



# Towards a coalescence of the community-based tourism and 'Albergo Difusso' tourism models for Sustainable Local Economic Development

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## Abstract

Tourism is a major global economic sector and its potential role in decreasing poverty and inequality and fostering community development should not be underestimated. However, while tourism can have positive impacts on localities, invariably the model of tourism development determines the type of impacts. This is a conceptual paper based entirely on secondary data. It has been acknowledged that the current system of conventional/mass tourism has not fulfilled tourism's potential to promote development. Local Economic Development (LED) focuses on local resources and benefits, while community-based tourism (CBT) and, Albergo Diffuso (AD) are tourism models that are compatible with the development of the local context. This article coalesces the CBT and AD tourism model in relation to LED to advance a 'new' tourism model, referred to as community-based diffused tourism (CBDT), based on the characteristics of CBT and AD. More specifically, it explores the socio-economic and ownership/control characteristics of CBT together with geographical/space characteristics and a specific 'social' feature of AD. The geographical/space characteristics of AD are expanded and reconfigured.

**Keywords:** Local Economic Development (LED), Community-based tourism (CBT), Albergo Diffuso (AD), Tourism.

## Introduction

Tourism is a major global sector that is recognised as having various benefits for local and regional economies (Agarwal, 1999: 518). The academic literature and institutions (Comerio & Strozzi, 2019: 109; Dłuzewska & Rodzos, 2018: 252; Rifai, 2013: 8) note that this sector has added value at the global level and has experienced on-going growth over the past six decades. However, tourism also has negative consequences (Dłuzewska, 2009; Nagarjuna, 2015: 14) and the 1990s witnessed increased acknowledgement of its negative social and environmental effects (Welford, Ytterhus & Eligh, 1999: 165). In addition, conventional/mass tourism does not have a redistributive impact (Saayman & Giampiccoli, 2016: 148). In developing countries, tourism development is based on neo-colonial models that create dependency on foreign resources with associated loss of local community control of their own resources, and are marked by leakages, few multiplier effects, uneven distribution of tourism costs and benefits, and environmental degradation (Guo, Jiang & Li, 2019: 9). Recognition of these negative effects led to the emergence of environmental and sustainable tourism perspectives during the 1980s (Archer, Cooper & Ruhanen, 2005: 95). The literature also acknowledges the need to involve local community members in tourism development (Burgos & Mertens, 2017: 546; Nagarjuna, 2015: 14; Salleh, Shukor, Othman, Samsudin & Idris, 2016: 565). It is noted that, "sustainable tourism policies should not only focus on increasing the



number of tourists or income, but also better serve the tourism industry to serve the broader development goals of local communities, regions and countries” (Guo et al., 2019: 9). However, sustainable tourism has its own challenges and contradictory objectives resulting in confusion often evident in policies and regulations (Guo et al., 2019: 9). We argue that local communities should benefit from tourism through creation and acquisition of jobs, increased and diversified incomes and preservation of local cultures and ways of doing things. Ultimately, we argue that the final goal should be a comprehensive local ownership and control of tourism sector especially by disadvantaged community members to eventuate in redistributive measures.

Other alternative tourism approaches – often including sustainability within their parameters – also emerged following acknowledgement of tourism’s (mainly conventional/mass tourism) negative effects. An example is community-based tourism (CBT) that aims to counteract the negative impacts of conventional/mass tourism “while promoting sustainable development in local communities” (Sène-Harper & Séye, 2019: 2019). The *Albergo Diffuso* (AD) model also emerged, albeit in a different context, but also in relation to development (or rather, regeneration) of the local context. This Italian term, which literally means scattered/diffused/spread hotels (*Albergo*: ‘Hotel’; *Diffuso*: ‘scattered/diffused/spread’) was coined by Mr Giancarlo Dall’Ara” in 1982 to refer to the strategy to recuperate and regenerate localities destroyed by a devastating earthquake that hit north-east Italy in 1976 (Dichter & Dall’Ara, n.d: 4).

Local economic development (LED), which originated in the 1970s in high-income countries of the North has recently been reconfigured as an alternative development strategy focused on localities. This development strategy emerged in response to competition amongst municipalities for business and investment (Swinburn, Goga & Murphy, 2006: 1). While LED has been extensively utilized in the Global North, its utilization in the South is more recent “and one which, in an era of economic crisis, needs to be evaluated in terms of its potential to help to address the challenges of poverty and unemployment and simultaneously to encourage growth” (Nel, 2001: 1004). Thus, LED has recently attracted increased international attention based on its potential for local development (Nel & Rogerson, 2015: 1) and the fact that it fits well with “community-based development initiatives” (Nel, 2001: 1005). In LED, while localities become the foci of subventions, communities become the centres of socio-economic development.

Despite the various challenges and obstacles confronting them, localities, whatever rich or poor, “have the challenge and opportunity of crafting their own destinies” (Blakely & Leigh, 2013: 1). The failure of more traditional top-down and supply side development approaches to accomplish sustainable development shows that no single model exists to confront the challenges arising from globalisation (Rodríguez-Pose & Tijnstra, 2010: 35). Locally focused development strategies such as LED focus on the territorial rather than the sectorial dimension as well as “on governance structures and institutions in order to achieve greater sustainability and generate not just work, but quality work” (Rodríguez-Pose & Tijnstra, 2010: 35). In terms of thrust, LED assumes a multi-faceted and multi-sectoral approach to development. In that sense, various dimensions of development and many socio-economic sectors are involved.

