Community-based tourism in practice: evidence from three coastal communities in Bohuslän, Sweden

Kristina N. Lindström[1, CDFRM], **Mia Larson**[2, CDMR]

[1]*University of Gothenburg,* School of Business Economics and Law, Department of Economy and Society, Human Geography Unit & Centre for Tourism, P.O Box 625, 405 30 Gothenburg, Sweden; phone: +46 317 864 682, e-mail: kristina.lindstrom@handels.gu.se (*corresponding author*), [2]*Lund University*, Campus Helsingborg, Department of Service Management and Service Studies, P.O. Box 882, 251 08, Helsingborg, Sweden; phone: +46 42 356 621, e-mail: mia.larson@ism.lu.se

Abstract. Local involvement in tourism development is defined as a key issue for sustainable tourism, however it is often questioned and less seldom implemented in reality. Reasons behind this condition are lack of knowledge and practical experience on community-based tourism as a bottom-up approach. In this paper it is argued that local involvement in tourism development is both a democratic right and a strategic destination management tool. The paper scrutinizes a process of collaboration and local participation in a tourism development project within three coastal communities on the Swedish West Coast. A mixed-methods approach was employed in the project with the specific aim of investigating attitudes to the community and tourism development and of involving community stakeholders in exploring alternative avenues of tourism development. The article describes four phases of the process of local involvement in a tourism development project: step 1, formation of a representative project group and negotiation of community-based approach; step 2, consulting local stakeholders and employing a mixed-methods approach; step 3, elaborating results with local stakeholders; step 4, increased community collaboration.

Contents:

1. Introduction

As the notion of sustainable development has gained ground in tourism, increased attention has been paid to the issue of involving the local community in policy and planning for destination development. However, in spite of the growing field, many researchers, as well as practitioners, still question the value and applicability of community participation theories, claiming those to be too naïve and costly to implement (Taylor, 1995; Blackstock, 2005; Okazaki, 2008). Part of the problem is that definitions of sustainability in tourism tend to become too general and all-embracing for practical implementation (Campbell, 1996; Lew et. al., 2016). Furthermore, the lack of practical actions promoting and testing community involvement strategies is considered a weakness (Okazaki, 2008). Consequently, this paper contributes to this gap by describing and discussing the efforts made to apply a bottom-up approach in tourism destination development in three coastal communities in the county of Bohuslän on the Swedish West Coast. The main aim of this article is to describe and discuss the process of community involvement in tourism development. The focus is on how stakeholders can be involved in the process, and how knowledge can be created in the interaction between community actors and, as a consequence, implemented in the tourism development process.

Community participation composes an integral part of sustainable tourism development, specifically in accordance with the community-based tradition (Murphy, Murphy, 1985; Tosun, 2000; Blackstock, 2005; Beeton, 2006; Saarinen, 2006; Iorio, Corsale, 2014). As opposed to research traditions highlighting economic growth and environmental protection in tourism planning and development, the community approach calls for a main focus on the "host" *per se*. Furthermore, it also highlights the right to be involved in the community transformation into a tourist destination, and the benefits that may come out of such involvement (Beeton, 2006; Saarinen, 2006). Additionally, it is argued that the community approach constitutes a necessary link between the economic growth and environmental protection approaches to sustainable tourism. That is simply due

to the fact that relevant stakeholders have to represent and act in the interest of these perspectives in order to make "things happen" (Selin, 1999; Saarinen, 2006). Furthermore, community participation underpins meaningful interaction between "hosts and guests" in the process of tourism development (Beeton, 2006).

That being said, few attempts have been made to articulate the practical actions of community involvement in tourism development. It is often claimed to be an unrealistic and utopic strategy due to its complexity and high transaction costs (Jamal, Getz, 2000; Blackstock, 2005; Okazaki, 2008; Ioro, Corsale, 2014). This article contributes to the debate and applicability of community-based tourism, specifically highlighting the practical implementation process. How can the practical implementation of a tourism development project focused on community involvement be performed? How are the community stakeholders involved in different stages of the project? How is knowledge created and implemented?

