

# The importance of rural communities' participation in the management of tourism management

## A case study from Lesotho

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Participation  
in the  
management  
of tourism

453

### Abstract

**Purpose** – The purpose of this study is to analyse the importance of rural communities' participation in the management of tourism development.

**Design/methodology/approach** – A case study was conducted at the Katse and Mohale Tourism Development Area of Lesotho. This study was conducted in three villages adjacent to the Ts'ehlanyane Nature Reserve: Ha 'Mali, Bokong Nature Reserve; Ha Lejone and Liphofung Nature Reserve; and Phelandaba using a mixed method design. In-depth interviews were conducted with Conservation Committee Forum members, and a survey was conducted on various stakeholders that included local rural communities, local authorities, nature reserve managers, tourism officers and environmental/conservation officers.

**Findings** – Respondents from all three villages (Ha Lejone, Ha 'Mali and Phelandaba) shared the same preference of greater community involvement and decision-making power in the management of tourism. Ha 'Mali and Ha Lejone respondents recognised community members' participation but the Phelandaba respondents generally disagreed that the communities were involved in management, as they indicated not being consulted in any planning about tourism.

**Practical implications** – This study concluded that governments should not merely set aside conservation areas or construct tourist destinations in rural areas but should also empower local communities to participate in all stages of planning, developing and managing the tourism venture. Involving community members in the formulation of supporting tourism regulations, implementation, monitoring and evaluation procedures would be beneficial for sustainable development of rural tourism. Building partnership amongst all tourism-related stakeholders in rural tourism management is an ideal tool for promoting rural tourism.

**Originality/value** – Although the case study specifically referred to KMTD, the information gathered was used to formulate a model of the elements influencing rural tourism benefit-sharing processes from the perspective of a rural local community.

**Keywords** Lesotho, Tourism, Sustainable development, Rural tourism, Local community participation, Rural tourism development

**Paper type** Research paper



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### 1. Introduction

Rural tourism, like any other business, needs to be managed. One important aspect of rural tourism management is to have a specific focus on the participation of the local

people. Participation of the locals in tourism is usually referred to as functional management and can be seen as part of strategic management (Mason, 2008). Mason argues further that tourism management is also concerned with ways to manage the resources for tourism, the interaction of tourists with physical resources and the interaction of tourists with residents of tourist areas. This aspect of tourism management is concerned primarily with tourism's impacts on its development.

This study was built on collaboration theory. Issues of coordination, collaboration and partnership are now at the forefront of much tourism research on finding new solutions to resource management and problems associated with the development of tourist destinations (Hall and Page, 1999). The inclusion of local communities at all levels of management of tourist destinations could help solve problems in the development of tourism. A community approach to tourism management and planning is an attempt to formulate a bottom-up form of planning (Hall and Page, 1999). The community approach here emphasizes development in the community rather than development of the community. Researchers have indicated that when local stakeholders have had an opportunity to participate in the management and planning processes from the very beginning, their opinions regarding the development of their area tend to be more positive than those of people who have not (Simmons, 1994; Jamal and Getz, 1995; Page and Thorn, 1997).

The idea of sustainability has become an important policy issue in tourism management and development (Saarinen *et al.*, 2009). Many tourism planning scholars agree that the sustainable development of tourism can best be accomplished by involving local residents in the decision-making processes for the tourism industry and by collaboration among various stakeholders during that process (Timothy, 2001). Community participation should involve shared decision-making at all levels of the programs, such as setting goals, formulating policies, planning and implementation (Butler *et al.*, 1998) and having a high degree of control or ownership of the tourism activities and resources (Hall and Page, 1999; Saarinen, 2007). It is very important to consider the level of participation by the local communities when assessing the success or failure on any rural tourism venture. In some areas in Lesotho, the communities are not involved in tourism development, thus adversely affecting the tourism industry.

Recognising the importance of community participation as part of tourism management, this study aimed to explain why local communities feel that they should be included in the management of tourist destinations developed in their areas (nature reserves). This paper covers the literature review, research methodology, results, managerial applications and conclusions in the following sections.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 *Community participation in tourism*

Increasing community participation in tourism is a major issue facing governments. Community participation refers to a form of voluntary action in which individuals confront the opportunities and responsibilities of citizenship (Tosun, 1999). The opportunities for such participation include joining in the process of self-governance, responding to authoritative decisions that impact on one's life and working co-operatively with others on issues of mutual concern (Tosun, 1999). Literature shows that being a community member and being invited to participate do not automatically give a resident/participant easy access to getting his/her issues addressed. Indeed, the

right to participate does not always equal the capacity to participate (Bramwell and Lane, 2000).

