

**SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION: A REALITY OR A FALLACY?**

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**Abstract**

'Small and medium-sized businesses represent around 80% of the tourism sector and are particularly at risk as millions of people around the world, including [those from] vulnerable communities, depend on tourism' (UNWTO, 2020b). This study analysed the level of community participation in tourism in the Capricorn District of Limpopo. A positivist paradigm was adopted where quantitative data (descriptive statistics) was obtained through a structured questionnaire. Stratified random sampling, was adopted with a sample size of n=394. The results revealed that community participation is limited, because 62% of the respondents were not aware of the extent of tourism in the Capricorn District Municipality. Yet, community participation is driven by awareness, good management practices, and support from stakeholders, among other factors. Hence, a roadmap for the development and management of tourism in the Capricorn District Municipality area was developed for facilitating community participation in tourism development initiatives. The research limitation is that the research was conducted during lockdown, when many tourism businesses were experiencing great difficulties, with staff (especially part-time, seasonal workers) retrenched or placed on unpaid leave. In conclusion, tourism is a highly resilient sector that depends on the inclusion of several stakeholders and the ability of different countries, provinces, and destinations to respond to and recover from the crisis.

**Keywords:** Sustainable tourism, Responsible tourism, Community participation in Tourism, Community-based tourism

**Introduction**

Implementing sustainable tourism is advocated as a way to encourage the participation of community members in the tourism planning process (Matiku, Zuwarimwe & Tshipala, 2021:525). Chili and Ngxongo (2017:4) are of the opinion that obstacles to community participation in tourism range from a lack of awareness to the general bearing of tourism on the community. Sebele (2012:144) points out the lack of required skills needed in the tourism sector, which also hinders community involvement in tourism projects. "Operational, structural, and cultural limitations can make the process of community participation and integrated tourism uncoordinated, fragmented, and hampered" (Van Niekerk, 2014:82).

One of the main challenges confronting the tourism sector in South Africa is the poor participation of the local communities in the sector (NDT, 2014). Nembudani (2017) also refers to this by indicating that the communities in the Capricorn District do not understand that municipalities have limited resources and that community development is a partnership between the public and the private sectors. In the Capricorn District, a large proportion of previously disadvantaged communities are located in the rural areas, and it is for this reason that there is a need to investigate how the local communities are involved in the tourism sector. Dlamini (2013:47) supports this argument and asserts that increased local involvement and participation are essential for helping communities to become empowered. This study analyses the level of community participation in tourism in the Capricorn District of Limpopo, hence the question whether sustainable community participation is a fallacy or a reality.

## Literature Review

### Community Participation Definition

Community participation has to do with tourism development planning that affect persons of concern (local community, local government, and entrepreneurs). The persons are involved such that decisions are made as a collective. According to Arnstein (1995:216), this participation is regarded as a resource by which the local community can achieve meaningful social gains that can allow them to share benefits from tourism. Several authors have emphasised the importance of community participation. According to Novelli and Gebhardt (2007:449), participation of the community is frequently recognised as a significant component of the effectiveness in enhancing local contributions to the development of the nation. Increased participation of indigenous communities, people with less income, people in the cities and villages who are typically not engaged in politics is important to tourism (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018:4).

### Community Participation in Tourism

For decades tourism researchers and government policymakers have been discussing the issue of involving the community as key role players to participate in the tourism sector (Grybovych & Hafermann, 2010:354). Recent studies have indicated that communities are unaware of tourism activities and the part they should play, participation and benefits deriving from the development of tourism, local behaviours to tourism frequently shift from good to bad (Choi & Murray, 2010:575). This could be due to the tourism industry's participation and benefits, which can encourage local communities to invest in tourism development (Lukhele & Mearns, 2013:199). Lähdesmäki and Suutari (2012:485) is of the view that when members of the local community's benefit from tourism and recognise the importance of tourism activities, they will possibly embrace the sector and how it influences them in their environment daily. Various authors' findings on different kinds of community participation will be discussed below.