2. Theoretical frame of reference

In spite of the acceptance for the notion of community-based tourism and the involvement of local stakeholders in tourism development in the theoretical debate, effective implementation is still considered a challenge among scholars, as well as practitioners, in the field. One fundamental issue seems to be the lack of understanding of the notion of "community" as a complex phenomenon. The notion of a local community needs to be unpacked in order to develop effective techniques to involve local stakeholders in tourism development (e.g. Iorio, Corsale, 2014). Hence, unlike the shallow understanding and lack of interest in the community when applying a tourist-centric approach, the main concern needs to be the wellbeing of the community and, the understanding of place as a community developing tourism, rather than a tourist destination serving the tourists (e.g. Saarinen, 2004, 2006). Consequently, a community can be defined as an amalgamation of people who share an environment. In the case of the present study, the environment is preferentially physical, with geographical, political,

social, and economic boundaries, but could as well be virtual, as in the illustration of virtual communities (Beeton, 2006; Ioro, Corsale, 2014). A resident's identification with a community group often occurs in reaction to policy and land-use decisions made by local officials (Madrigal, 1994). Madrigal (1994) considers residents who share the same perceptions as part of the same nested community, whereas residents with competing views of development are part of different nested communities. Thus, a community is not homogenous, and this paper views a community as consisting of a number of different stakeholders, having different interests, opinions and visions on tourism development. When using a community-based tourism development approach it is relevant to understand the stakeholders sense of place, or place attachment, i.e. how the residents feel about their community and also what they do in that community such as how they engage visitors, each other, and natural resources (Amsden, Stedman, Kruger, 2011)

In this study, a "community stakeholder" is defined as any individual (or group of individuals) who has an interest and/or can influence community development in any way (Beeton, 2006). Consequently, the notion of community stakeholders may include such disparate groups as residents, second home owners, retail and trade workers, tourism organisations, and government and public administration bodies. Furthermore, stakeholder interests are not fixed and clear, but instead multiple and fluid (Jamal, Getz, 2000), e.g. local stakeholders are not always local (Iorio, Corsale, 2014). Moreover, local stakeholders tend to compete with each other, be involved in various conflicts of interest, and have very different degrees of power to influence community development (Blackstock, 2005; Kumar, 2005; Harwood, 2010; Iorio, Corsale, 2014). Due to the attraction of the coast and the sea, coastal communities, in particular, face these stakeholder conflicts (e.g. Wesley, Pforr, 2010).

"Community involvement" in tourism development is fundamental for sustainable development and should be defined as both a process of involving local stakeholders in decision-making, and an outcome of tourism development (Sofield, 2003; Okazaki, 2008). It can be argued that a community-based approach to tourism development can build social capital. Social capital is about social

structures and how these facilitate productive actions that make possible achievements,otherwise not possible(Coleman, 1988). Thus, according to Coleman (1988) social capital spoken through changes into trustful relations among persons who facilitate action. Hence, when applying a community-based approach, local residents, tourism entrepreneurs, other relevant business actors, government representatives, planners, and developers are all part of the social structure of the community and their involvement, or lack of involvement, influence the course of tourism development.

Community involvement requires both the stakeholders' capacity and means,e.g. power, legal rights knowledge, time and money, to be involved in participatory processes (Jamal, Getz, 2000). One argument against community participation is the unwieldy nature of such projects and consequently, the high transaction costs in terms of time and financial resources (Okazaki, 2008). Nevertheless, one response to this critique would be that what is missing is rather a lack of education and experience among planners and other stakeholders about how to deal with local involvement in tourism development. In accordance with Okazaki's (2008) attempt to scrutinise community participation from the perspective of level and degree of involvement, the authors of this paper wish to stress the importance of defining local participation as a process including a "ladder" of involvement, power redistribution, collaboration and social capital creation. Furthermore, the process of learning itself, alongside sharing and negotiating knowledge, are key components.

