Regional Spotlight

Advocating community participation and integrated tourism development planning in local destinations: The case of South Africa

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

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A B S T R A C T

The processes of community participation and integrated tourism development planning can often be uncoordinated, fragmented and hindered by operational, structural and cultural limitations. Although these processes are usually more sophisticated in developed countries, some important lessons can be learned from their use in less-developed countries like South Africa. As part of their commitment towards a more democratic South Africa and their voluntary obligations towards Local Agenda 21, the national government has embarked on a process through which they aspire to improve decision-making and thereby achieve more integrated tourism development at a local level. This regional spotlight takes a closer look at the processes being legislated and implemented by South Africa to ensure community participation and integrated tourism planning takes place in a coordinated and inclusive way. The case provides valuable insights to practitioners and academics that are engaging in community participation and integrated tourism development planning.

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South Africa, the “Rainbow Nation”, is a diverse country with 11 official languages. South Africa’s international tourist arrivals grew by more than 10% between 2011 and 2012. This is more than double the average annual global tourism growth rate of 4%, as reported by the UNWTO in 2012 (Department of Tourism, 2012). Over this year, tourism’s direct contribution to South Africa’s GDP increased by 5%, direct employment in the tourism sector increased from 4.3% to 4.5%, and foreign tourists’ expenditure increased by 3.3%. Reflecting on South Africa’s successes, President Zuma stated: “This phenomenal tourism growth is evidence that we are successfully setting ourselves apart in a competitive marketplace and that South Africa’s reputation as a friendly, welcoming, inspiring and unique tourism destination continues to grow” (Department of Tourism, 2012). It is relevant to consider, therefore, how South Africa has formulated their integrated tourism development plans and how, as the touch point for tourists, local communities are participating in the process.

Community participation can be viewed from at least three schools of thought. The first school of thought considers that under the best conditions, most people tend to avoid community participation (Riedel, 1972). The second recognizes that community participation is a voluntary process in which the community will only engage in destination planning and development when doing so is likely to benefit them (Bramwell & Lane, 2009; Bronkhorst et al., 2010; Jamal & Getz, 1995). The third argues that the community often wants to participate in destination development but is rarely provided the opportunity to do so effectively (Zhao & Ritchie, 2008). One way of overcoming the exclusion of the community is by legislating for community participation within the destination management process. This ensures that destination planners follow certain procedures during destination development to ensure that the communities involved have ample opportunities to participate if they want to (Zhao & Ritchie, 2008).

South Africa can be used as an example of how, through legislation, the community has been given the opportunity to participate in integrated tourism development planning. Before 1994, South Africa’s planning practices were shaped by the history of embedded inequalities. Through legislation, post-apartheid (post-1994) planning practices now promote integrated and sustainable development, and include people-driven processes that aim to involve and empower the community through the Reconstruction and Development Program (South Africa, 1994). This legislation was motivated by Agenda 21, a product of the United Nations Conference on Environmental and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992. Agenda 21 is a non-binding, voluntarily implemented action plan that promotes sustainable development within destinations and can be executed at the local, national and global levels (Buckley et al., 2003; Harrison et al., 2003; Mowforth & Munt, 1998). According to the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP), local governments are best positioned to implement Agenda 21, as they can set standards and put strategies in place that balance the interests of tourism...
enterprises, tourists and the local community (UNEP, 2003). At the 19th special session of the UN General Assembly (UNGASS), popularly known as Earth Summit, held in June 1997, Thabo Mbeki (then the vice president of South Africa) stated that Agenda 21 remained the fundamental program of action for achieving integrated sustainable development in South Africa (South Africa, 2007). South Africa has therefore committed at a national level to implement Agenda 21 through their local authorities. Legislation has also been introduced through the Municipal Systems Act 2000 (South Africa, 2000) so that integrated development planning becomes a local government function and that the local government is responsible for developing an integrated development plan (IDP) for the local area.