Researchers have made several proposals regarding different forms of community participation, ranging from "manipulative participation to citizen power" (Arnstein, 1969:216). Arnstein (1969:216) proposed 8 different levels of citizen involvement, which he divided into three categories: "citizen tokenism, manipulative participation and citizen power" to be included in the future of tourism (Tosun, 1999:113). The other three categories of community participation relate to the one described above which are: self-mobilisation, passive participation, and manipulative participation (Marzuki & Hay, 2013:494). According to Tosun (2006:493), forcible community participation is defined as citizens' engagement in pre-set activities due to decisions made by powerholders, who also decide how citizens should behave in trying to promote the destination and to which financial advantages they are deemed. Residents, on the other hand, have no real authority or prospects to have their opinion heard (Tosun, 2006:493). In summary, those in positions of power decide whether residents' ideas will be taken or not taken, as well as the way they will influence the process of planning and development. This kind of involvement usually can be public hearings in the planning process of development after the most of concerns have been handled and decisions have been made (Rasoolimanesh, Ringle, Jaafar & Ramayah, 2017:155).

Tosun's model proposes 'spontaneous participation as the highest level of community participation, power of the citizen in Arnstein's typology, interactive participation', 'self-mobilisation' in Petty's research. It is worth noting that spontaneous participation refers to the power and ability of the community to decide and control the process of development (Tosun, 2006:393). Trust can be developed among social capital, residents, and ownership through spontaneous participation (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2014:156). numerous researchers have found that destination communities such as rural destinations in developing countries they might be interested in lower community participation level and participation in the economy (Li, 2003:

132; Tosun, 2000:613), not being interested in decision-making participation or controlling the development of tourism in a community. Sithole, Giampiccoli and Jugmohan (2020:223) add that spontaneous participation is a framework that is adjustable and alterable to the situation of different kinds aiming at the global connection in tourism. A resident of the tourist attractions that are less developed, shows a preference for participation in the economy and the advantage of sharing over participation in decision-making procedures (Saner, Yiu & Filadoro, 2019). Such research results, we believe, are the consequence of the economic gains of tourism to rural areas. Tourism in rural areas has been a key development instrument looking at history. Thus, a rural destination in rural communities strives towards becoming engaged in tourism activities, just to obtain a substantial share of the socio-economic advantages in terms of direct income, jobs, construction, and ownership control (Saarinen, 2014). Local community involvement has advantages because the local community is better placed to provide tourists with a variety of accommodation, location knowledge, transportation, as well as other tourism auxiliary services (Godfrey & Clarke, 2000:232). Therefore, the improvement of living conditions in the community plays a role in tourism (Godfrey, 1998:213). Studies on tourism in a mountain region found out that participation of the local community performed an essential part in the growth of expertise and natural preservation of the destination's surroundings and heritage assets.

### **Community Participation in Tourism Development**

According to (Arnstein, 2019:26), community participation can be compared to an eight-tiered ladder, with citizen control at the top manipulation, partnership, delegated authority, consultation, placation, informing and therapy. Several other researchers have investigated multiple types of community participation, from manipulation to citizen power. According to Novelli and Gebhardt (2007:443), the inclusion of stakeholders in tourism development can be supported by a range of very different objectives and prospects. Tchamy, Ateba, Koubikat and Tchamy (2020:7) adds that participation in undeveloped countries may be low; however, this may change as more people become aware of the critical role that communities play in tourism development. (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2015:39) suggest that community-based tourism development occurs within particular involvement boundaries that improve or impair community involvement." As a result, only the elevated concentrations of participation, which include and delegated authority, self-mobilisation, citizen control, empowerment and transformation can be connected to community-based tourism (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2015:27).

### **Participation and Community-based Tourism Approach**

The CBT model is well vested in socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable development approaches and the participation of communities (Burgos & Mertens, 2017:546). One of the characteristics that define CBT can be understood as the participation of the community members to manage the development tourism. This means that CBT is a kind of activity of tourism that is based on 3 critical characteristics, which consists of (a) community participation; (b) fair access of the economic and (c) political empowerment to allow the citizens to make decisions (Djou, Baiquni, Widodo & Fandeli, 2017:302). As participation is viewed as crucial, also interpreted in different ways. CBT can be understood as a sector that encourages ownership, investment, and growth of the resources of tourism in the communities. Other authors like Briones, Yusay and Valdez (2017:55) contend that the communities are at the focal point of CBT and in the center of employment creation. It has to be known that on any projects of tourism, the community members have to be informed in order to agree (Briones, Yusay & Valdez, 2017:56). When developing tourism, communities in the local area play a significant part as in tourist destinations they are regarded as the main stakeholders. The communities in the local area will only accept the contributions of tourism once growth is managed properly and sustainably (Hulu, Baiquni, Fandeli & Wirasanti, 2019:225). Furthermore, different ways of describing CBT include (Amerta, 2017a:97): The form of tourism governance that enables local people to have

