

**MANAGEMENT OF ECOLOGICAL RESOURCES FOR SUSTAINABLE
TOURISM: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW ON COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN
ECOTOURISM LITERATURE**

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Article history: Received 29 August 2021 Accepted 21 October 2021</p>	<p>Purpose: This paper aims to analyse how community participation is viewed and implemented in ecotourism projects with evidence from ecotourism literature. The paper elaborates on the evolution and trends of community participation in ecotourism projects.</p> <p>Methodology: With the use of content analysis method, the study analyses literature in the form of journal articles. For the analysis, research articles published from 1990-2019 were collected from journal databases and search engines, including Scopus, Science Direct, Taylor and Francis, and Google Scholar.</p> <p>Originality/ Relevance: The present study intends to address the research gap in ecotourism literature that reviews and descriptively analyze the disseminated information on community participation.</p> <p>Findings: The main findings suggest that only some ecotourism projects are successfully running with the full participation of local communities. The extent and type of community participation vary in each ecotourism project depending on social, cultural, and political factors. It also points out the presence of contradicting views regarding its effectiveness and applicability.</p> <p>Theoretical/ Methodological Contributions: Analysis of ecotourism literature on one of the key aspects of ecotourism is necessary to investigate and understand the patterns and themes of community participation and contributes on the directions for future research.</p>
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GESTIÓN COMUNITARIA DE RECURSOS ECOLÓGICOS PARA EL TURISMO SOSTENIBLE: UMA REVISÃO SISTEMÁTICA SOBRE A PARTICIPAÇÃO COMUNITARIA EN PROYECTOS DE ECOTURISMO

ABSTRACTO

Objetivo del estudio: Este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar cómo se ve e implementa la participación comunitaria en proyectos de ecoturismo con evidencia de la literatura sobre ecoturismo. El documento profundiza en la evolución y tendencias de la participación comunitaria en proyectos de ecoturismo.

Metodología: Con el uso del método de análisis de contenido, el estudio analiza la literatura en forma de artículos de revistas. Para el análisis, los artículos de investigación publicados entre 1990 y 2019 se recopilaron de bases de datos de revistas y motores de búsqueda, incluidos Scopus, Science Direct, Taylor y Francis y Google Scholar.

Originalidad / Relevancia: El presente estudio pretende abordar la brecha de investigación en la literatura sobre ecoturismo que revisa y analiza descriptivamente la información difundida sobre la participación comunitaria.

Hallazgos: Los hallazgos principales sugieren que solo a algunos proyectos de ecoturismo se están ejecutando con éxito con la plena participación de las comunidades locales. El alcance y el tipo de participación comunitaria varían en cada proyecto de ecoturismo dependiendo de factores sociales, culturales y políticos. También señala la presencia de opiniones contradictorias sobre su eficacia y aplicabilidad.

Contribuciones teóricas / metodológicas: El análisis de la literatura sobre ecoturismo sobre uno de los aspectos clave del ecoturismo es necesario para investigar y comprender los patrones y temas de participación comunitaria y contribuye a las direcciones de la investigación futura.

Palabras clave: Ecoturismo, Participación Comunitaria, Ecoturismo Comunitario, Participación Comunitaria, Desarrollo Sostenible.

1. Introduction

Ecotourism as a form of alternative tourism was originated in the second half of the twentieth century. Since its inception as a niche travel market, it has evolved into an alternative tourism model that caters to development and conservation. In the past three decades, ecotourism has become one of the vigorously promoted forms of tourism in many countries (Honey, 2008). It is actively advocated by development and conservation organizations claiming to overcome the negative impacts of mass travel (Butcher, 2005).

The concept of ecotourism has not only witnessed its growth as a niche travel market but also as an academic discipline with a good number of research works published every year on various aspects of ecotourism (Hunt & Stronza, 2009). Despite being one of the fastest-growing areas of tourism, it is still not a well-defined concept due to the lack of consensus about what it does and does not constitute (Fennell, 2001). Scholars argue that it is challenging

to define ecotourism in a particular way since it is an approach influenced by different regional, political, cultural, and social factors (Honey, 2008). Hence, it is opined that the concept of ecotourism should be implemented through a set of principles and frameworks engaging multiple actors rather than defining it in a rigid manner (Cobbinah et al., 2015). These ecotourism principles can be grouped into three components: nature-based, educational, and sustainability (Diamantis, 1999).

Among the three components, the claim that it contributes to the sustainable development of the host region distinguishes ecotourism from nature or wildlife tourism, making it one of the widely adopted practices in many developing countries (Butcher, 2011; Stone & Wall, 2004). To achieve sustainable development through ecotourism, a significant number of ecotourism studies argue community participation or involvement as one of the main criteria (Krüger, 2005; Ocampo et al., 2018; Tsaur et al., 2006). The significance of community participation was reinstated on the International Year of Ecotourism 2002, in which ecotourism was projected as a development model and insisted on the importance of community participation in all stages of ecotourism projects (*The World Ecotourism Summit*, 2002). Empirical studies investigating ecotourism projects shows a positive link between community participation and benefits including better quality of life (Ali et al., 2020). The complexities inherent in development projects like ecotourism makes it difficult to achieve participation from community members. However, community participation is inevitable to ensure sustainable development of ecotourism projects (Noh et al., 2020).

