RESEARCH NOTE

Sustainable Tourism Planning and Regional Development in Peripheries: A Nordic View

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ABSTRACT In a declining periphery, tourism is often considered as a vehicle for regional development due to the positive economic impacts of the industry. However, tourism is not automatically the best saviour for all peripheral areas, because it can also cause some negative impacts. Therefore, sustainable planning is needed to balance the benefits and costs of tourism. The aim of this review is to discuss how to develop the tourism industry in order to create positive regional development in the peripheral areas in the Nordic context. The paper presents two approaches to the tourism planning and regional development nexus: the tourism-centred and regional development-centred. However, the structure of the regional economy and the tourism resources of the area set limitations for the application of these basic approaches in practice. In this respect, the proposed spatio-functional model would be an option to increase the positive regional development at the local level in a sustainable way. The model emphasizes a functional collaboration between industries in the core-periphery framework.

KEY WORDS: Sustainable planning, Regional development, Periphery, Nordic countries

Introduction

For decades tourism has been used as a tool for regional development in peripheral areas (see Hall & Jenkins, 1998; Moscardo, 2005). Due to the economic and employment significance of the industry, it has also become a crucial policy issue in many countries in Europe and therefore, tourism has taken an important position in the European Union’s regional development work (Hall, 2005, p. 166; Williams & Shaw, 1998a, p. 6). At the regional and national levels, the aim of tourism development is to balance regional disparities, whereas at the local level the main objective is to control...
the structural changes of declining rural areas and industrial towns, as well as to diversify the economic base of those areas (Williams & Shaw, 1998b). Particularly in peripheral rural areas, characterized by unemployment, out-migration and an ageing population, among many other challenges, tourism is usually considered the only industry having realistic growth prospects in the future.

From the perspective of regional development, the positive economic impacts of tourism are often highlighted. On the other hand, studies have shown that tourism is not automatically the saviour for all peripheral areas and it can also cause some negative impacts (see Hall, 2005). Owing to this, the key word and need for maximization of the benefits of tourism and for minimization of the costs of developing industry is planning. According to Chadwick (1994), planning refers to a process of future-oriented thinking and the following goals and actions based on this value-driven thinking. Recently, discussions on tourism planning have underlined the need for sustainability which, along with the ecological issues, pays attention to economic and socio-cultural factors (see Hall, 2000).

This review scrutinizes the principles and limitations in utilizing tourism for positive regional development within the context of sustainable tourism planning. In this light, this conceptual paper critically assesses the role of the tourism industry to contribute to the regional economy in peripheral areas and communities. The study ends with a discussion on a spatio-functional model applied at the local level in the Nordic context. The model refers to a functional collaboration between industries in the core-periphery framework.

Principles in Sustainable Tourism Planning

In the public sector, the need for tourism planning was introduced no later than in the 1950s and 1960s, and from the very beginning, economic arguments have dominated the planning discussions (Burns, 1999; Hall, 2000). Indeed, governments and regional development bodies have always been interested in tourism development linked with the positive economic impacts of the industry: employment, source of income and the diversification of economy. However, in addition to economic perspectives, there are several different traditions in tourism planning. Getz (1987) divides them into boosterism, development, physical and community-based approaches to which Hall (2000) has added a new dimension termed sustainable tourism planning. Recently, sustainability has been manifested to a large extent both in the international (e.g. Hall, 2000; Sofield, 2003; Swarbrooke, 2000) and Nordic (e.g. Hall, Müller, & Saarinen, 2009; Müller, 2002; Saarinen, 2003, 2007a, 2007b) regional development and tourism planning studies and debates.

