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**Key Elements for Successful
Management of Tourism
Ventures in Rural
Communities**

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Key Elements for Successful Management of Tourism Ventures in Rural Communities

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Abstract

Tourism constitutes an important sector in the economy of many countries around the world and it is recognized as being a powerful factor for the economic development and improvement of livelihood of rural communities. In this context, tourism ventures have emerged and have been developed to attract and increase the flow of tourists to certain rural communities with only partial success, due to the lack of appropriate management and business skills. Research has revealed that rural tourism is not perfectly organized so to be sustainable and to maximize the benefit for the local community. Based on the review of literature, key elements determining the success of the development of tourism ventures in rural areas, along with management recommendations targeting to sustainable tourism development, are discussed. The proposed recommendations aim to address the main elements on how to successfully manage tourism enterprises within rural communities.

Keywords: rural tourism; alternative tourism; sustainability; stakeholders; tourism planning

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Introduction

Tourism is recognized as being a powerful factor for economic development around the world. Tourism development has been increasingly addressed as a solution for the improvement of the livelihood of rural communities by enhancing economic opportunities and promoting social regeneration. According to United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTOa), tourism has become a major tool for development and a significant source of tax revenues, particularly in developing countries, where the creation of tourism jobs and enterprises, have helped to balance economic opportunities and kept rural residents from moving to overcrowded cities (Moscardo, 2008).

Likewise, in the developed world, within peripheral or economically disadvantaged areas, tourism has become a means of economic and social revitalization (Sharpley, 2009b). Tourism, in rural areas, has contributed to the development of new kinds of jobs in communities where the local economy requires an impulse allowing them to improve their quality of life. Nevertheless, tourism development in rural areas should be addressed in the broader economic, natural and cultural context in which it takes place as part of a sustainable livelihood strategy and its contribution to reduce poverty, particularly, in least developed countries (Moscardo, 2008; Sharpley, 2009a; Tao & Wall, 2009).

Mowforth and Munt (1998) have explored the ways in which the *new tourism*, distinctive from the conventional mass tourism, is interrelated with the concept of sustainable development in the Third World destinations. According to Mowforth and Munt (1998), a significant proportion of the *new tourism* in the Third World could be directly related to the growth of the middle classes of the First World as well as an increased interest in otherness, e.g. ethnicity and ecology that could be found in the Third World destinations.

According to previous research, economic opportunities in rural communities have been dimin-

ished by both economic restructuring and farm crises in developed and developing countries (e.g. Wilson, Fesenmaier, Fesenmaier & Van, 2001; Sharpley, 2002). These changes have restricted the economic development options for rural communities. However, tourism has emerged as an alternative strategy for economic development within these communities due to the generation of tourist business opportunities which are sources of job creation and a better livelihood.

At an early stage of tourism planning and development, however, it is imperative to gain an understanding of residents' opinion and support toward tourism development (Allen, Hafer, Long, & Perdue, 1993; Andereck & Vogt, 2000; Long, Perdue, & Allen, 1990; McGehee & Andereck, 2004; Wang & Pfister, 2008; Hwang et al., 2012). Furthermore, community stakeholders should implement strategies that aim to gain residents' support for tourism development. Hence, local authorities should engage in tourism initiatives associated with infrastructure improvements, increased recreational community choices as well as improved amenities that can be shared by residents and tourists alike to promote a favorable attitude towards tourism within the community (Wang & Pfister, 2008)

According to Allen et al. (1993) rural residents generally have positive attitudes toward recreation facilities and tourism development, but these attitudes are related to the level of tourism development and the total economic activity in a rural community. Andereck and Vogt (2000) explored the relationship between residents' attitudes toward tourism development for economic benefit in rural communities, where they found a large tendency to support tourism as a community development strategy.

