The Case for Community-Led Tourism Development: Engaging & supporting entrepreneurial communities

Abstract

This paper critically assesses a case study approach to community-led tourism development based upon reflective observational research carried out by the author between 2004-2006. The paper establishes the ad-hoc nature of stakeholder and volunteer led development projects and identifies a lack of available resources in either academic or practical fields to support individuals and groups involved in these projects. Often these are good examples of community entrepreneurship or are a reaction to the often-missed opportunity to encourage tourist spend. Projects discussed in the paper include interpretation, product development and community enterprise initiatives.

The research is underpinned by observational and experiential reviews of work delivered through innovative methodologies to inform community consultation and subsequently supported by the development of strategies that lend a clear vision to the community aim. These developments often have considerable potential to make a significant impact on local economies and community socio-economics and strengthen public sector relationships through strategic clarity. Often they only come about through professional input at a regional level and are still delivered through a top-down approach, even though their altruistic vision and successful community engagement is bottom-up in ideology.

Further research identifies a similar trend in Asia and Africa where community led tourism projects are considered a key catalyst for economic regeneration. In all the cases discussed there is a clear lack of accessible information and it is the overall aim of this paper to highlight a greater need to reflect upon existing case studies, to address the theoretical perspectives of sustainable development in this context, and to create a toolkit for potential sustainable communities.

Keywords

Community, tourism, sustainable development, social inclusion, local economies, multiplier & leakage

Introduction

This paper contends that whilst much is known about tourism at a community level, there is little available to community practitioners to support individuals and groups with good ideas to create real projects that work for the benefit of the local community. More often than not it seems, at least to community participants, that academics are engaged in philosophical debate, local authorities in pursuing their own agendas and local business in increasing profitability. None of these generalisations are true, and some shining examples of good practice that will be discussed in this paper illustrate what can be achieved with vision, drive, cohesion and participation of communities in developing tourism destination products that have credibility, focus and economic benefit for the wider community. The paper considers only briefly some of the theory that relates to the topic, because much of that is well known. This paper instead is concerned with how the myriad examples of good practice can be shared, disseminated and used to provide guidance and ideas to other entrepreneurial

communities wanting to engage in projects which often reach farther and wider than may at first appear be apparent. The paper argues that it is crucial that support in some form is necessary for communities wanting to have leadership and influence to develop the local tourism and hospitality sectors.

The overall inspiration for the paper lies in the authors personal experience of delivering community led projects in the Peak District National Park, and a subsequent desire to share these experiences with others whilst helping other communities improve their tourism potential. That experience highlights a range of issues that underpin and challenge theory, but similarly proves there is a lack of available support.

Both these aims are supported effectively by Shaw and Williams (2004: 183-4) who similarly identify that:

> *The array of studies on residents' perceptions of tourism, along with the application of various conceptual frameworks ... all point to the importance of increased community participation ... the conceptual frameworks for such participation have been partially constructed in abstract terms, while more specific frameworks tend to have been disproportionately researched in the context of eco-tourism developments in fragile environments. The shift from theory to practice remains a major issue in community tourism planning in all types of environments"*

The fact much has been written in theoretical terms is also supported by Beech and Chadwick (2006) explaining that *"since ... Murphy's (1985) text on the topic, community-based tourism has become a growth area in tourist writing in recognition that, although tourists emanate from communities, they visit destinations or host communities and that is where the impacts occur"*. Indeed much has been written, but much of this relates to research, reviews and occasional publications providing guides and toolkits to development, but little of this information is available to community leaders and in the UK there is a real scarcity of resources.

The paper does not provide a detailed methodology because it describes purely previous observational and experiential research and allows the author to revisit early experiences in community participation. There is the inclusion of some other experiences recalled by other practitioners to demonstrate the issue is geographically disparate in nature and is a worldwide challenge, because the underpinning barriers are common. There are of course other fields of research and conceptual frameworks which need to be considered alongside this paper, because these are the models which actually turn community-led tourism from good idea to successful project. These will not be discussed in detail here but may be alluded to through the subsequent discussion.