Furthermore, ecotourism projects are implemented in the regions which are not only environmentally fragile but also economically and culturally fragile, making the local communities inhabiting such places more vulnerable to its impacts (Butcher, 2011; *The World Ecotourism Summit*, 2002). Hence, ecotourism should not be considered just as a niche travel market or a conservation strategy but as a paradigm that directly impacts the livelihoods and lifestyles of the communities in the destination (Cobbinah et al., 2015). The local community's total benefits received from tourism development are less than the costs suffered by them mainly due to the lack of control they have over ecotourism planning, development, and management (Mowforth & Munt, 2016). This makes the local community and their relation with ecotourism one of the significant areas in planning and implementing any ecotourism project. Still, like the concept and definition of ecotourism, community participation in ecotourism is a widely debated topic with no explicit agreement.

As a result, a vast body of literature is published every year covering various dimensions of ecotourism. Subsequently, the growth in the publications on ecotourism paved the way for a large number of works that review the patterns, trends, and prospects of ecotourism research (Cabral & Dhar, 2020; Das & Chatterjee, 2015; Liu et al., 2013; Mgonja et al., 2015). However, despite the community being one of the key aspects of ecotourism with a plethora of research publications, there is a scarcity of works that review and descriptively analyze the disseminated information on community participation available in ecotourism literature. The present study intends to address this research gap in ecotourism literature.

With this background, the present study aims to address the following research questions; 1. How has the concept of community participation evolved in ecotourism literature? 2. What are the types or levels under which community participation in ecotourism can be categorized? 3. What are the benefits and challenges faced by the community in terms of participation? And 4. What are the future implications of community participation in ecotourism? The present study addresses these research questions by systematically reviewing published works on community participation in ecotourism projects.

2. Research Methodology

This paper is based on the review of published ecotourism literature concerning community participation. Content analysis method was used to review and analyze the literature since it is one of the most commonly used methods in social science research "to study processes occurring over a long time" (Babbie, 2008, p. 361). It is used to analyze the contents available in any form of recorded communications systematically (Kolbe & Burnett, 1991). Similar studies covering other aspects of ecotourism literature have also employed content analysis (Araújo et al., 2020; Das & Chatterjee, 2015; Fennell, 2001). Figure 2.1 presents a detailed overview of the research design used for the study.

