4
UNDERSTANDING THE FACILITATORS AND INHIBITORS OF COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM

A case study of Dharamshala

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4.1 Introduction

Travelling not only gives us the opportunity to get to know and witness other cultures but also assists us in learning about the diversity of people on the earth. However, researchers believe that tourism should not just be beneficial for the tourists or visitors, but also for the local people/communities. The term ‘community-based tourism’ (CBT) may sound very new, but the fact is that it has been used around for many years. CBT is generally looked upon as an opportunity for the local community to obtain monitory benefits by making their products available and presenting them to the tourists. These products can emerge from the local lifestyle, the natural resources obtained from the native area and local cultures. CBT is also considered a developmental platform which improves the economic, cultural and social aspects of the local community through cultural and social interactions and exchanges with tourists. CBT basically focusses on giving tourists an opportunity to intermingle with the host community and to indulge in a process of authentic cultural exchange. Hence, CBT is about backing up local activities, events and businesses that can be directly beneficial for the host community as well as for tourists. Regrettably, this isn’t the first priority for a majority of tour operators.

Tour operators need to integrate the fundamentals of CBT into their tourism products. CBT is an umbrella term which includes many ways to benefit the local people. Homestays, visiting villages, witnessing local festivals/events, eating local food, buying local souvenirs and interacting with local artists and handicrafts are some of the most basic forms of CBT. Amongst the most significant and imperative features of CBT is that it is a form of tourism which is completely maintained and supported by the local community. CBT can be defined as a means for the development of the community that reinforces the capability of the local communities to sustain and maintain local resources related to tourism while guaranteeing the participation of the local community in the tourism activities (Jamal & Getz, 1995). CBT can be looked upon as a way to return to a more traditional way of looking at tourism activities. In the past, small businesses led by local communities were more common than the
large companies or hotel chains we see today. Additionally, because of increasing reputation of tourism as solution for income generation, it is domineering that philosophies and apparatuses for evolving CBT are conventional (Bramwell & Sharman, 1999). Therefore, CBT is certainly a tried and tested kind of idea, and only the name of the phenomenon has changed.

The aim of this chapter is to utilize a case study of Dharamshala city to assess the facilitators and inhibitors of CBT. In this chapter, the research work has been designed as following. First, an introduction is described based on the idea of CBT and its connections with the tourism industry and tourism development. After that a contemporary literature review published in the research papers and studies on CBT is presented. The last section includes the results of the study and the conclusion. The findings can be utilized by governing bodies, tourism planners, players from the industry and the community as a roadmap to guarantee that CBT is established in a justifiable manner in the study area. The suggestions and recommendations are practical in nature and present best practices which can be adopted from this case study.

4.2 Review of literature

Gray (1991) mentioned that the local residents of a community require acceptable resources, expertise and skills to obtain the right and capacity be a part of tourism-related activities. Governments or other stakeholders usually have control over these activities and their planning, and usually they do not consider local residents equivalent partners. Blank (1989) explained that community participation in the tourism industry is imperious, and he further says that having authority over tourism activities is an ideal situation for rural communities.

CBT is focussed on the engrossment of the local community in the growth and sustenance of tourism development so that a sustainable industry can be created (Hall, 1991). “Many researchers indicate that the giving control in the hands of local community is not necessarily good for the community and tourism development, particularly in the cases where the control over tourism activities resides with the development-oriented politicians” (Pearce, 1992). The local residents’ involvement in tourism activities, their daily parts as workers or businesspersons and the friendliness of locals towards tourists are a few very important pillars on which the tourism industry depends (Laws, 1995; Dann, 1996; Cole, 1997; Taylor & Davis, 1997). Murphy (1985, 1988) stressed the point that tourism development and employment should integrate the visions and values of local residents. On the other hand Haywood (1988) explained that vigorous and flourishing societies or communities are the benchmark of an efficacious tourism industry.

Pearce, Moscardo and Ross (1996) also believed in the idea that the resident-controlled tourism will be the mantra of the tourism industry of tomorrow. CBT shares boundaries with notable equivalents, like community development strategies and participatory planning philosophies, which also focus on keeping control in the hands of community (Ife & Smith, 1995). There is a possibility that local communities might become overly dependent on the tour operators, if they can’t acquire the compulsory abilities and proficiency to handle the swelling tourist influxes and the rapidly fluctuating demands of tourists (Taylor, 1995). There are multiple identities and interests residing within a community, and attention must be given to them and their associations with external players, political organizations and governing policies. This is essential to comprehend the various challenges CBT has to face (Belsky, 1999).

Community development can be demarcated as “constructing dynamic and sustainable societies[,] which are constructed on the pillars of community related justice and shared
A case study of Dharamshala

CBT needs a systematic approach. This necessitates an understanding of the appropriateness and strength of the community which is going to participate in the tourism activity in order to guarantee that the people from that community have an equal chance to be a part of the tourism-based projects and participate in screening and monitoring the undesirable challenges which may occur in the future (Kiss, 2004). As per Sofield (2003), numerous aids of tourism development built on CBT are based on the process and not merely on the results. By embarking on the journey of community participation and enablement, challenging zones like authority imbalances, absence of community skills and prosperity can be pointed out, which can help work towards the local community’s benefit (Beeton, 2006) (Figure 4.1).

As per Blackstock (2005), the research work on CBT that was available into the 1990s has three main loopholes from the viewpoint of community development. CBT can prove to be a best way to establish a sustainable tourism industry. The available literature on CBT uses a practical tactic for the involvement of community; it considers that the local community has similar features, and it ignores the organizational limitations of the local community regarding the governing of the tourism industry. Tourism is concurrently represented as a demolisher of culture, detector of social norms and economies, corruptor of the social structures, uplifter of the poor and under-privileged, provider of prospects and economic assistance, promoter of socio-cultural exchange and improver of the quality of life of local people (Simpson, 2008).