It is against this background that this article theoretically advances an LED oriented new innovative model of tourism development dubbed Community-based Diffused Tourism (CBDT) based on the coalescence of CBT and AD, with one of the characteristics of AD expanded. The aim is to integrate the socio-economic and business model characteristics and principles of CBT with the geographical/space characteristics and a specific ‘social’ feature of AD. The geographical/space characteristics of the AD model are expanded and reconfigured. The article proposes that CBDT focuses on the urban context; however, with location specific adjustments, it could be replicated in various contexts. The objective is to enhance local control of, and local benefits from, tourism and to advance local social cohesion and socio-economic development, resulting in more sustainable tourism development. This theoretical



article that is based on previous literature, proposes integration of two tourism development models with an LED perspective. A literature review is presented on LED, CBT and AD, followed by the presentation of the proposed integrated model.

## Literature review

### ***Local Economic Development (LED)***

Various definitions of LED have been proposed, including “self-reliance, local coping, endogenous or bottom-up development” (Nel, 2001: 1005). In the 1990s, it was defined as “the process in which local governments or community-based organizations” are involved in maintaining and developing local businesses and employment. “Governments and/or community based groups” manage local resources in a collaborative framework so as to promote the local economy (Nel, 2001: 1005). More recently, LED has been proposed as a development approach to increase “local economic potential and sustainable employment through giving local governments the tools to devise locally tailored strategies in cooperation with local, regional, and international stakeholders and actors” (Rodríguez-Pose & Tijmstra, 2010: 36). Collaboration amongst local actors remains a fundamental tenet of LED. This is based on the notion that, various local stakeholders, using local resources and capacities better understand, and should better care for and value, the local social, economic and environmental context in which sustainable development can be facilitated. While there is no common definition of LED a number of LED characteristics has been identified, namely: LED is a territorial-based approach, it is a participatory approach to development, LED does not ignore or reject globalisation, and this approach aims to promote sustainable economic development (Rodríguez-Pose & Tijmstra, 2010, p. 37; also see O’Sullivan & Jackson, 2002: 329). This implies that it takes into account how people of world interact and integrate as they coalesce into one big global economy through the influence of Information and Communication Technologies. The sustainable LED approach involves “consideration of the ‘longer term’ and ‘inter-generational equity’”. Notions of ‘carrying capacity’ and ‘balance’ (social, economic and environmental) are common, fostering participation and community ownership of initiatives” (O’Sullivan & Jackson, 2002: 329). LED takes both short-term and long term planning horizons with the intention to balance socio-economic and environmental matters for the good of the community.

In both the North and the South, LED operates at two levels: the formal level that involves a number of institutional actors; and the informal level usually associated with community-based organizations and NGOs and relating to self-reliance and the informal sector (Nel, 2001: 1006). Four strategies have been proposed to foster structural change in LED planning and practices (Blakely & Leigh, 2013: 435): the entrepreneurial strategy; the LED eco-friendly or green development strategy; LED based on “creating a culturally adaptive community”; and an LED knowledge-based strategy (Blakely & Leigh, 2013: 436). The four important requirements of LED are local control, promotion of enterprises, utilisation of local resources and facilitation of community co-operation (Eisenschitz and Gough, 1993 in O’Sullivan & Jackson, 2002: 328). Capacity building and training, community enterprise, and trading locally are also relevant to the LED approach (from Forum for the Future, 1998 in O’Sullivan & Jackson, 2002: 330). Community members need to take charge of, and lead, LED to improve their own lives as well as the economic local context (Swinburn et al., 2006: 1). Government institutions prioritise positive economic results over equity and the environment, calling for the need to strike a balance among environmental protection, social equity, and economic development, or what is referred to as the “challenge of sustainability” (Zhang, Warner & Homsy, 2017: 196). LED is also concerned with improving the overall well-being of communities through the concerted development of local infrastructure for the benefit of the locality and the region. Corruption leads to the diversion of resources from benefiting a majority of the people to a few who are corrupt.



Local economic development interventions in social and economic contexts are interrelated, with the core objective being collaboration amongst local stakeholders and their “rational use of local capacities and resources”. Local development priorities are identified that take the social and environmental contexts into consideration (ILO, 2013a: 2). The community approach and LED have much in common, but LED is more concerned with economic growth, whereas the community approach leans towards addressing social issues. However, both “focus on bottom-up, participatory development and the tendency to combine social and economic roles” (Rodríguez-Pose & Tijmstra, 2010: 42). Local economic development also seeks to strengthen social dialogue and its major focus is employment and micro and small enterprises (ILO, 2013a: 2). In South Africa, LED strategies include human capital development, community-based development; the creation of linkages; municipal services and infrastructure, and nurturing local economic activity over and above the top-down Spatial Development Initiatives and Industrial Development Zones. Social dialogue is, therefore, important to gain the necessary buy-in to LED initiatives from stakeholders such as municipalities, communities and the private sector. It promotes an inclusive approach that fosters equality among the various local stakeholders (Rodríguez-Pose & Tijmstra, 2010: 38); thus, ideally, LED “cases are highly democratic, participatory, and inclusive of all groups within a community, especially the vulnerable, marginalized, and minorities” (ILO, 2013a: 6). Participation is crucial for buy-in and inclusion. The dialogic and participatory atmosphere nurtures cooperation and cohesion in which common goals are established and common concerns are addressed.

