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Responsible Tourism Management and Community Orientation

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ABSTRACT: Two years after COVID-19 struck the world, the tourism industry is now in a state of recovery and rebuilding. One key realization that emerged from the pandemic is that tourism development and tourism activities need to be planned and carried out with the local community in the picture, especially those in suburbs and rural areas. Community members are more than just beneficiaries of tourism. Their voice about local issues and knowledge about culture and society can be invaluable to destination management, and thus cannot be dismissed or overlooked. Involving the local community in every stage of tourism planning will ensure that tourism development and rebuilding in the wake of COVID-19 can be administered in a more sustainable manner. This paper offers our views about focusing on the community in managing a tourism-laden destination in the suburbs. We summarize our views in six phases: (1) communication with community leaders and members; (2) alliance with local authorities and relevant agencies; (3) elderly consultation; (4) women empowerment; (5) school engagement; and (6) communal programs and activities. A Community Orientation Framework (COF) is subsequently proposed, highlighting the interplays between partnership, people, platforms, and process to realize responsible tourism in the local context.

KEYWORDS: responsible tourism, community orientation, women empowerment, school engagement, elderly consultation

Background

The tourism industry worldwide has been heavily hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, forcing it to embrace a constant process of rebuilding itself. In a very "expensive" yet valuable manner, the impacts of COVID-19 on the tourism industry have taught us the importance of a practical but comprehensive understanding of tourism management. In relation to this, recent studies on tourism management, policies, and strategies have emphasized that tourism has to be managed responsibly to be sustainable (Cheer et al., 2021). Responsible tourism reaches beyond the narrow concept of minimizing the negative impacts of tourism activities. More significantly, rather than blaming over-tourism, responsible tourism emphasizes the participation of all stakeholders (e.g., individuals, governments, and businesses) to co-create value and benefits for the local community and its environment. Tourism destinations and activities that adopt

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responsible practices are, in fact, better managed and more sustainable (Buhalis, 2000), making them ideal to visit and to take part in, respectively (Goodwin, 2016).

Just as other businesses, the tourism business has to be managed profitably to survive. To this end, putting responsible tourism practices in place balances the interests of all tourism stakeholders, both on the demand and supply side. This is especially true in terms of positive destination management from sociocultural, environmental, and economic aspects (Goodwin, 2016; Paskova & Zelenka, 2019). Nonetheless, more studies and improvements are still needed to ensure the responsible tourism campaign continues to grow and expand into an integrated and measurable action (Ting et al., 2020). Meanwhile, in the local context, initiatives and pragmatic approaches are necessary to achieve responsible tourism. From the supply side, local communities have roles not only as recipients or beneficiaries of tourism activities but also as active stakeholders in policy-making, decision-making, and service provision. Through the lens of responsible tourism management, this involvement of both tourism stakeholders and local communities advocates that nobody is and should be left behind.

Community orientation

The term community is defined as a social group of any size whose members reside in a specific area and share a common heritage, value system, cultural identity, and sometimes, political interest (Joshi et al., 2021). Be it to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) or responsible tourism, tourism stakeholders are encouraged to work together and prioritize the welfare of the local community - socially, environmentally, and economically (Farmaki et al., 2014). In fact, responsible tourism emphasizes behavioral factors, such as showing respect towards people and the planet and establishing collaboration between stakeholders.

Geipele et al. (2021) suggested that there are many forms of communication with community members other than just classical methods like workshops, meetings, and trainings. While classical methods are more formal, non-classical methods allow communication to take place anywhere beyond just a meeting room and offer better control over the decisions and results achieved. These methods are divided into seven categories, namely: 1) "walk and talk", where the communication can take place at a specific gathering site (e.g., a village in Indonesia held gatherings by the creek of their village, resulting in better and healthier communication) (Yusrini et al., 2021); 2) unplanned meetings, where tourism planners meet and talk with villagers on various topics; 3) cycling routes to discuss the conditions, value, and potential of the village; 4) special events; 5) idea collection maps (i.e., mind maps); 6) activities with children during drawing exhibitions where they draw pictures following the themes of their village's nature, history, or cultural heritage; and 7) web-based engagement, where forums and blogs become online platforms for discussion.

