

Improving sustainability of tourism development through enhancing the role of local communities - A case study of county-based rural tourism in Yangshuo, China

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Introduction

- Sustainable tourism and local communities
- The case study of Yangshuo
- Research methodology
- Empirical findings
- Discussion
- Conclusion

Sustainable tourism and local communities

Understanding of the concept of „sustainable tourism“

Traditions of sustainability in tourism studies (Saarinen, 2006):

- Resource-based
- Activity-based
- Community-based

Application in physical environment and human environment

Sustainable tourism and local communities

Local communities receive increasing attention in tourism research

Local community:

- A key stakeholder who can affect or is affected by tourism development in an area
- Local communities in literature:
different groups involved in tourism
- Local communities in the present case study:
Host residents who live geographically in or close to the locale where tourism activities intensively happen

Sustainable tourism and local communities

Main research themes concerning local communities:

(I) Impact perceptions and attitudes research

- „Real“ impacts of tourism in the objective physical world
- Perceived impacts evaluated with subjective perspectives (Sarrinen 2006; Ap and Crompton 1998)
- The attitudes of local people:
Supportive attitude is indispensable for sustainable tourism development (Murphy 1983; Ahn, Lee and Shafer 2002)

Sustainable tourism and local communities

(II) Community participation in tourism development

- Community participatory approach:
community as the focus for decision making (Murphy 1985)
- Community participation in developing countries:
various barriers to the applicability (Tosun and Timothy 2003)
- Adaptive categorical paradigm with different participatory levels and various forms (Tosun 1999, 2006):
pseudo, passive, and spontaneous community participation

The case study of Yangshuo

Research objective

Background information of Yangshuo

Yangshuo as a county-based rural tourism destination



Source: www.glys.cn/yangsou



Source: www.sh51766.com



Location:

110° 013'-110° 040' E
longitude
24° 028' -25° 004' N
latitude

Population:

300,000

Area:

1,428 km²

Annual PCDI (2007):

Urban: 17,092 Yuan
Rural: 4,353 Yuan

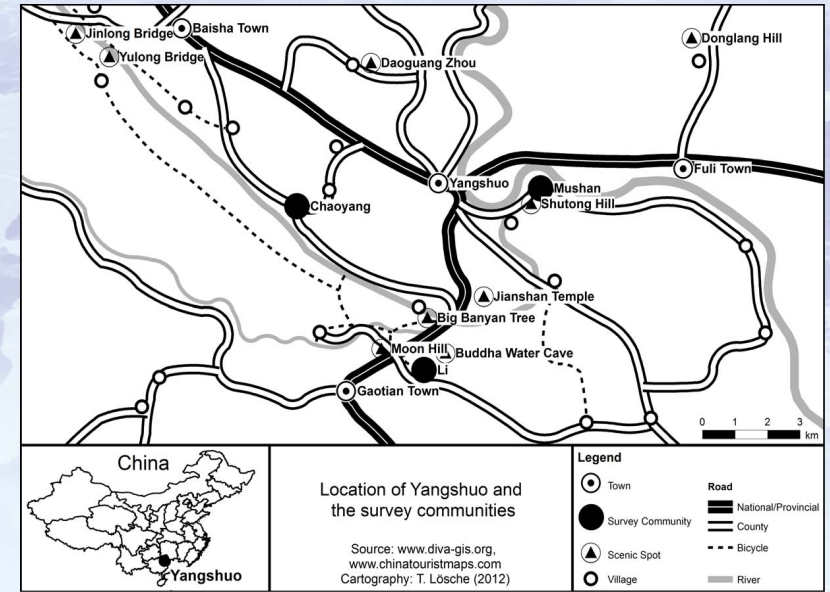
Yangshuo in Guangxi, China

Source: www.itourbeijing.com

Research methodology

Combination of qualitative and quantitative methods:

- Literature review
- Interviews
- Field research
- Observation
- Survey



Location of survey communities



Photos of local landscapes around the survey communities

Empirical findings

(I) Involvement in practical operations:

- Occasional involvement since the late 1970s and a large scale of involvement after the 2000s

- Active in operational practices

- Different forms of involvement :

Li Village:

Mainly accommodation and catering service with self-investment

Mushan Village:

Part-time employed in tourism enterprise with external investment

Chaoyang Village:

Employed in tourism company managed by the local government



Empirical findings

(II) Perceptions, attitudes and participation

(sample size:150, valid:136, response rate: 90.6%):

Predicted impacts in the literature could be proved agreed, but only with light tendency. High consensus found in aspects of

- (+) income and job opportunity increase
- (+) infrastructure improvement
- (+) cultural exchange enhancement
- (-) over dependence on tourism

Respondents also have diverse impacts perceptions. Greater perception differences found in aspects of

- (-) widening local income disparity and unfair benefits distribution
- (-) traffic congestion
- (-) host-visitor conflicts
- (-) commercialized interpersonal relationships

Divergent perceptions of tourism influence on agriculture

Socio-demographic profile

	%		%
Gender(n=136)		Living years(n=127)	
male	48.5	< 5 years	8.1
female	51.5	5-15 years	13.9
Nationality(n=136)		> 15 years	71.3
Han	82.4	missing	6.6
Zhuang	14.0	Education	
other	3.6	no or primary school	25
Age(n=134)		middle school	30.9
18-34	54.5	high or vocational school	33.8
35-44	16.9	college or university and higher	8.8
45-54	14.7	missing	1.4
55-65	7.4	Family members in tourism(n=116)	
65 or above	5.1	no person	33.1
missing	1.4	one person	18.4
		two or more persons	33.8
		missing	14.7

Respondents' perceptions of the tourism impacts

Items	Mean	Std. Dev
Tourism increases household income	3.96	0.98
Tourism creates more job opportunities	3.87	1.01
Tourism benefits only a few people	3.24	1.25
Tourism widen the gap between rich and poor people	3.40	1.23
Local residents are becoming overly dependent on tourism	3.78	1.10
Tourism development brings natural environmental improvement	3.32	1.20
Tourism development brings infrastructure improvement	3.67	1.05
Tourism development enhances residents' environmental awareness	3.59	1.13
Tourism causes overcrowding and traffic congestion	3.50	1.24
Tourism development causes overexploitation of the local resources	3.35	1.10
Tourism development enhances protection of local cultural heritages	3.31	1.13
Tourism development enhances revitalization of local cultural traditions	3.47	1.02
Tourism development intensifies host-visitor cultural exchange	3.84	0.98
Tourism causes commercialized interpersonal relationships among residents within the local communities	3.37	1.27
Tourism causes increase of host-visitor conflicts because of cultural differences	2.85	1.25
Tourism brings satisfying additional income to agricultural income	3.82	1.10
Tourism competes for natural resources with agricultural production	3.44	1.28
Tourism causes labour lost for agriculture	3.39	1.18

Empirical findings

(II) Perceptions, attitudes and participation (continue):

Respondents' attitudes and participation willingness

- 93% expressed supportive attitude to tourism development
- 86% indicated willingness to do tourism relevant work
- 78% stated their willingness to participate in tourism management

Local government work

- 63% agreed on the need of coordination of fair distribution of benefits by the government
- 60% wishes further vocational tourism training and favourable financial measures

Empirical findings

(III) Emerging problems:

Conflicts have arisen in recent years

- between local communities and government management
- between local communities and investors
- between residents within the local communities

Discussion

Local rural communities in Yangshuo have been playing important roles in the local tourism development :

- „Real owners“ of the natural and cultural resources
- Active practical involvement and provide essential tourism services
- An integral part of the rural tourism attractions
- Wide supportive attitude and strong participation willingness

Decision-making participation is still limited and the government-led approach still dominates

Challenges and opportunities:

- Existing constraints to the applicability of western mode of community approach in the present social-economic circumstances of China
- Increasing recognition in China's tourism development: community participation is an unavoidable part of the concept of sustainability

Conclusion

- To improve the sustainability of the tourism development, local communities should be integrated into the whole development process through proper participation mechanisms.
- To unleash the potentials of their participation ability, the local communities should have more active roles, which need to be enhanced through all-round supports.
- The government is suggested to help to push forward the role enhancing progresses in various aspects.

THANK YOU!