Over the last years, there has been a shift from traditional "sun and sea" mass tourism to new alternative tourism destinations. Forty years ago, MacCannell (1973) reported the seeking of authentic tourist experience as the modern desire to see life as it is really lived in the places tourists visit by living a

demystified experience. For Pretes (1995) in post-modern society, tourism became a commodity to be consumed; however, the work of MacCannell (1973) argued that tourists seek the authentic. According to Urry (1992), tourists are seeking for extraordinary places, visually different, so they can get off the everyday life. The current global trend indicates that tourists are seeking for more authentic experiences by being involved within hosting communities and getting a deeper connection to the local people.

Tourists' main motivation in visiting rural areas is their interest in learning and enjoying the distinctive features that characterize the hosting communities. The success of this new kind of tourism lies in the experiential encounter of tourists with natural and cultural heritage of the community which enriches their experience (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004). According to Murphy (1985) a community needs to consider the authenticity of its tourism product, to ensure survival, because visitors tend to be more attracted to "get behind the scenes" and learn more about foreign cultures and ways of life. Murphy also defined a community-based tourism destination as a community where visitors interact with local hosts and services, and the natural/cultural environment to experience a tourism product.

Furthermore, the increasing importance of alternative rural tourism development has been addressed by the UNWTO that ranks rural tourism in parts of Africa and Asia among the major tourism growth areas for the next decades (Foroohar, 2002). However, the development of alternative tourism, hospitality and leisure services in rural communities should overcome certain challenges to be exercised in a responsible way in order to be sustainable. The conceptual definition of sustainable tourism refers to the "tourism that takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts, addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, the environment and host communities" (UNWTO, 2004a). In this scenario, Simpson (2009) has argued the concept of sustainable livelihood in communities

by addressing the interrelation of the local assets, capabilities, and activities that enable a community to implement desired development strategies while protecting their resources over time and improving their quality of life.

Tao and Wall (2009) contended that tourism development should be part of a major strategic system that provides a sustainable livelihood to aboriginal communities and enhances management of natural resources. Likewise, tourism in rural areas should aim to deliver economic and social benefits to local inhabitants and to fortify their cultural identity while being respectful of the natural environment.

Community tourism ventures have emerged and have been developed to attract and increase the flow of tourists to certain rural areas, with partial success, due to the lack of appropriate management and business skill (Sebele, 2010). Furthermore, Haywood (1988) argued that in tourism planning, as in any other business, strategic planning should be implemented at the operational level, which requires partnership and decision-making sharing among all relevant parties in the community. Simpson (2008) suggested that successful management of tourism ventures should consider the strategic roles of key stakeholders, i.e. of the rural community, the local, regional and national government, the private sector and the non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The role of the stakeholders is considered determinant in the monitoring, planning and management of any touristic destination (Choi & Sirakaya, 2006; Garrod, 2003; Haywood, 1998; Jamal & Getz, 1995; Moscardo, 2008; Murphy, 1985; Sebele, 2010; Simpson, 2008).

In the past, tourism planning and management used to be the result of a centralized and top-down process with little input and/or control from the destination communities in the decision making process (Murphy, 1985). In recent years, however, it has been widely recognized the need to building local capacity of the host communities and promoting their active participation in the planning and devel-

opment of successful tourism industry (Moscardo, 2008).

Furthermore, strategic management of tourism ventures in rural areas has been considered crucial to the development of sustainable tourism (Sebele, 2010; Simpson, 2008). However, there remains the challenge to overcome the lack of strategic management in planning and running tourism ventures, due mostly to improvised individual and uncoordinated effort. Previous research has addressed this issue and suggested an integrated cooperation among key stakeholders to obtain positive outcomes (Choi & Sirakaya, 2006; Jamal & Getz, 1995; Sebele, 2010; Simpson, 2008). However, there is still a need to further the knowledge in the topic and to propose actions to be undertaken by the key stakeholders in order to facilitate the sustainable management of tourism ventures for the benefit of the local society.