The focal factors in sustainable tourism planning are a long-term viewpoint and comprehensiveness. The latter refers to three basic elements of sustainability – ecological, economic and socio-cultural – and how to take them into account in planning. Ecological sustainability stresses development that is compatible with the maintenance of essential ecological processes, biological diversity and biological resources. Economic sustainability means economically effective development in which resources are used in such a way that they are preserved for the forthcoming generations, too (McIntyre, 1993, p. 10, 40). Tourism revenues should also stay
within the destination and regional economy as much as possible in order that the local population gains benefits from tourism. In addition, the tourism industry should employ the locals as a primary target group instead of people living outside the region (Inskeep, 2001, p. 31). Socio-cultural sustainability refers to local peoples’ needs to have control over their own life, culture and use of their environment (Dowling & Fennell, 2003, pp. 13–14; McIntyre, 1993, p. 10).

Sustainable tourism planning aims to support the community and economic goals in regional development with elements safeguarding the environment. On the principle level, sustainable tourism planning integrates the traditions and planning goals presented by Getz (1987). The basic goal and value of sustainable tourism planning is the reconciliation between economic development and the socio-cultural and ecological environment with an aim to integrate tourism planning into other broader spatial planning perspectives. Thus all the components and major stakeholders in tourism planning – the industry, environment or local people – are considered and collaboration between different stakeholders and industries is emphasized.

Recently, the role of local communities has been underlined in tourism development literature (see Marien & Pizam, 1997; Sofield, 2003; Timothy, 2002; Tosun, 2006), but already in the mid-1980s the local level and its actors have been taken into account in planning studies. Murphy’s (1985) and Krippendorf’s (1987) seminal textbooks are good examples of the early discussions emphasizing the need to involve local communities in tourism planning, development and decision-making processes. In general, this kind of community-based tourism aims to ensure that the members of the local communities have a high degree of control, or even ownership, over the tourism activities, its limits and resources used (Saarinen, 2006; Scheyvens, 2002; Simmons, 1994). Local people should receive a significant share of the economic benefits of tourism in the form of direct revenues and employment, upgraded infrastructures, environment and housing standards etc.

**Sustainable Tourism Planning and Regional Development**

*Discourses of Tourism Development*

Burns (1999) has presented two approaches for tourism planning by locating them at the opposite ends of a continuum. The tourism first perspective focuses mainly on the development of the tourism industry characterized by the indicators of business and its growth. Tourism represents development and supporting the industry is justified by the positive economic benefits it creates for the business. Furthermore, regional development is treated as a natural consequence of that approach. In contrast to this, the development first perspective underlines that tourism is a potential tool to enhance regional development goals but not an end in itself in development; the goals in the development first are aiming to achieve planned social and economic benefits for the local people and regional economies.

By utilizing Burns’s (1999) categorization Saarinen (2007a) has empirically examined the relationship between tourism and regional development in the Nordic context and the peripheral areas in Northern Finland. He studied the role of tourism in regional development and conceptualized three main discourses based on the way
Tourism and its meaning and importance were discussed and debated in the media and policy documents. *Tourism as an industry* discourse is based on the importance of tourism as an economic activity and the related indicators. As such it refers to Burns’s tourism first idea. The second discourse, *tourism as a tool for regional development*, also pays attention to the economic impacts of tourism, such as tourism revenues and employment, but the main emphasis is based on the benefits created for the socio-economic development of regions and communities. Thus, the scale of discussion is higher than a single business. In addition, the viewpoint takes notice of the negative impacts of tourism in the regional context. In order to prevent and manage the negative outcomes of tourism development, the role of sustainable planning in emphasized. Hence, the discourse encompasses the principles in sustainability and it can be interpreted as resembling Burns’s development first concept. The third discourse, *tourism as a problem*, represents a critical perspective of tourism development. This viewpoint stresses the aspect of tourism that can cause problems to the local social, cultural, economic and physical environment. In addition, tourism is defined and considered as a potential problem to other (local) industries, such as forestry and mining and their future prospects (see Butler, 1999; Saarinen, 2003). Further, tourism is also seen as problematic in relation to the general principles of sustainable development (see Saarinen, 2006; Sharpley, 2000).