3. Material and methods

In this study, the research context is the county of Bohuslän on the Swedish West Coast and, more specifically, three peripheral coastal communities. The communities, Marstrand, Käringön and Björholmen, were chosen as case studies in the EU-funded project *Future Coasts*, conducted between 2010 and 2012. The main aim of the overall project *Future Coasts* was to further the conditions for the sustainable development of coastal communities in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark. A lead-

ing concept of the project was to obtain knowledge by maximizing exchanges between different types of actors (researchers, municipalities, trade and industry) and between different coastal locations. Moreover, the project aimed to facilitate formulation and implementation of tourism development strategies in the participating communities in order to sustain the population and secure stable sources of income (Fredriksson, Larson, 2013). The three communities in Bohuslän presented in this article all face, yet in different stages, outmigration, a decrease of traditional industries, and an increase in tourism and recreational activities.

Fig. 1. Case study area

Source: Region Västra Götaland, 2010, 2016, revised

Inspired by Okazaki's (2008) community-based tourism model, the notion of gradually increasing local involvement as the project progresses, was applied in the current research. A mixed-method approach was employed in order to capture the complexity of the local community and its stakeholder groups (Simmons, 1994; Blackstock, 2005; Deery, Jago, 2012). Hence, several different research methods were used, including a household survey, qualitative interviews, focus groups, workshops, and informant interviews.

Table 1. Sampling frame

Sampling method	Sample	No of respondents
Key informants	15	Representatives of key stakeholder groups
Open-ended interviews	45	Permanent residents
	35	Entrepreneurs, policymakers
	35	Tourists
Survey	1759	Households (30% response rate)
Focus groups	9 groups (appr. 60 respondents)	Workshops with permanent residents, second home owners, municipality representatives, marina employees

Source: Authors' own data

4. Results

The community-based approach to tourism development in the described project was carried out in four phases as shown below in a revised model of Okazaki´s (2008) model of the process of local involvement.
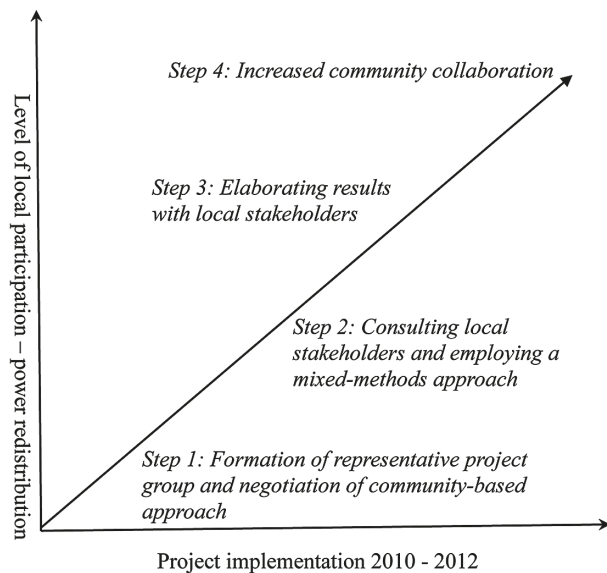
Fig. 2: Process of local involvement in tourism development

Source: Okazaki, 2008, revised

Step 1: In the initial stage of the study a project group was formed. The purpose of the group's composition was for it to be representative of, on the one hand, the local community, and on the other, those with relevant knowledge of sustainable tourism development. Consequently, a project group was formed with representatives from three municipalities, two regional tourist organisations, one tour-

ism entrepreneur, and two universities – all together eight persons. Hence, a group was formed involving people with substantial empirical and theoretical knowledge on the coastal communities and tourism development. Furthermore, the project group represented different relevant stakeholder networks. After discussing community development through tourism from different perspectives, the members of the group agreed on three overall themes to be central in the project, all together providing a holistic perspective: 1) quality and professionalism in the tourism industry, 2) public policy and governance, and 3) the wellbeing of the local community. Main themes that evolved out of the discussions was about the actual meaning of the notion of sustainable tourism and how it is possible to implement a sustainable tourism strategy. Furthermore, the need to understand and involve local community residents in sustainable tourism development was discussed. Notwithstanding, everyone in the project group agreed on the fact that knowledge about how the local residents perceive tourism was limited and less spoken out than that of, e.g., tourist consumption patterns, and hence, it was decided that the project would focus on the community perspective of tourism development.