The purpose of this paper is: a) to contribute to the identification of key elements for strategic management of tourism ventures in rural communities and b) to develop recommendations and to propose specific strategic actions for the benefit of the communities and for the conservation of their natural and cultural assets.

Literature Review

Evolving tourist trends have led to a shift from standardized mass tourism to more individualistic patterns in which more meaningful experience has gained prominence. For Simpson (2009) the scope of tourism has increased, due to "a rapid growth in demand for more individualistic, active/participatory and meaningful forms of tourism that provide a broader or more fulfilling experience" (p.20). Tourists are searching for alternative experiences such as ecological uniqueness, special adventure opportunities, or cultural attractions that can be found in rural areas with a vast source of distinctive natural and cultural assets (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004). According to Sharpley (2009b), tourists are now more adventurous and responsible in their consumption of tourism, therefore, they are seeking for meaningful

experiences that are less harmful to the natural environment and contribute to the improvement of the host communities.

This increasing trend has meant a great opportunity for rural operators to develop tourism ventures in rural communities to attract and increase the flow of tourists to rural areas. According to Wilson et al. (2001) successful rural tourism communities are those which have established specific and effective infrastructures oriented to support alternative tourism development. The less successful communities are those that, despite having major tourist attractions, have failed to develop a complete tourism package to entice tourists, and have not succeeded in promoting their touristic products effectively. Several factors can affect the success of tourism development in rural areas (Wilson et al., 2001); the 10 most important factors are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. A summarized list of factors for successful tourism development

1. A complete tourism package
2. Good community leadership
3. Support and participation of local government
4. Sufficient funds for tourism development
5. Strategic planning
6. Coordination and cooperation between businesspersons and local leadership
7. Coordination and cooperation between rural tourism entrepreneurs
8. Information and technical assistance for tourism development and promotion
9. Good convention and visitors bureaus
10. Widespread community support for tourism

(Source: adapted from Wilson et al. 2001)

As it is widely recognized in the tourism literature, successful tourism relies on luring tourists to prolong their stay at a destination. According to Murphy (1985), to be a destination an area must attract non-local visitors, people who have traveled

some distance from their home to see attractions or use the facilities. The aim should be, not only to have tourists visiting the majority of the attractions but to have repeat visits to the destination and maximize individual spending. The right mix of business for tourism (including lodging, restaurants, attractions, shops and the provision of unique experiences) will lead to the ultimate goal of getting tourists to visit, stay, spend money, and return on repeat visits (Wilson et al., 2001; Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004). Clearly, the level of income that tourism brings to a destination community will depend on the types of visitors attracted and their length of stay (Murphy, 1985). Hence, the importance of generating overnight stays and lodging taxes by offering a complete tourist destination that will increase visitor expenditure and boost the community's level of economic return.

Tourism ventures in rural communities deliver livelihood which can be defined as a means of subsistence but also as the broader economic, social and cultural outcomes derived from tourism development in a community (Tao & Wall, 2009). Similarly, tourism development can provide other benefits to the local communities. These benefits of tourism fall into four broad categories: economic, environmental, socio-cultural and the building of skills and influence (Simpson, 2008). By the introduction of tourism development, communities have secured businesses and employment in selling food, providing lodging and transport, selling souvenirs, serving as guides, and sourcing of tourism-related goods and services locally, hence, improving their economic opportunities and quality of life.

Despite the potential for positive benefits to communities, tourism initiatives may also have some downsides, such as the generation of problems to their stability and harmony and triggering a range of other factors disturbing the economic, environmental and socio-cultural sustainability of the local society. According to Simpson (2008), to overcome barriers and provide sustainable benefits to a community,

through a tourism initiative, appropriate management must be implemented. Although it is well established that tourism development in rural areas increases economic viability, stimulates social regeneration and improves the livelihood of rural communities (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004; Sharpley, 2002), from the perspective of business management, rural tourism suffers from several obstacles that complicate its competitiveness. Romeiro and Costa (2010) have suggested that tourism ventures in rural communities usually emerge from spontaneous and individual action with insufficient efforts in planning objectives and support instruments. Thus, the lack of appropriate skills, needed in the tourism industry, hampers the projects and provides very few benefits to rural communities, if any.

