



A conceptual framework of tourism social entrepreneurship for sustainable community development

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ABSTRACT

The continuous search for responsible and sustainable practices in the tourism industry paves the way for alternative approaches to tourism development. Often, local communities are at the foreground of these innovative tourism entrepreneurship and development strategies. The emergence of social enterprises operating in tourism refocuses the agenda of engaging and developing disadvantaged and underdeveloped communities sustainably through the industry. Tourism social entrepreneurship (TSE) is suggested as a market-based strategy to address social problems whilst maximising the benefits and minimising the negative consequences that tourism may provide to host communities. To date, there is limited understanding of how TSE can be a catalyst for sustainable community development. The purpose of this paper is to address this gap in knowledge by conceptualising TSE as a more holistic strategy for sustainable community development. By critically analysing the literature, this paper situates TSE within and for community development. A conceptual framework that incorporates community development concepts, generic social entrepreneurship and TSE principles, and community capitals perspectives, is proposed. This conceptual paper contributes to the emerging literature on TSE and may assist the actors in the TSE system as they establish new community-centric social enterprises.

1. Introduction

Communities, particularly those located in less-developed countries, are continuously faced with various social problems. The potential for tourism to drive economic growth makes it a relevant tool for developing low-income and underserved communities, and places these localities at the centre of tourism development (Scheyvens, 2002). Previous work implies that communities in need possess the necessary tourism assets, provide the local experiences that tourists seek and construct the spaces that they consume (Beeton, 2006; Dolezal & Burns, 2014). This leads to the goal of developing communities holistically and sustainably, often through community-based and pro-poor tourism initiatives (López-Guzmán, Borges, & Cerezo, 2011) that are aimed at providing regenerative economic and social wealth, including environmental benefits.

Tourism relies on various enterprises to mobilise the industry (Solvoll, Alsos, & Bulanova, 2015); this gives tourism businesses a critical role in delivering desired community development outcomes. Consequently, the orthodox tourism entrepreneurship and development models are skewed towards a capitalist approach that weakens the intended benefits of the industry, especially for host communities (Brookes, Altinay, & Ringham, 2014; Pollock, 2015). Dredge (2017)

depicts that there is little indication that tourism delivers these outcomes sustainably, challenging the traditional business models employed in the tourism and hospitality industry. By creating social value and inducing societal transformation at large, ‘social entrepreneurship’ practiced in tourism has the potential to counter these negative externalities (Altinay, Sigala, & Waligo, 2016; Newbert & Hill, 2014; Sheldon, Pollock, & Daniele, 2017).

Widely adopted since the 1980s, *social entrepreneurship* promotes an alternative business model established from non-profit ventures, also known as social enterprises, having the goal of eradicating various social problems such as poverty, lack of education, poor public health, unemployment, and other social needs unmet by the public and private sectors (Bornstein & Davis, 2010; Johnson, 2000). Apart from having social aims, social entrepreneurship is directed at eliminating the negative consequences or externalities that may arise from commercial operations, while distributing positive and sustainable outcomes to local communities and beneficiaries (Newbert & Hill, 2014; Shaw & Carter, 2007). In recent years, the application of social entrepreneurship in tourism, or *tourism social entrepreneurship* (TSE), has been emerging given the fact that tourism is one of the first industries to incorporate sustainable development in its agenda (Sloan, Legrand, & Simons-Kaufmann, 2014; von der Weppen & Cochrane, 2012).

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The scale of tourism social enterprises operating worldwide is not well-documented. This may be due to the varying recognition and legitimacy status of these ventures in their respective country context (e.g. de Lange & Dodds, 2017). Many academic case studies show that these tourism social enterprises exist in and for marginalised communities, often in developing countries (e.g. Biddulph, 2017; Laeis & Lemke, 2016; Stenvall, Laven, & Gelbman, 2017). Likewise, tourism social enterprises are usually micro, small or medium-scale organisations (Dredge, 2017; Porter, Orams, & Lück, 2015), and have been depicted as industry outliers that are aimed to positively transform the tourism system (Smith, 2017). By looking at the context of its operations, social missions, beneficiaries and geographic settings, TSE can be viewed as a catalyst for developing host communities. The scant academic literature shows no previous attempt that frames sustainable community development as the primary aim for TSE.

Against this backdrop, the purpose of this paper is to conceptualise TSE as a more holistic strategy for the sustainable development of communities. This paper responds to the call to theorise social entrepreneurship through tourism and how TSE can be a community-centric form of social innovation (e.g. Dredge, 2017; Mottiar & Boluk, 2017; Wang, Duan, & Yu, 2016). Through critically analysing the literature, this paper initially provides a brief review of what social entrepreneurship is. Thereafter, this paper situates social entrepreneurship in tourism, describes some of the schemes applied in TSE, and locates TSE within and for community development. By adopting a systems perspective, a conceptual framework based on the integration of community development concepts, generic social entrepreneurship and TSE principles, and community capitals perspectives is proposed. The conceptual framework illustrates how TSE can serve as a vehicle for sustainable community development, and in doing so, adds to the developing literature on this topic.

