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## **Residents' Engagement and Local Tourism Governance in Maturing Beach Destinations: Evidence from an Italian Case Study**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*In academia as well as in practice there is increasing interest in governing the complex relationships within destinations. Nevertheless, a gap persists in knowledge on how to valorize and engage the local community in the tourism development process. This paper analyzes residents' perceptions, attitudes, and involvement towards tourism development in a mature Italian "Sun, Sea and Sand" tourism destination. An Exploratory Factor Analysis was applied to reveal the underlying factors in the data, followed by a K-Means Cluster Analysis that resulted in the identification of four groups of residents representing different levels of interest towards tourism ranging from euphoria to apathy. The findings and conclusions are proposed as useful tools for tourism policymakers in Italy and beyond that are generally unfamiliar with stakeholder management and other strategic management approaches.*

**Keywords:** *destination governance, resident engagement, resident attitude and perception, resident behavior, principal component analysis, cluster analysis.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The main goals of tourism governance and development are generally premised on beliefs that tourism increases economic benefits, improves community infra/superstructure systems, and enhances the community quality of life. To ensure that these benefits occur and are sustainable requires planning that is sensitive to community's needs and attitudes towards tourism development (Fredline & Faulkner 2000). Lankford (2001) calls for base research on community tourism objectives from which plans can be developed to address local concerns and issues. This type of research should be used as a starting point in developing resident involvement in decisions on issues such as scope and density of tourism development. Therefore, research on resident attitudes and perceptions towards tourism is an essential starting point for tourism planning, aimed at the provision of an enjoyable tourism product for both tourists and residents. Positive attitude from local residents can not only help in boosting tourists' satisfaction level but it can also contribute to "word-of-mouth" promotion of the destination by the satisfied tourists. According to social exchange theory, if locals perceive that the benefits of tourism development are greater than the costs, they are more inclined to support its further expansion (Ap, 1992). Gaining or maintaining the support for tourism projects and initiatives requires policy-makers to become informed about resident perceptions of tourism and potential directions of new development.

A growing number of research studies have adopted different segmentation approaches to analyze local resident perceptions and attitudes. The analysis of community perception towards tourism impacts through segmentation techniques creates valuable information for policy-makers and tourism managers for strategy formulation, product development, and service delivery (Oviedo-Garcia et al., 2008). Among the diverse techniques, cluster analysis is commonly used to divide respondents into heterogeneous

groups and to identify clusters of people within the community that are more concerned or opposed to tourism development (Lankford, 2001).

Despite the proven importance given to these studies, none of them have analyzed and segmented the opinions of residents in the Italian context. Several Italian destinations (most of them in the South) are in a maturing stage of development (Trunfio et al., 2006), in which tourism, on the one hand, still struggles to have a clear priority in the local socio-economic system, on the other hand, reflects the inability of the destination to revitalize its product which is still tied to elements that are now mostly obsolete.

This paper analyzes resident perceptions and attitudes towards tourism development in a “*Sun, Sea and Sand*” (3S) mature tourism destination. It investigates factors influencing residents’ behavior and uses cluster analysis to identify coherent groups with common perceptions of tourism. The aim is to highlight the factors that most influence the behavior of the residents towards tourism and discuss the differing attitudes and characteristics of the groups identified. The study discusses the importance of the analysis and the engagement of residents in the destination governance processes in general. More specifically, the focus on Southern Italy allows for the identification of several peculiarities relevant to this context. In this regard, the study provides more in-depth critique on the tourism competitiveness and attractiveness of this part of Italy. Therefore the results are useful to Italian tourism practitioners.

### **OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS TO SOUTHERN ITALIAN TOURISM: HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE CASE OF THE TOWN OF TERMOLI**

In recent years, Italy has experienced an overall loss of competitiveness relative to both historical competitors and new emerging destinations. The result has been a steady decline in the market share of international arrivals and a worrying blur of the brand ‘Italy’, which is still the major asset for an overall repositioning of tourism.

