agro Park was not made through monetary funding but rather in kind. Members of the community lend a territory for the social center to function. Governmental members and university academics have been providing training, and the district has granted academic trips to the leaders of the community so they can learn from other experiences.
- The way of measuring goal achievements of poverty reductions, according to the UN Millennium Development Goals, is considered only by three indicators: reduce by half the number of people whose income is less than \$1.25 a day, achieve full and decent employment for all, and half the proportion of people suffering from

hunger. In the case of the Agro Park, while none of the people suffer from hunger because they are land workers, none of them have access to decent employment in the terms of having access to the conditions stated by law. Their income remains below \$1.25 a day.

- Tourism is a business like any other. In this sense, it should be approached as any other regular international business initiative in order to be successful due to the fact that the target of visitors interested in this type of tourism are foreigners.
- The paternalistic approach taken until now might mislead the intentions of generating development for the communities and, instead, is leading to a vicious circle where the undeveloped need to remain undeveloped in order to be considered attractive and competitive destinations. Pro-poor tourism, ecotourism, and community-based tourism are only divided by very blurred lines.

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