Community orientation in tourism develops a sense of belonging among the local community, along with pride towards their heritage. It aims to (re)establish the community's ownership of heritage, engage with the new generation, and transfer traditional knowledge (Joshi et al., 2021). In contrast, insufficient time spared by tourism stakeholders on the local community has been reported to be a substantial cause of potential conflicts (Yusrini et al., 2021). Since a strong community is characterized by equality and collaboration among its members, trust and respect are keys to involving the local community in responsible tourism management practices. In most cases, the involvement of local community members in tourism development and heritage conservation leads to greater acceptance and support from them. This involvement

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should cover all stages of the development process, including objective formulation, policy design, program planning and implementation, and tourism resource management.

Joshi et al. (2021) suggested three activities related to community involvement. The first activity, informing, involves providing the necessary information to the community to help them understand what is going on in their village. The second activity concerns consulting local communities and referring to their feedback during the decision-making process. The third activity, involvement, is about engaging with the community throughout the management process. Taking these activities into consideration, we propose the following phases to prioritize community orientation as part of responsible tourism management: (1) communication with community leaders and members, (2) alliance with local authorities and relevant agencies, (3) elderly consultation, (4) women empowerment, (5) school engagement, and (6) communal programs and activities.

Communication with community leaders and members

Communication with community leaders and members is fundamental to responsible tourism management. As such, both the time and money invested by local authorities, tourism planners, and other stakeholders in reaching the community are essential in creating more communication avenues. The purpose of such communication is to acknowledge their pride towards and ownership of their locale, and thus enhance their awareness of their roles in safeguarding the natural and historical assets in their areas (Gannon et al., 2021). It also shows our empathy and interest towards their well-being and local issues.

In most Southeast Asian countries, opening a communication path with community leaders is crucial, especially to expand the scale of communication to other community groups. Community leaders have the dedication, commitment, and perseverance to build their communities. They organize community gatherings to bring community members close together, address community issues like debt, and develop strategies and solutions for the village's development. The role of community leaders in interacting with their community members is thus meaningful as well as impactful (Rami et al., 2021), as they are excellent connecting bridges to disseminate government messages and ensure that messages reach the grassroot level. In this manner, community leaders constitute a form of social capital. Thus, the government should implement programs to develop the potential and skills of community leaders.

Alliance with local authorities and relevant agencies

Local authorities play an important role in promoting sustainable tourism development. They act for the national government and have access to the roadmap of a village's development. Consequently, in order to approach local communities, tourism planners must concurrently communicate with local government authorities as well as community leaders. Often, blessings from community leaders enable effective communication with the local authorities, which encourages cooperation between them. In contrast, a leader who refuses to show support makes it difficult for local authorities to cooperate with him/her. Hence, local authorities are required to demonstrate civic competence to develop the requisite engagement with community leaders. Nur Syamsi and Lee (2021) found that the collaboration between formal and informal leaders creates a powerful team. This working group is known as the "Local Committee," comprising various participants, i.e., community leaders, a sub-district counselor, a secretary who represents the local agencies, and leaders of other communities. Through this group, a well-

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planned monthly schedule is created to track the condition and situation of the community. For instance, in the Satun Province of Thailand, community leaders and local agencies have successfully demonstrated good team collaboration among stakeholders. Their joint efforts to promote the geological areas in that province came to fruition when the areas were included on the UNESCO list of Global Geoparks in 2018 (Nantakat & Vorachart, 2021).

Elderly consultation

Community-based tourism (CBT) is a type of tourism that involves the active participation of the local community. This initiative is in response to the challenges faced by community leaders as well as to secure blessings from older adults. The community elders, indeed, represent a community sub-group that needs to be taken into serious consideration. They are community leaders of the past, and despite not "reigning" over the community anymore, their voices and views are still counted. Being the older generation in the community, they refuse to depend on advanced communication platforms to communicate. Hence, tourism planners need to be aware of the effective role they play in overcoming communication barriers with the elders. For example, the former may approach the latter by going to their houses and spending time communicating with the community members. They may even sacrifice their free time in the evenings or weekends to listen to the elders and other members (Rami et al., 2021).