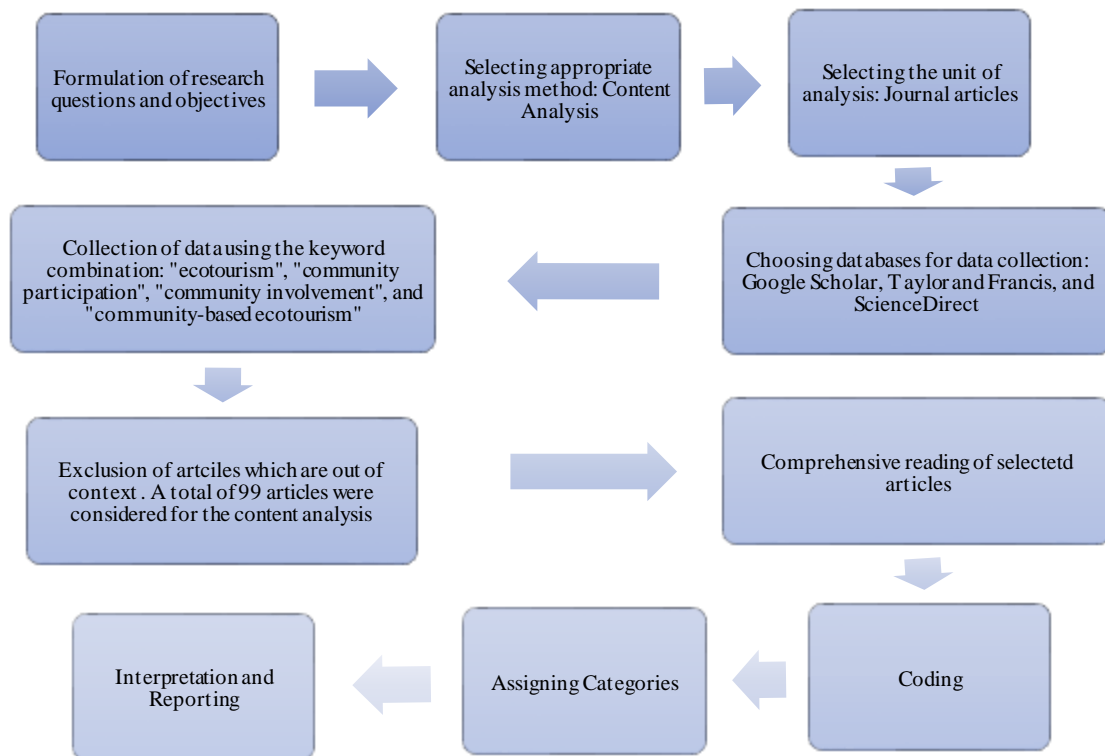


Figure 2.1: Research Design

Previous studies on ecotourism state that ecotourism's actual growth as a concept (in terms of development of definitions) and as an industry started in the 1990s (Fennell, 2001; Honey, 2008). Hence the data for the study were collected in the form of published research articles on community participation in ecotourism from 1990-2019. The data collection and analysis for the present study was carried out during the second quarter of 2020. A combination of keywords including "ecotourism", "community participation", "community involvement", and "community-based ecotourism" was used to collect articles published in the period mentioned above. Scopus was used as the main search engine for the present study. Additionally, research databases such as Google Scholar, Taylor and Francis, and ScienceDirect were used as the complimentary sources to collect journal articles. Table 2.1 provides the number of articles found in each database for the aforementioned combination of keyword search (before elimination based on context).

No	Database	No of articles
1	Scopus	238
2	Science Direct	118
3	Taylor and Francis	214
4	Google Scholar	1160*

*Includes books, book chapters and conference proceedings due to the limitations in refined search options.

Table 2.1 Number of Articles Found in Databases

For the study, journal articles published in only the English language were considered for the analysis. Further abstracts of each article were given a thorough read to eliminate works that were deviant from the focus area of the present study. After removing articles irrelevant to the current study's theme, a total of 99 articles were selected for content analysis.

As the current study has used the method of qualitative content analysis, collected data were organized by assigning codes, creating and assigning categories followed by abstraction (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Malhotra & Birks, 2007). Coding was done as each article was given a thorough read. These codes were then grouped to form categories under which contents with commonality were added to the respective categories (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). The results from interpretation are divided into four sections. The first section deals with how the concept of community participation is viewed in ecotourism literature; in the second part, there is a brief deliberation on the trends and patterns in community participation; the benefits acquired by the local community as a result of participation are mentioned in the third section, and the last section discusses the issues and challenges hindering community participation in ecotourism ventures.

3. Community Participation in Ecotourism Literature

There is an ample number of studies, both empirical and conceptual, conducted on ecotourism. Despite this, a study on the current state of ecotourism research points out that the ecotourism literature is not only imbalanced but also fragmented (Weaver & Lawton, 2007). Stronza suggests that exercising a holistic perspective in ecotourism research by connecting various aspects of ecotourism will not only help the local communities to receive maximum benefits but also provides a clear picture of ecotourism as a whole (Stronza, 2001). In many

ecotourism-related studies, community participation is not considered a criterion or principle of ecotourism (Garrod, 2003; Weaver & Lawton, 2007) . The literature covering community participation is relatively more diminutive in earlier ecotourism research (de los Angeles Somarriba-Chang & Gunnarsdotter, 2012).

The lack of consensus regarding the concept is very evident with the number of typologies used in connecting to community participation. Often the term "Community Based Ecotourism" is used instead of the term "ecotourism" to highlight the involvement of the local community in the project through active participation or ownership (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2005; Scheyvens, 1999; Weaver, 2005). The reason for the usage of the former term to highlight the involvement of the local community in ecotourism can also be attributed to the fact that generally, in ecotourism projects, there is a lack of local community participation, which has led to resentment by the local communities on such projects (Amati, 2013). The other major concern regarding the typologies related to participation was pointed out by Garrod on how the role of the local community in ecotourism is represented by two terms: local involvement and local participation, which are often used interchangeably. He explains that the former term implies the case in which the local communities' involvement in receiving only the benefits of ecotourism, and the latter means the case where there is active participation in planning (Garrod, 2003).

The studies on ecotourism in protected areas also stressed the need for local community participation owing to the community's dependency on the resources of protected areas (Goodwin, 2002; Nepal, 2000). Another refreshing take on community participation in ecotourism research came through the studies conducted from anthropological perspectives. Unlike other methods, studies from this perspective give a better understanding of the dynamics of the communities participating in ecotourism projects (Jamal & Stronza, 2009; Stronza, 2005). Furthermore, the growing importance of social capital in achieving pro-environmental behavior and sustainable development also suggests community participation plays an important role in building social capital (Jones, 2005; Liu et al., 2014).

In recent years, there has been a clear shift in the role of local communities from being considered just as the beneficiaries of ecotourism to being recognized as the partners of ecotourism projects (Garrod, 2003). However, there is still a lack of clear agreement on the roles and responsibilities of the local community in ecotourism (Sakata & Prideaux, 2013). As

a result, studies that deal with community participation in ecotourism have contradicting takes on its effectiveness and possibility, which can be grouped into two categories

- Community participation-a criteria to achieve sustainable development
- Community Participation- an Unattainable Task

3.1 Community participation-a criteria to achieve sustainable development

Scheyvens categorizes ecotourism literature into three perspectives: economic, environmental, and development (Scheyvens, 1999). The earlier literature on ecotourism focused mainly on the first two perspectives: the environmental and economic perspectives. The later researches argued that sustaining the support of the local community cannot be achieved only by generating economic benefits to the local community (Liu et al., 2014; Stronza & Gordillo, 2008). The ecotourism literature, which discussed ecotourism from a development perspective, observed the local community and its participation or involvement as an integral part of ecotourism.

