LOCAL COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SELECTED PUBLISHED LITERATURE

(*Partisipasi Masyarakat Lokal dalam Pengembangan Ekowisata: Analisis Kritis terhadap Publikasi Terpilih*)

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ABSTRAK

Banyak faktor yang mempengaruhi sukses tidaknya pengembangan ekowisata. Salah satu faktornya ialah partisipasi masyarakat lokal. Studi ini meneliti bagaimana masyarakat lokal berpartisipasi atau dilibatkan dalam pengembangan ekowisata melalui identifikasi proses penetapan tujuan pengembangan ekowisata dan level partisipasi dimana masyarakat terlibat atau dilibatkan. Informasi dikumpulkan dari data sekunder seperti laporan-laporan penelitian atau proyek yang dipublikasikan. Tujuh puluh tiga studi studi kasus berhasil dikumpulkan, di-review, dan kemudian di analisis dengan metode content analysis. Hasil studi mengindikasikan bahwa tujuan dari kebanyakan pengembangan ekowisata adalah untuk meningkatkan kapasitas masyarakat lokal. Namun demikian, tujuan kegiatan ini umumnya ditetapkan oleh pihak luar (outsider driven) dan masyarakat lokal hanya dilibatkan hanya pada level pelaksanaan (process nominal and action initiation).

Keywords: ecotourism, local community, participation, levels of participation, development, content analysis, case study

INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism is a form of tourism that should be both environmentally responsible and potentially beneficial to local people. In fact, the involvement of the local community in ecotourism projects has become an important issue in development studies. While many ecotourism projects have been developed in or near protected areas such as national parks, protected forests, and natural reserves, these areas usually exclude the local population who may depend on the natural resources in those areas. This approach creates a conflict between local populations and other parties involved in the projects. As a result, both sides have experienced adversity, such as a lack of access to resources for local people and a lack of support from the local community for the projects.

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Yet, local communities can contribute to the success of ecotourism projects by sharing their knowledge about the local areas, participating in conservation programs, and providing human resources (Davis, 1993; Furze et al., 1997; Saunier & Meganck, 1995). At the same time, local communities can benefit from projects through employment opportunities, improved social conditions and continued access to local resources.

While participation of a local community increases the chances of ecotourism development being successful, problems remain with how participation is conceptualized and practiced. For example, Drake (1991) defined community participation as the capability of local communities to be involved in projects that will affect their lives. In contrast, Rahnema (1992) cautioned that participation is not always used to benefit a local community. He has pointed to a number of ways in which the term "participation" has been deployed, including as a meaningless term to manipulate local people into accepting government programs or to attract funding from donors but without any real effort to implement a participatory element into a development project.

Variations in how participation is conceptualized and practiced lead to questions of what kind of participation is used? to what level of participation are community usually involved? Since most research to date on community participation in ecotourism development has not clearly addressed these questions, further study is needed.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the nature and extent of local community participation in international ecotourism development projects. The study aims to address the question, where on the spectrum of participation do most ecotourism projects fall? Through a review of ecotourism case studies, views and experiences about how communities have participated in ecotourism projects are identified and described. Whether or not the type of participation practiced in the case studies corresponds to the type of participation called for in the ecotourism literature also is analyzed critically.

METHODS

This study was used content analysis technique, a research technique used to analyze documents, records, transcribed conversations, letters, or anything in textual form (Henderson, 1991 and Krippendorf, 1980). Content analysis is also viewed as a systematic and replicable quantitative technique used to explain or infer the communication of the concept being studied (Riffe et al., 1998) or a technique that enables researchers to study human behavior in an indirect way, through an analysis of their communications (Fraenkel et al., 1996). Based on the technique used, the nature of the data collected in this study is written material. Data were gathered through an analysis of case study reports.

Sampling frame

The case study was the unit of analysis for this study and its content was the unit of observation. To observe the content of each case study, coding categories and a guide for raters (Appendix 1) were developed based on the literature reviewed. Using a non-probability sampling combining with the purposive sampling, the case studies were

selected by the following criteria:

- found in published literature such as theses, dissertations, refereed journals, books, internal reports, seminar papers and magazines;

- written in English and published between 1988, the year in which the definition of ecotourism was first introduced, and 1999, the year in which this study began; &

- contained one or more particular ecotourism projects and discussed the involvement of local communities in such projects;

Case studies were collected in two different ways. The first was through library research; the second was through correspondence via e-mail with three international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). From these efforts, eighty-one (81) ecotourism case studies were collected. seventy-three case studies were content analyzed.