Disadvantaged people that operate in the informal economy confront particular challenges. An LED strategy should recognize the needs of the informal economy so as to “encourage wider social benefits for all a community’s economic and social sectors, both formal and informal, disadvantaged and excluded” (Swinburn et al., 2006: 3). Local economic development thus recognizes and values the informal economy (ILO, 2013a: 2). Consideration of the informal sector is also relevant in CBT (Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2016). Formality and informality are social constructs which unnecessarily privileges formal sector over the informal – while both involve people, create jobs, generate income and contribute to Gross Domestic Product.

However, local elites who are influential people with connections to the ruling cliques can capture LED, preventing the prioritisation of disadvantaged groups (ILO, 2013a: 6). Power relations within localities should always be borne in mind. In short, LED involves working together within a collaborative framework, is participatory within egalitarian and redistributive parameters, and is a sustainable approach that uses local resources, and involves local control of the economy. It promotes local enterprises and employment, works to decrease leakage by favouring local trade relationships, and acknowledges the need for education and training. It is within this context that LED should be understood in relation to tourism, more specifically CBT, AD and sustainable development.

The relationship between LED and disadvantaged groups can be extended to include social and solidarity economy (SSE) enterprises, cooperatives and small businesses. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) (2017a: 5) promotes social and solidarity economy enterprises and organizations (SSEEOs) and “cooperative enterprises through LED as a way to draw on the strength of these different approaches.” Such enterprises can support “the development of rural- and community-based tourism, and foster participatory decision-making” (ILO, 2017a: 7). Cooperatives are locally developed, owned, and controlled and are embedded in the local territory (Zeuli & Radel, 2005: 48) and are thus critical in LED. They can facilitate the inclusion of marginalised people and create opportunities beyond monetary benefits to work against poverty, support skills development, decrease economic leakage, and contribute to employment (Khumalo, 2014: 66). There is increased acknowledgement of the need to promote sustainability and reduce inequality and workers’ cooperatives can speed up this shift by combining “economic growth and community well-being” (Hoover & Abell, 2016:



.7). LED interventions have the potential to reduce inequality if efforts are directed at creating jobs and improving the overall well-being of citizens through delivering services that meet their needs.

Examples from South Africa (Jili, Masuku & Selepe, 2017: 3) and Japan (Yoshimura & Kato, 2007: 104) show that Small Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) are also relevant in LED (see also Fiseha & Oyelana, 2015: 280). These enterprises are critical in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, including reducing inequality and ensuring that growth is more inclusive. They can also promote poverty reduction by “allowing disadvantaged or marginalised groups, including young people, women, seniors, migrants, ethnic minorities and the disabled, to participate in the economy” (OECD, 2018a: 7). Governments should therefore facilitate a supportive SMMEs development policy framework (Jili et al., 2017: 3; see also OECD, 2018b: 21). Policymakers regard SMMEs as one of the drivers of sustainable development (La Porta & Schleifer, 2008: 3; Naude, 1998: 134). The role played by cooperatives (and other forms of collective entrepreneurship) and SMMEs in LED can be used to coalesce CBT and AD for LED. SMMEs and cooperatives have a role to play in executing LED subventions.

Overuse of business incentives can have negative effects on social equity and environmental sustainability (Zhang et al., 2017: 196). Sustainable economic development requires “community economic development strategies to address the broad range of barriers that communities face” (Zhang et al., 2017: 196). The development policy milieu is shifting towards sustainable development by increasing “attention to environmental and social issues as part of a community’s economic development strategy” where, for example inequality is recognized as an obstacle to growth (Zhang et al., 2017: 196). There is an increased recognition that “economic growth alone is ‘not enough’” and of the need for sustainable development (O’Sullivan & Jackson, 2002: 329). Within an economic growth context, redistribution and social equity are necessary to address inequality and poverty. Community members, particularly, disadvantaged ones should be prioritized and assisted to achieve holistic development that redresses social injustice. Thus, “Inequality is also an issue of social justice” (UN, 2013: 22). By reducing inequality, justice will be in the process of being served.

### ***Community-based tourism (CBT)***

While it is not possible to develop tourism everywhere, where the potential exists, tourism can lead to vigorous LED, and promote poverty reduction through initiatives such as stand-alone community-based or microcredit projects (Hayakawa & Rivero, 2009: 1, 4). Local economic development projects to alleviate poverty through tourism – including CBT projects – that promote “both environmental sustainability and social responsibility” have been advocated by the World Bank (Hayakawa & Rivero, 2009: 1). However, this requires a restructuring of the tourism system and making CBT the mainstream tourism approach (Saayman & Giampiccoli, 2016: 164). Poverty eradication “should not be regarded as ‘charity’ – the domain of ‘bighearted’ pop stars or ‘enlightened’ bureaucrats” (Chok, Macbeth & Warren, 2007: 160), but should be understood as a comprehensive restructuring of the global system towards a more egalitarian society within an all-inclusive redistribution framework (Saayman & Giampiccoli, 2016: 148). At the same time, for local communities “to develop CBT, a shift in balance between the powerful and the powerless is required, not only in terms of economic, psychological, and social power but also political power to drive CBT implementation and influence public policy to support meaningful community involvement” (Yanes, Zielinski, Diaz Cano & Kim, 2019: 3). There are power dynamics and issues of agency around CBT. Ideally power much shift to communities and not to individuals for its exercise can result in positive or negative outcomes.