Over time, the idea that objectives of ecotourism can only be achieved if the people who live in and around the ecotourism destination have some control over it gained momentum. As a result, the debate on community participation has shifted from whether or not the communities should be involved in ecotourism ventures to how and to what extent community participation can be achieved (Mowforth & Munt, 2016; *The World Ecotourism Summit*, 2002). This eventually gave rise to the idea that for an ecotourism project to be sustainable, the local community should be involved in its different stages (Brohman, 1996; Place, 1995) because the local communities which are participating in ecotourism projects showed favorable attitude towards ecotourism and conservation (Goodwin, 1996; Snyman, 2014).

Even though awareness among the local people regarding conservation and ecotourism is required, it cannot contribute to the success of ecotourism until there is actual participation from local people (Barkin & Pailles, 1999; de los Angeles Somarriba-Chang & Gunnarsdotter, 2012). This view was supported by Scheyvens, who claimed that to promote ecotourism as a development tool, community participation in the form of ownership and the share of benefits are necessary, and with that base, she proposed an empowerment framework for ecotourism in which community participation was an essential requirement (Scheyvens, 1999). Literature which deals with the ethical issues associated with tourism development put forward an important point which states that it should be solely the choice of the communities to decide

whether they want ecotourism to be developed in their region and the type or level of participation (Ross & Wall, 1999; *The World Ecotourism Summit*, 2002).

Local participation in ecotourism, particularly in indigenous communities, can help overcome traditional gender roles by encouraging women through formal and informal employment opportunities, thus breaking the practice where women are only allowed to do household activities (Scheyvens, 2000; Stronza & Gordillo, 2008). Especially in protected areas, community participation in ecotourism and conservation projects tends to avoid potential conflicts (de los Angeles Somarriba-Chang & Gunnarsdotter, 2012). In addition, it also helps in maintaining the integrity of a community and different communities in a destination (Stone, 2015). However, the need for local participation cannot be restricted to ecotourism ventures in protected or pristine natural areas. According to a study on the dimensions of 'Urban Ecotourism,' social factors, including community participation was stated to have a significant role in ecotourism development (Wu et al., 2010).

3.2 Community Participation- an Unattainable Task

While community participation is actively promoted as a tool for sustainable development, the possibility of effective implementation of community participation in development projects in general and tourism, in particular, has been questioned by many researchers. The concept of community participation has become an umbrella term of the postindustrial era for a new form of public administration when the government's incapability in determining the public opinions has failed in development projects (Tosun, 2000). Moreover, since each country implements ecotourism-related policies based on its interpretation of ecotourism (Nianyong & Ren Zhuge, 2001), community participation is criticized for its one size fits all approach failing to consider the internal dynamics of the communities (Belsky, 2009). The criticisms regarding community participation are grounded mainly on the following three reasons:

- i) The practicality in implementing full/active community participation amidst the multiple stakeholders involved in addition to the diverse socio-cultural and political nature of regions (Das & Chatterjee, 2015; Morais et al., 2006; Stone, 2015; Su et al., 2014).
- ii) Romanticizing the concept of ecotourism and community participation and commercialization of local culture (Sonjai et al., 2018).

iii) The concept of community participation is put forth in an inflexible manner (Tosun, 1999).

Community participation is criticized as a tool used to impose the interests of funding and development agencies on local communities to promote and achieve their perspective of conservation and development (Butcher, 2006). The influential network in ecotourism ventures comprising private companies and other multinational agencies makes it difficult for local communities to have a say (Duffy, 2008). The objectives and goals of many sustainable community-driven tourism initiatives are decided well in advance before introducing them to the locals and their involvement. Such practices contradict the democratic nature of community participation as there are no real options left for the communities to choose from (Butcher, 2010). The policies and projects that affect disadvantaged communities still follow a top-down approach by marginalizing the communities involved (Taylor, 2007).

Community participation in tourism is criticized as a romanticized concept which only exists at a theory level. In contrast, in reality, the culture of these communities is commercialized in the name of participation by the stakeholders, thus questioning its sustainable nature (Sonjai et al., 2018). It is also alleged that it is promoted so that the local community can be manipulated into supporting the tourism projects developed in their region. Even if such Community-Based Ecotourism Projects contribute to the livelihood and development of local communities, it can only be a supplement source and not an alternative source, making the communities still dependent on other sources of income (Kiss, 2004).

One of the central norms required to engage the local community in ecotourism consistently is maintaining it as a small-scale business. The importance of ecotourism to remain as a small-scale business was also emphasized by Blamey, where he suggests that it should be included at least as a "secondary principle" of ecotourism (Blamey, 2001). However, small-scale businesses can yield only limited benefits that are not always sufficient to fund conservation and community development (Kiss, 2004). This view was criticized by Butcher, who pointed out how community participation is repeatedly viewed and studied in reference to the microenvironment, thereby completely ignoring the case of the national community and why until community participation is discussed in terms of the national community, it cannot be considered as a progressive approach because development should have an impact at a national level especially in the transforming developing nations (Butcher, 2010). However, the fact that the consequences faced by the local communities who live in the immediate vicinity

of the projects are more intense (Karst, 2017) than those faced by the national community; hence they are entitled to receive an appropriate return from it cannot be ignored entirely.