Clearly, it is not easy for poor marginalized rural populations to compete within the international tourism sector due to their lack of knowledge and experience in the subject (Snyder & Sulle, 2011). In developing countries, for example, tourism planning and development has traditionally been prepared by central governments, without taking into account the critical input of the local communities (Tosun, 2000, 2006). Hence, active local participation in decision making may be difficult to put into practice, not only due to institutional arrangements but also to the different stages of tourism development in the community (Tosun & Timothy, 2003; Li, 2006). Nevertheless, community participation may help to reduce the gap between the community and bureaucratic decision makers, by strengthening the democratization process in tourism development at any destination (Tosun & Timothy, 2003)

Furthermore, Sebele (2010) suggested that communities need to acquire managerial, entrepreneurial and marketing skills to ensure they break through into the market and gain a bigger share of benefits from tourism industry. The lack of general tourism knowledge has been pointed out as the most crucial barrier to successful tourism development, because it limits the local tourism leadership, and the

effective planning, management and participation of stakeholders within a community (Moscardo, 2008). Moreover, centralization is another major issue mainly faced by developing countries due to a highly centralized and undemocratic tourism planning system that limits community participation in the tourism development process (Tosun, 2000, 2006).

Local communities used to be seen only as the beneficiaries of tourism development, rather than active partners in tourism planning and development (Garrod, 2003). However, it is evident that communities should be allowed to become active participants and decision-makers in the development of tourism ventures. Community active participation require support from other stakeholders (e.g. the government, the private sector and NGOS) to enable the transfer of skills and knowledge in order to properly manage tourism enterprises, to provide local benefits and to increase the conservation of natural resources (Sebele, 2010).

For a successful development of sustainable tourism in rural areas, there are certain policies and actions, monitoring systems, and educational programs that, if followed, can maximize the full potential of local communities engaged in tourism enterprises (Choi & Sirakaya, 2006; Garrod, 2003; Ham & Weiler, 2007; Jamal & Getz, 1995; Liu, 2006; Moscardo, 2008; Sebele, 2010; Simpson, 2008, 2009). Sustainable tourism policies should provide strategies, action plans and a monitoring system of sustainable development for the entire spectrum of economic, social, cultural, natural, technological and political environments. Stakeholders must develop systems that can monitor and adjust planning and destination management (Choi & Sirakaya, 2006).

Moreover, community managers and planners need to provide educational information and programs (e.g. workshops) to residents, visitors, industry and other stakeholders in order to raise public and political awareness of the planning and conservation of community tourism resources. As capacity is encouraged and community members feel part of

the decision-making process in their communities, mutual trust will develop between all parties (Reid, Mair, & Taylor, 2000).

Community capacity building is a determinant for successful tourism development. Hence, communities should first work at building their capacity by gaining tourism knowledge and developing their ability to plan for, and critically evaluate tourism options, before conducting strategic planning and management (Moscardo, 2008). Particularly, in rural areas, the planning and management of tourism ventures require the professionalization of community members seeking to improve essential skills and qualifications. Liu (2006) has identified the key elements nurturing the capacity of rural communities allowing them to diversify the sources of income through successful sustainable tourism development (Table 2).

Table 2. A summarized list of key elements for successful local community involvement

1. Human capital
2. Commitment to training
3. Familiarity with the nature of tourism activities
4. Enthusiasm and participation of rural residents
5. Development of skills and qualifications
6. Achievement of professionalism
7. Promotion of cultural understanding, adaptability and appreciation of cultural differences

(Source: Liu, 2006)

Recommendations

Based on the review of academic literature, relevant to the issue addressed here, it is evident that tourism development in rural areas can contribute to the improvement of the quality of life of communities lacking opportunities for economic and social growth. According to UNWTO, the construction of public infrastructure and services, greater awareness

of environmental conservation and sense of ownership and cultural pride within rural communities are some of the positive aspects of tourism (as cited in Zapata, Hall, Lindo, & Vanderschaeghe, 2011).