- Multiplier and Leakage Effect
- Entrepreneurship
- Civic & Community Pride
- Social Inclusion
- Protection of community resources

Community Tourism

As Shaw and Williams describe community tourism is often linked to sustainability, so the definitions for this paper will also look at some of the historical development of community tourism, which is often more focussed on community participation than community-led approaches, although both are considered principally the same ideology. For a sustainable tourism viewpoint France (1997) offers some insight into the approach and the nature of community tourism as an alternative management approach, describing it thus: *"A type of tourism run by and for the local community. It may be alternative in character ... or may cater for larger numbers and have more in common with aspects of mass tourism* [it can even] *be associated with organised packages and even coach travel"* (France 1997:16). She also goes on to provide a useful historic contextualisation, noting that in 1991 the Department for the Environment (France 1997:26) identified that amongst the guiding principles they proposed for sustainable development, it is implicit that such initiatives would only be successful if there was a *"movement towards integration of the physical environment , the cultural environment (host community) and the tourist....future planning of tourism* [requires effort] *to incorporate community representation into the planning process"*. However there is also recognition within this that it will be difficult to achieve because of the problem of *"defining the true meaning of community because of its diversity and complexity of social construction"* which makes *"universal agreement of such wide representations of interests...difficult"*. Hayward (1988:105 cf France 1997:28) also usefully identifies that any community resident, "*as a community member is affected by tourism in all its positive and negative manifestations* [because they] *become part of the tourist product attracting tourists through their culture and hospitality"*.

Establishing that it is difficult to identify a community in the broad sense should not be a limiting factor, especially as this paper is specifically concerned with a place-located community defined by location. As Shaw and Williams (2004:178) state *"communities are defined in various ways, but usually in geographical terms"* although they also recognise that *"communities are complex entities and far from homogenous (Madrigal, 1995), thus presenting significant measurement difficulties"*. A further definition offered by Wall and Mathieson (2006:322) *"refers to enhancement, at the local level, of the capability to participate in the development process. Opportunities should be provided for local participation in tourism, both directly through investment in and employment in tourist businesses as well as in supporting activities such as agriculture and craft industries"*. It is these relationships which need to be understood. Shaw and Williams (2004: 23) recognise that communities *"may resist or embrace, or simply be overwhelmed by, the influences of the tourists. These host-guest relationships are central to tourism experiences and tourism impacts"*. This then, suggests a fragile balance and highlights the need for communities to play an active role in tourism development, but what if the community already resents tourists, or has already become a commodified component of the tourism industry.

Contemporary Views on Community Participation

None of that which has been discussed thus far is anything new. Indeed many public sector organisations are keen, and have a democratic need to ensure that communities are consulted and involved in development, but the reality of participation is often far from conceptual ideas and best practice guidelines. Public meetings and consultation events do not equate to the true ethos of community participation in planning processes, and are about asking rather than involving community members.

For example Tourism Concern (cf Shaw & Williams, 2004:182) suggests tourism should:

- *"Be run with the involvement and consent of local communities, which of course links directly with the ideas of community participation"*

- *"Be in a position to share profits 'fairly' with the local community"*

- *"Involve communities rather than individuals"*

However, these altruistic aims are limited by factors discussed by Beech and Chadwick (2006:349). These summarly include:

- Nature of politics and degree of political literacy and understanding

- Nature of tourism and tourism issues

- Perception of tourism and history of involvement in tourism

- Attitudes of media.

Other points cited in Beech and Chadwick are those proposed by Murphy (1985) and Jenkins (1993) which suggest additional barriers to community participation:

- Apathy amongst citizens

- Cost in relation to time and money

- Decision making takes longer with community involvement#

- Ensuring fair opportunities for representation from the whole community

- Lack of understanding of complex planning issues and processes

These points perhaps differentiate what is understood by participation with the notion of leadership in the community, where ideas and projects take a more bottom-up approach, instead of top-down, where partnerships between public sector organisations, communities and private sector work together. Some of these barriers are also discussed by Mathieson & Wall (2006: 307), identifying that *"communities are not homogenous, there are uneven power distributions, a multiplicity of stakeholders that are involved, different degrees of experience and tourism, a lack of desire to be involved ... a political and administrative history ... that is not conducive to such processes"*.