Community participation is encouraged in ecotourism among communities, especially indigenous communities, mainly based on the view that they are effective stewards for conservation. This viewpoint was profoundly criticized for the lack of adequate proof (Fennell, 2008). In many cases, the relationship between indigenous communities and ecotourism was not symbiotic. The introduction of ecotourism does not guarantee that the local communities will abandon their traditional practices such as hunting resulting in severe threats to the same species that the ecotourism projects are trying to protect (Buckley, 2005). Many ecotourism ventures failed because they could not actively involve and engage the indigenous communities towards conservation practices (Coria & Calfucura, 2012).

These contradicting takes on community participation are mostly grounded on the real-world issues reported in various ecotourism ventures, which are briefly discussed later in this study.

4. Trends in Community Participation in Ecotourism

The lack of clear agreement on the role of local communities in ecotourism projects has given rise to the scenario in which each ecotourism project has its own type of participation or involvement from the local communities (Sakata & Prideaux, 2013). Four major patterns/types of community participation which are common in ecotourism initiatives were identified from the analysis of literature and comparing it to the community participation typologies proposed by Tosun (Tosun, 1999).

4.1 Participation in Decision Making and Control

This type of participation is termed "active participation" and involves making the local community have control over its decision-making process and management (Tosun, 1999, p. 118). It is accomplished by granting full sovereignty in deciding the types of tourism activities they want to initiate and participate in their region (Akama, 1996). Hence they are provided with an opportunity to plan the ecotourism projects based on the social-political environment of that region (Farrelly, 2011). For instance, encouraging entrepreneurial ventures

provides suitable platforms for community members to control and manage ecotourism activities (Panta & Thapa, 2018).

The Chiphat Community Based Ecotourism Project of Cambodia is entirely managed by locals ensuring equal access to work and benefits from ecotourism through a rotation system. Even though the project can only provide an additional income instead of an alternative income, it still strives for an equal representation in local participation (Reimer & Walter, 2013). An ethnographic study on the three ecotourism projects in Amazon explains how the indigenous communities have restricted themselves from becoming destinations by actively involving in ecotourism management (Stronza & Gordillo, 2008). A collaborative ecotourism approach in Botswana's Chobe district has turned out to be a successful one mainly because the community organization made crucial decisions on the ecotourism projects despite the multiple stakeholders involved (Stone, 2015). A comparative study on two ecotourism projects in Tambopata, Peru, where one ecotourism actively involved locals in decision making, and the other one offered only direct employment opportunities, showed that the former project had a sustainable future than the latter despite both bringing economic benefits to the communities (Hill & Hill, 2011). When the decisions regarding ecotourism are made by the community leaders then the likelihood of convincing the other members of the community is higher because they are convinced by their heads (Chirozva, 2015).

4.2 Participation through Partnership

One of the important arguments put forth regarding the need for community control in decision making is that the local community function as an informal organization; hence it is impossible for it to participate in a project designed by formal organizations like private companies and NGOs as they do not have a clear understanding about the community and its values (Farrelly, 2011). However, there are also cases in which the local community has complete sovereignty or equal partnerships on ecotourism projects irrespective of the presence of external agencies (Foucat, 2002). This type of participation is referred to as "authentic host community participation" in Tosun's typology (Tosun, 1999, p. 129).

Joint ventures and partnerships in ecotourism projects are usually adopted when the local communities need financial assistance or training (Stone, 2015). These type of ventures helps the communities in effectively managing the ecotourism projects. Homestays managed by local communities in Binsar Protected Area, India through Public-Private Partnership are

running successfully mainly because of the assistance the community is receiving from its partner company (Bhalla et al., 2016). Similarly, a joint ecotourism venture between the private company and the local community in Peruvian Amazon called 'Posada Amazonas' serves as a classic example of how the local community can have complete control over ecotourism projects regardless of the partnerships with private companies (Jamal & Stronza, 2009).

4.3 Participation at Operational Level

Most ecotourism projects represent a neoliberal ideology that focuses on promoting conservation and development from the so-called first-world countries' perspective. These projects are financially and ideologically led by western NGOs who influence and also decide the level of community participation in ecotourism projects (Fletcher, 2009). This type of participation which does not necessarily include communities in decision making yet still addressing the needs and wants of communities, are referred to as "direct host community participation" (Tosun, 1999, p. 128).

Owing to the lack of resources needed for their establishments, ecotourism ventures in African countries follow such neoliberal forms of development in which the projects are led by multinational agencies (Kline & Slocum, 2015). Some ecotourism projects, such as in Namibia, are financially supported by foreign NGOs, and at the same time, the local community is actively engaged. This completely contradicts the argument that the ecotourism project should be owned by the local community to receive the maximum benefits (Butcher, 2011). The success of an ecotourism project when external agencies are involved is determined by the trust and relationship these agencies share with the local communities (Cobbinah et al., 2015). Hence, many studies prove that the local community can participate and benefit from ecotourism ventures without participating in the decision-making process (K.C. et al., 2015; Simpson, 2008).