However, research has revealed that rural tourism is not perfectly organized to be sustainable and to maximize the benefit for the local community and vague suggestions for the development of community tourism ventures have been reported in the literature (Sebele, 2010; Sharpley, 2002; Wilson, et al., 2001; Zapata, et al., 2011). Successful tourism development requires an active involvement of all stakeholders for planning and management of community-tourism ventures to ensure sustainability and to increase the potential benefits. A selection of recommendations for successful strategic management of tourism ventures in rural communities is illustrated in Table 3, along with possible actions that should be undertaken by the stakeholders.

Table 3. Recommended strategic management actions for community-based tourism ventures

-
- Strategic planning in the development of tourism ventures within rural communities as the start point
 - Setting medium to long term goals
 - Performing periodic evaluations of the projects and their outcomes
 - Environmental analysis:
 - External: to identify potential opportunities and threats
 - Internal: to identify weaknesses and strengths
 - Developing mission and vision, objectives, strategies and policies
 - Establishing programs, budgets and procedures
 - Monitoring and evaluation of performance
-

A strategic action plan includes the participation of the key stakeholders: government, private sector, NGOs and communities through a genuine coopera-

tion and partnership (Sebele, 2010; Simpson, 2008). A summary of the potential roles of the stakeholders in planning and managing tourism ventures in rural communities are shown in Table 4 along with the expected actions that will contribute to the development of sustainable tourism initiatives.

Table 4. Potential roles of key stakeholders

-
- Government (local, regional and national):
- Policy frameworks and legislation
 - Labor and environmental regulations
 - Infrastructure
 - Provision of social and environmental services
 - Funding, incentives
 - Skills training and capacity building
- The private sector
- Market knowledge and tourism expertise
 - Tourism enterprises, hospitality and leisure services and activities
 - Funding, investment and equity
 - Training and skill enhancement
 - Employment of local staff
- Community
- Environmental protection
 - Conservation of natural resources
 - Preservation of cultural identity
 - Protection of cultural heritage
 - Active involvement
 - Positive attitude towards tourists
- NGOs
- Advocacy and campaigning
 - Research and consultancy
 - Collaborative tourism initiatives
-

(Source: adapted from Sebele, 2010; Simpson, 2008)

The development of integrated management strategies will result in successful outcomes for community tourism initiatives in rural areas, in terms of branding their image, thus gaining market share, raising awareness regarding nature conservation; and the preservation of their culture through

building of human capital. The following six management areas have been identified for achieving sustainable tourism development in rural areas: (1) product development and marketing, (2) monitoring of environmental and socio-cultural impact, (3) environmental education, (4) conservation of natural and cultural resources, (5) community involvement, and (6) training and certification of human capital.

1. Product Development and Marketing

Rural communities should evaluate their natural and cultural resource assets to determine whether they have the potential to create tourism related products. The ultimate purpose is to develop a complete tourism package and a tourist destination, with high-quality attractions, suitable accommodations, and quality services, that can get tourists to visit, stay longer and come back to the host communities (Wilson, et al, 2001). The development of a promotion and marketing strategy of a community and its unique tourism attractions can help to build awareness, a branding image and identity that may help to distinguish a community from potential competitors. Further, a marketing strategy requires a community to pursue potential markets and to take advantage of trends and new marketing strategies, e.g. networking, alliances and partnerships, Internet and social media. The implementation of a product development and tourism marketing plan has some advantages, including the following:

- The design of a campaign to create brand image and market the community tourism as a tourist destination
- Positioning the community in the tourism market
- Creation of promotional materials, e.g. brochures, posters, websites
- Participation in national and international tourism exhibitions
- Travel promotion and public relations