Rural tourism and community-based tourism share community resources at those destinations and they both need to promote community participation. Community participation is considered necessary to obtain community support and acceptance of the development of tourism projects (Tosun and Timothy, 2003). However, citizens tend to participate only when strongly motivated to do so. This requires their ideas to be considered, otherwise community participation may be discouraged (Tosun, 2000).

Issues of participation, collaboration and partnership are at the forefront of tourism research to find new solutions to the problems of resource management and destination development (Hall and Page, 1999; Hall, 2008). Planners have been in a rush to involve various stakeholders in their work, but some have done so without full consideration of the progress in public collaboration tools and techniques suitable for use in the tourism industry (Tosun, 2000). Moreover, many authors support greater public participation, while few have tested or evaluated the appropriateness of methods used to engage local residents (Gunn, 1988; Simmons, 1994).

The rationale for community participation in tourism is that it can reduce the potential for conflict between tourists and members of the host community (Mason, 2008; Aramberri and Butler, 2005). When communities are willingly participating, the constraints that confuse their involvement are identified and the impediments to participation are discussed and possibly overcome (Haywood, 1998).

In consideration of the importance of community participation or involvement, negative issues regarding participation have also been researched. Researchers indicate that there are some difficulties associated with participation of community members in the management and planning processes in developing countries. Community participation has some challenges, as locals in regions with a tourism industry may lack information on the operational systems, processes and equipment necessary for tourism. Similarly, Nyaupane *et al.* (2006) have identified some limitations to community participation in tourism management. The first limitation is that local communities may not have the investment capital, knowledge or infrastructure necessary to take the initiative in developing tourism. Second, local communities may have cultural limitations to involvement in the planning and management of tourism. Next, tourism may be a difficult concept for people living in isolated rural communities. Finally, members of the host community may feel that it is the government's duty to plan economic development opportunities for their region and that it would not be appropriate for them to take the initiative. In addition, Hall and Page (1999) have identified seven impediments to incorporating public participation in tourism planning, but this study focused only on the following:

- the public are not always aware of, or do not understand, the decision-making process; there may be difficulty in attaining and maintaining representatives in the decision-making process;
- the decision-making process could be prolonged; and
- there may be adverse effects on the efficiency of decision-making.

It is clear that community participation has become an indispensable part of the development of sustainable tourism (Tosun and Timothy, 2003). Managing and

planning for rural tourism should always consider suitability of the location. A community-based approach to developing tourism is a prerequisite for its sustainability (Timothy, 1999). Sustainability has become an important topic, and concept, in relation to tourism planning and development (Chandralal, 2010). For tourism development to be successful, it should be planned and managed in a sustainable manner, and one key to the success and implementation of sustainable tourism development is the stakeholders (host community, tourism entrepreneurs and community leaders). Recently, sustainability has featured to a large extent in both international and regional studies which included debates on tourism development management and planning (Cole, 2006).

### *2.2 Rural tourism management*

Middleton and Hawkins (1998) define tourism management as “strategies and action programs using and coordinating available techniques to control and influence tourism supply and visitor demand in order to achieve defined policy goals”. Rural tourism businesses need a formalised strategy or approach during their start-up and operational phases. To operate tourism management strategies along business lines at a community level requires a strategic approach capable of handling inputs from different stakeholder groups in an open manner (Murphy and Murphy, 2004).

Literature indicates that management of rural tourism clarifies the need to consider the host or resident population. In relation to this, stakeholders should form part of destination management and be given responsibilities at the local level (Elliott, 1997; Choi and Sirakaya, 2006). Management at a local level must be involved with the coordination of direction given by different stakeholders in managing tourism. The lack of coordination within the highly fragmented tourism industry is a problem well-known to destination planners and managers (Jamal and Getz, 1995). Coordination is critical both within governments and between governments and the private sector to avoid duplication of resources in the various government tourism bodies and the private sector to enable the development of effective tourism strategies (Hall, 1994). But coordination should also be effected in development of tourist destinations. Achieving such coordination among the various bodies that are involved is a challenging task requiring the development of new mechanisms and processes for incorporating the diverse elements of the tourism system (Jamal and Getz, 1995). The implementation of participatory development approaches in developing countries is likely to meet obstacles usually associated with the lack of co-ordination between the parties concerned and failure to make sufficient information available to the local residents at the tourist destination (Tosun, 2000).

### **3. Research methodology**

This study was part of a larger research project. Only data pertaining to tourism management was extracted from that project’s questionnaire. Qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection were used to conduct the bigger study, but for this paper only, quantitative results were used. This study was conducted in three villages adjacent to Ts’ehlanyane, Liphofung and Bokong Nature Reserves (called Northern Parks). The sampling frame comprised the community members, local authorities of villages which were closest to the park and employees of Northern Parks of Lesotho from the three villages, as they were well informed about the parks’

operations. Convenience sampling was used amongst 278 community members and 23 community leaders by self-selection of respondents who were willing to participate in this study.