2. Literature review

2.1. What is social entrepreneurship?

Since its emergence, social entrepreneurship has received a multitude of overarching yet complementary definitions. Social entrepreneurship is simply described as a business activity with a central social purpose (Austin, Stevenson, & Wei-Skillern, 2006). This activity is led by *social entrepreneurs*, individuals who are championed as society's 'agents of change' viewing social problems as opportunities (Dees, 1998). In this light, social entrepreneurship is defined as "the process of identifying, evaluating and exploiting opportunities aiming at social value creation by means of commercial, market-based activities and of the use of a wide range of resources" (Bacq & Janssen, 2011, p. 374). Social entrepreneurship is conceptualised as a market-based approach for generating social impacts.

Social entrepreneurship has been portrayed as an instrument for countering the undesirable costs that traditional (solely) for-profit entrepreneurship brings to society. It is designed to minimise the negative effects or externalities that commercial businesses can have on actors employed in their operations (Newbert & Hill, 2014). This can be achieved through social entrepreneurship ventures or *social enterprises*, which adopt business models designed to create social value whilst generating economic benefits. Social enterprises can engage and operate in different industries, just as traditional enterprises do. Engaging in some form of trading, social enterprises create surpluses that are used to deliver both economic and social outcomes to their beneficiaries. Furthermore, social enterprises are usually found at the intersections of the work of cooperatives and non-profit organisations (NPOs), tend to operate in the social economy, and work by taking higher financial risks to fund their social causes (Defourny, 2001; Defourny & Nyssens, 2006).

Conversely, the goal of social enterprises is to distribute social and economic wealth more evenly among the individuals involved in their processes and the wider community (Shaw & Carter, 2007; Zahra,

Gedajlovic, Neubaum, & Shulman, 2009), unlike traditional commercial enterprises that are primarily aimed at increasing personal or shareholder wealth (Abu-Saifan, 2012, pp. 22–27). Given this, social entrepreneurship is also asserted as a form of 'social innovation', or the adoption of creative ideas that have the potential to positively impact people's quality of life (Pol & Ville, 2009). In other words, social entrepreneurship employs a high degree of inclusivity and creativity in dealing with societal problems, whilst considering the population's adaptive capacity (Zeyen et al., 2013). This idea is often linked with social entrepreneurs' ability to innovate, make sound decisions, remain pro-active amidst complex situations and challenges (such as lack of funding and resources) and engage local communities (Mort, Weerawardena, & Carnegie, 2003; Okpara & Halkias, 2011; Shaw & Carter, 2007). These propositions set a high importance on the concept of innovation in social entrepreneurship.

Continuous innovation is linked with inducing the wider sustainable societal transformation that is engendered by social entrepreneurs (Alvord, Brown, & Letts, 2004; Choi & Majumdar, 2014). Others suggest this as the concept of achieving 'total wealth', which is the economic and social benefits delivered by social enterprises to enhance society's wellbeing (Zahra et al., 2009). It has been explored that social entrepreneurship can foster societal transformation that can be economic, political or cultural in nature (Alvord et al., 2004). Nevertheless, it has been explicated that this envisioned positive and sustainable societal change should flow through to the community level, placing these localities at the heart of the social entrepreneurship agenda (Defourny & Nyssens, 2006; El Ebrashi, 2013). Given the many social problems that people face today, opportunities for social entrepreneurship can be found in many levels and sectors of society, and tourism is regarded as an industry where social entrepreneurs can find opportunities to fulfil their societal responsibilities.

2.2. Situating social entrepreneurship in tourism

The critical concepts that surround social entrepreneurship include social value creation, social innovation, and sustainability; these also encapsulate the significance of social entrepreneurship in the tourism industry. Based on this argument, TSE is defined as:

a process that uses tourism to create innovative solutions to immediate social, environmental and economic problems in destinations by mobilizing the ideas, capacities, resources and social agreements, from within or outside the destination, required for its sustainable social transformation. (Sheldon et al., 2017, p. 7).

Governments and development agencies promote tourism as a tool for development (Messerli, 2011). This rationale alone demonstrates the overarching goal of social entrepreneurship and tourism: addressing societal problems and delivering social benefits through market-based activities (Altinay et al., 2016; Porter, Orams, & Lück, 2018). Since the industry is led by enterprises that can be found across the tourism value system, it can be asserted that the potential of TSE to deliver economic and social benefits will be heightened if these establishments place a greater emphasis on creating social value.

Responding to this challenge are the growing number of mainly for-profit tourism enterprises that have embedded corporate social responsibility (CSR) in their agenda. This is partly because businesses with a more meaningful, corporate social mission lean towards producing higher profits than those that are solely 'for-profit' (Pollock, 2015; Tamajón & Font, 2013). Yet many tourism enterprises are still primarily commercial and profit-oriented, and tend to disregard the social aspects of doing business (Altinay et al., 2016).

On the one hand, these traditional tourism enterprises can deliver direct benefits from their operations, which are perceived as playing pivotal roles in destinations' local development. For example, the tourism industry relies on many businesses that require human

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