Mayaka et al. (2018) opined that in contrast to elders in Western countries, the unique characteristic of community elders in Asian countries is that they are enthusiastic about participating in tourism activities. For instance, Kertpolsert and Yamnill (2021), in their study on active citizenship among local communities in the Phanomthuan district of Thailand, found that the leadership practiced by the elders is divided into five aspects: 1) be aware of the common problems among the community; 2) cooperate with community members in identifying and implementing solutions; 3) maintain the dedication and efficacy of a leader; 4) strengthen community bonds; and 5) be enthusiastic about developing the local community. Community elders often do not come to the front stage; their involvement in village development is a symbol of approval for other community groups to proceed with their plan.

Women empowerment

Although gender equality campaigns have been organized for years, women continue to be overlooked in economic sectors. Therefore, Sustainable Development Goal 5 (SDG 5) of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development aims to "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls." Tourism is one of the potential sectors to highlight gender equality and women empowerment, given that the sector has contributed 10% of global jobs and GDP (UNWTO, 2019). By giving women platforms to make decisions, access to information, and the power to manage local resources, their involvement in tourism is an effective initiative to promote gender equality. Vukovic et al. (2021) said that being self-employed is the leading goal of women empowerment. To achieve this goal, support from the government (for entrepreneurial education) and banks (for access to loans) is essential (Noor et al., 2021).

Nur Syamsi and Lee's (2021) study on ecotourism development in Lombok, Indonesia revealed that women employed in the tourism industry are at a disadvantage. Nevertheless, they reported that tourism businesses have positively impacted the roles and economic condition of the local community, such that some concerted efforts and capacity-building programs have now granted more opportunities to women to improve their participation in the industry. Their study even shows that women's role in improving community welfare through tourism activities is

greater than that of men. Evidently, women can hold a significant position, and even a leading one, in realizing responsible tourism in their community by exerting their influence on the people around them, including the younger generation.

School engagement

Young people are another sub-group of the community that should be included in responsible tourism management. The year 2022 is the year for young people to take their place in global tourism development. The UNWTO demonstrates its commitment to upholding the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by empowering youths from across the globe to express their visions and hopes for tourism in a large-scale program. Set to take place in Sorrento, Italy from 27 June to 3 July, the six-day event serves as a platform for the youth to not only build networks with politicians and business leaders but also participate in the decision-making process in the tourism sector (UNWTO, 2022).

Strong support and influence from family members and peers are vital factors for the participation of young people (Roult et al., 2016). Accordingly, the interest in getting involved in tourism is apparent when youth are given opportunities by community members to take part in community programs. Tkáčová et al. (2021) found that despite being underrated, youth (or in their study university students) see the great need for individual responsibility towards sustainable development. Consequently, they are aware of the important roles they play. Moreover, for a tourism destination to be successful and sustainable, it is important to establish long-term environmentally friendly tourism behavior. For example, tourism planners can go to schools with the aim to engage with students and share knowledge on youth responsibilities in the tourism industry.
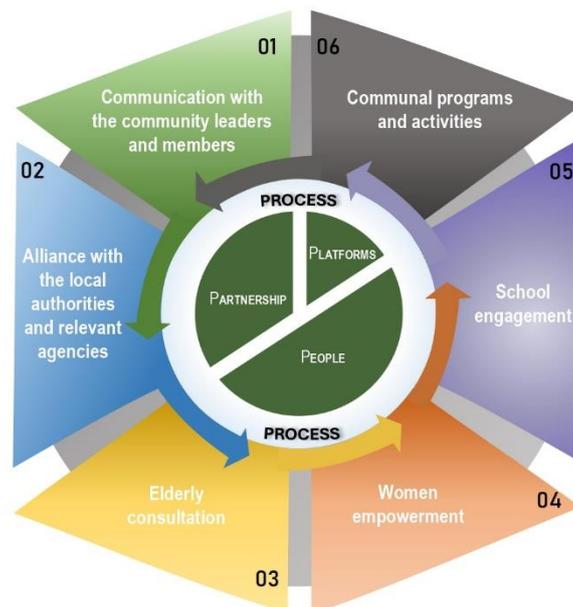
Communal programs and activities