2. Monitoring of Environmental and Sociocultural Impact

Community tourism development is perceived as a means for improving the quality of life of people in rural areas, not only in terms of economic benefits but also social and environmental ones. Hence, a primary concern and responsibility in community tourism development is to contribute to environmental, economic, social and cultural sustainability. Clearly, communities should support the conservation and development of environmental and cultural resources as key tourism assets. For instance, tourism development that exceeds the carrying capacity of the economic, natural and sociocultural environment will have a negative impact on the tourism industry of the community due the high interdependence of these elements with the community's tourism system (Jamal & Getz, 1995). Therefore, rural communities should aim to reduce environmental impacts arising from tourism development by enhancing management and stewardship of natural resources and by preserving cultural and social heritage (Sebele, 2010). The introduction of an environmental auditing and monitoring system may help to maximize the benefits and to reduce the negative impact outcomes of tourism development, including:

- Systematic and continuous monitoring
- Development of specific programs to prevent the adverse effects of natural and cultural resources
- Preserve and restore ecosystems
- Evaluation of current conditions and take corrective measurements
- Evaluation of the sociocultural impact of the tourism activity in the community

3. Environmental education

Successful rural tourism development and management depends also on fostering environmental awareness in both, the host community and the tourists through community capacity building (Moscardo, 2008). An environmental education program aims to promote community empowerment and the implementation of new and innovative ideas for the preservation and maintenance of nature and the eco-

systems in the region. In many rural communities ecotourism is increasingly seen as a strategy to deal with economic and social problems in local communities, but also as an effective tool of environmental education and conservation. Moreover, interpretation has played a key role not only for providing a more meaningful experience for visitors within natural, historical or recreational areas, but also as an educational resource for tourism providers to addressing management and conservation issues (Ham & Weiler, 2007). The implementation of an environmental education program may include the following:

- Development of an environmental awareness campaign on the issue of garbage, including a recycling program.
- Development of training materials for working environmental issues, with the participation of communities and educational institutions.
- Establishing links with non-governmental entities or organizations that are carrying out environmental education in order to work in the tourist-focused theme.
- Development forums or spaces training on the importance of the ecological roles of all plant and animal species and humans in different ecosystems that prevail in the region.

Clearly, environmental education is an ongoing process that communities should adapt to their current circumstances and level of tourism development

4. Conservation of natural and cultural resources

Successful management of community tourism initiatives in rural areas implies the building of awareness in both, the community and tourists, regarding proper use, conservation and respect of the natural and cultural resources in the area. The implementation of a conservation program can help communities to ensure tourism development in a responsible and sustainable manner (Sebele, 2010). For instance, national parks have implemented land use classification and zoning as a land planning and

management strategy to balance their preservation purposes and visitor access for recreation in public lands (Murphy, 1985). The main objectives of a conservation of natural and cultural resources plan are:

- Promote the preservation and enhancement of natural cultural heritage
- Enhance management and stewardship of the natural resources
- Advise and provide technical support to the community
- Induce preventive care, under the technical supervision of the appropriate authorities in the conservation of assets in the area
- Prevent negative tourism impact
- Establish penalties for non-compliance with respect to cultural resources through law enforcement

5. Community involvement

The involvement of communities in the planning and development of rural tourism initiatives is determinant in its sustainability and success. (Moscardo, 2008). However, it has been found that the extent to which community members participate in the tourism development process depends on motivation, opportunity, and ability to participate (Hung et al., 2011). According to Reid et.al (2000), in order to increase community participation in tourism development, a preplanning process should focus on the building of community capacity, trust and ownership and, in creating procedures for an open dialogue and information within the community members. Therefore, the implementation of a community involvement plan can be helpful in several ways, including:

- The integration of all community members to tourism
- Fostering community participation to promote sustainable tourism development
- Creating a positive impact for both tourists and the host community
- Promote collaborative management initiatives that are generated by the community