**Tourism-centred and Regional Development-centred Approaches in Planning**

Based on Burns’s (1999) findings and the previous empirical tourism development discourses, the tourism planning and regional development nexus can be categorized into tourism-centred and regional development-centred approaches (Figure 1). The former has dominated tourism planning for a long time and it refers to Getz’s (1987) view of planning as boosterism and Burns’s tourism first concept in development. In the tourism-centred model, tourism has been placed at the central focus of development and tourism is seen as the primary industry in peripheral areas. In practice, the industry is developed as an enclave industry without integration and links to other local or regional industries or those links are very narrow and dominated by the needs and values of the tourism industry. In other words, local industries are set to “serve” the tourism industry and its development needs. The tradition has close connections to the tourism as an industry discourse in which the bases of tourism development are industrial requirements only (see Saarinen, 2007a).

Another planning approach, the regional development-centred, is an option for the tourism-centred tradition (see Figure 1). In this model, tourism represents one possible opportunity among other industries and activities in the regional economy. A region, environment and local needs are at the core of development in this case. The regional development-centred model can be interpreted as deriving from the concept of development first created by Burns (1999). The model emphasizes collaboration between tourism and other (local) industries. For example, attention has been paid to link agriculture to the tourism industry in the tourism literature (e.g. Fleischer & Tchetchik, 2005; Telfer & Wall, 1996, 2000; Torres, 2003; Walpole & Goodwin, 2000). In other words, tourism is part of the local socio-economic structure supporting, together with other local industries, regional development, well-being and the
sustainable use of resources and the environment. In terms of tourism and regional development discourses, the regional development-centred model refers to tourism as a tool for regional development discourse.

Geographical Conditions for Tourism Development

The concept of periphery has been under discussion in tourism literature for a long time (see Christaller, 1963). A periphery can be defined in relation to a core which attracts resources and capital. A typical characteristic of a periphery is not only geographical but also social and cultural isolation (Shields, 1991). Peripheries are often situated far away from cores, markets and decision-making and they are characterized as countryside areas with traditional industries prevailing and a declining population (Botterill et al., 2000, pp. 8–9; Stuart, Pearce, & Weaver, 2005, pp. 236–237). Friedmann (1966) points out that both concepts of core and periphery are relative and dynamic in nature. Taking this into consideration at the local level, for example, cores can also be found in the countryside, and the characteristics of those cores distinguish them from the surrounding rural areas. Referring to the dynamic nature of the periphery concept, single resorts located in a periphery are able to develop “cores in a periphery” over time (see Kauppila, 2004; Kauppila & Rusanen, 2009).

From the viewpoint of tourism planning and development, both models – the tourism-centred and the regional development-centred – assume different kinds of characteristics in the regional economy and tourism resources in general. In the tourism-centred model, the structure of the regional economy does not necessarily

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**Figure 1.** Tourism-centred (a) and regional development-centred (b) approaches for tourism planning and regional development (Saarinen, 2007a, figure 3.1).
Tourism and Regional Development in Nordic Peripheries

need to be diversified, because tourism is at the focus when developing the economic base of the area. However, diversity makes it easier to link tourism with other industries influencing on the one hand, larger multiplicative effects in the area and on the other hand, smaller leakages from the area. Instead tourism resources have to be excellent in order that tourism promotion is generally an appropriate and realistic option.

In terms of the regional development-centred model, tourism is the only industry among the other industries to promote. Therefore, the structure of the regional economy has to be quite diverse, otherwise it is not possible to develop several industries simultaneously. Instead the tourism resources of the area do not need to be excellent, because development activities do not focus on tourism only. Naturally, a diverse resource base provides better opportunities to promote tourism as a stimulator for regional development.

A four-field model for tourism planning and regional development is portrayed in Figure 2. It is based on the relationship between the structure of the regional economy and tourism resources, and by means of this model the role of tourism in the development of the economic activity in destinations can be assessed. The model is interpreted in the context of peripheral areas, and it can be derived and applied in the context of Northern Finland and Sweden (for example see Hall et al., 2009; Kauppila, 2004; Lundmark, 2005; Saarinen, 2004).