The ecotourism projects in Phuket and Ao Phangnga from Thailand are mainly dominated by an ecotourism company that is owned by foreigners but at the same time provides employment opportunities to the local community. However, despite these benefits, there is still resentment from the local community members accusing the ecotourism company of taking away the control and ownership of ecotourism (Kontogeorgopoulos, 2005). In countries where protected areas are under government control, community participation is limited to

employment opportunities that do not guarantee appropriate economic benefits to locals. They also have no control over tourism planning (M. Stone & Wall, 2004).

The view that community participation is needed in decision-making for the success of ecotourism initiatives was questioned by Li. With evidence from his study on the community participation in ecotourism of Jiuzhaigou Biosphere Reserve, China, he claims that the local communities can engage and benefit from ecotourism without participating in decision-making (Li, 2006). Hence, some communities need external assistance in infrastructure, ideas, and finance through government and non-government agencies cannot be wholly denied.

4.4 Passive Participation

In countries where the concept of ecotourism is not well established, local communities tend to play a passive role in participation (Gurung & Scholz, 2008) which can sometimes lead to resentment from the local community towards NGOs and other agencies managing the ecotourism projects. Absence of proper communication channels between the community and NGOs regarding participation in ecotourism activities and benefits fuels resentment towards foreign agencies (Koninx, 2019; Snyman, 2014). The local Tibetan community of Shehnza county was given a passive role in its ecotourism venture regardless of their willingness to participate more, thus hindering the sustainable tourism development of the region (Chengcai et al., 2012). The scenario was similar at the Palawan ecotourism venture in the Philippines, where the local residents are not allowed to participate (Okazaki, 2008). Ecotourism venture at Lombok, Indonesia, aided by the donor agency, also reported underrepresentation of native residents at all levels of ecotourism jobs and no representation, especially at the top-level management jobs (Schellhorn, 2010).

5. Benefits of Community Participation

5.1 Level of Participation is Proportional to the Benefits Received

Reasonable return to the local communities is one of the objectives of ecotourism. For any ecotourism venture to sustain long-term, it has to benefit the residents inhabiting the region (Goodwin, 1996). It is impossible to deliver benefits to local people without actual local participation. Studies prove that the people involved in ecotourism-related jobs perceived that

they receive more benefits than the people who are not participating (Vannelli et al., 2019). In areas where there are limited opportunities for local participation resulted in limited benefits (mainly economic benefits) to local people (Mensah & Ernest, 2013; Stone & Wall, 2004).

5.2 Alternative or Supplementary Livelihood Options

Community participation in ecotourism is encouraged and advocated among the local communities for its benefits. It is mainly advocated as an alternative livelihood option to communities who are otherwise dependent on exploiting the very natural resources that these types of tourism are trying to conserve. The prevailing poverty and limited livelihood options in protected areas make the local communities depend on the natural resources leading to its exploitation which can be changed by engaging them in ecotourism (Butcher, 2011). Communities living in and around protected areas find it difficult to pursue their traditional livelihood activities, which are restricted or banned in the name of conservation (Coria & Calfucura, 2012). Ecotourism comes to the rescue in such situations by providing alternative livelihood options to communities, unlike traditional livelihood practices that depend on natural resources (Fletcher, 2009; Vannelli et al., 2019). By involving local communities in ecotourism-related jobs, it gives them an alternative source of income which can play a crucial role in addressing the economic problems prevalent in protected areas (K.C. et al., 2015; Swain et al., 2008). Even in the traditional farming communities, ecotourism can be used as a sustainable livelihood diversification possibility for supplementary income (Swain & Batabyal, 2016). Communities with other sources of income tend to participate in ecotourism as it delivers additional source of income through supplementary livelihood (Kim et al., 2019).

5.3 Impacts on Conservation Behavior

Receiving benefits from ecotourism-related jobs may encourage the local communities to participate in conservation practices, but it is not enough to influence the conservation perspectives of local communities. The increase in conservation attitude is attributed to the fact that those participating in ecotourism-related jobs place a high value on the natural resources since it attracts more tourists to their region (Vannelli et al., 2019). Communities engaged in ecotourism revealed less interest in traditional jobs that exploit natural resources (Stone, 2015). A study on ecotourism sites in Costa Rica shows that if there

are no employment opportunities from ecotourism, the local communities are likely to degrade forest resources for livelihood (Stem et al., 2003). Hence active local community participation beyond economic and employment benefits is needed to encourage a conservation attitude among locals (Stronza & Gordillo, 2008).

5.4 Influences Long-Term Success of Ecotourism

It is argued that to sustain the community support for the long term and for sustainable development, mere sharing of economic benefits to local people is insufficient. Instead, they have to be actively engaged in the decision-making and planning (Garrod, 2003). The long-term success of ecotourism ventures depends on the involvement of local communities (Stronza & Pegas, 2008), whereas the absence of local community involvement is considered to be one of the main reasons for the failure of ecotourism (Krüger, 2005). The long-term success of ecotourism is possible through local participation since it avoids economic leakage, thereby ensuring the local community's development (Place, 1995). Local participation aids in achieving this by avoiding potential conflicts (de los Angeles Somarriba-Chang & Gunnarsdotter, 2012).