- Training and professionalization of human resources

6. Training and professionalization of human capital

Community capacity building for effective tourism development and management requires training, skills enhancement of the local human resources to provide quality tourism services, and the conservation of the resources. Training and skills enhancement of human capital include: guiding, management, accounting, hospitality and operational for the development of a sustainable and competitive tourism development in a community (Sebele, 2010). The implementation of a training program has several advantages, including the following:

- Building capacity collectively and individually
- Fosters community empowerment
- Best practices: interpretive tourism, safety, customer service, and environmental sustainability
- Improved tourist satisfaction
- Risk management

According to Romeiro and Costa (2010) communities that follow the principles of sustainable tourism development can certainly obtain positive results in the management of tourism enterprises even in remote rural areas, through the building of a networking structure within the community businesses and nearby regions leading to build up competitiveness and innovation. Indeed, sharing of resources enables rural communities to generate innovative local responses to global markets. Therefore, for the suitable management of tourism ventures, that allows them to succeed in the global markets while ensuring sustainability, it is recommended the incorporation of new needs, trends and goals into strategic action plans.

Furthermore, the introduction of information and communication technology (e.g. the use of websites; TV advertisements, etc.) in promoting tourism ventures is suggested. In addition, the establishment of

strategic alliances, with universities and business incubators, may contribute to enhance the knowledge and business skills of the community for sustainable practices. Clearly, the creation of a cohesive destination through the clustering of activities and attractions of tourism and hospitality services as well as the development of tourism routes will stimulate cooperation between local areas and bring in more tourists to rural areas (Briedenhann & Wickens, 2004; Wilson et al., 2001; Zapata, et al., 2011). The increasing number of visitors to rural areas stresses the need for strategic planning and management of community-tourism initiatives to ensure the conservation of the natural and cultural heritage, which is the main source of tourists' attraction to these areas.

The proposed recommendations aim to address the main elements on how to successfully manage tourism enterprises within rural communities. Future research on the issue may conduce to additional strategic actions to be implemented by the key stakeholders for the successful management of tourism ventures, in terms of sustainability and potential benefits to improve the quality of life of the local community.

Conclusions and implications

This paper argued that although tourism ventures in rural communities are perceived to be an effective alternative source for the improvement of livelihood of local residents, it is fundamental to follow a strategic management approach to ensure sustainability. The discussion of academic research in the topic has demonstrated that, most of the time, community enterprises in rural areas emerge from spontaneous actions of non-skilled entrepreneurs lacking of knowledge and a planning strategy. As a result of uncoordinated strategic action between the key stakeholders, community tourism ventures lack of sustainability criteria and management plans without considering the potential negative impacts in the development of tourism in rural communities.

Conversely, planning and development of tourism enterprises within rural communities must be coordinated between key stakeholders. Genuine cooperation between the public and private sectors, and local communities are necessary to sustain projects that will enhance both economic and social development and the conservation of natural resources within the rural areas. Therefore, appropriate communication channels should be structured and participatory approaches should be implemented to ensure incorporation of different views and opinions, with an emphasis on encouraging active participation of rural communities in the development of the projects. McGehee and Andereck (2004) have argued that a major goal for rural tourism development is to assure that all the voices of the community are heard. Therefore, active participation and joint decision-making by key representative stakeholders is essential in the strategic planning process for practical results. Particularly, in communities that are experiencing a strong growth and change due tourism, the development of an active and collaborative planning process is critical (Jamal & Getz, 1995). Further, public participation contributes to a fair distribution of the social, cultural, economic and environmental costs and benefits among community members (Tosun & Timothy, 2003)

Communities in rural areas will be better positioned if they follow business management principles (Sebele, 2010) and adopt strategic management to develop tourism ventures and succeed in their effort to benefit from the global tourism market. The development of a sustainable management strategy that guarantees the implementation of a planned tourism activity will help to protect the natural and cultural resources of a rural community while delivering satisfaction to tourists and contributing to livelihood improvement within the local community.

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