

**LOCAL STAKEHOLDER INVOLVEMENT AND COMMUNITY- BASED RURAL TOURISM
DEVELOPMENT IN NORTH CENTRAL COASTAL VIETNAM**

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Abstract: Community-based rural tourism development has drawn interests among researchers, practitioners, governments and stakeholder as it has been widely promoted as a powerful force of change in the economy restructuring and a supporting alternative for local economy in response to increasing agriculture values in Viet Nam rural areas. Data for this study were obtained through a survey at 104 local households that has the collaboration and involvement of the related inter-organizational stakeholders in community-based rural tourism implementation in Nghe An and Quang Binh provinces in North Central Coastal Vietnam. This study found that the local community has a major role in implementing the program, among those various entities of stakeholders, especially the local government role can be utilized in tourism research as a source of empirical reference and policy implications.

Keywords: Community-based rural tourism, community participation, local stakeholders, North Central Coastal Vietnam

Introduction

Tourism has been placed among the largest industries in the world so far and has the potential to contribute to rural development which is well recognized, particularly by job creating, including employment for rural women and marginalized groups, creating better opportunities for local people to gain larger and more balanced benefits from tourism development taking place in their localities (Tosun, 2000). The development of rural tourism, in particular community based rural tourism, according to Powell, Green, Holladay (2018) take into account rural environmental, social, and cultural sustainability and has been promoted as a supporting alternative and adding agriculture values for the local economy. In recent years, socio-economic disparities between rural and urban areas have attracted significant concern from the Government of Vietnam, which developed a community-based rural tourism as one of the attempts to overcome this problem. There is a widespread recognition of the need to diversify the tourism product and develop alternative forms of tourism in rural tourism development in North Central Coastal Vietnam (Nguyen, 2018).

The urge for research and the main focus of this research is on how the collaboration and involvement of the related local governance and inter-organizational stakeholders, initiated by the local community which plays a major role in implementing the tourism development, among those various entities of stakeholders in the light of government support. Research questions have been debated on questions regarding community participation for community-based rural development such as “how much participation/ involvement of community or level of community participation at certain destination can have in the rural tourism development process? Is there a way that this situation can be rectified so that the needs and power of citizens and residents in a rural tourism community can be satisfied and every-day life not diminished? What types of local governance collaboration and support that local community are getting from tourism development activities in improving livelihoods and poverty reduction, too. These questions seem to be a research gap and need to be further and insightfully addressed in research on rural tourism development in North Central Coastal Vietnam’s rural areas. So, the paper findings from empirical approach can be utilized in tourism research as a source of

theoretical reference and public policy implications of community-based rural tourism development, which will be addressed below.

Literature Review

Rural community-based tourism is a form of tourism that is taking place in the economically marginalized rural communities and prioritizes on the environmental issue, social, and cultural sustainability, which supervised and owned by and for the community (Potjana, 2003). It takes the rural space as the basis and regards the unique rural production activities, folk customs, forms of life, countryside, rural housing and rural culture as objects, and develops them into products, such as sightseeing, tours, entertainment, leisure, vacations shopping etc. (Xiao; X.Y, 2001). In this case, one of the important things to know is the community-based rural tourism has a mission to raise awareness among tourists and enable them to learn about local people's daily life. This tourism development model supposed to begin with public awareness, to build more beneficial tourism for local communities, such as the needs, initiatives, and opportunities.

In particular, Community-based rural tourism (CBRT) should be managed and owned by the community with funding and assistance from stakeholders, government agencies or NGOs, for the community, with the purpose of enabling visitors to increase their awareness and learn about the community and the local way of life (Kamarudin et al., 2014; Aref, 2011; Suansri, 2003 in Dunn, 2007:14). Thus, the main outcome of CBRT is the improvement of livelihood of the community via tourism activities, whilst preserving natural environment, maintaining cultural authenticity sustainably and ensuring local ownership. Community participation which is a bottom-up approach by which communities are actively involved in rural tourism projects to solve their own problems, has been touted by various stakeholders like the local governors as a potent approach to sustainable tourism development since it ensures greater conservation of natural, rural and cultural resources, empowers host communities and improves their socio-economic well-being. As such, neither a function of government alone, nor a single powerful rural tourism organisation can develop a successful tourism destination; instead, it is recognised that in tourism destination planning, decision-making and management, stakeholders must collaborate and participate (Bornhorst, Brent & Sheehan, 2010).