Reliability

To establish the reliability of the study, a "test-test" procedure was employed. In addition to the principal investigator, two other raters were used. All raters should have knowledge about tourism development, ecotourism and community participation in tourism. Using the same instrument designed for this study, the raters independently interpreted and analyzed three different case studies chosen randomly from the sample and assumed by the principal investigator to be representative of the entire sample. Results from the three raters were then compared. The purpose of this comparison was to identify how much agreement and disagreement existed between raters. These agreements and disagreements were translated into numerical values. The Holsti formula (Kiah, 1976) was used to determine the reliability rate between raters as follows:

$$R = \frac{2(C1,2)}{C1+C2} \dotfill (1)$$

where,

R   =   the reliability rate (% of items that the all raters agreed were either present or not)

2   =   2 raters (could be extended for n raters)

C 1, 2   =   number of items all raters agreed upon

C1+C2 =   number of items all raters rated

The reliability rates between raters in this study were 85.8% for case study one, 84.6% for case study two and 79.5% for case study three. The average reliability rate was 83.3% .

Validity

To establish validity, two validity designs were evaluated: face and content validity. The face validity is the minimum criterion required to established validity. To establish face validity, intersubjective agreement on a measure should be high among relevant researchers or raters (Riffe et al., 1998). The results of the "test-test" reliability design were used to evaluate face validity in this study. The result of this test was an interrater

reliability rate of 81.4%.. This rate is above the standard for a minimum level of agreement, which is 80% (Riffe et al., 1998). Therefore, it is assumed that face validity of this study has been established.

Content (semantic) validity is defined as, " how much a measure covers the range of meanings included within the concept" (Babbie, 1998). To measure the concepts have a wide range of meanings, examples from previous studies nad literature reviewed were used.

Data analysis

The case studies were interpreted by their manifest and latent content. Variables were identified and analyzed by using a combination of qualitative and quantitative content analysis. Each case study was qualitatively coded by trying to identify the existence of twelve (12) variables (Table in Appendix 1).

To examine manifest content, each existence of each variable was directly identified from the text of the case study, direct quotes and examples. For example, if the case study indicated that if the goal of the project is to empower the local community, then variable number 2 (Appendix 1) was checked as positive (+) in the appropriate column and no inferences had to be drawn.

Latent content had to be inferred from the coding scheme, the context of the study, examples and direct quotes. For example, In Taquile Island, Peru (Mitchell, 1998) women may have been involved public meeting, but they do not express their opinion and ideas publicly. Their comments are expressed in their houses. This information inferred that women are involved indirectly in decision making.

Since one of the study objectives was to determine the kind of participation most commonly used in ecotourism projects, the frequencies and percentages of data were needed. To reach this objective, all qualitative data in all case studies were transformed into numerical values. For example, a value of one (1) was used if the variable was both discussed in the case study and there was an indication of involvement by the local community members. A value of two (2) was used if the variable was discussed in the case study but there was no indication involvement. A value of three (3) was used if the variable was not discussed at all.

These numerical data were then quantitatively analyzed by using the computer statistical program, Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) (Kelle, 1995; Weitzman & Miles, 1995). The results from this analysis were frequencies and percents of each variable from all case studies. In conjunction with further interpretation of the contextual meaning, these results were then compared to the participation for ecotourism development called for in the literature. The results of the data analysis are presented in the following section.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The case studies vary not only by broad categories of geographic locations, but also by country's level of development. Out of seventy-three case studies, 13.7% were from

Asia; 9.6% were from Africa; 2,7% were from Australia and New Zealand; 1,4% were from Canada; 42.5% were from Central America; 17.8% were from South America; 2.7% were from Europe; 5.5% were from the United States; and 4.1% were from Micronesia and South Pacific islands.

In terms of the country's level of development, the case studies were divided into two categories: developed and developing countries. Sixty-four of the seventy-three case studies were from developing countries; the other nine were from developed countries.

Goal of the Project

The ecotourism literature suggests that ecotourism development should actively involve community members in determining project goal as well as in community empowerment. These two variables were used to examine the nature of participation in most ecotourism projects.

Of the 73 case studies, the source of the ecotourism goals of mostly (74%) came from the outside community. Government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and private businesses are examples of outside entities of the community that determined project goals. Of these entities, a combination of government, foreign NGOs (e.g., TNC, CI, WWF) and funding agencies (e.g., USAID, World Bank) were most often identified as the source of the project goal. In literature, the source of the ecotourism development's goal should be determined by or came from the local community, while most of the case study indicates that the source of the goal came from the outsider then the source of project's goal in the case studies do not correspond with the literature.

