

How important is community empowerment in sustainable tourism development?

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International Journal of Science and Research Archive, 2026, 19(03), 359-363

Publication history: Received on 29 April 2026; revised on 06 June 2026; accepted on 08 June 2026

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/ijrsra.2026.19.3.1240>

Abstract

Issues related to sustainable tourism development are a concern at the global, national, and local levels. Overtourism and environmental degradation are urgent issues that require attention in the context of environmental conservation. Achieving effective sustainable tourism governance is crucial and depends on adequate community capacity. Various community empowerment efforts have been undertaken to achieve this goal. Unfortunately, however, community empowerment often remains merely a discourse and an ideal concept, rather than being effectively implemented on the ground. This situation has resulted in sustainable tourism development remaining far from being realized. This study aims to examine the importance of community empowerment in sustainable tourism development by describing and analyzing its supporting and inhibiting factors. This study was conducted through a literature review, examining several journals and other reading sources. The results indicate that community empowerment is a primary necessity in the practice of sustainable tourism development. Supporting factors include: community capacity, community participation, government policy support, availability of local resources, technology, information and communication, and collaboration. Meanwhile, inhibiting factors include low community participation, low community capacity, limited capital, the dominance of foreign investors, and low levels of collaboration.

Keywords: Community Empowerment; Sustainable Tourism Development; Environmental; Tourism; Overtourism

1. Introduction

Issues related to sustainable tourism development have drawn attention from various stakeholders at the global, national, and local levels. This situation indicates that tourism development has become a critical issue that is increasingly being viewed through the lens of environmental sustainability. Various environmental issues in tourism development ranging from overtourism and environmental degradation to ecosystem damage are linked to tourism sector development that fails to prioritize environmental sustainability.

The success of sustainable tourism development must be achieved through adequate community capacity and capabilities. The ability of local communities to manage the various resources available in their surroundings is key to the success of efforts and the implementation of sustainable tourism development. Community empowerment efforts, strategies, and programs must be directed toward achieving this goal. This success serves as a measure of whether the programs implemented to date are functioning effectively or not. Empowerment is an effort to build community capacity by motivating and raising awareness so that their potential can be better optimized (Zubaedi, 2013). Community empowerment is an effort to help individuals transition from a state of powerlessness to one of empowerment by creating opportunities and avenues for them to better achieve their life goals (Rakib and Syam, 2016).

However, community empowerment often remains merely a topic of discussion and an ideal concept. On-the-ground conditions indicate that community empowerment has not yet become a primary strategy in the implementation of

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sustainable tourism development. This is evident from the low level of community participation in community empowerment practices within sustainable tourism development. Ideally, however, local communities should serve as active participants in this development process. Whereas previously communities were merely bystanders or objects of development, in the practice of sustainable tourism development, they should ideally function as active agents of development.

On the other hand, community empowerment in sustainable tourism development is still hampered by suboptimal collaboration among stakeholders. Ideally, sustainable tourism development requires adequate collaboration among stakeholders such as the government, communities, the business sector, academia, NGOs, the media, and others. However, conditions on the ground show that these actors often do not work in tandem with one another. This situation results in poor collaboration among these stakeholders. In fact, the practice of community empowerment in sustainable tourism development requires collaboration for its implementation.

Thus, it is evident that community empowerment practices in sustainable tourism development still face various challenges, ranging from low community participation to suboptimal collaboration among the various stakeholders involved. These conditions result in the performance of sustainable tourism development remaining low and far from achieving its goals. This study aims to analyze and describe the importance of community empowerment in sustainable tourism development, including its inhibiting and supporting factors.

2. Discussion

2.1. Community Empowerment: Is It Important?

Community empowerment is an important area of study in public administration. The community is no longer viewed as an object of development, but rather as a subject of development. Community empowerment is an effort to encourage marginalized, vulnerable, and disadvantaged groups so that they have the ability to access productive resources for their livelihoods (Swift and Levin in Mardikanto, 2010). Community empowerment is an effort to build community capacity so that they have the ability to make decisions through their active participation in development (Crick in Azizy, 2003). Furthermore, community empowerment is the enhancement of the capacity of individuals or groups so that they have the ability to participate in decision-making processes that determine their lives (Alsop, et al., 2006).