(1) If the structural base of the regional economy is one-sided and the tourism resources of the area are modest, then industry policy should focus on an existing traditional industry or “find” a new one. Considering the one-sided structure of the regional economy, the model refers to a traditional or new industry in the singular. In Northern Finland, the traditional industries are, for example, agriculture and forestry, fishery, handicrafts, reindeer herding and their upgrading (see Kauppila, 2004; Saarinen, 2003, 2007a). In terms of new opportunities, the mining industry seems to be a very promising industry at present in the peripheral areas in Northern Finland. In the case of tourism, resources are quite modest and thus, tourism is not

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**Figure 2.** The structure of the regional economy, the tourism resources of the area and industry policy. The numbers in the figure are referred in the text.
the most important developing industry. To sum up, the area can be portrayed as a monoculture, that is regional development is dependent on one industry and hence vulnerable.

(2) If the structural base of the regional economy is diverse but the tourism resources of the area are modest, then development policy has two options: traditional and new industries. The enabler for this is a diverse economy base. In practice, the periphery’s economic structure is very rarely diverse in nature and, therefore, the spectrum of progressing industries is low. In addition, rural areas are usually lacking both material and immaterial resources. Due to the modest tourism resources, the tourism industry is not included among the primary developing industries.

(3) If the structure of the regional economy is diverse and the tourism resources of the area are excellent, then industry policy has – at least in principle – several options: traditional industries, new industries and the tourism industry. In this case, tourism is among the most significant industries. As mentioned earlier, peripheral areas have their own limitations with respect to diversity.

(4) If the structure of the regional economy is one-sided but the tourism resources of the area are excellent, development policy has just one option. Therefore, development resources should focus on the tourism industry that is referred to as a one-sided structure. However, in this case the regional economy represents a monoculture, tourism being the only industry with opportunities to develop. Particularly in peripheral areas, the tourism industry is usually treated as “the last resort”, because the primary industries are faced with problems and industrial production and population are moving to cores (Saarinen, 2007a; see also Johnson et al., 1994).

In the model presented, fields (3) and (4) can be interpreted, according to Saarinen’s (2007a) concepts, as the tourism-centred approach, but in field (4) the one-sided regional economy limits links between tourism and other (local) industries. Fields (2) and (3) conform quite well to Saarinen’s regional development-centred approach, although only field (3) contains the tourism industry among developing industries in the area. Instead, in field (2) tourism is excluded. It is noteworthy that in field (3) both approaches can be applied. Emphasis depends on whether tourism is one industry vehicle in the industry policy of the area or one industry among traditional and new ones. The requirement of the regional development-centred model, the diversity of the regional economy, is very challenging, for example, in the peripheral areas in Northern Finland. In field (1), neither approach is relevant because, on the one hand, tourism resources are modest only and on the other hand, the economic structure of the area is one-sided.

Conclusions and Discussion

The tourism-centred and regional development-centred models in tourism planning have close connection to Burns’s (1999) tourism first and development first concepts (Saarinen, 2007a). In the tourism-centred model, the focus is the industry and its needs, but the regional development-centred model regards tourism as only one industry among other (local) industries. Thus, in the latter case tourism is treated equally and seen as a respectable opportunity to vitalize the regional economy also taking traditional industries into consideration. Sustainable tourism
planning based on the ideology of sustainable development stresses a need to respect the environmental, socio-cultural and economic base of the area and therefore, the regional development-centred model can be interpreted as better representing the concept of sustainability (also see Lasanta, Laguna, & Vicente-Serrano, 2007; Tooman, 1997a, 1997b).