For any community participation to be effective Shaw & Williams (2004: 182) highlight it is essential to integrate "*local community needs and ways of life with tourism developments to avoid the problems and conflicts' associated with erosion of local cultures*" These ideals of community tourism *"are increasingly part of the state and NGO agenda's billed under 'community tourism' or sustainable tourism'".* At this point the paper has come full circle, from looking at the origins of community involvement in tourism set in the context of sustainability, to a recognisably different aspect of tourism management which contributes to sustainability and giving consideration throughout to the different stakeholder groups. This indeed being the focus of much of the authors' experience in delivering community focussed tourism projects.

Observational and Experiential Data

As Manager of the Peak District Sustainable Tourism Forum Project (PDSTF) hosted at University of Derby the author was responsible for developing and delivering a range of measures to support economic growth in the Peak District National Park. The project was in part a reaction to the impact of Foot & Mouth, and in part a response to the impact of day trippers on the local environment who visit in high numbers but make little financial contribution. The Peak District has for a number of years, due to proximity to major conurbations, debated options such as Visitor Payback Schemes and Public Transport Initiatives to reduce tourism impacts. The overarching aim of PDSTF and its sister projects (Hospitality & Tourism Training (HATTS), Leader+ Tourism Opportunities for Women & Young People, Foods From the Peak District) was to provide training and support to improve business quality whilst encouraging visitors to stay longer and therefore spend more money. The project funding was such that innovative approaches could be taken to project development so long as outputs were met in achieving economic growth, increased employment and new business start ups. Such projects provide an opportunity, therefore, to experiment with new ideas.

Whilst in some areas of the Peak District the project aims this could be achieved through one-to-one business support and dissemination of information through conferences and training sessions, in others the situation was more complex. Wirksworth, a small historic quarrying community on the edges of the National Park had, in 2004, employed a regeneration officer as part of the NOW project (New Opportunities Wirksworth) to focus on development of Arts Projects and Community Events. This was itself a response to the decline and the loss of traditional industries and the opportunity to develop a growing community of artisans. However, the overall tourist offer was not socially or geographically cohesive. Facilities and attractions included an annual arts festival, a small but underused and difficult to access heritage centre in the town centre, a small but developing heritage railway at the bottom end of the town, down a long hill, and some important but overlooked historic buildings. Wirksworth has notable literary connections with George Eliot, was the childhood home of yachtswoman Ellen MacArthur and is close to the High Peak Trail, Derwent Valley Heritage Corridor (a UNESCO World Heritage Site) and The National Stone Centre. However, the brown tourist signs leading to the most popular local attraction, the Severn Trent managed Carsington Water Reservoir with over 1 million visitors a year, actively direct people away from Wirksworth because in the 1980s the community was

concerned about overcrowding and congestion. It is, ironically, this passing trade which is now needed to revitalise the town.

The question posed in 2004 was, quite simply, how? How could this small, industrial community attract visitors? How could the shops and cafes maximise the potential of visitors to the Heritage Centre and Railway? How could niche market attractions, such as the Church and Arts Festival become a cohesive whole? How could the entire community support and benefit from tourism? How ultimately could visitors be attracted to visit the town, to stay in the local area and to spend more money?

The local community readily criticised the local authority about the presentation of the town and lack of promotion. The local authority was, however, more focussed on its statutory duties of street scene, toilets and highways and had little additional involvement in the town. The attractions were small and disparate and there was unnecessary competitive conflict. The focus then of the Wirksworth Tourism Cluster Project was to get the different stakeholders with a vision of shared marketing costs and promotional activity and the creation of a holistic product that was successful as a destination.

The subsequent project that was trialled was labelled as a Tourism Cluster and was led by the PDSTF in partnership with NOW. The process was initiated through a community consultation event which brought together key stakeholders and community representatives, local authorities, funding bodies and the University of Derby, whose innovative 'mystery shopper' approach to researching the community highlighted the weaknesses in the tourism product.

Some of the key aspects here do reflect upon the theory discussed previously. For example the fact that one of the barriers to participation is a lack of understanding of politics and systems. This was very true and the community quickly realised that there was no hesitation on the part of the local authority to address issues of concern, but nobody had spoken to the local authority about the issues, there was just an assumption that no one cared. This provided opportunities for all the stakeholders to work together to develop new ideas and to identify whose responsibilities lay where.

