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ADVANCES IN HOSPITALITY AND LEISURE VOLUME 15

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EDITED BY

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Indiana University, Bloomington, USA



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CONTENTS

<i>List of Contributors</i>	<i>ix</i>
<i>Aims and Submission Guidelines</i>	<i>xi</i>

FULL PAPERS

Leadership and Tourism Development in Rural South-East Asia: Analysis of a Capacity-building Project in a Rural Community in Timor-Leste <i>Frederic Bouchon and Bruce Prideaux</i>	<i>3</i>
Managing Entitled Employees in the Hospitality Industry: An Exploratory Study <i>Valentini Kalargyrou, Emmanuel Kalargiros and Paul Harvey</i>	<i>23</i>
Constructing Brand Value of Museums <i>Wan-Yu Liu and Joseph S. Chen</i>	<i>43</i>
The Role of Grit in Enhancing Job Performance of Frontline Employees: The Moderating Role of Organizational Tenure <i>Minseong Kim, Jungmin Lee and Jihye Kim</i>	<i>61</i>
Residents' Attitude and Behavior Toward Legalizing Gambling in a Small Island: Case of Kinmen, Taiwan <i>Chien-Yi Yang, Ming-Huey Li, and Shih-Shuo Yeh</i>	<i>85</i>
Memorable Travel Experiences: Qualitative Approach <i>Hyangmi Kim, Junhyoung Kim, Kyoung Tae Kim and Ya-Ling Chen</i>	<i>101</i>
Effects of Scuba Divers' Social Support on Happiness <i>Li-Ming Ho, Siou-Lan Yang and Jao-Chuan Lin</i>	<i>113</i>
Antecedences of Customer Loyalty in the Pakistani Hospitality Industry <i>Sadia Cheema, Nirmal Ahsan, Sadaf Amjad and Zaira Yasmeen Bukhari</i>	<i>129</i>

RESEARCH NOTES

The Impacts of Destination Knowledge and Destination Interest on Generation Z's Memory of a New Tourism Destination <i>Chengming Hu and Shu Cole</i>	147
Determinants of Hotel Room Prices in India <i>Sameer Mathur and Ashish Dubey</i>	161
The Concepts and Practices of Social Tourism in South Korea <i>Kyungmi Kim</i>	173
<i>Index</i>	183

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AIMS AND SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Advances in Hospitality and Leisure (AHL), a double-blind peer view journal published annually since 2004, attempts to promote seminal and innovative research outputs pertaining to hospitality, leisure, tourism, and lifestyle. Specifically, this journal encourages researchers to investigate new research issues and problems that are critical but have been largely ignored while providing a forum that will disseminate singular thoughts advancing empirical undertakings both theoretically and methodologically.

These fifteenth annual volume includes eight full papers and three research notes. As for data collection, most articles deploy either a quantitative or qualitative approach while one presents conceptual models. The contributors to the present issue come from five nations/regions entailing Australia, India, France, Taiwan, and the United States of America.

For submission to future issues, please review the following guidelines.

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AHL requires electronic submission. Please send an email attachment with a Word format to the editor Dr Joseph Chen (joechen@indiana.edu) or send a CD to Tourism, Hospitality and Event Management, Department of Recreation Park and Tourism Studies, School of Public Health Building #133, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana 47405-7109, USA.

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FULL PAPERS

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LEADERSHIP AND TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN RURAL SOUTH-EAST ASIA: ANALYSIS OF A CAPACITY-BUILDING PROJECT IN A RURAL COMMUNITY IN TIMOR-LESTE

Frederic Bouchon and Bruce Prideaux

ABSTRACT

Tourism development is often seen as a tool to empower rural and peripheral communities. Problems can arise if there is an imbalance in the power relationship between local communities and external actors promoting development, including investors and Non Government Organisations (NGOs). This chapter examines the issues of leadership and power related to a hotel project operated by a private company in a small rural town in Timor-Leste. While there was initially substantial support for the project, the private company leading the project failed to adequately engage with community leaders creating feeling of loss of authority. Moreover, the members of the community who were not directly associated with the project felt that there was a gap between promises made to the community and the actual outcomes.