It is worth noting that this phase was the most challenging and time-consuming of the project. Different interests (cf. Jamal, Getz, 2000) and lack of understanding of the rational of different organisations' operations often led to communication problems and misunderstandings. Almost a year of meetings and discussion finally led to consensus on the project goal. However, the tourism entrepreneur chose to leave the project group since he did not see how it would benefit his business.

Step 2: In the second step of the project, local stakeholders were asked to give their opinion on tourism development in the communities. This was a crucial part of the study as representativeness is both essential but challenging when applying a community-based approach. Due to that, a mixed-method research design was developed, and a selection of different stakeholder groups was defined to be included in the empirical study (see above). The main focus of the data gathering was the local residents and their perceptions of community development through tourism. In addition, informant interviews were conducted with entrepreneurs having businesses in the community, local politicians and representatives of the municipality, and tourists visiting the community.

Step 3: The next step in the project was to inform community stakeholders about the results of the surveys and interviews, and more importantly, to elaborate the results. The main arguments behind this were to make the stakeholders aware of opinions and perceptions in their own community, to increase local participation in future tourism development, and to initiate future projects, i.e. to increase the degree of citizen power over tourism development (Okazaki, 2008). This was done by organising open seminars and workshops in each of the three communities. Over 100 persons attended the seminar in Marstrand and about 50 each at Käringön and Björholmen. The seminars served as knowledge dissemination on tourism development in general, and in the communities in specific, and were followed by discussions and brain storming on problem solving and generation of new ideas. Furthermore, the results of the studies, combined with the reactions of stakeholders at the seminars, were presented and discussed with local politicians in the municipal councils. The practical outcomes of the project was increased knowledge in the communities on tourism development in their own communities, suggested new strategies for tourism development, new ideas for future tourism projects, and overall a more tightly knit network of local community stakeholders.

Step 4: Tourism development projects are challenging in many respects, and one crucial aspect is to make them sustainable over time. Many projects tend to end when the project period is over. Hence, in order to scrutinise the long-term effects of the project, follow up interviews were conducted with the communities' informants. Due to a lack of post project financial resources, this part of the study became less systematic and comprehensive. Nevertheless, the interviews indicated interesting information about the long-term impact of the project and how the three communities responded in different ways to the project interventions. On a general level, it can be argued, the project made an impact as an innovative tourism scheme, highlighting the local community rather than the tourists. Further, the holistic collaboration between stakeholders made an impact in all three communities. However, when scrutinising the effects of the project, it is evident that one of the communities was relatively passive. The other two, however, showed engagement that can be traced back to the *Future Coasts* project, yet in different ways, one to increased entrepreneurial collaboration and business activities (such as a new homepage, which was decided on the project workshop and later implemented), and the other to the local governance of tourism development. In the interviews, the informants discussed how the project had raised awareness and increased knowledge about tourism development from a community-based perspective and further, how the project became a catalyst for holistic collaboration. The latter became an important tool to "unlock" any conflicts of interests and other barriers for collaboration, which was essential for long-term strategic collaboration and development of new products.

Interestingly enough, the three communities involved in the study embraced the project in different ways. It became evident that the engagement (willingness and resources) of the municipality's civil servants was a crucial factor. On the contrary, strong entrepreneurship in one of the other communities also generated development initiatives and facilitated the implementation.