Community-based tourism is not without its critics (see for example, Overseas Development Institute, Caroline Ashley’s critique in Hayakawa, & Rivero, 2009: 1). However, its relevance as an alternative development strategy to conventional/mass tourism is increasingly



recognised (Torres Tricárico, dos Santos Pires & da Conceição Walkowski, 2019: 4). Stand-alone CBT projects in Bolivia demonstrate positive sustainable economic outcomes that generate LED and empower local people in the poorest areas (Hayakawa, & Rivero, 2009:1). While both CBT and ecotourism have not delivered as expected, they “still hold the greatest potential for many regions” and CBT practices and principles have not been matched. The issue is that, real CBT “has not been implemented” (Moscardo, 2008: 175; see also Scheyvens, 1999: 74). Community-based tourism has been exploited by donor agencies with mediocre results (Scheyvens, 1999: 74). Having lost its transformative and empowering intents, since the 1990s, CBT has deviated from its community development approach (Beeton, 2006: 50; see also Pleumaron, 2002). Education and appropriate support are required to enhance its success (Scheyvens, 1999: 74). Thus, “the potential of CBT is still recognised and its development should be facilitated instead of surrendering to an improper approach or lack of capacity and resources” (Saayman & Giampiccoli, 2016: 150). The scope for the practice and diffusion of CBT is abundant. In circumstances of diffusion, it requires taking into account the contextual factors of culture and norms.

Given this background, and in light of CBT’s contribution to LED, in its original form, it holds much potential to enhance local community development by serving as an initial substratum upon which to reorganise the tourism sector. Community-based tourism emerged in the 1970s as an alternative development milieu to conventional/mass tourism. It focuses on disadvantaged members of society and is concerned with matters of empowerment, social justice, self-reliance and sustainability (Giampiccoli, 2015; Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2019: 4; Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018: 5; Tasci, Semrad & Yilmaz, 2013: 10). Importantly, CBT “emerges as a form of resistance to the global tourism market pressures resulting in the exclusion of local populations, weakening the potential benefits of tourism, and threatening their social, cultural, and environmental cohesion” (Torres Tricárico et al., 2019: 4). It aims to counteract global conventional/mass tourism that excludes local disadvantaged people by jeopardizing and limiting their control, ownership and management as well as tourism benefits. Hence community-based tourism is steeped in communities. In other words, it should have its roots in communities, driven by communities for their own benefit, however they define those benefits. It presents a window through which visitors can experience the local life in its natural settings.

While CBT is usually regarded as a rural tourism approach and is mainly implemented in developing countries, its significance is increasing and it is implemented in both developed and developing countries and in rural and urban contexts (Bhartiya & Masoud, 2015: 348; Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2017: 1; Giampiccoli, Saayman & Jugmohan, 2016: 550; Ndlovu & Rogerson, 2004: 436; Rogerson, 2004: 25). The literature offers various understandings and models of CBT (for example Calanog, Reyes, & Eugenio, 2012; Dodds, Ali & Galaski, 2018; Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2012; Ha“usler & Strasdas, 2003; Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2013, 2016; Naguran, 1999; Spenceley, 2008; Zapata, Hall, Lindo & Vanderschaeghe, 2011). There are numerous CBT development strategies and associated possibilities (Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2016). Examples of models range from lease agreements between the community and the private sector to ones where the whole community is involved in the project (see Denman, 2001: 11; Spenceley, 2008; Ha“usler & Strasdas, 2003: 26; Naguran, 1999). Business models also include cooperative businesses and private sector concessions (see Calanog et al., 2012: 306; Dodds et al., 2018: 1549; Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2012) and can involve a single CBT entity or multiple associated individual enterprises (Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2013, 2016). Zapata et al. (2011) suggest a bottom-up and a top-down model of CBT.

The different perspectives and definitions of CBT gave rise to two main trajectories, namely, involving communities in tourism development in line with the neoliberal approach, or developing “the community through tourism” that is associated with alternative development and the original concept of CBT (Mayaka, Croy & Wolfram Cox, 2019: 178). This article



supports the second trajectory and argues for the “centrality of disadvantaged community members in CBT and their control of CBT” (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018: 760).

The academic and grey literature concur that CBT must be ‘community-owned/managed’ (Dodds et al., 2018: 1549). Together with community benefits, this principle is fundamental to academic definitions of CBT (see, for example, Yanes et al., 2019: 2. See also Amat Ramsa & Mohd, 2004; George, Nedelea & Antony, 2007; Giampiccoli & Nauright, 2010; Giriwati, Hawa, Pamungkas, Iyati & Hidayat, 2019; Kaur, Jawaid & Bt Abu Othman, 2016; Koster, 2007; Leksakundilok & Hirsch, 2008; Nataraja & Devidasan, 2014; Petrovic & Bieliková, 2015; Sánchez-Cañizares & Castillo-Canalejo, 2014; Somnuek, 2018; Tasci et al., 2013). Community ownership and management of CBT is also “one of the important principles to the long term functionality of CBT projects” (Tamir, 2015: 70). Considering the geographical space, which can lean towards the context of LED, CBT “is a tourism conceived, managed and supplied by the local communities of a given territory” (Ngono Mindzeng, 2018: 26). Without community control, benefits will be secondary and will centre “mostly on the provision of low-level employment for local people” (Yanes et al., 2019:2).

The main principle of CBT is to build up the local communities rather than external parties. CBT disallows non local communities to be involved in the tourism management of the local communities. In addition, CBT is managed and owned by local people, because the main objective is to help local residents for their economic benefits [...] The potential of CBT is that it empowers the community, encouraging them to engage in such decisions: planning, evaluation and control of resources. CBT encourages this whole and holistic approach to benefit the visitors (Kaur et al., 2016: 17).

