

The Imperative Role of Community Groups in Rural Tourism Development

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Abstract

Rural tourism, if strategically developed and managed, can make a substantial positive contribution towards the prosperity of the rural community. The management of the community group as primary stakeholders within a rural tourism development context is essential to enhance the rural collective economy of a region, augmenting the rural appearance, strengthening the rural civilisation construction, reducing the urban-rural gap, and building a cohesive and harmonious community. The primary objective is to examine the community group's level of involvement in rural tourism development programmes; as well as to establish their level of participation in rural tourism development activities. A survey was undertaken to obtain the quantitative data needed from the community group. The findings show that the involvement of the community group in the decision-making process will assist in the effective implementation of projects without delays and contribute towards the sustainable development of rural tourism. The management of sustainable rural tourism development therefore necessitates that the needs of the community group are considered in the decision-making process and their participation therein. Participation facilitates rational cooperation, strengthens partnerships, builds trust and credibility, empowers the community group, and therefore makes management more effective.

Keywords: Rural tourism, community involvement, community participation, stakeholders

Introduction

Tourist destinations are essential sectors that can contribute to the development of areas, both in urban and rural environments, specifically the rural environments. Tourism development in rural environments, as assessed by Hadiwijoyo (2012) and Wijijayanti, Augustina, Winarno, Istanti and Dhama (2020), has the ability to improve the welfare and livelihoods of the rural communities, and furthermore, it provides a multiple effect and a large value of benefits for the community group, such as creating new jobs and reducing unemployment that stands at 32.6 percent in 2021 (Statistics South Africa [StatsSA], 2021). Rural areas in many countries have faced the pressures of economic transition over the past decades. Traditionally, strong primary industries such as fishing, agriculture, forestry and mining have declined dramatically and many places have viewed and are viewing tourism and related industries as replacements for traditional rural livelihoods (Ronningen, 2010; Phillips, Wolfe, Hodur & Leistritz, 2013). Rural tourism, as explained by Haven-Tang and Jones (2012) and Shen, Liu-Lastres, Pennington-Gray, Hu and Liu (2019), can make a significant contribution to the rural economy and to the wider tourism industry. Therefore, rural tourism has a major role to play in the rural environment, such as job creation, farm diversification (tourism activities inside a farm),

promotion of local crafts, food and drinks, destination stewardship, and also community empowerment. In addition, Anderson (2015), Gao and Wu (2017) and Lwoga and Maturo (2020) indicate that rural tourism can revive and diversify rural economies, conserve the local heritage and revitalise traditional villages that have suffered from the effects of urbanisation and modernisation.

Sustainable and inclusive rural tourism development therefore requires consideration of the heterogeneous interests of the community group and their involvement in managerial decision-making as well as representation in governing institutions (Baumgartner, 2008; Carius & Job, 2019). Community group involvement has various benefits – decisions are based on all available knowledge, democratically legitimated and socially accepted. Community group participation facilitates rational cooperation, strengthens partnerships, increases stakeholder support, builds trust and credibility, promotes equity, pluralism and good governance, assists to resolve conflicts, builds capacities, creates ownership, empowers communities and marginalised groups, and therefore makes management more effective (Amer, Ashong & Timoko, 2015). Host communities play a pivotal role in rural tourism development and their commitment and involvement are critical to the success of sustainable tourism (Gursoy, Jurowski & Uysal 2002; Teye, Sonmez & Sirakaya, 2002; Cole, 2006; Tosun, 2006; Chili & Ngxongo, 2017; Carius & Job, 2019). Previous studies investigating the participation of destination residents in tourism development recorded that their willingness to engage in tourism activities and their behaviour toward tourists in their area are strong predictors of tourism sustainability (Jurowski & Gursoy, 2004; Weaver & Lawton, 2006; Saufi, O'Brien & Wilkins, 2014).

The paper is based on the role of the community group in rural tourism development. The primary objective of this study was to examine the community group's level of involvement in rural tourism development programmes, as well as to establish their level of participation in rural tourism development activities. There are numerous challenges that hinder the community group's degree of participation in the formulation of laws and regulations of rural tourism, and therefore for the sustainable development of rural tourism would be a challenge devoid of the community group's support and active participation. The findings of the study can not only provide theoretical explanations on the subject matter, but can also offer further practical implications for rural development planners and tourism policymakers. The following section will elaborate on the literature review of the study.