5. Conclusion

Due to the tradition of tourism development from a top-down perspective, many communities reject a bottom-up community-based approach. However, as the community-based approach, to an ever-increasing extent, is considered a central aspect

of the concept of sustainable development, it needs to be taken in to consideration in tourism planning and development. According to the body of critics, one of the main problems with the community-based approach is the notion of everyone's right to express their opinion about tourism development (cf. Beeton, 2006). The current study is one example of how this challenge can be solved through a combination of activities aimed at gradually involving the local community in tourism development. The study shows the importance of having relevant knowledge about how to deal with the complexity of the local community and, the lack of such knowledge and experience that exists among practitioners. Consequently, one concluding remark is about the relevance of investing in community-based tourism projects as a strategy to innovate new perspectives. Furthermore, applied research projects, such as *Future Coasts*, offer relevant platforms to facilitate researchers' and practitioners' perspectives.

A key issue in community-based tourism development is the ability to reach beyond the stages of "fake" consultation and one-way information, e.g., community surveys and informative meetings (Okazaki, 2008). One conclusion is that knowledge-exchange is a valuable tool, not only in a democratic respect, but also as a strategy to pinpoint local tourist attractions. The fusion of local know-how and expert knowledge about tourism is a successful method; not only does it result in fruitful ideas of tourist products and services, but also in an increased mutual understanding. Consequently, this is also a strategy to prevent the conflict of interests among stakeholders involved in tourism development (cf. Campbell, 1996). Furthermore, a challenge when investigating tourism in popular tourist destination communities, is the tendency of stakeholder project fatigue based on not only the enervation of participating in various studies, but also the frustration that results are rarely carried back as knowledge or practical actions. The study shows how local involvement gradually can increase in a tourism development project and, how moving beyond the stage of surveys and informative meetings can contribute to the forming of more trustful relationships resulting in increased social capital in the community (cf. Coleman, 1988). Moreover, the study indicated how communities respond very differently to the same initiative. Consequently, one conclusion is

that the bottom-up approach is important in order to adjust the project to local conditions.

The issue of implementation is a crucial in community-based tourism development. The project proved the importance of not only discussing the possibility to apply a community-based approach, but to actually achieve a community-based project, and to learn from such an experience. Here, the strength of EU-funded cooperation programmes such as the *Interreg* is evident, offering an opportunity for innovative regional collaboration. In spite of this, such projects tend to be problematic in at least two respects. First of all, the temporal nature of them needs to be scrutinised, and further, the feasibility to perform studies within time-frames of about three years should be critically analysed. The process of involving the local community is time-consuming and the risk of reaching the end of the project before partnerships, delegated power and citizens have been accomplished, is imminent (Okazaki, 2008).

A final concluding remark revolves around the importance of having relevant knowledge and resources when approaching the local community; hence, community involvement in tourism development calls for alternative strategies. Furthermore, bias, selection criterion, municipality's level of engagement, and feedback activities are crucial factors in community participation. If not managed successfully, the risk of causing interest conflicts and exclusion, rather than harmony and inclusion, is imminent.

Note

In 2013, the project received University of Gothenburg's Award of Excellence 2013 for research in collaboration with stakeholders in the surrounding community.

References

Amsden, B. L., Stedman, R.C. and Kruger, L.E., 2011: The Creation and Maintenance of Sense of Place in

a Tourism-Dependent Community. In: *Leisure Sciences*, Vol. 33, pp. 32–51. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01490400.2011.533105

Beeton, S., 2006: Community development through tourism. Landlinks Press.

Blackstock, K., 2005: A critical look at community based tourism. In: *Community Development Journal*, Vol. 40(1), pp. 39–49. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/ 10.1093/cdj/bsi005

Campbell, S., 1996: Green cities, growing cities, just cities? Urban planning and the contradictions of sustainable development. In: *Journal of the American Planning Association*, Vol. 62(3), pp. 296–312. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01944369608975696

Coleman, J.S., 1988: Social Capital in the Creation of Human Capital. In: *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 94, pp. 95–120. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2780243

Deery, M., Jago, L. and Fredline, L., 2012: Rethinking social impacts of tourism research: A new research agenda. In: *Tourism Management*, Vol. 33(1), pp. 64–73. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2011.01.026

Fredriksson, C., and Larson, M. editors, 2013: Framtidskuster: hållbar utveckling i kustsamhällen (Future Coasts: Sustainable development in coastal communities – in Swedish), Göteborg, Makadam Förlag.

