Community Based Tourism and Development in Third World Countries: The Case of the Bamileke Region of Cameroon

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Abstract—Community based tourism, as a sustainable tourism approach, has been adopted as a tool for development among local communities in third world countries with income generation as the main driver. However, an analysis of community based tourism and development brings to light another driving force which is paramount to development strategies in the difficult conditions of third world countries: this driving force is "place revitalization". This paper seeks to assess the relevance of "place revitalization" to the enhancement of development within the challenging context of developing countries. The research provides a community based tourism model to development in third world countries through a three step process based on awareness, mentoring and empowerment at the local level. It also tries to examine how effectively this model can address the development problems faced by the local communities of third world countries. The case study for this research is the Bamiléké region of Cameroon, the breeding ground of community based tourism initiatives and a region facing the difficulties of third world countries that are great impediments to community based tourism.

Keywords—Awareness, empowerment, local communities, mentoring, place revitalization, third world countries.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE essential problem facing third world countries, as far as socio-economic and environmental development are concerned, is to identify the right methodology to initiate development through the participation of local communities at the basis in the choices of priorities, the adoption of strategies and the mobilization of means to achieve the overall goal of ensuring the general well being of the local communities through the continuous improvement of their income and living conditions. It is indeed this human aspect of development, as well as the revitalization of the environment in which man lives, that should underpin all the arising objectives and priorities, be it economic, social, political, cultural and environmental. However, some major strains, in almost all third world countries, stand as an impediment to the achievement of the main objective of sustainable development which is to ensure the general well-being of the local communities and that of the future generations through the sustainable improvement of income, of living conditions and a viable management of the environment. The major obstacles to development in third world countries are:

– Problems of place revitalization: place revitalization is critical to the receptivity of the local communities,

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especially when it involves enhancing community participation in each of the stages of the development effort.
– Political problems of governance and problems of environmental management.
– Institutional and decision problems.
– Problems of lack of resources to achieve specific objectives.

Hence, the main goal pursued by the third world countries for their development seems the same. The less important objectives are geared towards strengthening this main objective. These secondary objectives concern economic growth, income generation, job creation, women capacity development (gender issues), and the promotion of individual spaces in the country.

An instrument to development that is designed in this perspective can be transferrable in all the third world countries that are faced with the socio-economic and environmental problems that have been mentioned above and that stand as an obstacle to their overall development. This integrated vision of development promoted since 1993 by the UNDP (United Nation Development Program), and which is a combination of the concepts of human and sustainable development, place the human being at the center of the development process, encourage the protection of the ecosystem's equilibrium and emphasizes on the empowerment and enhancement of women in society.

Community based tourism is an option that can provide this integrated vision of development with the participation of the indigenous communities at the bases and that can bolster gender empowerment within the local communities of third world countries.

The theoretical setting of the thesis defines community based tourism: its characteristics and requirements as a tool to development and how to apply it to find solutions to the socio-economic and environmental problems facing third world countries.

II. COMMUNITY BASED TOURISM

Community based tourism is a tourism conceived, managed and supplied by the local communities of a given territory. These indigenous communities are the principal stakeholders of the activity and are at the centre of the cultural exchange and the tourism hospitality. Community based tourism calls for the collective will of a local community to promote natural resources and cultural heritage for the improvement of living

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conditions. This gives rise to community projects involving services like catering housing and cultural activities like ecotourism for tourists, in exchange for financial compensation to fund local community development projects. Community based tourism focuses on an endogenous development approach which is far from the conventional industrial tourism patterns and that deals with issues of poverty at the base and reinforces the values and claims of indigenous communities that are often ostracized in industrial development policies [1].

Even if income generation seems to be the main driver behind the adoption of community based tourism by indigenous communities, its greatest asset is that of enhancing the sense of belonging [4] and pride of local communities through the re-appropriation of their cultural identity and the acknowledgement of their heritage by tourists [3].

The concept of community based tourism arises from the principle of commitment and community ownership, advocated by sustainable tourism and which is in line with a logic that considers community participation as paramount to the tourism activity [5]. It is important to note here that community participation calls for a shift of power, from the conventional decision makers to isolated communities that are not accustomed to governing responsibilities [6]. As a result, the success of community based tourism initiatives through community participation relies on its efficient and sustainable management by the local communities and the mobilization of different stake-holders:

– Tourism operators and social stakeholders (NGOs) capable of propelling a tourism dynamic by elaborating tourism projects with the local communities.
– Informal local organizations and communities themselves: these are traditional or indigenous institutions and authorities within the local communities, such as traditional chiefs or kings, capable of reaching out to and representing the local communities because they are aware of the problems they face.
– The tourist: He does not only bring foreign currency to communities but brings, first and foremost, a skill transfer which is a sustainable asset. The tourist also raises the awareness of the local communities on their potential to initiate development and improve their living conditions by using their own strength.
– The government: Its main role is to design specific laws for the conduction of community based tourism, provide a legal framework for the acknowledgment and implementation of community based tourism initiatives and provide financial, technical and legal help to the communities. They can also provide exposure to the community based tourism projects at the local and international levels to stimulate tourist traffic within the local communities.