Literature review

Rural tourism, if strategically developed and managed, can undoubtedly make a substantial positive contribution towards the prosperity of rural communities (Sanagustin-Fons, Fierro & Patino, 2011; Haven-Tong & Jones, 2012; Hwang, Stewart & Ko, 2012; Phillips, Wolfe, Hodur & Leistriz, 2013). Therefore, community involvement and participation can be seen as a way to build the capacity of local people in terms of developmental activities in their region. Tourism developers often encourage a sense of community belonging and pride among residents as a way of including them to contribute towards their own tourism development. The focus of the study is on the community group's involvement and participation in rural tourism and how it can contribute towards the sustainable development thereof.

Rural tourism development in South Africa

For decades, rural areas around the world have endured challenges of declining economic activity, restructuring of traditional agrarian industries, aging population and out-migration of higher-educated youth and dwindling viability of small towns and villages, as explained by Liu, Dou, Li and Cai (2020). The quest for rural regeneration has led to the adoption of tourism



as an alternative means for achieving economic and social revitalisation. The benefits of rural tourism as an engine for economic development and a contributor to rural resident quality of life have been studied extensively (Sharples & Vaas, 2006; Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011; Su, Wall, Wang & Jin, 2019). Rural tourism, as explained by Personen and Komppula (2011), is often located in the remote countryside, far away from neighbours. Villages and services (shops, restaurants, etc.) are often a distance of several kilometres from each other. Most common is a holiday in a self-catering cottage, but accommodations in bed-and-breakfast (B&B) establishments are often available with half board or full board holidays with versatile services. Table 1 presents a description of the concept ‘rural tourism’ by different authors. The synthesis mentioned above is derived from the descriptions of ‘rural tourism’ as stated in Table 1.

Table 1: Description of rural tourism

Source	Description
Rodriguez, Rodrigues & Kastenzholz (2010)	Any form of tourism that showcases the rural life, arts, culture and heritage at rural locations, thereby benefiting a local community economically and socially, as well as enabling interaction between tourists and locals for a more enriching tourism experience.
Ronningen (2010)	Rural tourism should ideally be located in rural areas and should be functionally rural and rural in scale, it should furthermore comprise small-scale enterprises owned by local family units, that the services should relate to local history, including traditional ways of living and agrarian economies, and that the activities should take place in relatively natural settings.
Dimitrovski, Todorovic & Valjarevic (2012)	Rural tourism is based in areas that are rural in all aspects and furthermore includes small companies owned by local families, thereby connecting the tourist to local production.
Rathone (2012)	To benefit the local community through entrepreneurial opportunities, income generation, employment opportunities, conservation and development of rural arts and crafts, investment for infrastructure development and preservation of the environment and heritage.
Sgroi, Di Trapani, Testa & Tudisca (2014)	Rural tourism acts as an important role in modifying rural communities in their environmental, economic, social and cultural structures, processes and dynamics.
Ruzi-Real, Uribe-Taril, Valenciano & Gazquez-Abad (2020)	Rural tourism encompasses various forms of tourism, most of which are alternatives to the more conventional, mainstream, and mass form of tourism with the common denominator of activities taking place in a rural setting.

The descriptions of rural tourism by different authors deduce that rural tourism is tourism activities that showcase arts and crafts, culture, local history, heritage, attractions that primarily occur in a rural location, to the benefit of a local community, as explained by Ruiz-Real *et al.* (2020). A number of years ago, Lane (1994) already advocated that rural tourism should integrate the families living in rural areas and their attractions, and added to this is the fact that the community group largely determines a tourist’s experience through tourist-host interaction (Otto & Ritchie, 1996). Apart from the physical resources of a destination, the attitudes, behaviours and skills of local residents and business entrepreneurs are also very important, especially to create competitive tourism supplies and experiences (Hogstrom, Rosner & Gustafsson, 2010).

