Contested perspectives towards the benefits of community-based tourism

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CONTESTED PERSPECTIVES TOWARDS THE BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM
A case study from Lombok, Indonesia

Lotte Kuijstermans

14.1 Introduction

Tourism can be a powerful tool for reducing poverty and promoting entrepreneurship and small businesses (World Tourism Organization, 2018). Through this way, it can contribute to community development and empower less favoured groups. However, it has been recognized that many community-based tourism (CBT) initiatives, developed without local involvement and analysis of visitors’ focal interest in the destination, fail to cater to the sensibilities of local communities and do not attract enough tourists to the CBT destinations (Mayaka et al., 2017). As long as both host communities’ and tourists’ perceptions towards CBT elements are well understood and matched, CBT can be an effective tool to develop and implement sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products.

Community involvement is the key factor in developing community welfare through CBT, and is, therefore, a requirement to develop sustainable tourism (Sutawa, 2012). Understanding the social impacts of tourism on communities is important for governments, the industry, tourism departments, and agencies in order to understand how individuals within a host community, as well as the host community overall, perceive the benefits and disadvantages of tourism (Deery et al., 2012). Communities’ perceptions about the negative effects of tourism development and the need for high-quality development of tourism have a sizeable impact on the success of a destination.

Following the global trend of developing a more responsible tourism industry, the Indonesian government is now focussing on sustainable tourism and CBT development in its country (UNWTO, 2013). A Sustainable Tourism Master Plan (STMP) has been made for Lombok and is guided by the principles of sustainability (Ministry of Tourism, 2014). Tete-batu, a small rural village, located adjacent to Gunung Rinjani National Park, on Lombok island, is mentioned as a focus area in the master plan. In the village, CBT programmes started with the help of various actors amongst national tourism operators in 2015. The project is called Green Tourism Village and is focussing on turning Indigenous villages into tourist-friendly spots without losing their authenticity. The priority is to conserve the integrity and originality of the villages but at the same time offer a certain comfort for tourists, which includes the implementation and installation of basic sanitation and the expansion of...
infrastructure to provide safe access to the villages (Ministry of Tourism, 2014). However, little is known about the communities that have been working in CBT destinations. This research investigates residents’ perceptions about CBT development and evaluates the impacts and consequences for the local community.

14.2 The concept of community-based tourism

While most tourist activities are carried out at the level of local communities of various destinations, tourism plays an important role in the development of national economy and has brought substantial social and cultural changes (UNWTO, 2008; Goodwin & Santilli, 2009). Tourism can be seen as a way of offering more opportunities for local communities to reach sustainability by managing their cultural and natural assets to offer services that benefit their economy by creating job opportunities. Therefore, the concept of CBT was introduced in the 1980s as a way to strive for sustainable tourism (Goodwin & Santilli, 2009). According to Blackstock (2005) the essence of CBT ‘centres on the involvement of the host community in planning and maintain[ing] tourism development in order to create a more sustainable industry’ (p. 39).

Researchers stated that the tourism industry is dependent on resident goodwill towards tourists and local resident involvement, through their roles as local employees and entrepreneurs. Most CBT indicates a close relationship between tourism and the community. Hence, the concept of CBT emerged as a tool for development, and the product often refers to village tourism, rural tourism, and ecotourism (Blackstock, 2005; UNWTO, 2008). Moreover, the changing expectations of tourists have contributed to the emergence of this concept. Academics argue that tourists increasingly look for experiences that bring them closer to locals (Blackstock, 2005; Rocharungsat, 2005; Goodwin & Santilli, 2009; Hashemkhani Zolfani et al., 2015).

In tourism, host communities play important roles in tourism development and their involvement is crucial to the success of sustainable tourism (Gursoy et al., 2002; Teye et al., 2002; Cole, 2006; Tosun, 2006; Saufi et al., 2013). According to Cole (2006), ‘Local community participation is considered as an essential step to ensure tourism development is sustainable’ (p. 629). Sustaining the community has, therefore, become an essential element of sustainable tourism (Hall & Richards, 2000; Singh et al., 2003). The principle of CBT development usually rests on the assurance of renewable economic, social, and cultural benefits to the community and its environment. Hence, this approach requires the continuing economic, social, and cultural well-being of human communities (Hall & Richards, 2000).