"At the conference widespread support was received for the formation of a tourism cluster for Wirksworth and the first meeting was set for the following month with agreement that the cluster would continue to meet on a quarterly basis. PDSTF have given encouragement, guidance and support at cluster meetings and the on going planning and development of tourism activity in the area.

Practical support received includes:

- *Raising awareness of the benefits of working together as a cluster*
- *Preparation and consultation of local tourism strategy*
- *Distribution of new town guides*
- *Promotion of the cluster*

- *Increasing capacity of members by sharing information of wider tourism activity and structures*

- *Advice to individual members*

On a more strategic level PDSTF by expertise in the tourism industry, has been key to the development of a clear sense of direction within NOW in regard to this aspect of the overall regeneration programme"

<div align="right">(New Opportunities Wirksworth)</div>

As a result over a series of meetings a Tourism Strategy was developed and reviewed, community projects and events developed, and the local authority was able to work more closely with the community. One strength of the Tourism Forum was its relationship with other EU funded projects that could add value and support new business networks in the community. One example was the project focussed on local foods, promoting the production, use and sale of local produce to residents and visitors of the area, through branding, benchmarks and quality initiatives. This project shared its branding themes with the Destination Management Partnership, which added credibility and visible links to the wider community. Members of the project also became members of a region-wide food group, itself another type of community. Other tourism clusters then seemed to develop organically: Churches; village trails, links to other market towns and mining/quarrying communities. What emerged was a multi-layered approach to community-led development allowing enthusiasts to develop small projects whilst having the support of the wider community to develop a holistic product. Other projects mooted by the stakeholders included a community owned and managed hotel although this never came to fruition for reasons outlined below.

A change in funding and personal eventually led in 2006 to the demise and disintegration of the good work that had been done in Wirksworth once the PDSTF project funding ended. This highlights the need for consistency of personnel and perhaps proves that the project, although community participatory was still really led by funded project officers rather than community leaders. No doubt this is a common problem where community led projects' have been attempted before. Similar projects in the area, including locally owned shops and discounts in 'touristy' pubs for local residents, have been very successful and all the evidence points to a truly bottom-up approach to the conception and development of ideas.

This pilot project offered clarity of vision for future projects. The initial consultation event and presentation of mystery shopping exercises were promoted to as the catalyst to kick-start other tourism clusters, where the approach seemed, through talking to community stakeholders, likely to have the greatest impact. It is worth highlighting the removal of the term tourism as this was felt by stakeholders in the planning of other events to be emphasising an area of contention for some communities, so the concept was also promoted as a Village Network. The promotional material summarised the aims of the events thus:

- *To explore the benefits of village networks, and how you can maximise that benefit for your businesses.*

- *To give local businesses and village societies the opportunity to discuss shared concerns and interests, with a view to forming Village Networks which will attract funding, enhance communication, create new ideas and contribute to economic development, whilst considering the needs of residents, businesses and other stakeholders."*

(Letter from PDSTF)

Matlock & Matlock Bath: The initial meeting in Matlock was attended by two representatives from a small voluntary sector attraction keen to point out that the source of all the residents' woes were the major visitor attractions which actually support the local economy, but draw in sufficient numbers to cause congestion, limit parking for locals and 'leave a mess behind'. The fact those attractions were not represented resulted in a one sided argument which failed to consider the bigger picture. Despite this the overall concept of a community approach to tourism development was greeted with interest, but subsequent attempts to reinvigorate the process never achieved the capacity of interest needed to get the project going.

Ashbourne: This project started had potential to be as successful as Wirksworth and attracted a good number of people to the first meeting, which unfortunately coincided with the sudden departure of key staff in the community, who had asked for the event, and a subsequent change in funding. This inevitably reduced the initial impact of the consultation event and although the University retained some input into community development through research, the necessary momentum was never achieved. Some enthusiasm bubbled below the surface, however, and in recent months funding has been found to assess the development of creative industries to enhance the tourism offer, one if the issues identified through the 'mystery-shop' exercise prepared in advance of the first consultation meeting.