However, challenges confront the implementation of CBT and success stories are few and far between (Dangi & Jamal, 2016: 10).

Participation is one challenging aspect of CBT. People can “either possess the power to influence decisions or are just spectators of the process” (Yanes et al., 2019, p. 2). Participation can augment or impair a community’s contribution (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2015: 39). A high level of participation distinguishes CBT from conventional tourism (Yanes et al., 2019: 2). Thus, citizen control and delegated power, self-mobilization, transformation and empowerment are associated with CBT (see Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2015). However, such participation should not be externally imposed (Mayaka et al., 2018: 2). At the same time, the concept of community participation/involvement “is not enough” as CBT is about the community owning and managing the development process from the start (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018: 9). Therefore, CBT is “*not* about participation (or involvement) if such participation is organised or directed by external entities” but it is about a process of “*self*-participation (not guided or directed by outsiders)” (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2018: 9, emphasis in original).

However, disadvantaged community members often lack resources and capacity to promote CBT development, necessitating external facilitation. External intervention can take “different levels of protagonism and intensity” that result in different CBT experiences, “also affecting their sustainability and true autonomy” (Ruiz Ballesteros, 2017, no page). Rather than external assistance/facilitation *per se*, the methodology and process of the external intervention is important. Thus, external facilitation should be ‘long-term but temporary’, based on facilitation instead of participation and should involve technical assistance rather than ownership of CBT entities (see Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2013: 9; Saayman & Giampiccoli, 2016: 152).

Community-based tourism is about equity, redistribution and collective ownership with no winners or losers (Tasci et al., 2013: 2; Ullan de La Rosa, Aledo Tur & Garcia Andreu, 2017: 469). It “very clearly identifies with distributive and social justice, ethical relationships and equity, from its rootedness in the locale/community” (Dangi & Jamal, 2008: 12) and should have direct and indirect beneficiaries (Sproule & Suhandi, 1998: 216; see also Ndlovu &



Rogerson, 2004: 446; Singh, 2008: 156; Suansri, 2003: 69). Redistribution is enhanced by linking a CBT entity with other local businesses (Mtapuri & Giampiccoli, 2013). The supply chains consisting of players, information and resources on tourism must link to these CBT entities as part of Government support to these entities should communities want to get involved in community-based tourism at scale. This implies that such supply chains should be restructured in a more egalitarian manner to counteract the tendencies by the local and international elites and power holders to appropriate them for their sole benefit. Environmental sustainability should be an essential element of all forms of tourism, including CBT. However, it is regarded as intrinsic to CBT and not to conventional tourism. This disadvantages CBT as local people are expected to carry a greater burden of caring for the environment (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2017: 9). This is not to suggest that CBT should not be environmentally sustainable, but “that both CBT and conventional tourism should be regarded and treated in a similar manner with respect to environmental issues” (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2017: 9), taking into consideration specific entities’ resources and capacity. It should be borne in mind that large corporations with extensive resources should be tasked with implementing sustainability procedures and new technologies that mitigate the negative impacts of their proportional footprint on the environment.

### ***Albergo Diffuso (AD)***

The AD tourism model was developed in Italy in 1982 (Dichter & Dall’Ara, n.d: 4) and its popularity has continued to grow. Recent research (Morena, Truppi & Del Gatto, 2017: 453; Silvestrelli, 2013) shows that there were 56 ADs in Italy in 2011, 63 in 2013 and 82 in 2014. The AD model has also gained international momentum and is becoming “a hospitality model found internationally” (Romolini, Fissi & Gori, 2017: 67), with the AD trademark for Europe having been registered (Dichter & Dall’Ara, n.d: 10). The model’s expansion highlights the need to understand AD and how it can be linked to or integrated with other tourism development models.

Two main characteristics of AD are highlighted here: its connection with, and regeneration of, the local context and its geographical/space ‘diffusion’ typology. The link between these characteristics should be understood, as the ‘horizontal’ structure of AD is integrated with the local territory (Pietrogrande & Vaccher, 2017: 13). *Albergo Diffuso* has various characteristics such as unlimited space, accommodation units in different buildings on different streets, different accommodation units, connection with the local community, stimulation of local communities to enter the tourism sector, and an ownership structure that is not limited to one owner (Dropulić, Krajnović & Ružić, 2008: 609). The AD model should not be considered as “spontaneous accommodation depending upon the good will of the local inhabitants” but should be recognized as a different, but professionally managed venture with its own rooms and other specific facilities available to tourists (Morena et al., 2017: 450). AD is not a haphazard arrangement, it is carefully planned set-up for the benefit of local entrepreneurs and the visitors.