Hall and Richards (2000) mentioned that the interests of those living in the local community do not always coincide. Not all local residents benefit equally from or are equally happy with tourism development. The community is often treated as homogeneous, with little attention given to internal conflict. It has become clear that different groups or individuals may benefit or suffer from tourism development (Bras et al., 2000; Bowles & Gintis, 2002; Hall & Richards, 2000). For this reason, different researchers argue about the concept of CBT in tourism development, which has moved to the centre of the sustainability debate (Hall & Richards, 2000; Cole, 2006; Tosun, 2006; Sharples, 2014; Woo et al., 2015).

14.3 Tourism development in Lombok

The vast majority of the NTB (Nusa Tenggara Barat) province’s international tourism concentrates on Lombok island and, within that, along with the beaches of North-West Lombok...
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Tourism development in Lombok started in the mid-1980s when it attracted attention as an "unspoiled" alternative to Bali. Apart from the capital Mataram, Lombok's tourism development started in 1989, by opening the first beach resort area of Senggigi, where the first star-rated hotel started. Most early tourists on Lombok were welcomed by people who set up homestays and guesthouses. Since the mid-1980s, more and more hotels from low-budget to five-star rating have been constructed along the western coast and in the key tourism area of Senggigi. The three small Gili islands, Gili-T, Gili Meno, and Gili Air, located off the western coast were the other important accommodation centres, where mainly locally owned guesthouses and bungalows offered a range of facilities in a lower-cost market (Graci, 2013). These islands began as a low-key backpacker destination (Dodds et al., 2010). Lombok became more popular as a tourist destination and people began to buy parcels of land in resort development areas. In the 1990s, the government began to take an active role in planning and promoting Lombok’s tourism. The Lombok Tourism Development Corporation (LTDC) was formed and prepared detailed land-use plans with maps and areas zoned for tourism facilities (Horwath HTL, 2015). Then, more recently, the third beach resort area developed along the Southern coastline around the village of Kuta. By this time, farmers in Kuta were fighting for their land title or higher compensation for their land. Hence, their property was often purchased under intimidation by the LTDC (Bras et al., 2000; Fallon, 2001).

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, Lombok as a tourism destination (and Indonesia) was negatively affected and underwent a series of discouragements, including because of the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997, which led to the collapse of the Indonesian rupiah and increased levels of foreign debt and which threw millions of Indonesians into unemployment. Since then further tourism development on Lombok has been 'on hold,' because of its legal problems in relation to land acquisition issues (Fallon, 2001). Moreover, a series of terrorist attacks, especially the Bali bombings in 2002; the SARS outbreak in 2003; the Middle East conflict in 2005, and other issues such as instability in the South-East Asian economic and political environments have caused some problems. On top of that, the global financial crisis in 2008 affected foreign investors in the project, which resulted in ending the prospects of LTDC. The government assumed land ownership from LTDC and then appointed the Indonesia Tourism Development Corporation (ITDC) to develop the area within Lombok (Schellhorn, 2007; Saufi et al., 2013; Ministry of Tourism, 2014; Horwath HTL, 2015). From 2006, tourism started to recover, reaching higher numbers than ever before, with 1,357,602 total tourist arrivals in 2013 (NTB, 2016). The period before 2000 was characterized by foreign tourist arrivals, while domestic tourists have been accounting for the majority of visitors since 2006 (Ministry of Tourism, 2014). In spite of the relatively rapid tourism development, Lombok is still predominantly an island of farmers.

As a destination, it has always lain in the shadow of neighbouring Bali (Nunns, 2015). However, demand for new destinations and the interest in Lombok began to develop amongst tourists (Bras et al., 2000). As tourism in Lombok is relatively recent after the recovery period, it faces big development decisions, fuelled by an uptick in tourism. Besides the improving domestic economic environment, the opening of the international airport in 2011 was another important factor that triggered the increase of tourist arrivals. The latest big tourism development on Lombok is known as the Mandalika Resort. The Mandalika has been designed by ITDC (the state-owned company) as an SEZ and as an ecotourism destination, which will not only maintain and protect the natural beauty of the Mandalika scenery but also enhance the life and culture of the local people (ITDC, 2016; JakartaGlobe, 2018; JakartaPost, 2018). The presence of hotels is the key to developing Mandalika Resort. There
will be mostly four- and five-star hotels with recognizable brand names. Boutique resorts will also be developed, which will result in a total of 10,533 hotel rooms in the Mandalika Resort area (ITDC, 2016). Moreover, these hotels will help the Meetings, Incentives, Conventions and Exhibitions (MICE) business grow, with the development of convention centres and leisure facilities such as a water park, an eco-park, a conservative area, and a theme park. The resort generates an improvement of overall infrastructures such as water supply and solar panels of the area as well. Therefore, the Mandalika development was expected to boost the island’s tourism.