Hope Valley: It is interesting to note that Bramwell & Sharman (cf Hall, 2003) carried out research in the Hope Valley in the 1990s, looking at the role that the local community played in tourism development. Their findings highlighted the fluid and incomparable nature of different communities, and indeed twelve years on the scenario in the Hope Valley was very different to the experience of these two researchers. A strong representative group of tourism micro-businesses attended, but there was no leadership from within the community to sustain the momentum.

Buxton: Buxton is included here because unlike the other projects, a community group already existed. The dynamics of Vision Buxton and the money available to spend on reports and research provides the antithesis to the other projects; because the community had such capacity the destination management was relatively simple and almost self-propagating in its nature. In a community where the local authority is more involved and has more interest, and where businesses are proactive and in close proximity the role of the author in getting businesses to work together was unnecessary, and attendance at meetings quickly became an exercise in disseminating information, rather than leading and developing a tourism focussed community. It proves to a certain extent that where tourism is a narrow focus of development in a small community it works because the potential benefits are more tangible and smaller communities tend to have a stronger desire to protect their

services and resources, such as shops, post offices and pubs, something tourism is able to contribute to. These services are less likely to be at risk in towns and where they are at risk consumers still having plenty of choice over where they go to access the same.

An International Perspective

To support the development of this paper further desk-based research has been carried out more recently with a small selection of organisations in the UIK and overseas. There is clear evidence of a wide range of organisations and individuals working on innovative community-led approaches to tourism development. Some of these experiences are described briefly below:

Andaman Discoveries, Indonesia: The flagship project of North Andaman Tsunami Relief which has implemented over 120 projects in 12 Tsunami-affected communities. The project has been instrumental in helping several communities develop successful community based tourism and as a consequence have also developed supporting resources. The project team recognises that "*we can surely benefit from learning about CBT best practices in other parts of the world*".

Some examples of the projects include:

- Community-based tourism development and marketing
- Making local products and crafts
- Youth-led conservation work and environmental education
- Traditional Thai music lessons
- Waste management and recycling
- Community centre to coordinate activities

(May, 2008)

The Inverclyde Tourism Group, Scotland: This community tourism project started with an advert in the local paper, and through building capacity and community involvement ultimately secured funding from the National Lottery, Scottish Enterprise Renfrewshire and Inverclyde Council. The group took part in local coach tours, were given uniforms and undertook training programmes. The whole experience has been described as "*marvellous… totally worthwhile meeting and helping visitors enjoy their visit here and showing the local community the wonderful buildings and architecture on their own doorstep*". Some members of the group work 13 hour days greeting the first boats to arrive at 6am, working in partnership with the Greenock Ocean Terminal. The long term vision is for Inverclyde to be recognised as a cruise call port and it is evident through the groups work "*that local people and organisations are now convinced of the importance of tourism to the area … although a small voluntary group we find we are now consulted on plans to exploit our rich heritage and to bid for major maritime events*". Other initiatives developed by the group include "*be a tourist in your own town*" and hosting a conference on cruise tourism "Cruise Communities – Opportunities and Challenges" (Inverclyde Tourism Group).

The Virgin Holidays Responsible Tourism Awards: In partnership with responsibletravel.com these awards provide some fascinating insight into the benefits of community focused tourism development, and potentially unlock access to a range of private sector practitioners whose ethos for business is equal to their ethos for sustainable development.

One example of such good practice is the **Guludo Beach Lodge:** *"Our ability to expand life saving projects in the Guludo area demonstrates the success of our business model and success in using tourism as the catalyst to unlock the chains of poverty"* Projects that are supported by the lodge include:

- Trained community health volunteers, including malaria teams and hygiene and sanitation teams

- Provided food for local primary schools

- Supported scholarships for people aged 11-18

- 100% local staff to build and staff the lodge

- Purchase of local food, building materials (which need to be replaced because of their type and application)

- Providing training and finance for new small businesses.

(Fewings, 2008)

Reflections on Experience

Taking the examples of Wirksworth and the Inverclyde Tourism Group, Fiertag (1999) is proved correct in the observation that "*tourism promotions can be developed for any size community, with very little or practically no budget….all that is needed is some local organization willing to put in the time and effort to draw in other local entities, along with a lot of volunteer support … The development of tourism for any community, regardless of size, should not be the sole responsibility of convention bureaus, chambers of commerce or city councils. All members of the business community need to participate, especially hotels. After all, it is just good business sense to do so".* Clearly the local community can take ownership of their own tourism product, and make it a success. These examples show some excellent practice and highlight some weaknesses, all of which can be related back to the theory and the notion that communities are so characteristically different that no one solution fits all.