authority over and participate actively in tourism administration and development; and the form of tourism administration that may benefit individuals that are not engaged directly in the sector of tourism. This form of tourism necessitates democratic, structured empowerment as well as equitable benefit sharing to underserved communities at destinations. In CBT planning, three basic principles are highlighted: decision-making in community participation, assurance that from tourism activities communities will gain and educating local communities about the impact of tourism (Amerta, 2017:102). According to Beeh (2017:51) CBT, tourism allows people in the local area to manage and participate in the development of tourism management. Therefore, the community must be consulted on all aspects and be provided with the chance to take part in the process of making the decision (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018:7). On the other hand, maintaining that the community must be consulted in all aspects is self-contradictory and represents what CBT is not, since communities are viewed as key players who must be in charge from the beginning by establishing and operating CBT. It might not be feasible to seek advice about CBT with someone who already owns and manages it. Again, it is worth mentioning that CBT allows communities to take charge and successfully be involved in managing tourism development appears to be a key principle. According to Amerta (2017), the fundamental principle of CBT is engaging community members in decision-making processes. Scholtz and Slabbert (2018:744) concur that because community people are engaged in CBT, decision-making ought to be entirely in their hands.

### **Global Experience in Community Participation**

At present, many governments around the globe, including the United Nations agencies and nongovernmental organisation (NGOs), regard community participation as being crucial for programme planning and as a means of eradicating poverty (World Bank,1996). Participation in community resulted in the creation of development projects in the 1960s and 1970s as a means of achieving sustainability and fairness, especially for the less privileged. In 1978 at conferences, it played a significant part in health policy encouraged by World Health Organisation's (WHO) (WHO/UNICEF, 1978).

The World Bank indicates that community participation is important for the following reasons:

- People within the community are well experienced regarding the issues affecting the community; they know what will work for them and what will not, and why.
- Involving people within the community in planning projects makes them feel part of a whole and their devotion towards the growth of the project.
- Allowing local people to do planning might assist them to establish managerial and technical skills and will improve their opportunities prospect of employment.
- The participation of local people encourages 'social learning' for those who plan and those will benefit.

It should be noted, however, in tourism that there are barriers in community participation.

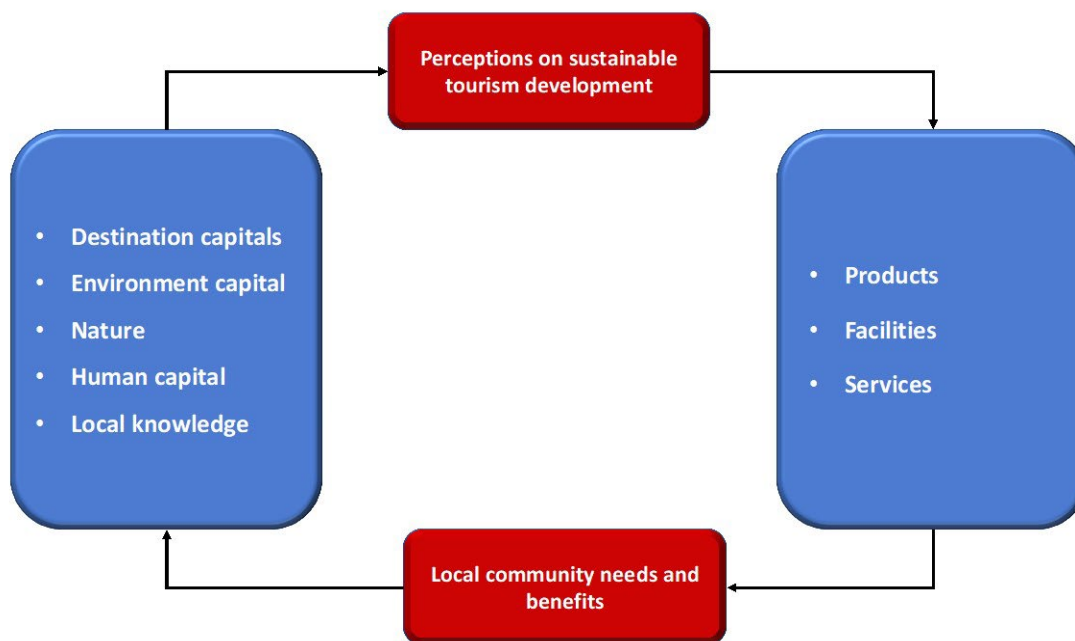
## **Obstacles to Community Participation**