Community empowerment is necessary to encourage their active involvement in various development programs. Implementing community-based development programs is essential through active community participation. Community empowerment is an effort to provide opportunities for communities to actively participate in development (Mardikanto and Soebianto, 2015). This effort is carried out by providing equal opportunities in politics and decision-making processes. Furthermore, community empowerment is an effort to help communities gain influence in decision-making processes, which is significantly influenced by personal and social factors (Payne in Masrukin, et al., 2014). Building on this, it is evident that community empowerment is closely linked to efforts to help communities develop the capacity and ability to make decisions that impact their lives.

Community empowerment is an effort to enhance the capacity, capabilities, and self-reliance of communities, with the ultimate goal of achieving community independence (Sumodiningrat, 2007). The World Bank (Narayan, ed., 2002) states that community empowerment is the expansion of the assets and capabilities of marginalized, poor, and underdeveloped communities so they can actively participate, improve their negotiation skills, and gain the power to control and influence their lives. Kartasasmita (Andriyani, et al., 2017) states that community empowerment is an effort to enhance the capacity and capabilities of marginalized communities so they can escape poverty and underdevelopment in the context of development.

Community empowerment is a concept in economic development that also incorporates social values. Furthermore, community empowerment is associated with elements such as being people-centered, participatory, empowering, and sustainable (Chambers in Alfitri, 2011). Community empowerment refers to the steps taken to facilitate local communities in planning, decision-making, and managing the resources they possess, with the aim of enabling them to improve their standard of living (Noor, 2011).

Based on these various definitions of community empowerment provided by experts, it can be seen that community empowerment is based on three principles. First, efforts to create conditions and open opportunities for communities to develop. Second, efforts to build the capacity of communities to actively participate in development, through mentoring, training, and other means. Third, efforts to protect marginalized, vulnerable, and disadvantaged groups from the negative impacts of unequal competition.

2.2. Sustainable Tourism Development: Eco-Friendly Tourism

The term “sustainable tourism development” is often used interchangeably with “sustainable tourism governance.” The two terms are used in tandem. In this study, the term “sustainable tourism development” is used more frequently to explore the phenomenon under investigation. Essentially, Sustainable Tourism Development aims to involve various stakeholders in supporting the operationalization of sustainable tourism (Ginting, et al., 2024). This means that Sustainable Tourism Development does not only focus on policies formulated by the government in a top-down manner, but rather its focus is on the involvement of various elements within the tourism sector. Sustainable Tourism Development is a series of interactions established between the government, the business sector, the community, and other stakeholders in tourism governance (Bramwell, et al., 2011).

Sustainable Tourism Development is focused on inclusivity (Farsari, 2023). Furthermore, it is a form of good governance practice aimed at ensuring the success of sustainable tourism governance (Borges, et al., 2014). Sustainable Tourism Development is a consistent effort toward sustainable development, achieved by incorporating policies that promote democratization, community engagement, and active participation. Sustainable Tourism Development is a crucial governance framework for engaging various stakeholders within the institutional framework of improved tourism governance (Sharpley, 2023). Sustainable Tourism Development is a series of regulations, institutions, processes, and relationships established among various stakeholders in the tourism sector, aimed at achieving inclusivity, proactivity, and ethical management of tourist destinations. This is essential to ensure that tourism governance is implemented in accordance with the principles of better environmental conservation (Farsari, 2023).

2.3. Factors Supporting Community Empowerment in Sustainable Tourism Development

The results of this study identify several enabling factors in community empowerment for sustainable tourism development. These factors include: community capacity, community participation, government policy support, availability of local resources, technology, information and communication, and collaboration. The following is an explanation of each of these enabling factors

2.3.1. Community Capacity

Community empowerment in sustainable tourism development is heavily influenced by the community's capacity. Communities are the subjects of development, so their capacity in tourism governance is crucial to the success of its implementation. Therefore, various training programs related to tourism management need to be conducted as part of this empowerment, including: digital marketing training, homestay management, tourism waste management, strengthening foreign language proficiency, and so on. It is crucial to organize these training programs to enhance the capacity and empowerment of local communities in managing their tourism businesses.