Coppola (2009) highlights the main features of this part of Southern Italy. A strong imbalance between the North and South of Italy continues to persist, and is even more evident if the focus is on international visitations, which continues to remain very low compared to the market potential. Coppola’s (2009) study reveals a tourism system that is almost exclusively organized around the 3S model which results in a concentration of tourism demand mainly in the summer period. The review of the Southern Italian tourism system highlights the predominance of community-defined destinations, i.e. destinations consisting of a system of fragmented services delivered by many actors (numerous SMEs) (Murphy, 1985), and where the local community (physically and culturally) usually is an integral part of the touristic experience. This presents a great opportunity in light of evolving modern tourist interests in experiences that permit tourists to rediscover the sense of identity of places through traditions and direct contact with the local people, and that interpret the place visited by means of stories and participation in the daily life of residents. However, if community members adopt a hostile attitude towards tourism, they can have a very deleterious effect on the local touristic industry and damage the destination’s reputation especially in relation to experiencing its ‘people’ and ‘culture’ (Leiper, 2004).

A typical example of community-type destinations of Southern Italy is the town of Termoli, a beach destination located on the Adriatic coast. With approximately 35,000 inhabitants, the economy is based on manufacturing, agri-food industries and, to a lesser extent, on tourism. The tourism industry is highly seasonal with the peak being driven by mass beach tourism in the summer. Termoli hosts approximately 200,000 arrivals per year (Termoli Office of Tourism, 2012). The accommodation capacity consists of about 2,000 beds, spread among a few small hotels and several non-hotel accommodations, such as bed&breakfasts and residences.

Termoli’s strategic location, the proximity to important national markets (primarily, Rome and its region) and the provision of tourism infrastructure, have allowed it to enjoy

significant benefits from tourism. However, growing concerns over maintaining its market share, has made it clear that the destination is very dependent on the notion of sun, sea and sand which has concentrated visitation in the months of July and August. Based on Butler's model of tourism evolution, the destination appears to be in the stagnation stage. The city is at a crucial fork in the path of developing tourism - to continue to offer a relatively generic beach tourism product or to differentiate itself from other Southern Italian tourism destinations with the creation of new products and services.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

Over the last decade, the role of destination governance has led researchers and practitioners to direct their attention towards analyzing the relationships that are established between government, businesses and the local community (Del Chiappa & Presenza, 2011). This highlights how important is to recognize that the performance of a tourism destination depends not only on the intrinsic characteristics of the destination (March & Wilkinson, 2009), but also on the level of cohesion among the various actors present in the destination.

There is no doubt that the perceptions and attitudes of residents towards the impacts of any proposed model of tourism development should be considered in the creation of tourism policies and plans (Ritchie & Inkari, 2006). Despite this acknowledgement, the local community is often one of the stakeholders least involved with tourism destination governance and development processes (Bornhorst et al., 2010). The local community must play an active role, and participate in the design and management of tourism development in their destination (Simpson & Bretherton, 2009) in order to ensure community support and a favorable attitude towards tourism activities. There are two main reasons to use community participation in tourism planning (Simmons, 1994): firstly, the impacts of tourism are felt most keenly at the local community level; and secondly, community residents are recognized as an essential ingredient in the 'hospitality atmosphere' of a destination.

Planning for tourism is very important in order for tourism development to deliver positive social, economic, and environmental effects (Dredge & Jenkins, 2007). Kibicho (2008) supports the thesis that if well developed, community-based tourism has the power to overcome potential resentments through empowering local people by generating employment opportunities, thereby improving their incomes and developing their skills and institutions.

However, if not properly planned and managed, tourism can also have negative effects, especially upon host destinations. Tourism destination strategies which underestimate these potential negative effects risk divisions in the host community. So much so that some community members may assume a hostile attitude towards tourists and the hospitality industry (Keogh, 1990). Murphy and Murphy (2004) state that the more the community is consulted and engaged, the more it will be inclined to accept and support tourism and related programs of development.