Rural tourism can contribute immensely to poverty alleviation, job creation, preservation of arts and culture, and sustainable environmental management in the development of rural regions (National Department of Tourism (NDT), 2012; Xu & Kerstetter, 2019). Tourism, however, remains a popular non-traditional rural developmental policy framework (Irshad, 2010) throughout South Africa. Tourism and agriculture were initially identified as the potential economic pillars for rural development in South Africa (NDT, 2012), and in this regard, the NDT, in its endeavour and response to rural development, prepared the Rural Tourism Strategy (NDT, 2012). Sustainability and strategy, as asserted by Louw and Venter (2013), are considered to be inseparable. Therefore, sustainable tourism can be accomplished through an integrated system that incorporates other economic sectors such as

agriculture, mining, retailing and manufacturing (Fons, Fierro & Patino, 2011). Sustainable tourism, as resolved by Dimitrovski et al. (2012), is therefore acknowledged as a key component of rural development.

The policy of fiscal decentralisation to the villages shows great and progressive alignment from the national government on the priority of increasing regional economic development in community services, assisting to meet the welfare of rural communities, as ascertained by Wijijayanti et al. (2020). The pursuit of rural economic development through tourism is challenging because of the diversity of resources and stakeholders involved (Delmas & Toffel, 2008). However, the community group, as stated by Hurst and Niehm (2012), plays an important role in rural tourism development, as stakeholders and their involvement are critical to the success of sustainable rural tourism development. Adequate knowledge about tourism, as suggested by Cole (2006), Aref (2011) and Hwang et al. (2011), empowers the community group and engages them in tourism development matters. Hampton (2005) concurs and points out that communication should be a two-way function, such as between tourism authorities and the community group, and that the opinions and interests of the community should be heeded. In addition, the strategy of generating the local economy through rural tourism destinations in regional areas of South Africa also requires a strong motivation from the community group. They have to be willing to jointly manage their capabilities, as mentioned by Wijijayanti et al. (2020). Local knowledge can be used to develop authentic products to develop the village and, in doing so, it lessens the rural and urban economic gap, and as a result increases the economic activities in rural settlements.

The significant role of the community group in rural tourism development

Tourism development results in several economic and social benefits for rural destinations (Andereck, Valentine, Knoff & Vogt, 2005; Kwan & Vogt, 2010). However, growth of the tourism sector in a rural destination is also accompanied by several costs, affecting the lives of the host community group (Andereck et al., 2005; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2011). The success of sustainable rural tourism development depends on the active support of the community group as stakeholders (Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004), without which the sustainability of tourism is threatened. The community group as stakeholders should be the focal point of the tourism decision-making process (Choi & Sirakaya, 2005). It is consequently important for planners to consider information about the impacts of tourism from the community group perspective when planning the development of tourism, as recommended by Nunkoo and Ramkissoon (2011).

Community group involvement in rural tourism development

The community group's involvement, as pointed out by Michael, Mgonja and Beckman (2013), Talo, Mannanni and Rochira (2013), and Rasodimanesh, Jaafar and Tangit (2018) in development projects, in particular rural tourism projects, can be observed from two concepts: being involved in the decision-making process and sharing in tourism benefits. Rasodimanesh et al. (2018) indicate that involvement encompasses a variety of approaches whereby public service bodies empower stakeholders to consider and express their views in the development of a region or destination, and to be involved in the decision-making process. The community group's involvement as stakeholders and their public participation in developmental scenarios in the rural areas has been highlighted since the late 1990s (Edwards, Jones & Nowell, 1997; Cici-Sain, Knecht, Jang & Fisk, 1998; Milligan & O'riordan, 2007; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2010; Chili & Ngxongo, 2017; Carius & Job, 2019). Some form of tourism awareness tool, as explained by Carius and Job (2013), is needed to develop tourism awareness in the community group as primary stakeholders, to get more involved in tourism development programmes and

initiatives. The involvement of the community group in tourism, as mentioned by Franch, Martini and Buffa (2010), determines the strength of the tie between social and economic dimensions of relationships, meaning between informal (based mainly on trust) and formal relationships (established by institutional agreement).

Community group participation in rural tourism development

Participation is a process in which stakeholders influence and share control of development initiative decisions and resources that affect them, as explained by Michael et al. (2013). The improvement of communication between the community group as stakeholders will contribute substantially to facilitating better decision-making and sustainable development (Aref, 2011; Xu, Jiang, Wall & Wang, 2019). Without participation, there would be no partnership, no development and no programme. In the case of this study, lack of community-group participation in decision-making to implement rural tourism development can lead to failure in the development of the community (Aref, 2011). The participation of the community group as stakeholder in particular is important for the realisation of sustainable development of rural tourism within a specific region/community. According to Saaren et al. (2014) and Xu et al. (2019), the community group's participation is an essential element in the decision-making process, more so when strategic decisions are being considered for the development of a region/community.

