

Promoting Sustainable Rural Development Through Community-Based Tourism

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2024

Online at https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/122229/ MPRA Paper No. 122229, posted 29 Sep 2024 23:30 UTC

Working Paper

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Abstract

Community-based tourism (CBT) is a viable alternative to promoting sustainable rural development. In the same vein, sustainable rural development is possible by reinforcing the priority of local policies and increasing the involvement of local communities in the development process to achieve positive socio-economic and ecological-environmental impacts. Rural communities face numerous challenges, including economic limitations, socio-cultural preservation issues, and environmental degradation, which can hinder long-term Sustainability. CBT offers a solution by directly involving local communities in the planning and management of tourism, ensuring that economic benefits are equitably distributed, cultural heritage is preserved, and the natural environment is protected. By aligning tourism activities with the community's socio-economic and environmental goals; CBT Can create a balanced framework for development. The review comes up with a conceptual framework that explores the role of CBT in enhancing sustainable rural development. Therefore, this proposal argues that CBT provides a steady income stream and straightens the resilience of rural communities by integrating sustainable practices into tourism, ultimately contributing to long-term sustainable rural development.

Keywords: Community-Based Tourism, SDGs, Sustainable Rural Development, Sustainable Tourism Development

1. Introduction

In the dynamic landscape of global development, the role of the rural community has emerged as a pivotal force, especially in the context of sustainable rural development. Rural areas, which often rely heavily on agriculture and natural resources, face challenges in ensuring long-term economic growth and environmental sustainability (Fong & Lo, 2015; Shafieisabet & Haratifard, 2020). Sustainable rural development focuses on improving the quality of life for rural populations while preserving the natural environment and cultural heritage (Fong & Lo, 2015; Masot & Gascón, 2021). It aims to create resilient communities by fostering local economic growth, enhancing access to essential services, and promoting environmental stewardship (Prayitno et al., 2023). Tourism, especially sustainable tourism, has gained recognition as a viable alternative for rural development, offering opportunities for economic diversification and community empowerment (Selcuk et al., 2021).

Despite its potential, rural development faces numerous challenges. Many rural areas struggle with poverty, limited infrastructure, outmigration, and unemployment, making it difficult to achieve sustainable growth (Sitikarn, 2021). The depletion of natural resources due to unsustainable agricultural practices and environmental challenges such as deforestation and climate change further exacerbate these issues. Moreover, rural communities often face marginalization in development planning, with external actors making decisions without considering local needs or knowledge (Krittayaruangroj et al., 2023; Sitikarn, 2021). The lack of access to education, healthcare, and modern infrastructure further limits rural development prospects. In response to these challenges, sustainable tourism has emerged (as a strategy) to address some of these critical issues while offering new economic opportunities for rural areas (Iddawala et al., 2024).

Sustainable tourism has proven to be a powerful tool in supporting rural development by promoting responsible travel practices that minimize environmental and social impacts (Chamodya & Wickramaratne, n.d.; Prayitno et al., 2023). It emphasizes protecting cultural and natural resources, allowing local communities to benefit from tourism without compromising their environment or cultural heritage (UNWTO, 2013). In rural areas, sustainable tourism offers an alternative to environmentally damaging industries, generating income while preserving the landscape and cultural traditions (Hariyadi et al., 2024; Selcuk et al., 2021). It can drive inclusive

development, ensuring local communities economically benefit while fostering environmental conservation (Ikhtiagung & Radyanto, 2020).

One promising model of sustainable tourism is Community-Based Tourism (CBT). This approach emphasizes the active participation of local communities in developing and managing tourism activities (Fong & Lo, 2015; Sapkota et al., 2024.; Shafieisabet & Haratifard, 2020). CBT empowers communities by involving them in decision-making processes, ensuring economic benefits stay within the community, and preserving local cultural heritage. Tourists in CBT interact directly with the local population, experiencing authentic cultural exchanges while contributing to community welfare and environmental sustainability (Abreu et al., 2024; Samarathunga, et al., 2015). CBT serves as an effective tool for sustainable rural development by promoting cultural preservation, economic opportunities, and local empowerment. Travelers who support CBT initiatives contribute directly to the well-being and empowerment of rural communities, making tourism a force for positive change (Krittayaruangroj et al., 2023; Sumanapala & Samarakoon, 2021; Sitikarn, 2021).