According to Muganda, Sirima, and Ezra (2013:53), when glancing at community participation, various obstacles are indicted which hinder proper tourism industry community participation. Among these obstacles includes the communities' lack of enthusiasm for the industry, poor coordination among the role players, and a dearth of distribution information in the community residents (Ramukumba, 2018:35). Nandi (2013:160) conducted a study on the community of Jaldapara and discovered that as a result of the collapse of collective ownership, insufficient job generation, and reliance on external funding community participation was challenging for locals. According to Towner (2016), some of the barriers to taking part in local areas identified in research conducted on the Mentawai Islands included extreme ownership of resources by foreigners in the community and government support such deficiency. In this context, it was felt that training and awareness were essential for increasing participation. According to Kala and Bagri (2018:318), a range of stakeholders are included in tourism participation, who may have conflicting interests. Furthermore, engaging all stakeholders can be difficult, and there are prospective losers and winners in the process of participation. According to Tosun (2004:504), a challenging task in participation is that the perspectives of the community are considered when the development has been implemented. There should be a setup of participation in a way that ethnic minorities and women as marginalised groups are described in order for them to stand to gain from resources of tourism and to have a positive impact on development narratives (Wang, Jiang, Xu & Guo, 2021:2454).

Therefore, is important to recognise that the privilege to take part in community decision-making is not the same as the privilege to participate capacity (Lin & Simmons, 2017:315). Furthermore, Tosun (2009: 493), as quoted by Zapata and Hall (2012:61), recommends a reconsideration of the form of community participation preferred tourism destinations interest groups and also behaviours to prospective development of tourism. Aref and Redzuan (2010:88), noted that cultural, operational, and structural hindrances to local community participation are what dishearten members of the community from actually engaging. Every community has its obstacles, with an absence of community participation recognised as a critical reason for non-tourism development (Eshliki & Kaboudi, 2012:334). When numerous parties are involved in boosting the goals of CBT, meaningful engagement in the growth of CBT can be realised (Hlengwa & Maruta, 2020).

## **The Importance of Sustainable Tourism in a Community**

According to Van Niekerk (2014:214), tourism's sustainable goal is to boost the advantages of tourism while decreasing destinations adverse effects. This can be achieved by safeguarding natural ecosystems, wildlife, and natural resources when establishing and maintaining tourism activities. Participation and empowerment of stakeholder are crucial features for aiding communities and improving communities' capacity to handle tourist facilities within the local area (Park & Kim, 2016:320). Sustainable tourism study appears to be frequently generalized from other circumstances to be applied to local communities, which its needs, abilities are different. To comprehend the options for sustainable tourism development within destination capitals, the destination capitals that are open to small investors are required to be fully examined in local societies (Drammeh, 2015:2). According to Fairer-Wessels (2017:9), the model for sustainable tourism upliftment of community-based tourism is centred on emphasizing the destination capitals in communities readily accessible. Drammeh (2015:11) suggested a framework of sustainable tourism development based on Shapley's (2010) framework that is more liberating for LDCs, recognized as the "destination 3 capitals framework for tourism sustainable development."



**Figure 1:** The destination 3 capitals framework for sustainable tourism  
**Source:** Drammeh (2015:11)

According to the Limpopo Department of Economic Development, Environment, and Tourism (LEDET), in Limpopo community-based tourism is one of the methods to enhance the local societies' livelihood. Community-based tourism was established to enhance development in rural areas of Limpopo by ensuring the community members become influencers of their development. The concept of community-based tourism in the following section is thoroughly discussed.

### Research Methodology

The study was focused on the positivist research paradigm, which entails the collecting of scientific data that is exact and based on measurement, as well as statistical analysis with the goal that findings are generalisable (Park & Kim, 2016:690). In this case, it was undertaken to analyse the sustainable community participation in tourism in the Capricorn District. The study was quantitative, as detailed, and structured research planning was required to produce detailed and generalisable findings that will improve the knowledge of such participation and involvement in the Capricorn District of Limpopo. Therefore, a quantitative research approach was used to determine the level of participation of communities in the tourism sector. This study analysed community participation in tourism by making use of a survey. The elements of the questionnaire were influenced by a wide spectrum of respondents that included community members, and tribal and local government leaders in the Capricorn District. The population (N) of the Capricorn District is estimated at around 1.3 million (COGTA, 2020). Therefore, through stratified random sampling, a sample size of n=394 was sufficient for this study (Singh & Masuku, 2014:4). Each respondent was given their own copy of the survey instrument (questionnaire) to complete. Once the questionnaires had been completed, they were collected and analysed to reach at the findings, conclusions, and recommendations. The data were first corded and then captured in Excel prior to being exported to Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 24, for final analysis. The sample was drawn from communities in four local municipalities in the Capricorn District for this study. The researcher used stratified random sampling to recruit the appropriate number of potential respondents (Strydom, 2011a:230).