The balance associated with the tangible and intangible benefits of rural tourism development, as provided by Marin, Palmisani, Iraldi, Dursi and Fabiano (2009), Lee (2013) and Gon, Osti and Pechlaner (2016), is unachievable without the community group's involvement, support and participation. Therefore, the community group's participation is central in the management planning process of rural tourism development (Lee, 2013). Therefore, as revealed by Sharpley (2014) and Nicolaidis (2020), the more the community group perceives tourism as potentially having a positive economic impact on the rural region/community, the more likely they will be to participate in tourism development. Choi and Sirakaya (2005), Jayawardena et al. (2008), Sharma, Tam and Kim (2009), Guan, Verkuyten, Fung, Bond, Chen and Chan (2011), Hao, Long and Kleckley (2011) and Nicolaidis (2020) explained that the community group's participation, specifically that of residents for further development in rural tourism, is positively related to the personal benefits and perceived positive impacts of tourism, and negatively related to its perceived impacts.

Research method

The study utilised a quantitative research method. The quantitative approach was recognised as appropriate for the purpose of this study as it allowed for the examination of the community group's role in rural tourism development in South Africa. The basis of rural tourism lies in the importance of the community-group's support and their capacity to participate in programmes in pursuit of building sustainable rural development for the benefit of all stakeholders. Quantitative research, as explained by Ivankova (2015), enables for testing of theories about reality, looks for probable cause and effect, and uses quantitative measures to gather data to answer research questions. In this study, the community group's perspective was obtained in order to investigate their level of involvement and participation in rural tourism development activities. In this study, the population was all members of the community group residing in the 32 villages located in the Pilanesberg region, North West Province of South Africa. Non-probability conventional sampling for the quantitative method was used; it is a method that relies on data collection from populations who are conveniently available to participate in the study (Thomas, 2003; Watkins, Scheaffer & Cobb, 2011; Zijlstra, Van der Ark & Sijtsma, 2011; Gobo & Mauceri, 2014). This method involves accessing participants

wherever in the chosen villages and typically wherever is convenient (Collis & Hussey, 2009). A large number of participants from the community group (local residents, local business associations, local business entrepreneurs, educational institutions, and others) from four villages answered the same questionnaire. The sample size was 800 residents who reside in the villages in Pilanesberg. The recommended sample size, according to Matthews (2010), for a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error for a population of 350 000, is 384. However, all effort was made to obtain more completed questionnaires to reduce the margin of error to 3.5%, and therefore 800 questionnaires were distributed and 480 were returned; however, after the data editing and cleaning processes were complete, 359 were ready to be used and were captured onto the Excel spreadsheet before it was imported into the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The community group was the subjects of the study and tourists from other regions, provinces and also international tourists who were in the Pilanesberg area during the course of this survey were excluded. Typically, in most research conducted on groups of people, both descriptive and inferential statistics are used to analyse the data into results and draw conclusions. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used for the purpose of this study, each providing different insights into the nature of the data obtained.

Results and discussion

Table 2 indicates that the mean score is 31 years and the median is 11 years, and this proposes that the average age of the respondents is 31 years. This could translate into the community being in an age category whereby they could actively be involved in all the phases of rural tourism development, particularly in the decision-making phase of anticipated future initiatives and rural tourism development in the area. This noticeably highlights that a greater percentage of respondents are in their economically active phase and in all probability are prepared to be involved and participate in the tourism sector as employees or owning a business and contribute towards the development of tourism in their area.

Table 2: Measure of dispersion: Age category

Number of years	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Up to 20	129	36.2%
21-40 yrs	110	30.9%
41-60 yrs	87	24.4%
Above 60yrs	30	8.4%
TOTAL	n= 356	100%
Measures of central tendency Mean = 31 years Median = 29 years Mode = 17.4 years Standard deviation = 19.4 years		

The community group's viewpoints on rural tourism development

The two constructs (involvement and participation) used to determine the respondents' viewpoints on rural tourism development will now be dealt with.