Within a tourism destination research, where stakeholders have different interests in the development of an area, stakeholder collaboration is obvious. As balancing the power in decision-making processes is difficult, collaboration is necessary to build a partnership approach among stakeholders involved in the planning process. Key successes of partnership efforts are identification, legitimation, and recognition of all potential stakeholders and inclusion of key stakeholder groups involved in the planning process. Stakeholders can include: the government (national, regional and local); government departments with links to tourism; international, national, regional and local tourism organisations; tourism developers and entrepreneurs, tourism industry operators; non-tourism business practitioners, and the community including local community group, indigenous people's groups and local residents (Saito & Ruhanen, 2017). The local community has been involved in the planning, development, and management of the tourism destination areas (Pawson, D'Arcy & Richardson, 2017).

Scholars have discussed this issue in terms of collaborative governance that is based on the common understanding of stakeholders in rural community-based tourism development. This concept offers an opportunity to solve common problems that cannot be solved by single actors. Here, the community can collaborate with other stakeholders like the local governors who have the impacts on rural local tourism development and have power in terms of networking, and skills needed for developing the rural tourism and local community. In this collaboration,

stakeholders can share knowledge and, information as well as issues related to their common goals and are expected to address all real needs and issues of the tourism development. Furthermore, collaborative governance can avoid conflicts among the stakeholders (McGlashan & Williams, 2003).

Methodology and Research Results

The quantitative approach was conducted to explore and describe the involvement of stakeholders of local citizens in participating developing community-based rural tourism (CBRT), especially the local communities involved in the light collaboration with local governance. In particular, the survey was conducted with local households who are participating the tourism activities at rural areas in Quang Binh and Nghe An in North Central Coastal Vietnam (**Table 1**). The key question addressed centered on understanding how local communities participate in tourism industry and any barriers influencing their participation in the sector as a growth development strategy and a poverty reduction in the local tourism activities (**Table 2**). As discussed by literature reviews in earlier section, the participation of local stakeholders and local governance collaboration is important since many tourism activities have various impacts (direct and indirect) on the local community wellbeing. Furthermore, local tourism activities also received support and established relationships with the government, especially agencies bodies directly related to tourism development activities from central to local levels and which might affect their local householders within tourism development process and implementation (**Table 2**).

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents

| Variable | Number of respondents (N=104) | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------|
| Gender | | |
| Male | 45 | 43.27 |
| Female | 59 | 56.73 |
| Age | | |
| 21-30 years | 9 | 10.47 |
| 31-40 years | 32 | 37.21 |
| 41-50 years | 23 | 26.74 |
| 50 years above | 22 | 25.58 |
| Monthly income (million VND) | | |
| <2 | 9 | 9.47 |
| 2-4 | 19 | 20.00 |
| 4-5 | 30 | 31.58 |
| 5-6 | 14 | 14.74 |
| 6-10 | 15 | 15.79 |
| >10 | 8 | 8.42 |

Table 1 illustrates the demographic profile of respondents. There were 59 female respondents (56.73 percent), and 45 male respondents (43.27 percent) in this study; hence making a total of 104 respondents. In terms of age, a majority of the respondents (62 percent) were from the middle-age from 31- 40 (37 percent) and 41-50 (26.7 percent) while the younger age group (21-30 years of age) made up 10.47 percent of the respondents. With respect to the income levels, the highest percentage was 31.5 0% for those earning a monthly income between 4-5 million VND, whereas the smallest percentage was those with a monthly income of more than 10 million VND with only 8.42 percent.

The greater engagement of local community and stakeholders in the decision-making process is a critical element for tourism to become sustainable (Graci and Dodds, 2010). The survey also explored the likelihood of respondents to be included in participation and implementation process and the result was presented in **Table 2**.

Table 2: Local participation in rural community-based tourism development and implementation

| Statement | N | Strongly disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree | Mean | SD |
|---|-----|-------------------|---------|-------|----------------|------|------|
| Willing to participate in local meetings on rural tourism development | 104 | 2.9 | 2.9 | 37.5 | 56.7 | 4.45 | .811 |
| Willing to link with neighboring villages to develop rural community tourism | 104 | 2.9 | 3.8 | 35.6 | 57.7 | 4.45 | .822 |
| Willing to help neighbors participate in rural community tourism development | 104 | 2.9 | 5.8 | 40.4 | 51.0 | 4.36 | .836 |
| Willing to call and persuade other people to participate in activities of local rural community tourism | 104 | 2.9 | 3.8 | 47.1 | 45.2 | 4.30 | .836 |
| Regularly keep good contacts with local authorities and tourism businesses | 104 | 1.9 | 3.8 | 49.0 | 43.3 | 4.29 | .799 |
| Regularly participate in meeting with local officials in organizing and developing tourism | 104 | 10.6 | 11.5 | 45.2 | 30.8 | 4.16 | .935 |
| Be informed and consulted about developing plan of local tourism | 104 | 3.8 | 9.6 | 49.0 | 35.6 | 4.09 | .929 |
| Being consulted by local officials how to do tourism business | 104 | 10.6 | 11.5 | 45.2 | 30.8 | 3.80 | 1.20 |

Factors and barriers hindering within participating and implementing in tourism activities are very important in this research as this helps to identify if there were any specific needs and, maybe, levels of participation and tolerance regarding certain aspects of local tourism activities, which might affect their lives when tourism activities are developed in their rural life (Table 2). A majority of respondents felt that the likelihood of their being included in local meetings on rural tourism development process is positive (57%). However, 49% regularly keep good contacts with local authorities and tourism businesses.