14.4 Desa Tetebatu as a case study of tourism development

Exploring community perceptions in tourism development and how tourism providers prepare for future development is the main driver of this case study. The study reports from an ethnographic study looking at the perceptions of the host community towards the CBT elements and how CBT can contribute to host community members’ livelihoods and to tourists’ experiences. As there is limited research concerning communities’ perceptions in Lombok, this study is exploratory by nature. Accordingly, this research was conducted qualitatively. Knowledge is created by using an interpretive paradigm with a realist ontology, underpinned by the belief of multiple realities that examine people and their social behaviour (Altinay et al., 2016). Via this approach, participants provide the starting point of collecting new knowledge inductively, focussing on the understanding and interpretation of what is occurring and why.

Desa Tetebatu is located in the Sikur District, East Lombok Regency. The village was selected because previous research gave no attention to it, however, it is reported in the STMP. Tetebatu is well known and famous as a tourist destination because of the scenery, hills, and rice fields located at the southern foot of Mount Rinjani. Tetebatu is located in a farming area, which makes the livelihood of the residents mostly in the agricultural sector, either as farmers with land or as farm labourers. The choice for Desa Tetebatu as the research destination was made after visiting the village after the researcher’s Rinjani Trek, and for the tourism impacts such as the attractions in Tetebatu, its accessible location, the younger generation who are eager to build their village, support from community leaders, and support for capacity building, which shows the current attitude and tourism involvement in the development of the village.

The investigator took an active part in the research process to ensure that knowledge represents the reality of the subject. Over three weeks’ time, field research was done by the researcher living in the village of Tetebatu, constantly interacting with the residents. Primary data was obtained using participant observation, 17 semi-structured expert interviews with residents, 11 informal interviews with tourists, and visual research methods. Residents were interviewed to understand how CBT products are developed and implemented in the village, while tourists were interviewed about their experiences in the village and their interaction between hosts and guests. The data gathered from interviews and field notes were prepared for analysis, transcribed word-for-word. In total, the dataset of 94 pages was analyzed using thematic analysis as a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Baarda, 2014).

14.4.1 CBT as a tourism product

In Tetebatu, CBT products commonly refer to communities that engage in frontline operations, that incorporate direct interface with tourists such as homestays, lodges, guesthouses,
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eo-tours, guides, and porter services or local tours and treks; cultural performances for visitors; restaurants; kiosks, and souvenir and handicraft shops. Residents mentioned that many of these activities are based on the development of local resources such as attractions or as direct services to tourists. Mostly, these small organizations are owned either by the community on a cooperative basis or by families/individuals within the community. In Tetebatu, all activities are based on the local resources and natural attractions in the village. Almost all residents agree on the concept of ‘nature as the tourist attraction’ in the development of tourism. First, from the perspective of the residents, it is authentic nature that attract tourists. The most mentioned attractions by the residents were visiting the rice fields to see the rice growing process, but also to see the waterfalls and the forest. Second, residents mentioned trekking to the famous Rinjani Volcano is one of the most popular activities in Lombok. Before, only the northern villages gave access to the park, but now a new gateway to the park opened recently from Tetebatu. Hence, this new tourism product could lead to more visitors. Moreover, the analysis showed that learning experiences are classified as a tourism product. A tourist explained:

Going from village to village and to see all the processes. To visit all the different activities here. We are not really persons to make holiday with only other tourists. We would like to meet local people and learn from them.

The Tetebatu area is perhaps best known for its cultural attractions and traditional Sasak handicraft artisans are spread throughout the villages in this area, demonstrating the bamboo weaving process, sarong weaving, and pottery. These activities do not necessarily result in learning a new skill, but the experiences created can go much further and can also be related to other feelings, such as the knowledge of how difficult and time consuming these processes are. The participation and connection with residents resulted in an overall positive and memorable tourist experience. One tourist mentioned, ‘In my opinion, drinking coffee in a local place during the hike was most memorable and talking with the owner of the house we were invited to was really special.’