## Results

A total of 550 questionnaires were distributed to the respondents that were targeted in this study. A total of 394 questionnaires were completed in full and were returned for final analysis to determine the extent of participation of the community in tourism in the Capricorn District of the Limpopo Province.

### Distribution of respondents according to age

Most of the respondents who took part in this study were between the ages of 66 and 54; they contributed 31.7% to the total number of people who participated in this study. The 25 to 35 years group contributed 26.1%, while respondents between the ages of 16 and 24 years and those aged 55 to 74 years contributed 20.6% and 19.3%, respectively. Participants aged 75 years and above were the smallest cohort at 2.3%. This shows that about 46.7% of the respondents were youths. Table 1 shows the distribution of responders according to their age.

**Table 1: Distribution of respondents according to age**

Age range	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
16-24 years	81	20.6	20.6	20.6
25-35 years	103	26.1	26.1	46.7
36-54 years	125	31.7	31.7	78.4
55-74 years	76	19.3	19.3	97.7
75 + years	9	2.3	2.3	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>394</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

According to (Coyne, 2016:227), young people are often hesitant to be involved and to participate in developmental issues in a country. However, in this study, out of 394 respondents, 103 (46.7%) youths participated. The participation of young people provides a good dimension that can help authorities in tourism to understand and incorporate issues and concerns of the youths in tourism development.

### Distribution of Respondents According to Tourism Employment

The distribution of respondents according to how their jobs are related to the tourism sector is illustrated in Table 2. The results shows that most of jobs occupied by the respondents do not relate to tourism at all. Those whose jobs were somewhat and to a large extent related to tourism contributed 27.4% and 15.5% proportion to the total number of respondents.

**Table 2: Distribution of respondents according to tourism employment**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Valid percentage</b>	<b>Cumulative percentage</b>
Yes, to a large extent	60	15.2	15.5	25.3
Yes, somewhat	106	26.9	27.4	52.7
Not at all	183	46.4	47.3	100.0
Total	387	98.2	100.0	
System	7	1.8		
<b>Total</b>	<b>394</b>	<b>100.0</b>		

Following recent policies such as the New Growth Path and National Development Plan (NDP), LEDET has identified promotion and support for enterprise development as the most hopeful route towards job creation and poverty relief (NDP, 2012). This aligns with the Capricorn District's sustainable goals for 2040, which consider a diversified economy. One of the strategies is to develop the next generation of workers through research into the various sectors of the economy and skill requirements, such as the education sector, the business world, and the value chain of the infrastructure programmes. The results revealed that there are inadequate job opportunities for communities to work in the tourism sector.

Determination of the relationship between community participation and demographic variables  
The association between community participation and demographic variables that was analysed using a Chi-squared test is shown in Table 3. It can be recognised that the associations between community participation and home language and community participation and marital status were significant ( $p < 0.01$ ). The association between community participation and home language showed a positive and significant correlation with a coefficient of 0.447, while the association linkages between community participation and marital status showed a positive and significant correlation with a coefficient of 0.392. The results of this study revealed a significant association of demographic variables such as marital status, home language, gender, and employment status and tourism awareness.

The association between community participation and age was significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) and showed a positive and significant correlation with a coefficient of 0.22. The associations between community participation and employment status, community participation and years in district were significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) and showed positive and significant correlations with modest coefficients of 0.27, 0.228 and 0.215 respectively. This means that community participation is significantly dependent on age, home language, employment status, district, and years in district. This is corroborated by Mohammed's (2009) study on developing tourism awareness among school pupils in Jordan. In the current study, there was no evidence statistically to suggest that community participation other demographic variables are associated shown in Table 3.