Harwood, S., 2010: Planning for community based tourism in a remote location. In: *Sustainability*, Vol. 7, pp. 1909––1923. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.3390/su2071909

Iorio, M. and Corsale, A., 2014: Community-based tourism and networking: Viscri, Romania. In: *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, Vol. 22(2), pp. 234–255. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2013.802327

Jamal, T. and Getz, D., 2000: Community roundtables for tourism-related conflicts: The dialectics of consensus and process structures. In: Bramwell, B. and Lane, B. editors, *Tourism collaboration and partnerships: Politics, practice and sustainability,* Aspects of tourism 2, Clevedon, Channel View Publications, pp. 159–182.

Kumar, C., 2005: Revisiting 'community' in community-based natural resource management. In: *Community Development Journal*, Vol. 40(3), pp. 275–285. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/cdj/bsi036

Lew, A. A., Ng, P. T., Ni, C. C. and Wu, T. C., 2016: Community sustainability and resilience: similarities, differences and indicators. In: *Tourism Geographies*, Vol. 18(1), pp. 18–27. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14616688.2015.1122664

Lindström, K. and Larson, M., 2013: Strategier för lokal förankring i kustnära turismutveckling (Strategies for local participation in coastal tourism development – in Swedish). In: Fredriksson, C. and Larson, M. editors, *Framtidskuster: hållbar utveckling i kustsamhällen*, Göteborg Makadam Förlag.

Lundberg, E., 2015: The Level of Tourism Development and Resident Attitudes: A Comparative Case Study of Coastal Destinations. In: *Scandinavian Journal of Hospitality and Tourism*, Vol. 15(3), pp. 266–294. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/15022250.2015.1005335

Madrigal, R., 1994: Residents perceptions and the role of government. In: *Annals of Tourism Research*, 22(1), pp. 86–102. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0160-7383(94)00070-9

Okazaki, E., 2008: A community-based tourism model: Its conception and use. In: *Journal of sustainable tourism*, Vol. 16(5), pp. 511–529. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09669580802159594

Region Västra Götaland, 2010: Årsredovisning 2010 (Annual Report 2010 – in Swedish). http://weblisher.textalk.se/vgregion/2010/?page=96&mode=50&noConflict=1

Region Västra Götaland, 2016: http://www.vgregion.se

Saarinen, J., 2004: 'Destinations in change' The transformation process of tourist destinations. In: *Tourist Studies*, Vol. 2, pp. 161–179. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/1468797604054381

Saarinen, J., 2006: Traditions of sustainability in tourism studies. In: *Annals of tourism research*, Vol. 33(4), pp. 1121–1140. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2006.06.007

Selin, S., 1999: Developing a typology of sustainable tourism partnerships. In: *Journal of Sustainable tourism*, Vol. 7(3–4), pp. 260–273. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09669589908667339

Sofield, T.H., 2003: *Empowerment for sustainable tourism development*. Oxford, Emerald Group Publishing.

Simmons, D.G., 1994: Community participation in tourism planning. In: *Tourism Management,* Vol. 15(2), pp. 98–108. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/0261-5177(94)90003-5

Tosun, C., 2000: Limits to community participation in the tourism development process in developing countries. In: *Tourism management*, Vol. 21(6), pp. 613–633. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0261-5177(00)00009-1

Wesley, A. and Pforr, C., 2010: The governance of coastal tourism. Unravelling the layers of complexity at Smiths Beach, Western Australia. In: *Journal of Sustainable Tourism.* Vol. 18(6), pp. 773–792. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09669581003721273