Recent research on resident engagement in tourism destination governance reveals two main approaches. The first approach is focused on the study and identification of the factors that influence residents' attitudes towards tourism and its future development (Fredline & Faulkner, 2000; Williams & Lawson, 2001; Gursoy et al., 2002). The second approach concerns the study and categorization of positive and negative impacts on the host community as a result of tourism development (Upchurch & Teivane, 2000). Those studies have focused on how residents assess the benefits and costs of tourism development, and some of them have explained residents' support for future tourism development based on their evaluations of the benefits and costs of tourism (Yoon et al., 2000). Perdue et al. (1990) maintain that resident support for additional development is positively related to situations where residents perceive tourism to have mainly positive impacts, and negatively related to situations where residents perceive tourism to have mainly negative impacts. A third approach combines the first two approaches. It includes studies that use different approaches to analyze how local residents can be segmented based on perceptions and attitudes towards tourism (Williams & Lawson, 2001).

To summarize, researchers have used several factors to analyze and explain residents' perceptions and attitudes towards tourism. Some use variables that include geographical proximity to concentrations of activity (Amuquandoh, 2010; Jurowski & Gursoy, 2004), some focus on community attachment (Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004; Snaith & Haley, 1999), some give primacy to the state of the economy (Aguiló & Roselló, 2005), some use socio-demographic characteristics (Brida et al., 2010; Dyer et al., 2007), some examine impacts (Smith & Krannich, 1998), and others group residents based on distinct opinions (Andriotis & Vaughan, 2003). Herein we advance the latter based on resident opinions.

This paper builds on the latter focus of understanding resident perceptions and attitudes based directly on their opinions. However, the analysis uses other factors relating to socio-demographic characteristics and beliefs about the economy to profile the resulting resident typology.

## METHODOLOGY

In May 2011, a randomly selected sample of residents of Termoli participated in the study and completed a 2-part on-line questionnaire, drafted in Italian. Of the 1,247 invitations distributed, 880 responded with submissions. Of these, 144 were discarded due to missing data, which would have negatively affected the cluster analysis. The final result was 736 usable (completed in full) questionnaires, equivalent to a 59 percent response rate.

The first part of the survey consisted of questions regarding respondents' demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, and length of residency. The second part invited participants to state the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a list of 23 items (Table 4).

Items included in the questionnaire are derived from the related literature (Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004; Aguiló & Roselló, 2005; Dyer, et. al., 2007; Diedrich & García-Buades, 2009). Items were specifically chosen to investigate residents' perceptions and attitudes towards tourism development. The interviewees were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements on: (i) the positive and negative economic, social, and environmental repercussions that tourism has on the city; (ii) the implementation of tourism policies and the consequences on local welfare; and (iii) the sense of community belonging.

The answers were recorded on a Likert-type scale, with the anchors being "strongly agree = 7" and "strongly disagree = 1". SPSS-15.0 software package was used to analyze the sample data as follows.

An Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), specifically Principal Component Analysis (PCA), was used to reveal the underlying factors in the data. This procedure was carried out with the survey's items in order to guarantee the absence of correlations between factorial scores. The validity of the results of the factor analysis was calculated by measuring the Cronbach's Alpha index (Table 3). The index shows high values demonstrating the goodness of fit of the factors extracted by PCA. Based on the factor analysis results, a cluster analysis was run to find homogeneous groups. Cluster analysis involves grouping similar objects according to their degree of similarity. A K-means ipsative clustering method was performed to more accurately and intuitively describe the different cluster segments. The analysis identifies common patterns of interest across the concepts included in the research. This ipsative method is optimal when variables are operationalized at an interval level (as is the case in this study) and therefore subject to possible low variability in responses (Beamam & Vaske, 1995). Each pattern identifies a group of respondents (cluster) with a common level of agreement in relation to the statements.