The traditional top-down approach to tourism development, in which external entities such as government agencies and private corporations control decisions and resources, often neglects the needs and aspirations of local communities (Sapkota et al., 2024). This model has led to adverse social, cultural, and environmental impacts, including the displacement of local populations, exploitation of natural resources, and degradation of cultural traditions. Hence, many tourism models have failed to achieve long-term sustainability, commodifying culture and environmental degradation (Iddawala et al., 2024; Masot & Gascón, 2021).

CBT, in contrast, offers an alternative by placing local communities at the center of tourism development, ensuring that tourism benefits align with community goals and values (Fong & Lo, 2015; Shafieisabet & Haratifard, 2020). Communities engaged in CBT are more likely to prioritize long-term sustainability over short-term profits, thus promoting economic resilience and environmental conservation (Abreu et al., 2024; Bagus et al., 2019; Hariyadi et al., 2024). By aligning tourism development with the broader goals of sustainable rural development, CBT serves as a key mechanism for ensuring that tourism contributes positively to both the environment and the livelihoods of local populations (Iddawala et al., 2024; Krittayaruangroj et al., 2023).

During the sub sequent decades, CBT has attracted increasing interest in concert with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of the global adoption of the United Nations (Dangi & Jamal, 2016; Sumanapala et al., 2023b; Moyle et al., 2020). Therefore, a recent bibliometric review by Moyle et al. (2020) identified CBT as a "contextual theme" in the sustainable tourism domain. Within this framework, CBT emerges as a means of realizing the sustainable development goals (SDGs) articulated in the United Nations' Agenda 2030, outlined in 2015 (Krittayaruangroj et al., 2023; Gasimli et al., 2022). Therefore, the review explores the potential of community-based tourism (CBT) as a strategic approach to enhancing sustainable rural development. By integrating local culture, natural resources, and community engagement, CBT fosters economic opportunities while promoting environmental stewardship and social cohesion.

This Review draws on the principles of sustainable development, which emphasize the interconnectedness of economic, social, and environmental dimensions. Specifically, this approach empowers communities and aligns with the broader goals of sustainable rural development by ensuring that tourism initiatives are responsive to local needs and conditions.

2. Literature Review

The literature review examines the Sustainable tourism, role of community-based tourism (CBT) In promoting sustainable rural development, highlighting its potential to empower local communities and preserve cultural heritage.

Sustainable Tourism Development

Sustainable tourism is a continuously developed; concept that meets the needs of the local community and tourists; it provides broad opportunities for future developments (Sumanapala, et al., 2023a). McAreavey and McDonagh (2010) emphasized that Sustainable tourism focuses on the fluid relationship between humans and the physical environment. Sustainable tourism is possible by reinforcing the priority of local policies and increasing the involvement of local stakeholders in the development process to achieve positive socio-economic and ecological-environmental impacts (UNWTO, 2013). Sustainable tourism refers to the development of tourism in a manner that avoids ecological degradation, cultural disruption, and other adverse impacts while enhancing the well-being of host communities and meeting the expectations of tourists

(Ikhtiagung & Radyanto, 2020; Selcuk et al., 2021). This form of tourism ensures that tourism activities contribute positively to the environment, society, and economy (Prayitno et al., 2023; Gamage et al., 2018; Sumanapala et al., 2023a).

Social, cultural, economic, and environmental sustainability are the four dimensions of sustainable rural development. Social sustainability is attained when a tourism site successfully preserves its historical and cultural assets (Sanagustin Fons et al., 2011). According to Timur and Getz (2009), tourism can result in social challenges, including traffic congestion, construction activities, criminal activity, different effects on quality of life, and alterations in community identity. Tourism can also affect the moral standards of local communities due to economic benefits (Archer et al., 2012). Hence, local community involvement in rural tourism is essential for achieving positive social outcomes.