Each local municipality must develop an IDP for their local area every 5 years. Each is then reviewed on an annual basis and consists of all the different sector/industry plans for the local area, including the tourism sector plan. The IDP planning process promotes an integrated, participatory style, wherein the community must be legally consulted. The purpose of consultation is to provide the community with a process through which they have an opportunity to represent the interests and needs of their constituencies, and to provide a structure for discussion, negotiation and joint decision-making. It also provides an opportunity for communication to take place between the community and local government, and monitors the planning and implementation process of the IDP. The IDP takes into account the current problems, conditions and existing resources, and determines the development that needs to follow. It provides a framework for development and assists the local council to arrive at decisions in a systematic, strategic and consultative manner on issues such as the allocation of municipal budgets, promotion of local economic development, land management and institutional transformation.

The first step of the process is to conduct a situation analysis of the local area. This includes a demand- and supply-side survey of the destination and is led by the local municipality. The existing conditions of the area are thereby highlighted, and the development problems and levels of urgency are explained. Information of available resources, including tourism resources, is gathered, along with details of the priority problems and their causes. Community participation during this step takes place through community meetings within each planning area, as well as through surveys and opinion polls.

The second step is to develop strategies, programs and projects that address the problems identified in the area along with actions to address them. During this phase, a long-term vision is developed, as well as objectives (medium-term), developmental strategies and project identification for the various industries concerned, including the tourism industry. Strategies are developed and the community is engaged through public debates to determine the best methods to address these challenges.

The third step is to give a detailed description of each project that was identified in step two and to indicate how it will be implemented. It is important to determine the project beneficiaries, the costs involved, and how the project will be funded. Time lines are added to each project, as well as the entity responsible for the management, implementation and evaluation of each project. Community participation during this step takes place through meetings with affected communities, while community representatives are included in the subcommittees of the identified projects.

The fourth step is the integration of all of the tourism and other related sector plans into the overall IDP after all community participation meetings have taken place. Each and every department within the municipality first presents their sector plans for their sector/industry before the planning committee. It must be noted here that due to budget constraints, it is not always possible to integrate all projects and programs in one year, so projects and programs are prioritized according to the overall priorities of the destination. Depending on the municipality and the planning area, these priorities can be water, electricity, housing, job creation, tourism, and so forth. There are however two options: first, the project can still be incorporated into the IDP but listed as an unfunded project, which means the project can only continue if external funding is obtained. This is a good option, as many external-funding agencies in South Africa will only fund projects if they form part of the IDP. The second option is to indicate that the project is not funded for this year, but that it needs to take priority in the next financial year. Funding will then start in the next fiscal year, which ensures the implementation of the project at that time. Community participation at this stage takes place through the involvement of all the elected councilors from the different planning areas. They will explain the necessity of such projects and try to convince senior management and other politicians why they should take priority in this financial year.

The IDP is then submitted to the local council for consideration, approval and adoption, which is the fifth step. Having adopted the IDP in its draft format, the council will then announce the beginning of another community participation process. Although the community might already have had an opportunity to input into the plan, legislation ensures that the IDP again be made available for the community for their further comment before the final approval of the council. Public discussion and consultation with communities are conducted for the last time.

Following the council’s approval of the final version of the plan, the sixth step comprises the implementation and monitoring of the identified projects. The relevant local government officials are required to give feedback on an annual basis to the communities on the progress that has been made with the implementation of all of the sector plans, including the tourism development plan and its projects. This concludes the planning cycle for the year, and lays out the foundation for further planning and community participation in the following year.

Many countries have legislated community participation on a national level but struggle to implement it at the local government level because decentralization of the political, administrative and financial powers of national to local governments has not taken place (Royo et al., 2011). What makes this process successful and unique in South Africa is that decentralization from national to local government has taken place and local governments are not only mandated to lead the community participation process but this is also governed by legislation on how, when and where it should be done (South Africa, 2000). Although previous studies have identified similar processes in community participation (Sanoff, 1990), South Africa has developed an easily implementable process (Wray, 2011). The unique feature of the South African process is that tourism planning is integrated into the overall economic, social and cultural development plan from its very beginning. Furthermore, the process is integrative, goal-oriented and systematic, and it gives the community the opportunity to interact with the process continuously. These processes aim to ensure the success and growth of the tourism industry in South Africa and to provide the communities concerned with a very real and transparent opportunity to play their part in welcoming tourists to the Rainbow Nation.

References