6. Issues & Challenges in Community Participation in Ecotourism

Even though community participation is practiced in ecotourism projects at various levels, there was a lack of substantive benefits leading to the costs suffered by the local community more than the benefits received by them. This situation can be the result of the gap between community participation in theory and practice. Some of them are discussed below.

6.1 Lack of Local Ownership and Participation in Decision-Making

The low level of participation is mainly attributed to the lack of a sense of ownership (Stone & Stone, 2011) and not involving the locals in decision-making (Ogunjinmi & Braimoh, 2018). When the local communities are exempted from ownership and decision-making in ecotourism ventures of their region by NGOs and funding agencies, it will have severe implications on the long-term development goals of ecotourism (Coria & Calfucura, 2012; Mensah, 2017; Rajamanicam et al., 2018). A study on the community participation in

ecotourism at Hhuhuwe- Umfolozi Park in South Africa shows that the conflict between park management and the local community is due to the lack of local ownership despite ecotourism being the major contributor of income to the local community (Adeleke & Nzama, 2013). Similar work on ecotourism in Kakum National Park, Ghana, also revealed that the local communities are not involved in decision-making and state it as a reason for the lack of representation of local people in ecotourism-related jobs (Appiah-Opoku, 2004). The centralized form of administration followed in developing countries prevents them from practicing a collaborative approach among the stakeholders in planning ecotourism initiatives (Osman et al., 2018).

6.2 Exclusion of Local Communities

Excluding local communities from ecotourism projects is perceived to be the reason for the failure of many ecotourism projects (de los Angeles Somarriba-Chang & Gunnarsdotter, 2012). The most common form of exclusion is that the local communities are not allowed to give their opinion in the decision-making and management process where the local communities' views regarding ecotourism and the distribution of the revenue generated from ecotourism are not taken into consideration (Mensah & Ernest, 2013). Even if the local communities are involved in decision-making, it is not open to all the members within the community (Afua, 2012). The young members and the non-landowners of the community are more prone to exclusion, especially in decision-making (Ramos & Prideaux, 2014). The private and government agencies dominating the ecotourism market fail to provide platforms for community involvement (Wondirad, 2017).

6.3 Gender Issues and Participation

One of the main challenges concerning participation in ecotourism is the risk of women being excluded or marginalized from participation (Scheyvens, 2000). The gender issues in participation are not only limited to actual practice but also prevail in the research where generally the community's perception about participation is obtained from the male members of the community as they hold the position of family and community heads. With very few exceptions, the ecotourism literature dealing with community participation in ecotourism rarely mentions gender issues (Walter, 2011). The smaller number of participations from the total

members of the community is also because only men are actively involved and the lack of women participation (Foucat, 2002). The disparity exists in manual work where certain types of jobs are not offered to women, especially in the formal employment sector and the decision-making process (Scheyvens, 2000). The main reason for this disparity is the stereotypes that prevail on gender roles (Panta & Thapa, 2018; Reimer & Walter, 2013). Though this issue is gradually being addressed in many ecotourism sites where special initiatives are introduced to encourage the participation of women (Foucat, 2002; Scheyvens, 2000), breaking the gender stereotypes in local participation is still a far reach.

6.4 Inequality in Participation

There are many instances in which an entire community can't be employed in ecotourism projects. This leads to the benefits being received by the individual members and households participating rather than the community benefiting, resulting in unequal distribution of benefits, thereby hindering community development (Hummel, 1994; Karst, 2017; Snyman, 2014). Many factors influence the disparity in participation among the local communities. When analyzing the local participation in ecotourism ventures in Chiang Rai Province of Thailand, it is found that the availability and non-availability of land ownership acted as a significant determinant for participation with people who don't own any land are more likely to participate in ecotourism since they lack other sources of income (Palmer & Chuamuangphan, 2018). In contrast, a similar study on Okomu National Park in Nigeria reported inequalities in participation influenced due to the distance of community settlement areas from the park (Aweto et al., 2019). The involvement of the local community does not always ensure equal participation from all members of the community. Even in cases where the local community is included in decision-making, there might not be equal opportunities for all community members (Palmer & Chuamuangphan, 2018). Only a minimal number of ecotourism ventures address this issue by adopting a job rotational system and ensuring equality in the distribution of benefits (Hill & Hill, 2011).

6.5 Western Ideology

The entire concept of community participation is put forth based on developed countries, which makes its implementation challenging to achieve in developing countries as there is a

little consideration given to problems that arise on the operationality of the concept in the context of developing countries (Nault & Stapleton, 2011; Tosun, 2000). This could also be because ecotourism is a concept developed on the political and cultural ideologies prevalent in Western countries, making it a completely foreign concept to be implemented and, most importantly, to be acknowledged in developing and underdeveloped countries (Cater, 2006; Fletcher, 2009). When such foreign ideologies are introduced, local communities are alienated from such projects (Akama, 1996). For example, in Asian countries, Weaver argues that the concept of ecotourism is wholly hybridized. He claims that most of the so-called ecotourism projects in Asian countries are simply mass tourism concentrated on natural areas (Palmer & Chuamuangphan, 2018; D. Weaver, 2002).