## FINDINGS

### *Demographics*

The final survey sample consisted of 736 adult individuals, of which 54.7 percent were men and 45.3 percent were women, and 58.8 percent declared themselves as single. The category of age most represented is 18-30, while the least is the >60 category. Regarding the type of employment, there are more students than other typologies, followed by manual workers and administrative workers. Around 70% declared being a resident of Termoli for more than 20 years. One in five (20.4 percent) indicate that they are employed in the tourism sector, and 31.4 percent are a member of at least one local association.

**Table 1**  
**Demographics**

Demographic Attribute	Category	Percent of Total	Demographic Attribute	Category	Percent of Total
Gender	Male	54.7	Marital status	married / cohabiting	41.2
	Female	45.3		single / never married	58.8
Do you work into the tourism sector?	yes	20.4	Are you a member of a local association (cultural, environmental, sports, etc.)?	yes	31.4
	no	79.6		no	68.6
Age	18 - 30	48.4	How many years residing in the town of Termoli?	< 5	10.1
	31 - 40	25.2		5-10	5.7
	41 - 50	13.3		11-15	5.0
	51 - 60	9.3		16-20	8.5
	> 60	3.7		more than 20	70.7
Employment	student	33.3	Qualification	primary school	0.4
	unemployed	6.7		secondary school	22.3
	freelance	20.3		graduation	39.8
	manual worker	5.1		degree	31.8
	administrative worker	26.2		post-degree	5.7
	retired	1.4			
	other	6.9			

### ***Initial findings***

Residents of Termoli were asked about their perceptions of living in the community and of what tourism represents for the city. Table 2 lists common responses (to some of the 23 items) that provide an initial resident perspective of the destination.

In general, the results indicate that the majority of the sample has a pessimistic view regarding the economic future of Termoli (mean= 2.31). Most appreciate living in Termoli (mean= 4.02) and are relatively neutral about being satisfied with their life in the community (mean= 3.54). With respect to tourism development, the study reveals a generally very positive opinion of the benefits that this sector can bring to Termoli. For instance, more than 90 percent of the sample hopes that the community can be developed further for tourism.

Despite the positive outlook of residents, the analysis of their opinions about potential policies and proposals to develop tourism reveals a general feeling of lack of involvement and lack of voice in the decision-making process (mean= 2.16). Furthermore, they are skeptical about the ability of policy-makers to create advantages from tourism (mean= 2.65).

These results suggest that policy-makers must make better efforts to seek input from residents on potential tourism policies, plans and developments. They also need to communicate their decisions and the supporting rationale to residents so that they are better informed.

**Table 2**  
**Initial findings**

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Mean
The economic future of this area seems to me healthy and bright	40.6%	23.6%	14.9%	11.5%	5.6%	1.4%	2.3%	2.31
I feel at home in this community	15.5%	11.5%	14.1%	17.0%	13.7%	12.1%	16.0%	4.02
I am generally satisfied with life in my community	15.2%	14.5%	17.0%	24.5%	16.4%	7.7%	4.6%	3.54
I hope that my destination can be developed further for tourism	3.13%	0.95%	1.90%	3.53%	5.98%	13.45%	71.06%	6.33
Overall I feel involved and listened to in the tourism planning process for the destination	49.0%	21,7%	11,7%	6,9%	5,4%	2,2%	3.0%	2.16
The local bodies involved in the destination promotion area are able to transmit, in communication to the tourist market, identity and cultural elements of my community	27.2%	25.8%	20.0%	14.8%	7.5%	3.3%	1.5%	2.65

***Results from Principal Components Analysis (PCA)***

From the application of EFA with the principal components method over 23 items, four factors arise explaining 58.5 percent of the total data variance. The factors generated are the input for the cluster analysis as explained in the next section. The interpretation and denomination results from the values of the loadings of each factor are reported in table 3.