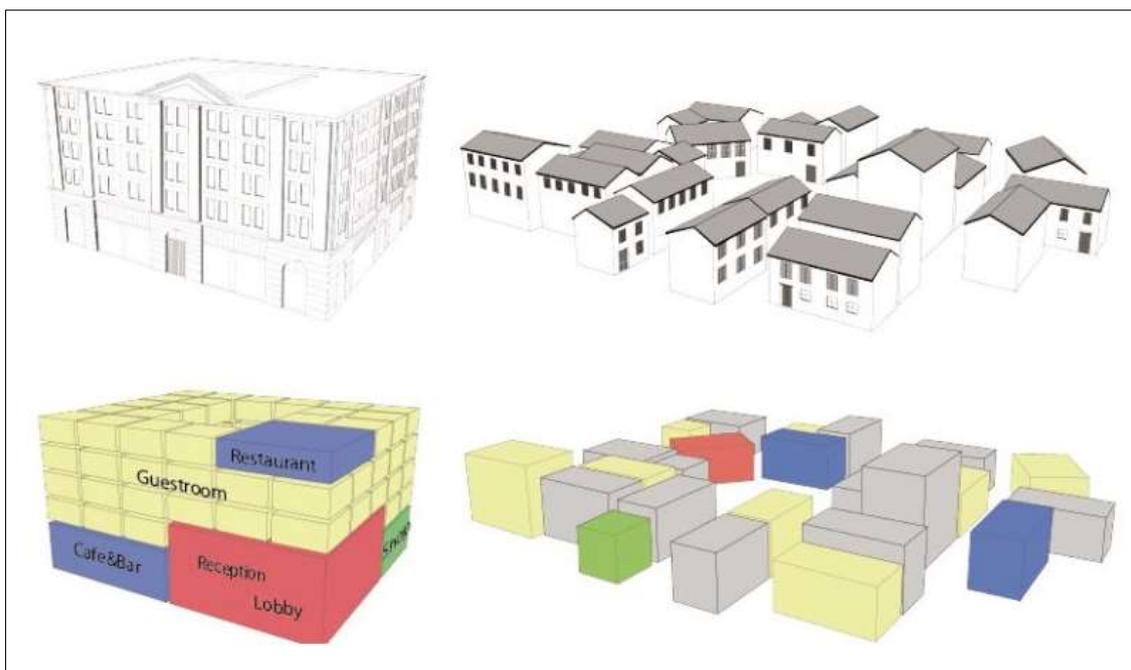
The AD tourism development model has a comprehensive and fundamental relationship with the local context, community and territory. It is not just about accommodation, but is an opportunity to regenerate and protect, in an inexpensive way, the entire economic, social and cultural local system (Tagliabue, Leonforte & Compostella, 2012: 1067; see also Cucari, Wankowicz & De Falco, 2019: 106; Di Gregorio, 2017: 123). In AD the local community is the protagonist (Villani & Dall’Ara, 2015: 171) and it is embedded in the local context as AD is based on local resources and is integrated in the local economy. It uses local products and services, and revives local activities and products, thus regenerating the local territory (Morena et al., 2017: 447, 452; Avram & Zarrilli, 2012: 36). It is AD’s positive connection and value for local context that has led to its expansion around the world (Romolini et al., 2017: 67). AD is about reviving and regenerating localities that are suffering decay or, by extension also anticipate localities where decay is foreseen.



*Albergo Diffuso* leans towards a more sustainable tourism approach. A comparison of AD with more traditional types of hotels show that “AD increases sustainable tourist development” as there is no need to construct new buildings (thus decreasing negative environmental impacts) (Dichter & Dall’Ara, n.d: 5). Moreover, AD should include economic prosperity, equity and social cohesion, and great potential for growth and job generation (Vallone, Orlandini & Cecchetti, 2013: 22; see also Tagliabue et al., 2012: 1061). It thus resembles CBT which is about redistribution/equity, economic development and visitors’ interaction with local communities. This makes their coalescence logical and ‘natural’.

The AD model also improves the local landscape and is a harmonious tourism development that is sustainable in the long term (Pietrogrande & Vaccher, 2017: 17). In AD, environmental resources are actively and passively conserved by introducing new life in the locality and avoiding the construction of new buildings (Pietrogrande & Vaccher, 2017: 17; see also Dropulić et al., 2008: 610). While the AD model does not preclude the construction of new buildings where required, such as to adhere to specific regulations, its main intention is to use pre-existing buildings (Pietrogrande & Vaccher, 2017: 13). As such, the literature (see for example Avram & Zarrilli, 2012; Dropulić et al., 2008; Morena et al., 2017; Romolini et al., 2017; Vallone et al., 2013) recognizes that AD is a new sustainable tourism approach. Avram and Zarrilli (2012: 35) observe that, the model “perfectly fits the model of tourist sustainable development, based on local resources, careful with the quality of products and processes, aware of how important it is to preserve and enhance the local identity.” AD supports preservation and curation and use of old infrastructure and the construction of new infrastructure entirely based on need.

The AD model has a specific ‘diffused’ character. *Diffuso* - in Italian - means to diffuse or spread and AD is “*horizontally* structured within the village, using different buildings and spaces suitable for hospitality services” (Silvestrelli, 2013: 28, emphasis in original). Compared to conventional hotels, it links various units regardless of the distance between them (Dragičević et al., 2016: 103). However, although not binding, a distance of 200-300 meters between the various AD units is regarded as reasonable. Common areas, such as reception, are about 200-300 meters from accommodation units and all units are located in pre-existing buildings (Pietrogrande & Vaccher, 2017: 13). Figure 1 shows the theoretical difference between a more conventional hotel and AD (with the conventional hotel on the left and AD on the right). It shows that the conventional hotel is usually contained within one building, while AD is diffused/spread within a geographical space in various buildings.



**Figure 1.** Graphic representation of the theoretical model of AD (Left – Conventional Hotel; Right – AD). Source: Dall’Ara, 2017.

However, the AD model should not be regarded as a rigid concept or structure. It is a flexible one that involves various buildings. Such flexibility “may be particularly suitable for a local development plan” (Pietrogrande & Vaccher, 2017: 13). *Albergo Diffusion* can be differently embedded in the territory and can be proposed in various locations such as in rural areas, mountain areas, historic villages and in old houses, as well as small and medium size cities (Silvestrelli, 2013: 28; see also Pietrogrande & Vaccher, 2017: 13).