4.3 Methodology

This research was conducted in the city of Dharamshala, located in Himachal Pradesh (India). Dharamshala is a municipal corporation and a city in the district Kangra. It is a famous tourism-oriented region as it is the first city being developed as a ‘smart city’ in the state of Himachal Pradesh. As far as the aim is concerned, this study undertakes an exploratory and descriptive research. Qualitative research is considered appropriate to accomplish the aim of this study because it comprises a very natural method for comprehending social phenomena in real-world scenarios or specific contexts, without the researcher’s manipulation. Through this study, the aim is to get theoretical and practical knowledge. To attain the goals, this research commences with a literature review on CBT.
In-depth interviews were taken from nine pertinent stakeholders from the public and private sector both. The stakeholders include members of destination management organizations (3), members of local governing bodies (2), hoteliers (2) and travel agents (2). After nine interviews data saturation was realized, and further collection of data was halted. The interviews were semi-structured in nature and were based on the CBT dimensions, as shown in Figure 4.2. These dimensions were measured through the proposed variables. In addition,
all the interviews were audio-taped with prior permission of the respondents. The audio recordings were then converted into transcripts. Transcribing is the process of converting recorded interviews into a written form so that it is easier to withdraw meanings from the statements which are identified for further categorization. Content analysis technique was used to analyze the transcripts. Content analysis is an extensively used method for data analysis in the field of qualitative research. It mainly pays attention to the frequency of text which has analogous or similar meanings. Thus, this means that the content analysis is systematic, objective and quantitative in nature (Auster, 1956).

4.4 Findings and discussion

As mentioned above, the transcripts were analyzed using content analysis, and words with similar meanings with highest frequency were identified, with the aim of recognizing the facilitators and inhibitors of CBT in Dharamshala. The Tibetan Guru Dalai Lama resides in Dharamshala, and because of accessibility of decent infrastructure facilities, the city attracts a number of tourists, who visit to witness the historical temples of Kangra, Dalai Lala, Chamunda, Jawalaji and other such tourist attractions. Dharamshala has been designated as one of the many Indian cities which are being established as ‘smart cities’ under the popular Smart Cities Mission. Although it faces many challenges and threats, it plans to cope with these by becoming a smart city. The smart city plan for Dharamshala aims to take a step forward towards a smart neighbourhood.

One of the respondents mentioned that

Locals need to be educated / trained first, so, that they can welcome all the guests in hospitable manner, because they are the frontline cultural ambassadors. People who are associated with transport sectors should be provided trainings and in regular intervals. Government departments and employees must also be provided with professional trainings. New Certificate courses must be run to hone their skills.

Another respondent stated that

Even if you go to the interiors, people know the important of tourism and how to welcome the tourists. That hospitality and nature is not been adopted by people in Dharamshala. Still, they feel like tourist is interfering with their daily life. Dharamshala is very diverse and local’s part is very important. If they won’t behave properly with the tourist, they won’t come again to Dharamshala. Locals need to understand that tourism is a source of income.

A respondent who runs a hotel mentioned that

I believe that in order to engage tourism’s possibilities and responsibilities in the creation of more sustainable futures, collaboration is vital. Collaboration in the city can lead to the sustainable development of tourism between diverse groups of agencies, organizations, businesses and people. We have to go to the masses and make them aware about the importance of the attractions and how can they contribute in the preservation of these attractions. Without participation of locals we cannot manage the attractions effectively.
Another respondent added that

I am sure you have noticed that tourists, specially the foreign tourists engage in all kinds of cultural activities and come here to learn about local traditions and arts. Through cultural exchange tourists can learn more about destination and the local way of life in a mutually beneficial relationship which fosters a deeper cultural understanding. So, cultural exchange is very important point according to me.

The content analysis shows that the facilitators of CBT in the region are, namely, local participation, skill enhancements, sustainable tourism developments and inclusive developmental plans. The results support the theory that CBT can play a vital part in encouraging community participation for the unprejudiced and overall development of the local community. It is indeed a unique technique aimed at facilitating participation, involvement and flow of benefits to locals, with the help of a bottom-up approach. Results also indicated a pressing need for governments, private players, academics and NGOs, etc. to come together to collectively develop a shared vision to formulate programmes that educate and train people for human and social capital development. According to the answers of the respondents and direct observation, it is observed that the city has various inhibitors for CBT. The in-depth interviews with relevant stakeholders presented indications that numerous loopholes arise from the absence of collective decision-making, lack of cooperation among stakeholders and the absence of a shared vision in Dharamshala.

4.5 Conclusion

This research aims to understand the facilitators and the inhibitors of CBT in the city of Dharamshala. Through direct observation and by conducting interviews with the relevant stakeholders, the results show that Dharamshala has immense potential for CBT. However, to successfully establish a CBT practice, it would need to meet, in a more comprehensive way, all dimensions presented by the available literature and overcome the various challenges on the way. The majority of the interviewees repeatedly focussed on terms which fit perfectly under the umbrella of CBT. They stressed that CBT can become a great way to reduce poverty and ensure cultural exchange, the prosperity of local community, environmental sustainability, employment generation, tourism development, etc. In conclusion, one of the main challenges for CBT in the study area is an unskilled local community and unplanned tourism developments. Regarding the limitations of the research, first of all, it must be considered that the interviews approached only members of destination management organizations, members of local governing bodies, hoteliers and travel agents, and therefore did not include managers of tourism companies, local residents, tourists and other types of stakeholders. As far as future prospects are concerned, it would be thought-provoking to carry out a quantitative study on the perception of the local residents regarding the prospects of CBT in the city.

References


A case study of Dharamshala