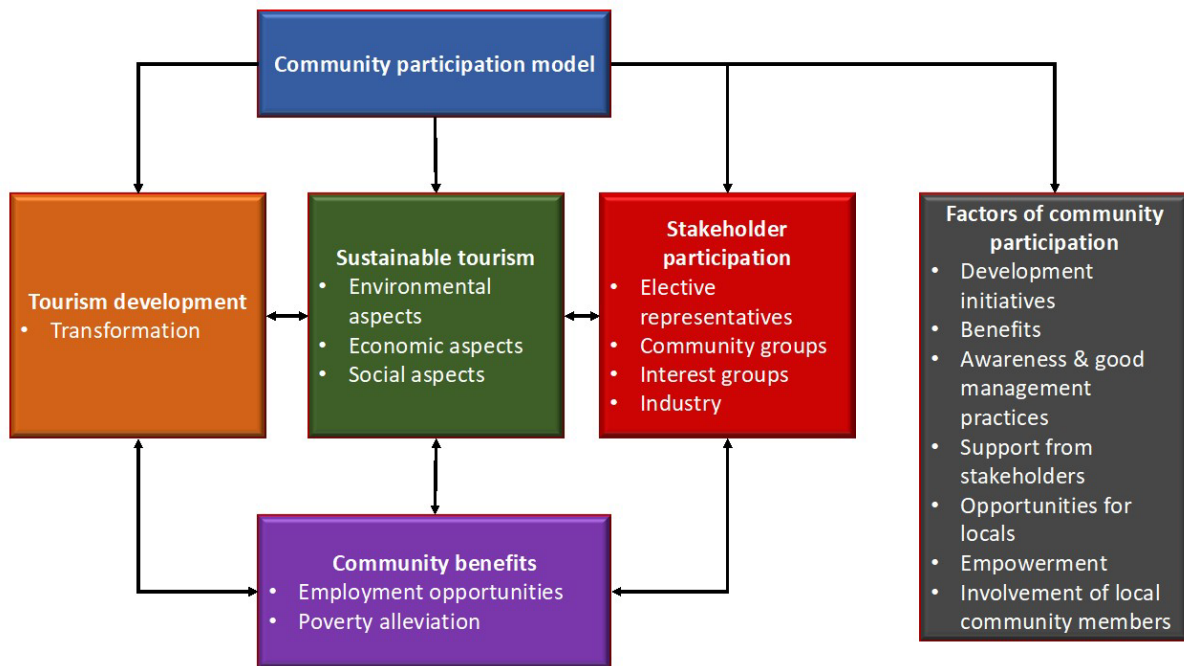


**Table 3: The relationship between community participation and demographic factors**

Variables	Significance of association		Association coefficient	
	Likelihood ratio	Sign.	Cramer's V	Sign.
Participation * Age	20.493	*	0.22	NS
Participation * Gender	4.387	NS	0.096	NS
Participation * Language	83.684	**	0.447	**
Participation * Education	34.759	NS	0.167	NS
Participation * Employment status	29.306	*	0.27	*
Participation * Income	11.892	NS	0.101	NS
Participation * Marital status	57.097	**	0.392	**
Participation * District	20.437	*	0.228	*
Participation * Years in district	17.548	*	0.215	*

## Conclusion

The concept of community participation in tourism has become a worldwide phenomenon in recent decades and it is recognised as one of the tourism industry's quickest growing sectors. This study has consequently proved to be an important contribution to the tourism sector, as data was gathered by using appropriate research methods to obtain useful information. The main goal of the study was to assess whether community participation in tourism in the Capricorn District of Limpopo is a fallacy or a reality. A community participation model based on real findings is presented in Figure 2 below.



**Figure 2.2: Community Participation Concept**

### Managerial and Practical Implication

Regardless of current disturbances, tourism has grown and continues to grow throughout South Africa. Prior to and after COVID-19, tourism is thought to be one of the largest economic sectors, contributing significantly to the national economy and job creation. However, far too often, the impact of tourism is enjoyed by a select few rather than by all South Africans. This is the reality of the communities in the Capricon District Municipality. Furthermore, as a result tourism nature break up, investment in tourism for community participation remains limited. Tourism has the potential and responsibility to have a positive and long-term impact on communities. The tourism development aspects were covered in the literature study. In the African context, tourism must benefit the communities, government, or economy on a large scale through employment opportunities. Tourism development in the country, is part of the transformational agenda, therefore, sustainable tourism development is important in a manner that it contributes to the environmental, socio-economic aspects. It must be transformative in the sense that local societies should be empowered. Therefore, guaranteeing participation of the destination societies, stakeholders from elected representatives, community groups, interest groups and tourism industry must be involved.

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