A fairly high percentage (53.4%) of the case studies indicated empowerment as a goal but there was some variation in how empowerment was defined in the case studies. Empowerment was defined as providing training for related ecotourism jobs (e.g., a nature guide, tour operator, or traditional crafter), giving opportunities for community members to express their opinions and ideas through public meetings or monthly meetings, and involving community members in the decision-making process.

Where the goal of the project was to empower the community, community members were involved in decision-making process in almost half of the case studies (47.9%). Empowerment in the literature includes decision making, then empowerment in the case studies closely correspond with the literature on that one dimension of empowerment.

Levels of Participation

Community members were most often involved in process nominal (41,1%) and action initiation levels (65%). These findings do not agree with the levels of participation called for in the literature which highlights the involvement of community members at the decision making level and recommends community involvement in all levels. Three patterns of results shed further light on this conclusion. The first pattern emerged from an analysis of case studies in which community members were involved at the process nominal level. In most of the case studies that involved community in process nominal, 81% of the community members developed private enterprises. This finding emphasizes

that community members might use this level of participation to gain economic benefits from ecotourism development. In addition, private enterprises provide the potential to enhance the capability of community members to empower and develop themselves.

The second pattern concerns the involvement of community members in action initiation. In 65% of the case studies, community members were involved in action initiation and this exceeded the rate of participation in decision making (48% of case studies). Action initiation might exceed decision making because of an increasing awareness of community members about the right to be involved in projects that could affect them. In addition, decision making varied a great deal in quality, being frequently characterized as outsider-driven, passive, or token. Thus, the third pattern was that local residents appeared to initiate action frequently but only after many decisions had already been made by outside entities.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The levels of involvement of community members in the case studies deviated from the level of involvement called for in the literature. While community members often take it upon themselves to participate or find ways to participate, there were few efforts from the outside to empower and involve the community in all levels of participation. However, through their ability to empower themselves, several communities had indicated that they could still receive "nominal" benefits from their involvement in ecotourism development no matter what the level of participation in which they were involved.

Policy Recommendation

Although participation in the case studies still reflected some biases, this study found that the kind of participation with empowerment as a goal and development of private enterprises provided opportunities for capacity building among local community members. It is suggested that the authorities or local government create and establish a general policy to ensure that ecotourism developers attempt to empower and build capacity by a) having empowerment as a clear goal, b) involving people in decision making from beginning to end and c) providing resources for training in management and development of private enterprises.

Planning Recommendations

The results of this study indicated that there were several problems which occurred when practicing this kind of participation. Problems include passive involvement and/or tokenism in the decision making process and low representation of community members. Passive involvement in the decision-making process might be caused by a lack of information about the project, a lack of power, or cultural differences between the community and outside entities. Informing the community about the project concept through various information media might help reduce the lack of information. Involving

community members at all levels of participation might also help them gain a clearer understanding about the project.

To reduce feelings of powerlessness and cultural differences, fostering a common decision-making process within the local community is recommended by asking for the assistance of community leaders or representatives of various community groups. In addition, creating and employing different types of decision-making processes may make community members more comfortable to be involved.

To avoid tokenism in the decision-making process, representation in decision making among the parties involved needs to be more equal. The results of the decision-making process also need to be published through various communication media that exist within the affected community.

In terms of, inappropriate representation of the community, it is recommended that the project planner or manager conducting an informal or formal study of the characteristics of the local community. From this study, the planners could have a clear picture about those in the community who need to be involved.

Research recommendations

Though some findings have been produced, there remain some limitations of this study that need to be addressed in further research. It is recommended that different research methods be used for the same study objectives including field research, surveys or case studies. These types of research may produce more accurate and in-depth data. An examination of the nature and extent of levels of participation also is needed to gain a better understanding about the different roles of community involvement in each level of participation. Exploration of a strategy to maximize the involvement of community members is also needed to obtain better representation in the participation process.

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Appendix

CODING CATEGORIES

QUESTIONS	CATEGORY	VARIABLES IDENTIFIED	Discussed +	Discussed -	Not discussed	Pg.
Who is source of the project goal?	-	(1) Outside of the community (2 Within the community				
What was the project goal?	-	(3) Empowerment and capacity building of the local community are part of the project's goals				
In what levels of participation were the community members involved, and how were the authority and responsibility shared ?	Information sharing	(4) Local people participate in preliminary data collection (5) Local people volunteer				
	Process nominal	(6) Local people hired by the project (7) Local people develop private enterprises				
	Consultation	(8) Public meetings (9) Focus groups (10) Other "consultative" methods*				
	Decision making	(11) Local community is involved				
	Action initiation	(12) Local community is involved				

Notes:

(…) data code; (+) means "yes" or indicates involvement; (-) means "no" or indicates there is no involvement; *) write some necessary notes