Community participation also requires the involvement of sociologists, social psychologist and political scientist with some prior knowledge of tourism because it is a multi-dimensional phenomenon that goes beyond technical know-how [2].

The interaction of these protagonists and their combined efforts within the community based tourism setting can give rise to a development pattern that is structured around three fundamental components: awareness, mentoring and place revitalization. This development pattern can help community based tourism play an instrumental role to development.

Before assessing this development model, it is important to define and understand the development process within the specific context of community based tourism in general and community participation in particular.

III. DEFINING DEVELOPMENT IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Development here is an incremental process of change: time is necessary to witness the acquired change
– It is a discontinuous process that is cumulative discontinuous and cumulative, because the acquired changes are used as the basis to the advancement of new changes.
– It is a social and psychological change.
– It is a self-sustaining change because it is wanted and comprehended by the beneficiaries.
– It is a change that is rooted in the history, because it stems from the problems and the values of the beneficiaries and is aimed at solving their problems in line with their evolving values.
– Development requires accountability by the beneficiaries in finding solutions to their problems.
– Development is a process of change that calls for the beneficiaries accountability as well as place revitalization.

IV. THE COMMUNITY BASED TOURISM THREE STEP DEVELOPMENT MODEL

As previously mentioned the community based tourism three step development model emphasizes on three components: Awareness, mentoring and place revitalization. Awareness is brought about by the tourist, an exogenous force within the local community who plays the role of the "awakener" in the mechanism of local community development. The tourist is then part of an "awakening" process in which he serves as an eye-opener to the local communities. In this process, the communities are made to understand that they have to rely on their own strength and capabilities to meet their expectations. They first have to handle their own problems to be able to find solutions: solutions that are, in some cases, directly available to them. These are solutions they can find themselves or at least have the desire to do so with the help of technicians.

The mentoring process is brought by the technicians, or teachers, scientists, engineers and experts who can provide technical solutions to solve the problems that have been identified by the communities and for which the communities want a change. After achieving these two stages, accountability by the "milieu" itself and the local community will then be possible; by accountability, we mean the capacity by the local communities to assume and acknowledge the

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responsibility of their involvement and actions in the development process. The local community, with the help of technicians, will come together to try to find solutions to the problems identified by the awakeners and that the communities can easily solve by themselves.

Place revitalization, as far as community development in concerned, entails bolstering an environment through community participation at every stage of the development process. The involvement of local communities then expands to different levels of the "milieu" and generates a momentum which is a prerequisite to local community development. The success of place revitalization relies on awareness, mentoring and accountability by the local communities.

The development of this three stage process starts at the local level where awareness and mentoring are achieved with the help of "awakeners" and technicians. It should be reminded that the awakeners and technicians are exogenous to the "milieu": these are tourists spending their time with the "milieu" and within the" milieu".

Once that accountability has been acquired at the local level, the" milieu" will expand little by little to a multi-local level, then a regional level and a national level of processes and operations of awareness and mentoring, so much so that the exogenous forces (external staff or tourist) to the "milieu", will allow development to take place by limiting its action at the local level and increasing his action at the higher level: development will then follow a bottom up pattern, from the base to the summit, a movement in which the base releases its elites , in the form of militants, leaders of change , who meet up with the expectations of the masses that they uplift by giving them responsibilities: development is then achieved by militants, leaders of change and active elites who are accountable for their anchorage within the masses.

The awakeners and the technicians are initially exogenous to the local "milieu". As a result, they can decide to ignore the problems of the local communities and surrender the role of "awakening" to the elites or notables that can monopolize it. The solution at this level lies in the hands of the tourist managers and operators who must build the awareness of the tourist upon problems of this nature. They need to know that there is no development without an immersion within the local community, or without facing a certain degree of responsibilities in the midst of the whole community. An awakener must make efforts to understand the local community and to be understood by the local community in a setting where he shares his knowledge. The tourist operators must make sure that the tourists are ready for that.

V. LOCAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND FUNCTION TRANSFER

A process of empowerment and accountability is a process of transfer, which does not call for a juxtaposition of stages because each stage is static. It rather combines a progress of a cumulative nature; this therefore brings about a change in the context due to a constantly operating transfer.

A first transfer of understanding occurs during the maturation of awareness: the maturation of awareness happens during the prioritization of needs. At this level, the communities must be able to tackle problems by understanding and analyzing them and defining the area of focus. This first transfer is a comprehension transfer that leads to an awareness enlightened by an analysis and a prioritization of choices.

A second transfer concerns decision and implementation. This transfer occurs during the establishment of a mentoring agreement: the apportionment of specific inputs of the local communities and external services consists in transferring power from the population to the external services to enable them to partially implement the development process. This second transfer concerns the transfer of the decision and the implementation of functions. It results into a fair distribution of responsibility in line with the prevailing resources between the population and external services.

The third and last transfer is one of accountability. This appears when the local community acquires knowledge after having implemented a development project. The acquisition of this knowledge by the community enhances its power to manage and monitor local projects. In case an initiation to empowerment is triggered by the mentoring process, this initiation should be subjected to a preliminary decision in order to ensure development on contract. The development on contract should then be limited to a partial implementation of the project. At this level, the managing and monitoring power that was formerly in the hands of the exogenous forces (the awakening tourist) is taken over by the population to implement the project. Here, the power of intervention of the awakener (tourist) is limited. This third transfer is one of management that is, a monitoring transfer that results to community responsibility.