Keywords: Capacity building; tourism development; Timor-Leste; rural tourism; leadership; power; social enterprise

INTRODUCTION

Capacity building is a widely used approach to achieve improved tourism outcomes for host communities (Rawat, Bouchon, & Nair, 2015; Tolkach & King, 2015). There remains, however, questions over power relationships within communities as well as between host communities and external stakeholders. Given that each community is the product of its location, the resources it has access to, and the regional and national governance models that it operates under, it can be expected that the characteristics of the power relationships that apply within specific communities will differ to those that apply in other communities. On these grounds, it is apparent that the solutions required for tourism development in a specific community is likely to be specific to that community. This does not mean that planning frameworks should be ignored. It does mean that planning frameworks need to be able to adapt to multiple circumstances. A number of researchers (Cabasset-Semedo, 2009a; Scheyvens & Russell, 2012) have argued that communities benefit through decentralized approaches to tourism development. Others have argued that successful tourism development requires capacity building (Moscardo, 2011). Brickell (2012) notes that outcomes should be evaluated based on the capacity building approaches adopted. Unfortunately, in efforts to understand the desires, motivations and behaviors, of tourists the perspectives of the host communities are often overlooked.

This study is concerned with Timor-Leste, one of the world's newest nations and one of its least developed. Since independence in 2002, the national government, foreign aid organizations, and NGOs have encouraged tourism development but with relatively little success. The aim of the study is to examine a range of issues related to leadership and power in the context of capacity building in a rural tourism situation using external private tourism investment to foster local development. The findings suggest that more attention needs to be given to understanding local community concerns and expectations about tourism development, the power that donor organizations have over local communities because these organizations have access to resources not otherwise available to local communities, and the need for researchers to pay more attention to community political structures.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In developing countries, rural tourism is a complex phenomenon that is determined by the approaches taken to tourism development by public and private sectors. Community-based tourism (CBT) is an example of one form of development that has been widely cited. Other approaches include ecotourism, agritourism, rural tourism, cultural tourism (Tane & Thierheimer, 2009), and in some cases large resorts located in rural areas. Rural tourism is often advocated as a tool for generating moderate economic growth and maintaining the socio-cultural fabric of rural areas while allowing locals to participate in new economic activities (Kalsom, 2008). However, many rural communities lack the financial, business, and human resources skills to initiate tourism development.

Investment in rural tourism may therefore take a number of forms including by the community using its own resources, investment by external aid agencies including NGOs and government bodies or by external investors. Of the three approaches, community sourced investment is relatively rare although there are some examples of successful projects (Sakarta & Prideaux, 2013). CBT is a more common approach although the success rate is not high in many projects that involve investment by external agencies. To achieve successful outcomes, CBT requires community participation as a core requirement to maximizing the benefits to the local community through capacity building and community empowering activities (Hampton & Jeyacheya, 2015; Scheyvens & Russell, 2012; Sin & Minca, 2014; Tolkach & King, 2015). The third approach involves external for-profit investment in rural areas. As Bittar-Rodrigues and Prideaux (2018) observed, the form that external for-profit investment may take can range from profit sharing between the investor and the community, to all profits accruing to the external investor. Central to each form of investment is the balance of power between the community (and factions within communities) and external investors.

Institutions such as the UNWTO (2014) advocate pro-poor tourism in rural areas as a partial solution to socio-economic hurdles and as a catalyst for endogenous development. The UNWTO (2014) also advocates ownership of small-scale tourism activities as a pathway to enhancing craftsmanship and agricultural skills associated with the environment and its offerings. Scheyvens and Russell (2012) argue that community participation can minimize negative tourism impacts since local communities are encouraged to participate in planning and development enabling them to more effectively deal with negative impacts. The form of participation including ownership is also an important issue. As Sakata and Prideaux (2013) argue, ownership by individuals who work with their community may be more successful than community ownership, which raises a range of questions regarding authority, leadership, and distribution of profits. Irrespective of the approach taken to ownership, successful collaboration requires coordination and cooperation between internal and external stakeholders, which may include governments, NGOs, tourists, volunteers, and the private sector. Collaboration based on genuine partnerships offers considerable scope for successful community capacity building.