Partnership among multiple stakeholders is fundamental to initiate communication, in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Collaboration with external partners outside the community signifies two sides of the same coin. If not managed responsibly, it can bring conflicts, such as the imbalance of power (Rembulan et al., 2020). The readiness level of the community itself is another matter. Some community members are more informed and more aware of tourism activities as well as the possible impacts of tourism. As an example of positive collaboration, Dolezal and Novelli (2020) revealed that the secret of successful CBT programs in Bali, Indonesia is the sense of understanding and trust established with the local community, which encourages the local community to participate in communal programs and activities.

Instead of inviting community members to join tourism development objectively, communal programs and activities on a smaller scale should be organized meaningfully to involve them in a subjective manner. For example, beach clean-ups and charity walks can be held to promote solidarity and strengthen the bond between community members and other stakeholders. Such "leading by doing" initiatives will persuade doubtful members and empower ready ones. In addition, Walter et al. (2018) studied host learning among communities in Nepal and emphasized that local communities are more likely to participate in tourism activities if their local culture and livelihoods are understood and well taken care of. Engaging community members sincerely and consistently through various means will create avenues for conversation and win their trust. This will in turn enhance their support and participation in any tourism development project.

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Conclusion

Figure 1 shows our Community Orientation Framework (COF) in the context of responsible tourism. This framework focuses on the implementation of six community-oriented phases for responsible tourism, which can be integrated to form four different 'Ps': Partnership, People, Platforms, and Process. The first 'P', partnership, involves the first and second phases, namely communication with community leaders and members and alliance with local authorities and relevant agencies. The second 'P', people, comprises the third, fourth, and fifth phases, which are elderly consultation, women empowerment, and school engagement, respectively. The third 'P', platforms, corresponds to the sixth phase, i.e., communal programs and activities. The fourth 'P', process, refers to the cycle of all the phases. Overall, these phases serve as pillars for sustaining tourism destinations and ensuring optimum community participation in responsible tourism. Different communities, however, may move through these phases differently. Hence, the COF should be applied organically based on the progress of the six phases, the coordination among the four Ps, and the particular context.

After the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism stakeholders, including local communities, have central roles in rebuilding and redeveloping the tourism industry. Multiple stakeholders' initiatives to redevelop tourism via recovery plans that prioritize responsible tourism justify the need for local community participation in tourism programs and activities. Also, the local community's participation in tourism is vital for responsible tourism destination management. This editorial has highlighted six phases through which various stakeholders can practice responsible tourism and manage tourism destinations by involving local communities of the destination. These six phases are: 1) communication with community leaders and members; 2) alliance with local authorities and relevant agencies; 3) elderly consultation; 4) women empowerment; 5) school engagement; and 6) communal programs and activities.

Figure 1. Community Orientation Framework (COF) in Responsible Tourism

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One of the exemplars would be the ongoing tourism development project in a suburb called Bau in Sarawak (Borneo Post Online, 2021). Named as *Green and Gold Experiential Tourism*, the project team uses these six phases of COF to realize responsible tourism among the community members. Hence, tourism is not just a product or a goal for economic growth, rather it is also and more a process or means by which community members are involved and engaged. Additionally, in line with this year's World Tourism Day (WTD) theme – Rethinking Tourism – the collaboration between tourism policymakers, rural communities, and the tourism sector is undeniably crucial. Along with the six proposed phases discussed in this editorial, actions that demonstrate resilience will ensure that the tourism industry is on pace to meet the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

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