2.3.2. Community Participation

Community participation is crucial to the success of community empowerment in sustainable tourism development. Active involvement of local communities in tourism management is essential, as communities need to be encouraged to actively participate in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of programs. Furthermore, community involvement in various community empowerment programs related to tourism management is crucial for fostering a sense of ownership regarding tourist destinations. This, in turn, is expected to encourage communities to care about the sustainability of tourism and environmental conservation.

2.3.3. Government Policy Support

Community empowerment in sustainable tourism development requires strong government policy support. The government is expected to facilitate this support by formulating policies that can empower communities to enhance their capacity for sustainable tourism management, particularly for local businesses. In addition, the government should ideally prioritize training programs and financial assistance to help tourism businesses grow through community-based tourism.

2.3.4. Availability of Local Resources

Local resources influence the extent to which community empowerment succeeds in sustainable tourism development. Local assets such as natural resources, culture, cuisine, traditions, and so on serve as the primary capital for sustainable tourism development. These elements serve as the main attractions for tourists and are also expected to strengthen the community's identity.

2.3.5. Technology, Information, and Communication

The success of community empowerment in sustainable tourism development is also influenced by the application of technology, information, and communication. Various digital platforms need to be developed to support the success of sustainable tourism management. The ability of tourism businesses to promote their operations through websites or social media is a key requirement for sustainable tourism management. In addition to enhancing competitiveness, this also provides effective and efficient accessibility services for tourists.

2.3.6. Collaboration

Community empowerment in sustainable tourism development is heavily influenced by the extent of collaboration among various stakeholders. Collaboration between the government, communities, the private sector, academia, NGOs, the media, and other actors is essential in the practice of sustainable tourism development. Various innovations and program enhancements can be achieved more efficiently and effectively through collaboration among these actors in tourism governance.

2.4. Barriers to Community Empowerment in Sustainable Tourism Development

The results of this study identify several barriers to community empowerment in sustainable tourism development. These barriers include: low community participation, limited community capacity, lack of capital, the dominance of foreign investors, and a lack of collaboration. The following are some of these barriers:

2.4.1. Low community participation

Suboptimal participation often hinders community empowerment practices in sustainable tourism development. Communities are often reluctant to position themselves as active participants in development, resulting in low levels of their involvement in decision-making related to sustainable tourism development. This situation can lead to the government and other actors exerting greater influence than the community itself.

2.4.2. Low community capacity

Low community capacity hinders the performance of sustainable tourism development. The community's limited knowledge and skills often result in a lack of innovation and adequate strategies for tourism development. This situation also makes it difficult for them to adapt to the challenges of modern tourism.

2.4.3. Limited capital

Limited capital is a fundamental problem in community empowerment practices within sustainable tourism development. The community's difficulty in accessing capital makes it hard for them to develop their businesses. Various sustainable tourism facilities will not be able to operate optimally without adequate financial support.

2.4.4. Dominance of Foreign Investors

Foreign investors often lead to various economic imbalances in community-based tourism management. This situation can hinder community empowerment efforts in the implementation of sustainable tourism development. The entry of large investors often leaves local communities unable to compete, as it creates an unbalanced competitive landscape in the tourism industry.

2.4.5. Low Levels of Collaboration

Low levels of collaboration prevent community empowerment practices in sustainable tourism governance from functioning optimally. Ideally, each stakeholder should be integrated with one another. However, these stakeholders such as the government, communities, the business sector, academia, the media, and NGOs often operate independently without effective collaboration.

3. Conclusion

The success or failure of community empowerment in sustainable tourism development is largely determined by various factors. This study successfully identified several enabling factors in community empowerment practices within sustainable tourism development, including: community capacity, community participation, government policy support, availability of local resources, technology, information and communication, and collaboration. On the other hand, this study has successfully identified several factors that hinder the performance of community empowerment in

sustainable tourism development, including: low community participation, low community capacity, limited capital, the dominance of foreign investors, and low levels of collaboration.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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