6.6 Heterogenous nature of the local community

Whenever the term local community is used, it is generally assumed as a homogenous community, thereby completely ignoring the possibility of a heterogeneous community (Mowforth & Munt, 2016). One of the crucial factors to be noted in community participation is the concept of power relations both within the community and between different communities. This is often neglected because of the belief that a community is homogenous where the clans and community members share a similar view about ecotourism or any such projects (Southgate, 2006). The hierarchical power structures existing in each community allow only a privileged few to have a say in decisions related to ecotourism planning and participation (Farrelly, 2011). A similar issue was also reported in the ecotourism venture at Tafi Atome, Ghana, where the non-indigenous residents were not given the same opportunity for participation and share in benefits as the indigenous counterparts (Afenyo & Amuquandoh, 2014).

6.7 Lack of Interest in Participation

It is wrong to assume that the local people are ready to participate in ecotourism projects willingly. The unwillingness can result from various reasons like lack of awareness, unequal distribution of benefits, and lack of skills (Bello et al., 2017). Their perception of ecotourism and its benefits also play an essential role in participation (Cobbinah et al., 2015). Especially in the case of indigenous ecotourism, where the decision-making power rests with

the elder members of the community, it is difficult to receive participation from the community as the elder members restrict the other members from participating due to their lack of awareness about ecotourism (Ramos & Prideaux, 2014). This lack of interest in participation can also be due to the belief that the majority of the ecotourism projects concentrate exclusively on their environmental conservation objectives by completely neglecting the local communities and putting their development at risk (Cobbinah et al., 2015).

6.8 Lack of Awareness & Skills

The local community's lack of awareness regarding ecotourism has severe implications on their motivation level, hindering participation in ecotourism ventures (Stone & Stone, 2011). The community members who were well aware of the benefits of ecotourism participated actively at various stages of ecotourism projects. In contrast, the members who lacked the idea of ecotourism benefits did not participate (Kayat, 2002). The skills and training required for managing and running an ecotourism business played a significant role in participation (Eshun & Tichaawa, 2019; Gumede & Nzama, 2019; Schellhorn, 2010). Hence, when the local community is deficient in the skills and education required, it hampers the possibility of their involvement in ecotourism-related jobs. As a result, these jobs are bagged by outsiders who are not part of the local community (Kim et al., 2019).

7. Conclusion

The literature showed a direct proportionality in the active local participation and the success of ecotourism. At the same time, it also points out the inability of many ecotourism ventures to implement community participation. However, only very few initiatives could achieve this type of full participation. Most of the criteria needed for ecotourism initiatives still exist only at the paper level (Cobbinah et al., 2015; de los Angeles Somarriba-Chang & Gunnarsdotter, 2012). The participation of communities in decision-making and control in ecotourism projects is relatively low in Asian countries compared to South American and African countries. The majority of these projects employ local community as unskilled laborers and in the worst-case scenario, they are entirely ignored from participating in ecotourism initiatives. For example, case studies on ecotourism ventures in China, India, and Malaysia have proven that local communities are not involved in planning and decision-making.

The study reassures the claim that community participation is not practiced uniformly. It shows how, like ecotourism, community and participation have a black and white approach in literature. Except for a few studies, the literature analyzed reveals active community participation in ecotourism projects still appears to be a farfetched goal. Yet, the view that community participation has direct and indirect positive effects on the local community and the success of ecotourism ventures was very evident. The differences in the level of participation are influenced by factors such as how the concept of ecotourism is understood in a region, model of administration, presence or absence of resources, and political and cultural factors. Hence, to plan local community participation in any region, it is important to consider all these factors. However, how far community participation can be carried out consistently for a longer term is a serious issue that should be discussed. A detailed review from the present study would significantly contribute to such discussions.

8. Limitations and Future Research

Even though the study helps understand the aspects of community participation in ecotourism, it is not free from certain limitations. This study is only based on the analysis from literature in the form of published articles, thereby excluding other forms of published and unpublished works. Since the inferences are based only on the content analysis method, further studies aided with different types of analysis will help get more insights.

The various complexities and dynamics of local communities regarding participation prove why it shouldn't be approached from a "one size fits all perspective." Hence, it is the need of the hour for the studies that elaborate on community participation in ecotourism to move from discussing the significance and need for community participation to explore the effective ways through which it can be implemented (Bello et al., 2016). Also, the inevitable presence of NGOs and government agencies in ecotourism planning stresses the need for a participation framework in which local communities get their equal representation in participation.

Community's willingness to participate changes over the stages of tourism development in the region. During the early stages of ecotourism development, they show a positive attitude towards ecotourism and willingness to participate (Chen & Qiu, 2017). However, there is no guarantee that such a positive attitude sustains in the later stages when ecotourism projects fail to meet the community's expectations in terms of benefits (Ma & Wen, 2019). Hence there is

a need for site-specific studies that monitor and evaluates community participation at different stages of ecotourism development in the future.

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