The first factor - *sense of belonging* - is connected with items such as the “attachment” to the community, and the level of satisfaction in living in this community. Table 3 shows this factor as the predominant one, representing 28.6 percent of the total data variance. The second - *ability of involvement by local authorities* - included items that describe the behavior of the local authorities in developing and managing tourism policies and plans as perceived by the residents, and represents 12.7 percent of the total data variance. The third - *propensity to invest in tourism* - represents the 10.5 percent of the total data variance and includes items related to the interest of residents in directly supporting or being directly involved in tourism development. The fourth factor - *attitude towards tourism development* - is connected with items related to perceived impacts (economic, social and environmental) generated by the tourism development and represents 6.7 percent of the total data variance.

**Table 3**

### Factor's names extracted with the principal components method

Factor Names and letters representing statements*	% Factor loading	% of explained variance	Cumulative %	Cronbach's Alpha**
<b>Factor 1: Sense of belonging</b>		28.6	28.6	.891
B	0.280			
C	0.250			
E	0.266			
F	0.277			
G	0.289			
H	0.268			
I	0.288			
J	0.229			
P	0.245			
<b>Factor 2: Ability of involvement by local authorities</b>		12.7	41.3	.777
K	0.292			
M	0.308			
N	0.291			
O	0.315			
<b>Factor 3: Propensity to invest in tourism</b>		10.5	51.8	.681
R	-0.483			
S	-0.492			
T	-0.361			
<b>Factor 4: Attitude towards tourism development</b>		6.7	58.5	.886
U	-0.410			
V	-0.434			
Z	-0.418			

\* The letters listed below each factors indicate the ID of items as reported in Table 4.

\*\* Alpha coefficient ranges in value from 0 to 1 and may be used to describe the reliability of factors. The higher the score, the more reliable the generated scale is. 0.7 is generally indicated to be an acceptable reliability coefficient but lower thresholds are sometimes used in the literature.

### **Results from Clusters Analysis**

Scores on the four principal components were entered into a cluster analysis. Four distinct groups of residents emerged. A useful method to characterize clusters and determine their distinctness is to compare the means of the original variables for each cluster. Table 4 shows the average principal component scores and all the 23 item scores for each cluster.

The analysis of the main results provides insights about the main differences among the four groups, where the one labeled “activists” (C 1) is the biggest, followed by “disenchanted” (C 2), “opposers” (C 4), and “favorers” (C 3).

#### **CLUSTER 1: ACTIVISTS**

This group can be clearly identified as the most attached to the community. This group scored higher on items “I would encourage my children to undertake training and a profession in the tourism sector” (4.55), and “I hope that my destination can be developed further for tourism” (6.72). Residents of this group hope that the destination can be developed further for tourism but at the same time they believe they are not involved enough. They think that local authorities should do more to promote and encourage community participation in tourism planning. Looking at the demographics, 54.2 percent are male and most of them are young (42.4 percent in the class 18-30, and 26.9 percent in the class 31-40). Regarding employment, 29.7 percent are office clerks and 25.1 percent are freelancers. More



than three quarters (77.5 percent) have lived in Termoli from more than 20 years. Finally, 33.8 percent are part of at least one local association.

#### CLUSTER 2: DISENCHANTED

This label reflects a general skepticism towards concrete development opportunities for the destination. Even if tourism is deemed a good opportunity for the community's development, they do not believe that local policy-makers are able to develop a competitive strategy. This group does not feel very "attached" to the community and are not very satisfied living in Termoli. From a gender perspective, the majority are male (57.8 percent) and the 77 percent do not work in the tourism sector. The majority of the respondents are under 40 with the class 18-30 representing 44.7 percent and the class 31-40 being 28.6 percent of the sample. Most of them are single (around the 60 percent) and are students (38.1 percent). Just over one third (34.8 percent) are factory workers, while students represent 21.7 percent. It is interesting to note that more than 70 percent have lived in Termoli from more than 20 years. Membership in local associations was indicated by 31.8 percent.