The questionnaire used in this study collected data on community involvement in planning, decision-making, formulation of tourism regulations, monitoring, evaluation and control of the tourism developments such as parks. This study used a large number of participants (community members and leaders from the three villages) to answer the same questionnaire. The aim of this survey research was to learn more about the larger population by using a representative sample of that population (Leedy and Ormrod, 2005). A quantitative approach involves numbers of respondents together with results, findings and interpretation to establish interrelationships amongst variables in frequencies and percentages.

The analysis of coded data (from the structured questionnaire) was conducted with the use of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences. *H0* and *H1* were used to state whether there was statistically significant differences on opinions between the respondents. The significance of differences between means was examined by using the Mann-Whitney U test, and for three or more groups, the Kruskal-Wallis H test was used.

Cross-tabulations were applied to quantify the statistical differences noted among respondents using chi-squared statistics and Cramer's V. The open-ended questions and interview responses were grouped by themes to explain the statistical relationships. The use of cross-tabulation was also intended to identify any similarities or differences in the analysed data and relate the findings to the literature to allow conclusions to be drawn.

#### 4. Results

The questionnaire contained six items relating to management of tourism. All six items were characterised by having high standard deviations indicating disagreement among the respondents. All six items had their scales inverted and then each one of *Q1*, *Q3* and *Q5* were removed, as their measures of sampling adequacy values were below 0.6. This left only three items in the factor with a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value of 0.677 and Bartlett's sphericity of  $p < 0.005$ . Hence, the resulting principal component analysis with varimax rotation resulted in one factor which explained 63.98 per cent of the variance present. It had a Cronbach's alpha of 0.718.

The mean score of 3.96 and median of 4.00 should be interpreted against the inversion of the scales. Respondents thus disagreed with the items in the management of tourism factor. Items *Q1* (the community is involved in planning), *Q3* (community representatives participate in the formulation supporting tourism regulations) and *Q5* (assessment and evaluation are done by the community) were all answered unreliably and had mean scores indicating neutral opinions, which are often found in items which may have political connotations and as such could have been viewed with suspicion. They were, however, removed from the factor analytical procedure.

##### 4.1 Significance of differences between the positions occupied by groups with respect to the management of tourism

The respondents involved with the management of tourism had a mean score of 3.39, whilst the respondents from the local communities had a mean score of 4.00. Respondents occupying management positions agreed more strongly with the management of tourism than did members of the community. Given that those in

management positions were involved in the daily management of tourism would be acquainted with both the advantages and disadvantages of tourism, one would have expected a more positive response, although a value of 3.39 can be interpreted as partial agreement. The non-parametric values were  $U = 4,216.50$ ;  $Z = 2.622$ ;  $p = 0.009$ ;  $r = 0.15$ .

4.2 Significant differences between three or more independent groups regarding the management of tourism

Reponses were received from three categories, namely, Ha ‘Mali (101), Phelandaba (82) and Ha Lejone (118). These grouping were likely to see the management of resources differently from one another; the results of the Kruskal–Wallis H test are provided in Table I below.

The data in Figure 1 indicate that the null hypothesis cannot be accepted because the differences in the three groups were statistically significant with regard to their mean scores when considered together. The Kruskal–Wallis H value of 29.91 has a significant  $p$ -value ( $p < 0.0005$ ). Thus, the three village groups did differ but one would need to do a pair-wise comparison to see which groups differed from the other two. However, the graph in Figure 2 seems to indicate that the difference was mainly between the median value of Ha ‘Mali and Phelandaba and also between Ha ‘Mali and Ha Lejone. The pair-wise comparisons are shown in Figure 2 as well.

The main difference in mean ranks and in median scores was between Ha ‘Mali and Ha Lejone ( $Z = -4.913$ ;  $p < 0.0005$ ;  $r = 0.28$ ). The second largest difference was between Ha ‘Mali and Phelandaba ( $Z = -4.506$ ;  $p < 0.0005$ ;  $r = 0.26$ ). There was statistically no significant difference in factor mean scores between Ha Lejone and Phelandaba. As the scale was inverted, respondents from Ha ‘Mali ( $\bar{X} = 3.48$ ) agreed more strongly with the management of tourism than did respondents from Ha Lejone ( $\bar{X} = 4.20$ ) and respondents from Phelandaba ( $\bar{X} = 4.21$ ) both of whom could be said to disagree with the management of tourism factor.

5. Conclusion

The management of tourism should closely involve the government, the private sector and the host community at the destination being developed. Leaving any of these parties could undermine the sustainability of the venture. The communities should be included in the management of the development of rural tourism. This study recommends that communities in Lesotho Northern Park’s be involved in management. Members of the community of Ha ‘Mali knew the areas which could be of danger to tourists better than park rangers who were originally not from that area.