The ownership model and legal status of an AD entity is also flexible; however, it is usually within a collective / cooperative framework. Local cooperation involving various actors “are specific ideals characterising the field of cultural, rural and in general ‘alternative’ tourism” (Pietrogrande & Vaccher, 2017: 19). The AD “can be either a single entrepreneur, a cooperative, or any other most suitable form of productive association” (Dichter & Dall’Ara, n.d: 6). It is thus “not limited to one owner” (Dropulić et al., 2008: 609). While AD legal status varies, but it is “usually a Cooperative” (Racine, 2012, no page) and there are numerous AD cooperatives (Giampiccoli et al., 2016: 556).

The facilities and units offered by AD “are not inhabited by other residents” (Morena et al., 2017: 450). However, there is no reason or ‘legal’ limitation that can impede local residents to ‘normally’ inhabit AD units. In this case, the AD would lean towards Bed & Breakfast or guesthouse contexts. It has also been proposed that AD “can provide a form of homelike accommodation with hotel-level services” (Morena et al., 2017: 447). In other words, AD provides a hotel feel in a home.

## **Proposed model**

### ***The Community-based tourism and Albergo Diffuso integration model***

Within the CBT social and business model contexts – characteristics and principles (disadvantaged people, empowerment, social justice, collective entrepreneurship and so on) – this article proposes a model that expands the AD model geographically, but also includes inhabited homes/houses, enabling the CBT model to also lean towards a Bed & Breakfast/guest house context. The commonalities between CBT and AD suggest a number



of possible connections between AD and CBT, namely, the external collaboration model, service collaboration model, partial association model, or full association model (Giampiccoli et al., 2016: 557). The full association model proposes that AD and CBT “become a single entity; for example, by forming an umbrella structure with AD and CBT membership (with single members or as a single CBT and AD entity) or by making CBT and AD one legal entity itself” (Giampiccoli et al., 2016: 557). This article goes beyond this proposal to fully coalesce CBT and AD in a new innovative model dubbed community-based diffused tourism (CBDT) by integrating the socio-economic and business ownership/control characteristics and principles of CBT with the geographical/space characteristics of AD, where the geographical/space characteristics and a specific ‘social’ feature (uninhabited AD units) are expanded and reconfigured.

Such integration also aims to enhance the sustainable development context within which current tourism development efforts should be directed. The fact that CBT and AD are both embedded in the local context and that both favour collective ownership/entrepreneurship models makes for a perfect combination to reinforce the ‘locality’ of CBDT. The social context of CBT and the geographical context of AD could work together to enhance the local embedment of CBDT. However, in a global perspective, there is a need to go beyond the connection with a specific locality to work towards a global system based on CBT/AD principles and characteristics. For example, CBT should prioritise disadvantaged members of society and work within a redistributive and social justice approach at both local and global level and “it should influence and circumscribe the whole tourism sector (and society) to enhance the local control of, and local benefit from, tourism” (Saayman & Giampiccoli, 2016: 166).

Community-based diffused tourism enterprises should be a cooperative or other form of collective enterprises without, however, restricting individual initiatives such various enterprises (frequently SMMEs) under a single umbrella entity. These forms of enterprises should be primarily owned, controlled and managed by disadvantaged social groups for their own benefit. The CBDT entities should also owned and managed so as to support redistribution, equity, and empowerment, and so on. These are the social-economic context and objectives of CBT that are embedded in the CBDT model.

From a geographical/space perspective, originally taken from the AD model, but expanded, transformed and stretched, the CBDT will boast various typologies, such as:

1. Neighbourhood-based CBDT
2. Street-based CBDT
3. ‘Building’-based CBDT

Figure 2 shows fictional examples of neighbourhood-based CBDT and street-based CBDT. It illustrates the possible geographical dispersion of facilities/units in the two different types of CBDT. While in the neighbourhood-based CBDT type, geographical diffusion can cover the ‘full’ neighbourhood (depending on the extent of the neighbourhood), in the street-based CBDT, geographical diffusion is limited to a specific street. It is important to underline that in the neighbourhood-based CBDT, as much as they could cover the full neighbourhood, the facilities would usually be within comfortable distance for tourists and the local people involved. When distances make it impossible to have a single CBDT in a neighbourhood, further CBDT entities could be developed within the same neighbourhood so that each CBDT remains within specific ‘comfortable’ geographical limitations. In this case, a CBDT organisation could connect/associate the various CBDT entities within the same neighbourhood.

The suggestion that each CBDT entity must remain within a ‘comfortable’ distance might seem obvious in relation to visitors, but it is also important for local people involved in the CBDT venture. This would enhance social cohesion as people that live close to one another know

each other better and would be more eager to improve and protect their own geographical space, its endowments, artefacts and resources.

Figure 2 also shows a street-based CDBT. The green dots indicate the street-based CDBT types where all facilities (not differentiated in the figure) are on the same street. The only difference between the neighbourhood-based CDBT and the street-based CDBT lies in the 'geography' of the CDBT. The neighbourhood-based CDBT is based in the neighbourhood whereas the street-based CDBT is based on the streets (one CDBT per street). The facilities in the street-based CDBT should usually – but not necessarily – be less geographically dispersed. Again, the need to ensure that facilities are located within a comfortable distance for visitors and to promote social cohesion should be considered when developing a street-based CDBT.