A previous study in Kenya by Manyara et al (2006) suggested that there are considerable obstacles to the development of indigenous small and medium tourism enterprises (SMTEs), such as access to the global marketplace, literacy and numeracy, sector-specific skills, access to capital, resource ownership and lack of government support. However, the work did identify that *"through appropriate policy and legislative framework. Community-based enterprises (CBEs) could benefit the wider community and offer a developmental*

route enabling the establishment of a support network which in the longer term might benefit indigenous SMTEs" (Manyara et al, 2006: 630).

The solutions presented in Kenya to ensure projects are successful include the following requirements:

• The initiative is community-owned.
• Communities must be fully involved in the development and management of the initiative.
• Communities should be the main beneficiaries of the initiative.

Manyara comes up with a useful working definition for the concept, *"that it is a sustainable, community-owned and community-based tourism initiative that enhances conservation and in which the local community is fully involved throughout its development and management and are the main beneficiaries through community development",* (Manyara 2007: 637).

Caution is also required, however, because Manyara identifies the same issues about participation that also present difficulties in defining communities, that *"CBEs are relatively new concepts and community sensitisation at their inception is crucial for informed decision-making by local communities. One respondent observed how 'the community in fact rejected this initiative because of lack of awareness and because this was totally a new idea' (Member 3)"*, (Manyara 2007: 640).

Some of Shaw & Williams most valuable commentary on the subject are the criteria establish social representation at community level. This, they suggest (2004:180-1), can be achieved through:

- *Shared commonality or consensus, suggesting that a search for similarities of responses can provide a basis for community problem solving in tourism-related conflicts*

- *A network of shared experiences, beliefs, values and explanations of tourism impacts binds together a community. Social representations are conceptualized as systems of related attitudes and values" (c.f. Lea et al 1994)*

- *A need to understand how different beliefs and attitudes are interrelated, which re-emphasizes the importance of complex networks or beliefs about tourism (illustrated by Murphy (1988).*

The strengthening of a country's community tourism product helps diversify their tourism offerings and facilitates meaningful economic participation of communities in the tourism sector. It will also distribute tourism benefits beyond the primary tourism areas into rural areas throughout the country. As Wirksworth demonstrated the multi-layered nature of communities can lead to a significantly more impactful product that might be at first envisioned. Community tourism products and services are generally comprised of small enterprises and entrepreneurial ventures which don't work effectively alone, but which do work well in

harmony with others. *"These small businesses are the essence of the community tourism experience. They give numerous communities the opportunity to be involved in the industry and enable the benefits of tourism to be distributed throughout the community"* (Chambers, 2004: 326, cf Hayles (2005).

What Opportunities Exist?

Reflecting back upon the key quote for Shaw & Williams and comparing this to the findings do prove to be true that there is plenty written on the subject at a conceptual level, but not much which is of use to communities in searching for best practice and understanding the benefits of tourism to the community body. Similarly the experiential research demonstrates one size does not fit all, so the production of a rigid set of guidelines will do little to advance the sustainable community agenda.

The paper has highlighted a number of issues surrounding community led development and has presented to a community of academics, what potential exists for further work, if any, into this increasingly important aspect to sustainable tourism development.

The questions which are posed in conclusion are thus:

- What evidence is available and has been effectively researched to demonstrate the value of community-led tourism to communities in the UK and overseas?

- Is this a subject area which could in reality encourage research just to end up with more abstract concepts, rather than the provision of any benefits to communities and stakeholders?

- From initial research there appears to be little available as a tool-kit to developing community led projects, but for a few sparse publications form the public sector and publications from funded projects – could this be developed as a flexible adaptable document? Could something of this ilk be created?

- Is more research required to establish the best model to deliver community led tourism – is it through the public sector, or the private sector. Does, for example, private sector entrepreneurship encourage community entrepreneurship?

- What can HEIs do to engage more effectively and support community-led tourism development?

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