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

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
  (Sarinen 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)

(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
24°028’-25°004’N

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

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

Photos of local landscapes around the survey communities
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 consensuses 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

Respondents’ perceptions of the tourism impacts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Dev</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tourism increases household income</td>
<td>3.96</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism creates more job opportunities</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism benefits only a few people</td>
<td>3.24</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism widen the gap between rich and poor people</td>
<td>3.40</td>
<td>1.23</td>
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<td>Local residents are becoming overly dependent on tourism</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism development brings natural environmental improvement</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>1.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism development brings infrastructure improvement</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism development enhances residents’ environmental awareness</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism causes overcrowding and traffic congestion</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>1.24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tourism development causes overexploitation of the local resources</td>
<td>3.35</td>
<td>1.10</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tourism development enhances protection of local cultural heritages</td>
<td>3.31</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism development enhances revitalization of local cultural traditions</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>1.02</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tourism development intensifies host-visitor cultural exchange</td>
<td>3.84</td>
<td>0.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism causes commercialized interpersonal relationships among residents within the local communities</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism causes increase of host-visitor conflicts because of cultural differences</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>1.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism brings satisfying additional income to agricultural income</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>1.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism competes for natural resources with agricultural production</td>
<td>3.44</td>
<td>1.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism causes labour lost for agriculture</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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!