Involvement in management promoted interest and participation amongst communities because they felt that they were part of tourism development. In the

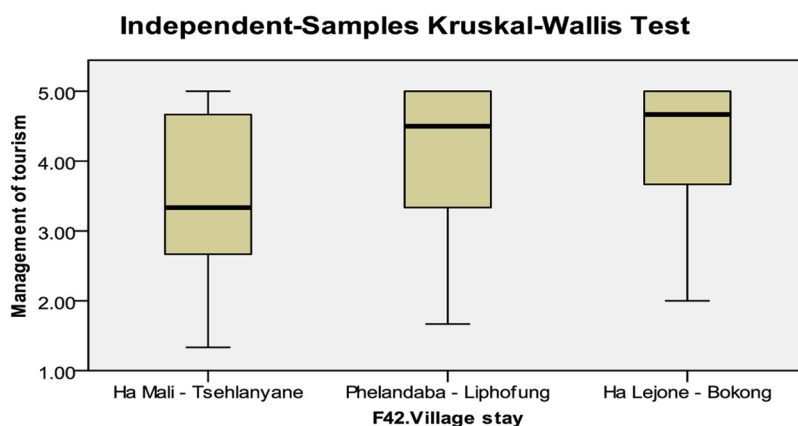
No.	Null hypothesis	Test	Significance	Decision
1	The distribution of management of tourism is the same across categories of F42. Village stay	Independent-samples Kruskal-Wallis test	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis

Table I.  
Hypothesis test  
summary

Notes: Asymptotic significances are displayed; the significance level is 0.05







<b>Total N</b>	301
<b>Test Statistic</b>	29.908
<b>Degrees of Freedom</b>	2
<b>Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)</b>	0.000

The test statistic is adjusted for ties

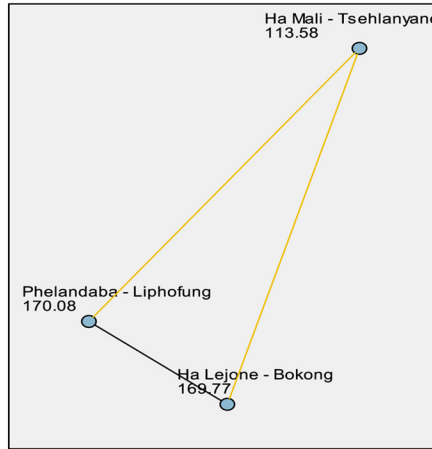
**Figure 1.**  
The hypothesis for  
the three village  
groups with respect  
to the management  
of resources

Lesotho Northern parks, not all stakeholders were involved in its management and planning. This created a problem because it led to a misunderstanding of how the parks should be operated. Involving communities in the management would reduce the present negative attitude of tourism and help communities to understand that rural tourism development cannot employ each and every one in the villages, although some roles can be shared or rotated amongst a few.

Communities should be involved in the management of tourist destinations to ensure that all issues concerning communities are taken into account during the development of tourism. Residents felt that ensuring greater benefit from tourism could help alleviate problems that may arise from contact between tourists and communities in developing countries, and they suggested that this could be overcome through community participation in the management of tourism, planning and development (Mason, 2008). This study found that public involvement in tourism was an essential element of the management of tourism, including its planning and design.

The engagement of all stakeholders is crucial to ensuring the sustainability of development of tourism in rural areas. Tourism developers have an obligation to let the local communities know about their plans and enable them to become involved, because this ultimately is in their interest. Local people have the right to participate in the management of tourism projects which affects them, and experience in tourism has

Pairwise Comparisons of F42.Village stay



Each node shows the sample average rank of F42.Village stay

Sample1-Sample2	Test Statistic	Std. Error	Std. Test Statistic	Sig.	Adj.Sig.
Ha Mali - Tsehlanyane-Ha Lejone - Bokong	-56.183	11.434	-4.913	0.000	0.000
Ha Mali - Tsehlanyane-Phelandaba - Liphofung	-56.495	12.539	-4.506	0.000	0.000
Ha Lejone - Bokong-Phelandaba - Liphofung	0.312	12.127	0.026	0.979	1.000

Each row tests the null hypothesis that the Sample 1 and Sample 2 distributions are the same. Asymptotic significances (2-sided tests) are displayed. The significance level is 0.05

**Figure 2.**  
The pair-wise comparison of the three village groups regarding the management of tourism

shown that communication with a wide spectrum of direct and indirect stakeholders is especially important (Messerli, 2011).

This study recommends that the local communities be involved in both the decision-making and the operation of the nature reserves. Studies in both developing and developed countries indicate that the success of a destination would largely depend on the support and engagement of the local community in management (Dredge and Jenkins, 2007).

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462

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