We come to notice that the basics of development is a process of transfer of function, a momentum that should be promoted and made sustainable: it is at this level that the structuring of the "milieu" takes place and the transfer of functions becomes sustainable only if it focuses around a management framework that originates from the "milieu" itself.

The management of the "milieu" and its structuring are sometimes neglected because it is often believed that the implementation of projects only requires volunteers. The structuring of the "milieu" is a process that must lead to something beyond temporary volunteering and that calls for a sound management and a combination of elements which are the following:

- structuring of the "milieu",
- effective organization of the milieu to permanently take into account the local development operations and to direct and handle the impulse of the transfer of functions.

An example to illustrate this pattern is for instance the creation of a pharmacy activity under the impulse of the tourist or the "awakener". In order to achieve this, an ad hoc committee is created: the creation of the ad hoc committee is the inception of structuring. With time, this committee expands its competencies to become a village health and hygiene commission.

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Similarly, we can have a village commission for public works and management to build a road or a bridge, and another committee for agriculture, commercialization and literacy etc. The confederation of these different commissions stemming from the ad doc committee pattern is necessary: this will then result into a global structuring of the village into a "village development local organization". This can be replicated in many villages, and the village local organizations can be confederated into an organization involving different villages at the zonal and regional levels.

It is crucial that the transfer of function should not only be a transfer of an elementary level that only operates from an exogenous individual to an individual within the local community because it only releases volunteers and committed activists. For the transfer of function to be successful, there need to be local bodies for development to trigger the structuring of the milieu. For community based tourism to be an effective tool to development, its main goal should be that of providing a sustainable and successful place revitalization at the local level and a sound transfer of function. This is only possible through a collective awareness, a collective participation and a collective responsibility by the tourist operators and the local communities: in other words, this requires a progressive local structuring of the communities into local, regional and national organizations and a real private and public partnership in the tourism sector in third world countries. This must be a partnership based on the pattern of place revitalization through the transfer of functions.

VI. The New Perspectives for Local Community Development

Basically, most of the promotion campaigns for development can be classified into four different categories according to the approach we apply:

– *The physical approach:* these are the different amenities (roads, tracks, harbors, airports, railways and telecommunications etc.) needed for development to take place; this implies disrupting isolation and ensuring interaction by making tangible investments to public works

– *The intellectual approach:* This involves education, training and teaching by teachers and instructors and leaders. This is all about delivering values, ways of life, technologies and knowledge through an intellectual investment in line with the principles of sustainable development.

– *The economic approach*: This involves processes of production, extraction, transformation, commercialization, packing and distribution of agricultural and industrial products or services. It is all about promoting resources and making them available for consumption within the country and abroad.

– *The physiological approach:* This approach aims at achieving the biological conservation of man. This involves health, housing, nutrition, hygiene, sanitation, health and environmental prevention.

These four categories are conventional and could be classified in a different way; but what we are trying to put forward is that there exists, in the advancement of social life and civilization, a labor specialization known as segmentation: whatever may be the perspective through which we choose to promote development, there is always a time when progress stops if it focuses only on one dominant approach. As a result, problems should be tackled under these four approaches to ensure a long lasting progress.

VII. How to Conduct Local Community Development

Conducting local community development requires a certain degree of intervention within the local environment. This intervention can succeed only if it is an expertise that is focused on a specific element, if it is part of a common set within the framework of development and if it respects the following principles:

– Integration within the framework of the global national policy.

– Participation of the milieu to a development on a contract.

– Mobilization of the structuring of the milieu for the purpose of development.

– Alternation of the study and development phases.

– Achievement of a multi-purpose intervention based on related transactions.

VIII. Community Based Tourism in Cameroon and the Bamileke Region

Community based tourism in Cameroon is in its inception phase. It is a tourism that is generated by the private sector. These are usually aggregations of communities into economic interest groups or organizations to provide community based tourism offers to tourists. These community based tourism initiatives are usually located in areas of high potential for tourism and that evolve in a context in which tourism is at its embryonic phase.

The Bamileke region, in the western part of Cameroon, is a good example of community based tourism. It is a breeding ground of local community initiatives, as far as tourism is concerned, and it is a territory with a high potential for tourism. However, community based tourism in the Bamileke region progresses at a very slow pace because of lack of awareness and knowledge on its development potential by the Cameroonian people and the Cameroonian authorities. The Cameroonian tourism authority's vision of tourism is geared towards poverty alleviation through heavy infrastructure development and income generation strategies, more than that of developing mechanisms to empower the local communities at the basis. Both strategies are favorable to development, but given the difficult Cameroonian economic framework and the pressing needs to address issues of poverty amongst the local communities in the rural regions, the adoption of strategies geared towards community empowerment and human capacity building are very paramount. This research can therefore provide local authorities with a model based on these objectives and that can be applied in other third world countries facing the same problems.

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