In the Nordic context and especially in the region’s peripheries, the recent focus has been on tourist resorts (see Hall et al., 2009). In Finland, for example, the present national tourism policy (Suomen matkailustrategia…, 2006) as well as Lapland’s tourism strategy (Lapin matkailustrategia 2007–2010, 2007) emphasize resorts and their role in tourism development. The resort-oriented development resembles Saarinen’s (2007a) tourism-centred model and hence, there seems to have emerged a few challenges from the perspective of regional development. The most critical issue relates to the regional dimension of the positive socio-economic impacts of tourism: they usually occur at the resort level and are not spread to a wider geographical area. In Northern Finland and Sweden, large resorts have increased the number of enterprises, jobs and population during the last few decades, but these positive effects have not reached the areas surrounding those resorts (see Hall et al., 2009; Kauppila, 2004; Kauppila & Rusanen, 2009; Lundmark, 2005). Actually, the location municipalities of the resorts have suffered from the typical features of a declining rural periphery as a whole, such as the recession of economic life and a decreasing and ageing population.

In this light, it is fruitful to discuss the nexus of the resort-oriented development and regional development. A realistic option could be to associate the tourism-centred model with elements of the regional development-centred model. This new model can be conceptualized as a spatio-functional model emphasizing both regional and functional collaboration (Figure 3). The former means the collaboration between a core (a resort) and a periphery (surrounding area), whereas the latter can be analyzed by extending Saarinen’s (2007a) tourism-centred approach to two levels: a collaboration within the tourism industries and between the tourism industries and other (local) industries.

First, in the spatio-functional collaboration of the primary tourism industries, the objective is to produce tourism packages taking a regional viewpoint into consideration, that is, to bring together enterprises that gain direct tourism revenues. The more diverse resources and attractions the core and the periphery include, the better opportunities they have to provide service products for the overall tourism supply of a destination. The role of rural areas surrounding the resorts is to specialize in such tourism products, like nature- and culture-based products, which can not be produced in the cores. Brenner (2005) proposes that resorts could be regarded as starting points or gates for the trips to the unknown, attractive countryside. In this case, the travel model is called base camp (Oppermann, 1995; Stewart & Vogt, 1997), hub-and-spoke (McKercher & Lew, 2004) or base site (Lau & McKercher, 2007). The purpose of the regional collaboration is, thus, to spread tourists to a wider geographical area in the form of day-trips, for example. This requires the decentralizing of sights, attractions and services.

Second, the spatio-functional collaboration deals with purchase chains between the primary tourism industries and other (local) industries benefiting indirectly from
tourism. In the peripheries, there are more favourable conditions to carry on traditional industries compared to the cores. On the one hand, the more direct tourism enterprises make purchases from those enterprises located within the destination, the larger the money flows are inside the destination, the smaller the leakages are outside the destination. Generally speaking, the more diverse the economic base of the area is, the better opportunities there are to create long purchase chains within the area and thus satisfy the need of the indirect demand of the tourism industries. Tooman (1997a,b) states that at the local level, links have to be strengthened and developed between tourism and other local industries, like agriculture and handicrafts, right from the beginning of the development process in order to keep the economic structure of the area as diverse as possible in the future. However, the one-sided economic structure of peripheral areas is usually a limiting factor in terms of multiplicative effects.

Regardless of the promising prospects and figures for global tourism, the industry is also a regional phenomenon and tied to certain places which have different potentials to develop it. Tourism is often seen as “the last resort” for economic development in peripheral areas. Indeed, depending on the potential of a region, tourism can be used successfully in regional development. Still, it should be remembered that it is neither always the best available tool to contribute to the regional economy nor is the industry automatically the saviour for all types of peripheral areas (see Lundmark, 2005). Added to this, an economic transition from one-sided agriculture and forestry

**Figure 3.** A spatio-functional model for collaboration within the tourism industries and between the tourism industries and other (local) industries at the local level. The internal circle represents the core (resort) and the external circle the periphery (surrounding area).
to one-sided tourism is a transition from one monoculture to another, and a monoculture always includes a risk from the perspective of the region and communities.

References