Developing a successful tourism business requires an understanding of a range of complex issues related to business administration, marketing, customer relations, and governance. These skills may be absent in communities that have little or no previous experience in the tourism industry. Bittar-Rodrigues and Prideaux (2018) argued that a lack of confidence in their ability to manage tourism related business may explain why many communities rarely initiate participation in tourism related business without some level of input from external organizations such as an NGO, government organizations, external investors, or private tourism operators.

A number of researchers (Salazar, 2010; Scheyvens & Russell, 2012) argue that rural tourism developments are often characterized by inequitable power relations between stakeholders within local communities and between local

communities and external agencies including the tourism distribution system. The issue of power becomes even more important where governments are involved and may include a center/periphery element as well as a range of legislative issues. Central governments often see tourism as a solution to high unemployment, isolation and the lack of industrialization in rural communities.

In Timor-Leste, [Currie and Turner \(2014\)](#) observed that there were differences in views toward tourism development between the national government and local communities. From a government perspective, tourism is viewed as a national growth enabler with this view having greater prominence in tourism planning strategies than the views of local communities. The concerns of local communities are to some degree echoed by [Cohen and Cohen \(2012\)](#) who observed that in many cases, tourism tends to favor the middle class rather than the poor who are more likely to suffer from the negative impacts of tourism. This is particularly important for rural areas where entrepreneurs may be city-based and equipped with an understanding of tourism, business, and access to capital that may be absent in rural communities. From a local community perspective, there is often a desire for local control and involvement in tourism projects that have strong links to local enterprise such as agriculture ([Cabasset-Semedo, 2009](#)). Issues that require further investigation include the role of small-scale private investors and the need for a framework able to assist in managing issues of this type at the community level. The negotiations that take place between service providers and their requirements regarding service quality, the expectations of the local community and the vision that both parties have of the future is at the centre of power relations issues in the community. This may require a redefinition of the roles that each stakeholder group should play in the management of projects of this type. Ultimately however, success will only occur if all stakeholders accept that the products they agree to take to market appeal to tourists.

Externally funded tourism projects may be viewed with suspicion if locals find it difficult to assess how tourism is likely to impact on their lives and community. In the longer term, they may withdraw support and reduce chances of success with inertia power ([Sheehan & Ritchie, 2005](#)). Based on their observations of community views on tourism in Timor-Leste, [Tolkach and King \(2015\)](#) stressed the importance of stakeholder involvement, and noted that management should be on the basis of transparency, equity, and trust. However, [Tolkach and King \(2015\)](#) also note that power generally resides in the tourism sector, not the communities wishing to become involved in tourism.

The researchers' perspective is also important. As [Belsky \(2004, p. 274\)](#) argued in her study on community ecotourism politics "tourism researchers rarely speak directly about the values that influence their choice of topics and the research methods they employ." For instance, the reality of power relations between all layers of tourism is often overlooked because research has not been enriched with ethnographic details of local stakeholders. Understanding community values takes time and ideally includes the inclusion of locals in research teams. This can be difficult for researchers who often have budget limitation both in time and money.

Managing Stakeholders' Challenges

Several authors have emphasized that the success of investment made by external agencies may hinge on the internal and external political context that local communities find themselves in, the strength of local leadership and the willingness of the community members to participate in local development through the medium of tourism (Salazar, 2010; Simpson, 2008). For this reason, NGOs, government, institutions and donor agencies must be aware of community aspirations and local community power relationships. As Mendoza-Ramos and Prideaux (2017) point out, internal power within the community may be either a facilitator or inhibitor to groups within communities who are interested in tourism development. The division of power between communities and external agencies is also important. A number of researchers have pointed out that inequitable power relations between the local community and outsiders in CBT projects may compromise successful results (Salazar, 2010). Several authors also underline the importance of stakeholders management in rural community development through tourism (Currie & Turner, 2014; Pandey, 2011). One issue that has received relatively little attention in the literature is the roles that various stakeholders play in communities. The broad view appears to indicate that communities are relatively homogeneous, but this appears to be naive with communities in reality being heterogeneous. For example, communities may contain migrants who have relocated there because of marriage, work or for other circumstances. Other community members may have returned to the community with new ideas after having migrated to other regions or countries. In some cases, returning community members may have different ideas and experiences to those who have never left the village.