Table 3: Respondents' viewpoint on rural tourism development

Statement		Strongly agree	Agree	Neither	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Mean	Standard deviation
IN1	Partnership and collaboration between tourism authorities and the community group are important in the development of sustainable rural tourism. (n=357)	32.3%	38.1%	12.9%	9.8%	7.0%	2.21	1.20
IN2	The rural tourism industry is dependent on the community-group's involvement. (n=359)	31.5%	38.2%	11.7%	12.0%	6.7%	2.24	1.21
PT3	I have participated in a form of decision-making process. (n=356)	5.3%	17.7%	10.4%	33.4%	33.1%	3.71	1.24
PT4	Community group participates in the formulation of laws and regulations of tourism. (n=358)	5.0%	12.8%	15.6%	34.1%	32.4%	3.76	1.18

Community-group's involvement in rural tourism development

Respondents were asked to indicate whether tourism is dependent on the involvement of community members (IN2), and the responses obtained are highlighted in Table 3. An overwhelming majority of respondents (69.7% (38.2% + 31.5%)) reacted positively to the statement that rural tourism industry is dependent on the involvement of the community group. The mean score of 2.23, as reflected in Figure 1, indicates a positive skewness of data distribution as most respondents agreed with the items of this construct indicating the level of involvement in tourism.

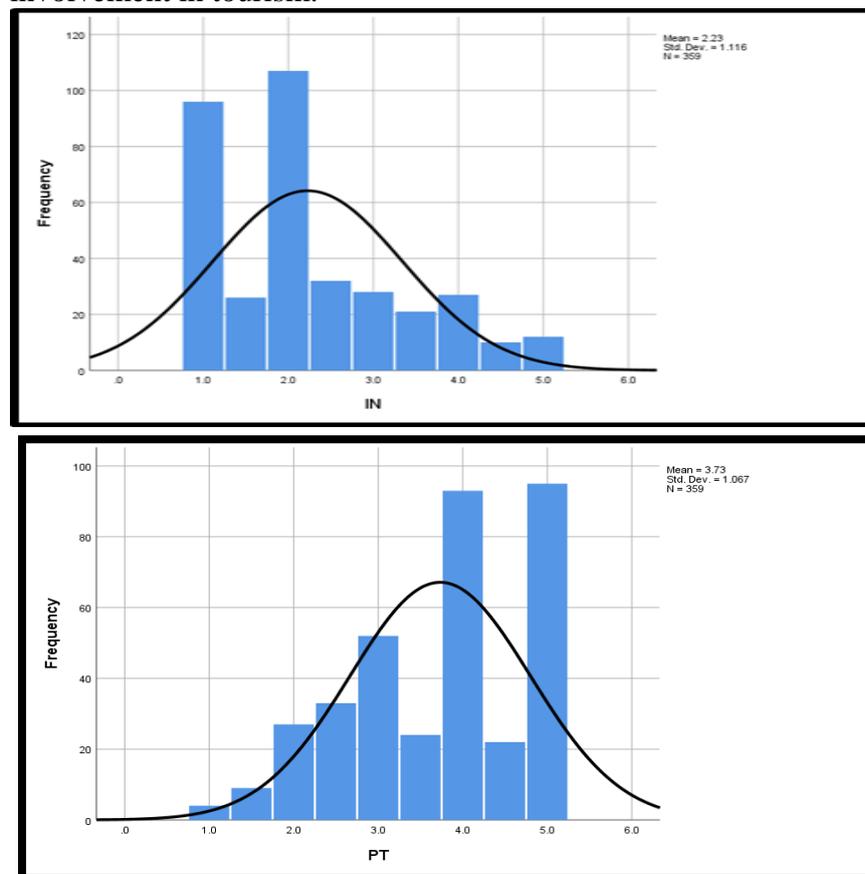


Figure 1: Histogram of the community group's involvement and participation in rural tourism development

The community-group’s involvement in the decision-making process is an opportunity for them to express their desires on how to develop the area through their participation. Furthermore, they can be involved in rural tourism development by establishing tourism business enterprises that gain profits and benefits from tourism activities, and contribute towards a region’s economic development by creating employment opportunities. This is because the community group is not only acting as a catalyst for rural tourism activities, they are a crucial asset that can empower tourism activities more robustly and efficiently.