Tourism, which is viewed positively, has changed the local communities' lifestyle regarding cultural sustainability. In other words, tourism may cause long-term changes in the community's values, beliefs, and cultural practices. Per Dorobantu and Nistoreanu, (2012), local community involvement in tourism activities is critical in preserving a community's traditional culture.

Rural tourism provides employment opportunities, increases local prosperity, conserves the environment, preserves cultural assets, and, in turn, ensures greater benefits for tourism stakeholders (McAreavey & McDonagh, 2010). Therefore, according to Thongma et al. (2011) and Ertuana and Kirbas, (2012), active involvement and participation of the local community in the rural tourism development process are the prerequisites for achieving sustainability and improving the community's overall welfare in economic sustainability.

Environmental sustainability, aligned with the preservation of ecological processes, diversity of life, and biological resources, is essential to developing a memorable setting for tourism. Consequently, community participation in the rural tourism development process is vital to ensuring environmental sustainability at tourist attractions (Dorobantu & Nistoreanu, 2012).

Social, cultural, economic, and environmental sustainability are affected by sustainable tourism, which is insensitive to the elements of sustainable rural development (Fiorello & Bo, 2012). previous researchers (Thongma et al., 2011; Hjalager, 2010) emphasized that local communities

are familiar with the tourists and their local cultural activities, and hence, their involvement and support are essential to the success and development of rural communities through community-based tourism.

Community-Based Tourism (CBT)

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) is an approach to tourism where local communities are central to the planning, management, and ownership of tourism activities, ensuring that the benefits of tourism are equitably distributed among community members (Fong & Lo, 2015; Sapkota et al., 2023; Shafieisabet & Haratifard, 2020). CBT aims to maximize the positive impacts of tourism by empowering local residents, promoting cultural preservation, and ensuring environmental sustainability. Krittayaruangroj et al. (2023) define CBT as a model where communities have control over tourism projects and receive the majority of the benefits. According to Abreu et al. (2024), CBT involves managing tourism for the community's benefit while educating visitors about local culture and ways of life. Local communities involved in tourism activities have been repeatedly addressed as an action of support towards tourism development in their communities (Simmons, 1994).

According to MacDonald and Jolliffe (2003), community involvement includes sharing knowledge, knowledge and skill development, cultural exchange, gaining commitment from the communities, and participation in the decision-making process. These will, in turn, achieve tourist satisfaction and sustainable rural tourism development. Cole (2006) mentioned that community empowerment triggers the local communities' ability to manage tourism development in their community. Hence, distributing power between and within the community groups is essential for sustainable rural development.

The community participation level encompasses a spectrum that spans from active involvement in the decision-making processes at the most elevated echelon to engagement in economic activities, Trust and confidence, Local Involvement, Partnerships and Collaboration, and advocating for the destination at the subordinate level (Rasoolimanesh & Jaafar, 2017).

The role of CBT in promoting sustainable rural development is increasingly recognized, as it provides an alternative to sustainable tourism that is more inclusive and environmentally friendly

(Samarathunga et al., 2015; Sitikarn, 2021). It encourages meaningful interactions between visitors and host communities, helping to preserve local cultures and traditions while generating income for rural populations. Samarathunga et al. (2015) note that CBT is particularly suited to rural areas, as it is small-scale and often involves locally owned tourism enterprises. This focus on local ownership and management allows for greater community involvement and ensures that tourism benefits are retained within the community (Sapkota et al., 2024).

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) in Sustainable Rural Development

CBT has emerged as a powerful tool for achieving sustainable rural development. It provides economic opportunities for local communities and helps protect the environment and preserve cultural heritage (Iddawala et al., 2024; Masot & Gascón, 2021). Nair et al. (2014) mention that one of the National Key Economic Areas (NKEA) under the Tenth Malaysia Plan is to create employment opportunities and increase the income levels among rural communities. In sum, tourism in Malaysia catalyzes and motivates economic growth, in particular, it improves the local communities' living standards (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004).