The study revealed that 45.2% of the total respondents agreed that they have been involved actively in the implementation and uses of the tourism attractions and enjoy the benefits and willing to call and persuade other people to participate in activities of local rural community tourism. Moreover, the study observed that 49.0 percent was informed and consulted about developing plan of local tourism of the total respondents participated by giving consultation to tourism attractions.

On the other based on practical reflections, the study revealed that they had involved actively in the areas of implementation and operationalization of the tourism attractions found in the case study area. It was also found that 51% of the total respondents had participated in

coordination towards tourism attraction and willing to link with neighbouring villages to develop rural community tourism. In general, the area of implementation and operationalization of tourism attractions has a great implication in improvement of the livelihood of the rural householders since it provides jobs and hence generate incomes for their participation.

Table 3: Local governance collaboration

| Statement | N | Of no interest | Disagree | Neutral | Agree | Strongly agree | Mean | SD |
|--|-----|----------------|----------|---------|-------|----------------|------|------|
| Local government and community counsellors are friendly | 104 | 3.8 | 2.9 | 16.3 | 49.0 | 27.9 | 3.93 | .958 |
| Comments by locals in tourism development are acknowledged in making decision and implementation | 104 | 11.5 | 2.9 | 13.5 | 44.2 | 27.9 | 3.85 | 1.12 |
| Policies clearly state the benefits of households participating in tourism | 104 | 9.6 | 1.9 | 17.3 | 49.0 | 22.1 | 3.70 | 1.13 |
| Supported by the government when participating in tourism organization | 104 | 13.5 | 1.9 | 12.5 | 43.3 | 28.8 | 3.69 | 1.30 |
| Provide, update policies supported when participating in tourism | 104 | 11.5 | 4.8 | 14.4 | 43.3 | 26.0 | 3.65 | 1.25 |

The greater engagement and collaboration of local community and local governance is a critical element for rural tourism to become sustainable (Graci and Dodds, 2010). The survey also explored that respondents agreed that they are interested in policies clearly state the benefits of households participating in tourism that enable them to understand and have been involved actively in the tourism industry simply if they were deeply educated and aware of rural tourism development in the area. It is a major concern hindering community participation in tourism sector when only 27.9 percent of respondents shared that local government and community counsellors are friendly enough and comments by locals in tourism development should be acknowledged in making decision and implementation (27.9 percent). Local government may opt to ensure that local communities' involvement and participation in the tourism sector in the rural areas through tourism education, training, and awareness creation programmers (Powell, Green, Holladay, Krafte, Duda, Nguyen & Das, 2018). This will help to build trust in planning process, decision-making process, coordination and control, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of tourism activities

Discussions and Conclusion

This study has shown that the underpinning empirical work of local governance collaboration can have significant effect on the local communities to participate in tourism activities for improving livelihoods and community-based rural tourism. This underlines the point out the significant and reliable explanation relevant to both the local people's participation in tourism industry and its sustainability of the local people. It is quite evident from the research findings that main factors hindering ineffective community participation in tourism activities or the inadequate local communities' participation in tourism activities results from both the lack of

relevant interaction amongst the local communities and local management of tourism activities, and knowledge, inadequate experience in tourism business. All in all it has been revealed that local governance collaboration with local community participation is instrumentally a tool to empower local people so that they can actively influence the process of planning, decision-making that affect their improved livelihoods and tourism development in rural areas.

Tourism policy and legislations need to be reviewed and amended in order to create more conducive enabling environment that encourages and empowers community participation in tourism sector at grassroots level and be able to execute the stipulated functions. This will assist local people to enhance their participation, getting more jobs and improve livelihoods opportunities for their well-being and therefore contribute to national efforts in poverty alleviation in in North Central Coastal Vietnam. It is crucial for tourism development and must be integrated into the favourable development policy and Act.

In conclusion, it can be asserted local communities must be actively involved in each stage of tourism planning and development in the light of local governance collaboration and support in order to ensure that all their tourism activities and products benefit the residents. This will represent a significant step forwards in ensuring more adequate community participates in the community-based rural tourism in rural areas in general and in North central in particular to enhance community involvement in tourism sector.

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