#### CLUSTER 3: FAVORERS

This is the smallest cluster. Residents of this group have a more favorable attitude to tourism development than those in other groups. Favorers highly agree that investing in tourism has a positive effect on residents. They believe that tourism can help create benefits for the local community and they support the initiatives of the local authorities. Almost one quarter (24.4 percent) work in the tourism sector. The age group most represented is the class 18-30 (44.8 percent) and most of them are male (56 percent) and single (60.5 percent). More than one third of favorers (35.4 percent) work as office clerks while 30.5 percent are students. A clear majority (69.2 percent) have lived in Termoli for more than 20 years.

#### CLUSTER 4: OPPOSERS

This group could be described as opposers in principle. This group was composed of those who were the most firmly convinced that Termoli does not have the potential to succeed as a tourism destination. A distinguishing characteristic of this group is the low level of involvement that the members feel and their strong detachment from their community. The vast majority (80 percent) don't work in the tourism sector. The general profile reveals respondents that are more likely to be female (of 55 percent), single (76.4 percent), under 30 (67.4 percent) and are students (39.4 percent). Just over half (58.6 percent) have lived in Termoli for more than 20 years and only 20.7 percent indicated that they are a member of a local association.

**Table 4**  
**Comparative analysis of the degree of agreement for groups of respondents (means)**

ID	Statements	Cluster 1 (N= 286)	Cluster 2 (N= 174)	Cluster 3 (N= 131)	Cluster 4 (N= 145)
F 1	<i>Sense of belonging</i>	0.94	-1.35	3.36	-3.28
F 2	<i>Ability of involvement by local authorities</i>	-1.00	-0.33	1.63	0.90
F 3	<i>Propensity to invest in tourism</i>	0.74	-1.51	-0.48	0.79
F 4	<i>Attitude towards tourism development</i>	0.12	0.02	-0.17	-0.11
A	The economic future of this area seems to me healthy and bright	2.09	2.07	3.99	1.52
B	I feel at home in this community	4.92	2.72	5.53	2.46
C	If I had to live in another community I would be displeased	5.25	2.93	5.47	2.29
D	It is important to maintain the traditions of this community	6.48	5.23	6.09	4.86
E	Belonging to this community is important to me	6.00	3.39	5.85	3.07
F	I am generally satisfied with life in my community	4.19	2.58	4.91	2.17
G	My community is the perfect place to build a family	4.62	2.74	5.08	2.08
H	The relationships between residents in this community are friendly and cordial	4.44	3.06	4.98	2.39

I	Overall I feel very "attached" to my community	5.45	3.06	5.68	2.68
J	My community through cultural identity and traditions that it expresses is one of the main tourism resources of my destination	4.75	3.42	5.29	2.76
K	Overall, local authorities should promote and encourage community participation in tourism planning	2.07	2.45	4.31	1.75
L	Overall I feel involved and listened in the process of tourism programming for the destination	1.79	2.03	3.96	1.45
M	Local authorities are able to strike a fair balance between protecting the needs and interests of the residents with the need to increase tourist visitation	2.03	2.04	4.07	1.96
N	The local authorities dedicated to tourism management promote authentic forms of tourism that enhance the identity and values expressed by the local community (such as aspects of culture, the natural environment, and local food and wine)	2.55	2.42	4.60	2.08
O	The local authorities involved in destination promotion are able to effectively communicate the identity and cultural elements of my community to the tourist market	2.46	2.20	4.50	1.92
P	Overall, I identify and recognize myself in Termoli's approach to tourism and the image that it evokes	2.67	1.99	4.63	1.76
Q	I hope that my destination can be developed further for tourism	6.72	6.47	6.12	5.57
R	I am willing to support the development of tourism in the region with a financial contribution to tourism promotion	3.06	3.60	4.09	2.05
S	I am willing to support further development of Termoli personally by investing in tourism activity	4.05	4.13	4.45	2.36
T	I would encourage my children to undertake training and a profession in the tourism sector	4.55	4.17	4.74	2.77
U	Overall, the economic benefits generated by tourism development (increased employment opportunities and incomes, improved quality of life, more revenue for local governments, etc.) are greater than the negative ones (increased cost of living for the local community, misappropriation of funds to other projects, etc.)	4.58	5.58	5.09	2.62
V	Overall, the positive socio-cultural impacts generated by the tourism development (improvement in the levels of quality of local services, meeting people with different cultures, etc.) are greater than the negative ones (the exploitation of local people, increased traffic and accidents, possible loss of socio-cultural assets, etc.)	4.70	5.84	5.22	2.64
Z	Overall, the positive environmental effects generated by tourism development (more attention to the preservation of historical heritage, greater environmental protection, infrastructure improvements, etc.) are greater than the negative ones (environmental damage, overcrowding of public spaces and activities related to the timing of activities, etc.)	4.45	5.47	5.03	2.39