**Figure 2.** Street- and neighbourhood-based CDBTs. Source: Google map (adapted). The green dots that indicate the possible street-based diffusion of CDBT have not been differentiated but will include various facilities such as bedrooms, and an eating room.

In both CDBT typologies, if the CDBT grows more facilities and structures can also be supplied. This could result in duplication of some facilities, such as eating rooms, that would make the CDBT more comfortable for visitors.

On the other hand, Figure 3 shows a 'building'-based CDBT where the geographical distance (diffusion) practically disappears. In this CDBT type, all facilities/units are located in the same building (or possibly in *two* buildings that *must* be adjacent). The figure schematically shows an example where different flats in the same building can constitute the CDBT facilities. The elimination of distance in the 'building'-based CDBT results in fewer logistical problems and, possibly, offers more comfortable facilities for tourists. Such a CDBT should also have positive impacts on social cohesion and people's management of their own 'blocks of flats'.



**Figure 3.** 'Building'-based CDBT. Simplified images of various basic buildings. Source: <https://www.vectorstock.com> (adapted).

These three proposed typologies of CDBT merely serve as examples. There are no limits in 'inventing' the precise geographical boundaries of a CDBT venture. Beyond that, CDBT should be made up of two possible categories: uninhabited (as in the original AD) or inhabited (such as Bed & Breakfasts/guest houses). The 'new' inhabited CDBT category can also possibly be due to disadvantaged members of society that do not have many resources to invest. They thus supply what they have, that is, where they live. Establishing and developing an inhabited CDBT will require social cooperation and common goals amongst those involved, which will be more relevant than financial resources. The inhabited CDBT category could allow many individuals and families to enter into the tourism business without any financial investment, offering great potential for social inclusion in the tourism business, except for what they have and willingness to participate in tourism. There ought to be the will and interest to participate and share ideas, facilities and know-how (including the profit and losses) to make this possible.

Community-based diffused tourism should not be solely understood in relation to offered spaces (e.g. accommodation, reception, eating rooms) but also in terms of services. This is important to increase its embeddedness with the local context and go beyond those directly involved in a specific CDBT entity. For example, a family that cannot supply any 'space' such as rooms could be part of a CDBT entity by supplying services such as cooking food or cleaning laundry. Individuals could be part of a CDBT venture as local guides, with each CDBT having its own guide. In addition, the local economy should also be involved and should benefit. Services such as shops (for example, bakeries, coffee shops, laundromats, etc.) should be part of, or linked to, CDBT. Existing local businesses, especially SMMEs and cooperatives should become part of (or linked to) the CDBT eco-system. This will serve two purposes. Firstly, it would increase local support and social cooperation amongst local people/stakeholders and secondly, it would increase the services and products offered to tourists. Local businesses' inclusion in CDBT should, as far as possible, prioritise business owned by disadvantaged social groups and collectively own. The involvement of various actors beyond the CDBT entity, will improve local control of the tourism business and tourism local spaces. Thus, above and beyond the three proposed CDBT typologies, CDBT should have the following four important characteristics:

- Be uninhabited or inhabited
- Include people without space to offer services



- Be linked to the local economy
- Willingness to participate and share ideas, know-how and resources

The CBDT model, especially – but not only – when it consists of inhabited structures, can enhance sustainable LED because it is based in the same place (area, neighbourhood, street) that attracts tourist. In CBDT, people (owner and managers) and place become one. People live in the same area where CBDT is located, thus enhancing local control of the geographical space through tourism. Consequently, managing the area in a sustainable way is fundamental to maintain and possibly increase, the attractiveness of the CBDT entity and the local area. While CBDT is specifically intended for, and should prioritise, disadvantaged community members, a collaborative framework that includes all sectors of society is required so that the benefits are spread and social cohesion is enhanced. A CBDT enhances solidarity and togetherness of citizens in a local area for collective entrepreneurship where everyone is an entrepreneur, if they want to.

## Conclusion

Tourism is a major sector that has great potential to contribute to development in many localities around the world. At the same time, global inequality and poverty, and the need for comprehensive community development remain pressing issues. The current tourism system – especially conventional/mass tourism – seems not to have fulfilled its potential and has also negatively impacted on tourism destinations. The negative consequences of conventional/mass tourism led to the emergence of alternative forms of tourism development such as CBT. In Italy, the devastating consequences of an earthquake and the need to advance tourism development resulted in the development of the AD tourism model. Community-based tourism and AD have much in common, including their embedment in the local context, their sustainable approach, their focus on local cooperation and the fact that they are mostly based on collective entrepreneurship. At the same time, the LED approach is advocated to improve local economies and community well-being.

Based on the above, this article has proposed an integration of the CBT and AD tourism models within an LED context in order to enhance sustainability. The new concept of CBDT which has been proposed has various typologies and categories and specific characteristics. While the proposed model focuses more on the urban context, with adjustments to accommodate local conditions, CBDT should be replicable in virtually any locality. For example, people living in a small village in a rural area could work together to establish CBDT, a small town could develop one or more CBDTs based on its geographical characteristics and size, and so on. The CBDT model aims to prioritise disadvantaged people, giving them the opportunity to participate in tourism by pooling their existing resources. Its embedment in the local context will enable CBDT to enhance local social cohesion and sustainability. Further research and inputs are welcome to improve the proposed model so to respond to changing local and global conditions and circumstances. It is hoped that the CBDT model will enhance tourism's role in reducing inequality and poverty, and promoting holistic community development and sustainable development approaches.

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