Integrating CBT into rural development strategies has the potential to address main challenges faced by rural areas, such as poverty, unemployment, and environmental degradation (Fong & Lo, 2015; Kulasinghe & Wijerathna, 2023; Wijerathna & Dharmarathna, 2023; Shafieisabet & Haratifard, 2020). According to Abebe and Singh, (2023), CBT empowers local people and helps build community capacity, fostering long-term sustainable development. By involving local communities in the decision-making process, CBT allows for a more tailored approach to tourism development that reflects the needs and aspirations of the community (Krittayaruangroj et al., 2023; Shafieisabet & Haratifard, 2020).

Bagus et al. (2019) emphasize that CBT'S success depends on effectively applying sustainable tourism development principles, particularly in rural and marginalized areas. The Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA, 2017) has promoted CBT as part of its broader strategy for sustainable tourism development in Sri Lanka (Samarathunga, et al., 2015). This approach seeks to generate economic benefits for local communities while enhancing their well-being and preserving the natural environment. Shafieisabet and Haratifard (2020) identified key performance indicators to assess the impact of CBT initiatives, focusing not only on financial outcomes but also

on non-financial benefits such as improvements in social cohesion, cultural preservation, and environmental sustainability.

Proposed Framework for Sustainable Rural Development through Community-Based Tourism

The theoretical framework for this study posits that community-based tourism (CBT) can serve as a vital mechanism for sustainable rural development by integrating economic, social, and environmental dimensions. Figure 1 illustrates the proposed framework, highlighting the interconnected elements of challenges in rural communities, sustainable tourism, community-based tourism and sustainable rural development.

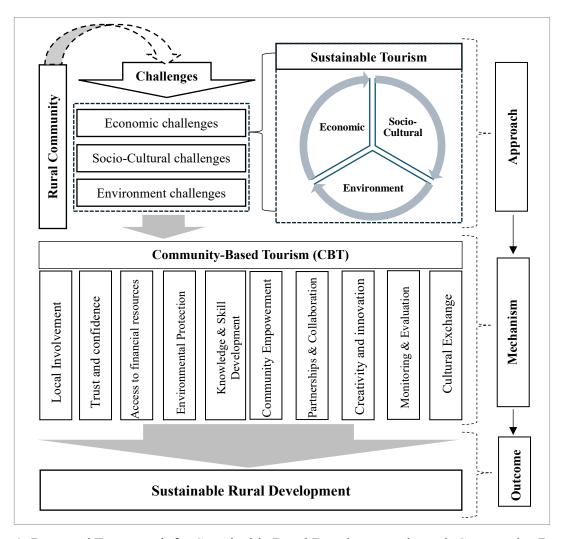


Figure 1: Proposed Framework for Sustainable Rural Development through Community-Based Tourism

This framework outlines a comprehensive approach to achieving sustainable rural development, addressing the three primary categories of challenges in rural communities: economic, socio-cultural, and environmental. The mechanism for addressing these challenges lies in Sustainable community-based tourism (CBT), which ensures that the local community plays a central role in tourism planning, management, and benefit-sharing. The strategies shown in the framework, such as local involvement, cultural preservation, economic benefits, skill development, and environmental protection, are interconnected solutions designed to tackle these challenges comprehensively. Promoting community empowerment, partnerships, and collaboration ensures that rural communities are not passive recipients but active participants in the development process.

Sustainable rural development is the outcome of implementing community-based tourism as a solution to the challenges in rural communities. This form of tourism provides a steady source of income and contributes to cultural preservation and environmental protection, in sharing the long-term sustainability of the Community. By involving locals in every aspect of tourism development, from decision-making to operations, CBT fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility. This leads to protecting cultural heritage and natural resources, reinforcing the community's resilience against external pressures and ensuring that tourism remains a sustainable economic driver for future generations.

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