## CONCLUSIONS

The study suggests that residents recognize, albeit at different levels of agreement, the economic, environmental, and socio-cultural benefits of tourism and support its further development in their community. However, a low level of community integration was also found, suggesting that policymakers should consider an internal marketing campaign aimed at enhancing resident involvement and commitment to tourism planning and place branding (especially targeted at the resident groups identified here). As residents of a mature destination, they are generally less euphoric than residents of a new dynamic and growing destination. This behavior also reflects the predominance of a tourism governance system based more on day-to-day operations than on coordinating a long term strategy able to engage the range of stakeholders that form the local community. It follows that to improve the effectiveness of tourism initiatives it is fundamental to involve local stakeholders to share tangible and intangible resources, such as the ability to cooperate in creating and diffusing knowledge inside the stakeholder network.

The need to define a destination policy more focused on collaboration implies that even in community-destinations a rather coordinated and focused kind of management of the whole destination network is needed (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). Community participation in tourism-based development aims to change the traditional top-down centralized method of development to a decentralized situation. In such a situation the local communities are empowered by having the appropriate institutional and occupational powers to exert a suitable level of control over the development and management of the tourism-based developments in and around the areas where they reside (Hall & Lew, 1998).

Recent research (Vargas-Sanchez et al., 2011) has shown that these levels of community control have not only provided communities with a sense of ownership and belonging but have also resulted in developments with more cultural and economic significance (such as the emergence of new youth enterprises, providing welcome services and tour guides as well as tour packages targeted at niche tourism that is more environmentally and socially sensitive), giving them a much better chance of success than the traditional centrally managed developments.

Whereas traditional top-down developments usually only provide benefits in terms of employment and compensation, proper empowerment and involvement should provide local communities with a greater level of control over the benefits generated by tourism-based developments and their distribution in the communities, and the ongoing management of such developments. True community participation depends not only on broad-based representation of all stakeholders, but also on intra-community representation. It is therefore clear that all the relevant interested and affected groups should be identified, represented, and then sufficiently involved. However, a real involvement of the local community is not always possible.

There are several barriers that restrict residents from being involved in tourism planning. Restrictions include a lack of financial resources, investment capital and/or know-how and the competencies needed to take an initiative in developing tourism and/or apathy and a low level of awareness within the local community (Nyaupane et al., 2006).

In these cases, the local body designated to lead tourism development helps local people to overcome these barriers, allowing residents to take advantage of the benefits that might be derived from tourism. Further, it is important that this local body - most of the time the DMO - makes appropriate use of adequate participation mechanisms to encourage the local community to become involved in tourism development and planning. Among these we suggest, communication activities, meetings, focus groups and surveys. At the same time, it is evident that the success of this more open style of governance requires a series of prerequisites (Simmons, 1994) including: a high degree of citizen involvement; achieving equity in participation; and efficiency of participation.

Further research is now required to examine and evaluate possible methods of participation and the associated structures that would ensure the ongoing support of the local community. In this sense, it would be of interest to explore the new developments in information design such as the creation of e-government applications. This would seem to be very functional, engaging for users, and useful for the achievement of democratic goals because it makes possible for government organizations to interact with citizens in new and compelling ways.

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