14.5 The interaction between hosts and guests

The results of this study show that there was considerable agreement on the different levels of interaction between hosts and guests as an important factor in CBT development. Residents are happy to welcome tourists in two ways: they enjoy sharing their way of life with tourists and tourism is for them about economic potential. Residents mentioned they are proud of the nature and culture and would like to show their experiences and way of life.

For example, a guesthouse owner explained:

It is not only being a guide but also to teach the tourists. Tetebatu is still authentic and a traditional village. We are proud of our traditions. It is about how we eat together and sitting together on the floor, to taste the local food. That is what we really would like to show.

An important opportunity for local communities to benefit from tourism clearly centres on tangible economic benefits and new forms of skills from employment. Residents who benefit from tourism work in the accommodation sector, have trekking companies, work in a small warung (restaurants), or have mini markets. These residents are directly involved in tourism
activities, and therefore, benefit from it as it generates income. According to Ernawati et al. (2017), the main positive impact mentioned in CBT is enhancing language skills. The findings revealed that learning the English language resulted in job opportunities, as a resident explained, ‘I am lucky because I can speak English. I used to be a beach boy on Gili-T. That is how I learned English and the tourists taught me more and more. Before that, I worked on the farm.’

Therefore, the possibility of getting involved in tourism and in particular of interacting with tourists is present. Besides staying together with their family, residents now have more reasons to stay in the village because of tourism and the introduction of organic farming, as there was no permanent work in the village before. The interaction between hosts and guests has also revealed residents’ views about their changing life as a result of modernization. The youth have the chance to leave the village to get experience somewhere else and promotion via the internet is now possible for tourism providers. Hence, online promotion possibilities for tourism providers make it easier to promote themselves. A difference in gender roles as a barrier for interacting with tourists was observed. It shows that still certain activities are typically performed by men or women. However, the Women Guide Association would like to give women a chance to become guides for trekking the Mount Rinjani; as the initiator pointed out, ‘It is time for women to not only do the laundry but also to do something for themselves.’ At the moment, social conflicts in terms of power struggles or competing values can be seen as a negative impact and failure in CBT (Blackstock, 2005; Schellhorn, 2010; Deery et al., 2012).

14.6 CBT challenges and opportunities

The study shows to what extent tourists experience and locals perceive CBT in the village of Tetebatu. It illustrates the importance of the culture as well as, on one hand, the opportunities for CBT and, on the other, the barriers for CBT. Data conveyed different reasons for preserving the residents’ culture, such as having a strong connection around the residents, friendliness, and their pride of traditions, which is described as the uniqueness of the village. Residents are aware of their natural attractions and unique landscape for future tourism development. The number of accommodations has doubled since the last year and tourists explained that they like the unique and primitive guesthouses in the village. The discussion of primitive guesthouses is still present as a tourist mentioned, ‘The absence of good accommodations, restaurants or places to go out are mentioned as weaknesses of the village. On the other hand, the ideal future development looks like keeping a green village, no new coming hotels and keep the village clean by having a good waste management plan.’

It is clear participation is perceived as an experience in the tourism product, however, this participation level is still passive. One tourist mentioned, ‘Working with the people who were harvesting the rice would have been very fun.’ Therefore, tourism providers can expand CBT products in the village, to focus more on education in the tourism product as visitors mentioned wanting to be more involved in the process, by providing activities such as a cooking class, helping at the farm by harvesting the rice, and cycling. These elements were crucial when discussing the improvement and future goals in the village.

The irritation of plastic pollution by the residents and tourists is mentioned often and is seen as the main challenge for the village. For this reason, clean-up activities can be organized by tourism providers to protect the environment and to create awareness about waste management, in order to overcome this irritation. The lack of promotion of activities and the village, in general, is a barrier for CBT. Some tourists mentioned that CBT is
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used as a marketing tool and that there is little promotion outside the village. Therefore, tourism providers should show their offer and unique attributes. To achieve this, an update of the offered products can be one strategy for promoting their activities and, therefore, the village. Although the residents can now promote their accommodations, whenever they were asked by the researcher if they had any questions, they generally asked, ‘Can you help me write a text for my homestay and to promote my activities?’ The residents mentioned there is a need to train the community and show them what they can share of their every-day of life with tourists. As there is a lack of human resources, it is necessary to train and educate people in the village. Destination managers can use the findings of this study by providing education and training to tourism providers, as there is a lack of coordination between them. It is necessary to learn how to market the village. External stakeholders can help connect tourism providers and bring them to the same stage of knowledge and understanding.