Community group’s participation in rural tourism development

Respondents were requested to indicate whether they participate in a form of decision-making in rural tourism development (PT3). A substantial percentage (66.5% (33.4% + 33.1%)) responded negatively, as shown in Table 3. Similarly, respondents were requested to indicate whether the community has participated in formulating the laws and regulations of tourism (PT4). Table 3 indicates that an overwhelmingly majority of 66.5% (34.1% + 32.4%) were once again negative in their response to the statement. The mean score of 3.73, as reflected in Figure 1, indicates a negative skewness of data distribution as most respondents disagreed with the items in the construct indicating their level of participation in tourism.

ANOVA test to compare the views of residents from different villages

One-way ANOVAs were used for further analyses of the data. ANOVA explains how independent variables interact with one another and what effects they have on a dependent variable. The SPSS 25 software package was used to perform an ANOVA test for the results in Table 4.

Table 4: The ANOVA test to compare the views of residents from different villages on rural tourism development

Variables		Villages				
Construct		Village1	Village2	Village3	Village4	Other
Involvement	Sample (n)	80	52	55	102	48
	Mean	2.16	1.79	2.21	2.11	2.98
	Standard deviation	1.04	1.04	1.22	0.96	1.15
		p-value = 0.000, significant difference, p-value < 0.05				
Participation	Sample (n)	80	52	55	102	48
	Mean	3.53	3.82	3.79	3.85	3.73
	Standard deviation	1.09	1.08	0.99	1.05	1.00
		p-value = 0.314, no significant difference, p-value > 0.05				

Since the p-value for the level of involvement is less than 0.05, there is a level of statistical significance. The findings revealed that there are significant differences of the population means of responses on rural tourism development among the community group in the five residential areas. This means that the community group in these five residential areas did not equally agree on rural tourism development in terms of the items, except for ‘participation’ as indicated in Table 4. However, closer inspection of Table 4 revealed that there is no statistical difference in terms of the level of participation, because respondents equally agree since the p-value for this construct is greater than 0.05, the level of significance.

T-test between two independent samples

The t-test between two independent samples (male and female respondents) about their views on rural tourism development was performed and the results are indicated in Table 5. When observing Table 5, the p-value of the level of participation is greater than the 0.05 level of significance, and the results are in concurrence with the ANOVA results; this means that there is no significant difference in the views on tourism between male and female residents.

Table 5: Two sample t-test

Variables		Sample size	Mean	Standard deviation	p-value	Comment
Involvement	Male	174	2.03	1.03	0.001	Significant difference, p-value < 0.05
	Female	183	2.42	1.17		
Participation	Male	174	3.78	1.06	0.398	No significant difference, p-value > 0.05
	Female	183	3.68	1.07		

The p-value for the level of involvement is less than the 0.05 level of significance. This implies that there is a significant difference of views on rural tourism development involvement between males and females.

Conclusion and recommendation

The results and discussion from previous sections have revealed the community group's level of involvement and participation in the development of tourism in a rural settlement. The focus of this research is on the important role of the community group in rural tourism development. The community group's involvement and participation in tourism planning is essential when interest groups are expected to play an active role in the implementation process, in operation and also in maintenance, as explained by Franch *et al.* (2010) and Beritelli and Bieger (2014). In general, with the high levels of unemployment, mainly in rural regions of South Africa, therefore, the active involvement and participation by members of the community group should be encouraged by local tourism authorities. Their involvement is through the establishment of tourism business enterprises and as entrepreneurs who sell products and services to tourists, as this will contribute towards the region's socio-economic development by creating employment opportunities and improving the living standards of members of the community. Community participation in tourism contributes to the development, empowerment and greater self-reliance of members of the community group. Overall, the involvement and participation of the community-group are a vital component for effective planning and implementation of tourism plans geared towards the sustainable development of rural tourism. Stakeholders in the community group tend to understand more clearly how they would benefit from rural tourism when they are involved in the planning phase of the developmental process. Azizan, Iain and Jane (2012) profess that communities should be involved in planning, ensuring that all issues concerning communities are taken into account during the tourism development process. Active participation in decision-making benefits members of the community group and public participation since it is an important tool for successful tourism planning. However, the findings echo those of Mason (2008), who reviewed that the result of the problems that might have arisen from contact between tourists and communities could have been as a result of insufficient community participation in tourism planning and development.

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