Host communities are often perceived by outsiders as having a “romantic and essentialist” notion (Sin & Minca, 2014). From a community perspective, residents may have no ties to tourism (e.g. farmers or traders, craftsmen), but may have a positive perception of tourism development if it leads to personal financial gain (Lee, 2013; Nunkoo & Ramkissoon, 2010). More recently, the divide between locals and outsiders has become blurred as migrations and mobilities make this binary view less relevant. Some locals who have returned to the community after having lived elsewhere may act as change agents (Ritchie & Sheehan, 2014). If their legitimacy is challenged, they may need the help of the authority to champion their ideas. Nevertheless, the success of CBT or any other type of aid depends on enabling factors such as policies, available funds, and skilled people. Special interest groups that sustain people’s awareness of the need for change (lobby groups, NGOs, media) may also play the role of opinion swayers. The level of community support for projects can vary from non-supportive through marginal support, to collaborative. The level of support will depend on the ability of the project and its backers to convince the local community that the project will have positive outcomes. Aid projects may face suspicion from the outset if locals find it difficult to assess the future impact of tourism and are not convinced that it will provide tangible benefits. In the longer

term, they might become non-supportive and disrupt the chances of success with inertia power (Sheehan & Ritchie, 2005).

Tourism in Timor-Leste

Timor-Leste is ranked 133rd out of 188 countries on the Human Development Index (UNDP, 2015). The society is largely agrarian with 70% of the population living in rural areas. Agriculture – principally coffee and rice – generates 27% of national GDP while oil and natural gas are the main contributors to the economy. Foreign aid is also important. Since independence the country has received more than US\$6 billion of foreign aid, however, as little as 10% (La'o Hamutuk, 2010) has been directed to the local economy. Corruption remains prevalent and affects governance decisions and priorities, including tourism development. While tourism has been advocated as a solution to diversifying the economy and generating employment, tourist arrivals remain low. In 2017, there were 118,586 arrivals (South Pacific Tourism Organisation) with Indonesians comprising 55% of arrivals followed by Australians (12.8%) and other Asian visitors (9.4%).

Recent tourism related investment in eco-lodges and countryside homestays have only attracted small numbers of ecotourists and sports tourists (diving or hiking). As a destination, Timor-Leste is struggling to attract the interest of the international outbound market. It remains a relatively uncompetitive and expensive destination compared to Indonesia. It is perceived as unknown, with limited access, little tourism infrastructure, and poor branding. Many of Timor-Leste's rural areas lack electricity and potable water, tourist standard lodging facilities and skilled labor. Moreover, organized internal transport suitable for tourists is difficult in many rural area, despite an intensive road system construction plan. Despite these issues, Timor-Leste is still trying to develop as a niche tourist destination but has failed to demonstrate how local communities can benefit (Cabasset-Semedo, 2009). Currie and Turner (2014) argue that there is a misunderstanding between the government and communities' desire for tourism development. The government wants quick development of mass tourism while local communities and businesses want a more cautious targeted program of slow development. The contrasting views between economic objectives and community needs are obvious in the Government's laissez-faire attitude to tourism, which one official expressed as "as long as the tourists come."

The aim of this research is to identify issues related to leadership and power in the context of capacity building in a rural tourism situation using external private tourism investment to foster local development. The research was undertaken in Balibo, a small rural community located in the western part of Timor-Leste and focuses on a tourism capacity-building program delivered to the employees of a heritage hotel.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted for this research was based on thematic analysis that included official documents and discourse review, observation, and interviews.