14.7 Product development – as future CBT potential

Since tourism providers mentioned being proud of their natural resources and willing to show their every day life, there are more products that can be implemented. Furthermore, their participation level is still passive and tourists mentioned hoping to be more involved in the process. A lot of activities are based on natural and cultural resources. Tourists mentioned that they would like to work with the community, for example harvesting the rice by themselves, planting the rice! or helping to prepare the land. Some tourists especially choose to stay at the farm to see what was happening. Moreover, participating in a cooking class was also an activity mentioned several times by tourists. This is also something women can organize, as the findings revealed that the gender-wise distribution of community benefits is different. It still shows that certain activities are typically performed by men or women. Another specific activity can be organized to overcome one of the barriers of CBT in the village. To preserve the area, clean-up activities can be organized to protect the environment and to create awareness about waste management by different travel agencies.

The interaction between hosts and guests has also revealed residents’ view about their changing life as a result of modernization. Because of tourism, the younger generation has now reasons to stay in the village. Tourism providers also mentioned that the availability of the promotion of their businesses through the internet has changed the village enormously. The number of accommodations has doubled since last year, and tourists explained that they like the unique and primitive guesthouses in the village. However, the promotion of the village and the available activities are recognized as a barrier of CBT. All accommodation providers or trekking companies promote their accommodations on online platforms, but there is no attention given towards this promotion. Therefore, pointing out what they offer as well as their unique attributes such as homestays and guesthouses are advised for promotion. To achieve this, providing an update of the offered products can be a strategy for promoting their activities and, therefore, the village in general.

Education and training need to be provided to the tourism providers. Since this research resulted in a lack of knowledge and coordination amongst villagers, external support is needed for future development of CBT. It is important to give support about the usage of online marketing tools. Some tourism providers (especially the younger generation), mentioned being familiar with social media and the internet in general. It is suggested to share the charm of the guesthouses and homestays in Tetebatu, built with local (wood, palm leaves, bamboo) materials. As well as to inform the tourists what they can experience in the village.
Moreover, a special website can be created to promote the village as a CBT destination. This can be done through a common website.

14.8 Conclusion

This case study is a starting point about community perceptions in tourism development and how CBT relates to its aim of supporting sustainable development for local communities in the village of Tetebatu. The involvement of local communities and local participation is crucial to the success of sustainable tourism, as discussed in the literature by many researchers (Gursoy et al., 2002; Teye et al., 2002; Cole, 2006; Tosun, 2006; Saufi et al., 2013). The findings provide several practical implications not only for destination managers and tourism providers in the village of Tetebatu, but also for villages in other destinations. The results of this chapter show that there was considerable agreement on the different levels of interaction between hosts and guests as an integral factor in CBT development. An important opportunity for local communities to benefit from tourism clearly centres on tangible economic benefits and new forms of skills from employment. A difference in gender roles is still present in the village. Local participation as tourism activity is recognized by the host community and tourists as one of the most important elements of CBT in the village. By framing the host communities’ and tourists’ perceptions, the importance of these results is to provide a useful way to develop and implement activities that are supposed to benefit the local community by creating jobs and promoting local culture and products. The ideal future development looks like keeping a green and cultural village and having unique homestays and guesthouses. A whole community can benefit from tourism and work together to provide a great experience for guests. Both parts will have a greater understanding of each other after a visit. In Lombok, it is about local involvement, cooking together, showing daily activities, visiting local houses for coffee or tea, etc. The community has an unique culture and nature that can induce these tourism activities, which attracts tourists to participate. A few activities which can be done or can be adapted by tourists are clean-up activities, cooking classes, market visits, and biking tours. An understanding of the position of these tourism stakeholders allows identifying their involvement and concerns but also the power, which can be used for future development. Knowing this, recommendations can be given effectively. Tourism in Lombok is relatively recent following the recovery period and faces big development decisions, fuelled by an upturn in tourism. The latest big tourism development on Lombok is known as the Mandalika Resort, which was expected to boost the island’s tourism. Whether these concepts can go hand in hand will be the biggest challenge for the village and is seen as a threat to preserving the village and local homestays.

References

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