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Surf-riding tourism in coastal fishing communities: A comparative case study of two projects from the Philippines

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ABSTRACT

Coastal inhabitants in the less developed world face growing challenges associated with dependence on marine resources in decline. The development of alternative livelihoods is one potential solution to alleviate dependency on fisheries. Tourism continues to be suggested as a potential development strategy for coastal communities, yet surf-riding tourism has received little attention as a means to achieve development goals. This paper documents two unique models currently being applied in remote artisanal fisheries communities within the Philippines. The data used to document the models have been derived from a combination of key informant interviews with surf-riding tourism developers/operators and *in situ* observations of the surf-riding tourism project operations. Results suggest the positive potential for surf-riding tourism as a development strategy in response to the changing needs of artisanal fishing communities in developing nations.

1. Introduction

Marine resources, primarily fisheries, have long been a livelihood for coastal inhabitants (Allison et al., 2005). In areas where alternative income opportunities are limited, fishers become critically dependent on coastal and marine resources not only for sustenance, but also for income (Kronen et al., 2010). The heavy reliance on fisheries creates considerable risks for the resource and those dependent upon it, due to illegal fishing practices and overfishing (Kronen et al., 2010; Turner et al., 2007). It is apparent that with the continued degradation of coastal fisheries, the communities reliant on them will be forced to change. The increasing use of illegal and destructive fishing methods such as fine mesh setnets, dynamite and cyanide, are indicators of such adaptation (Baticados, 2004). Necessity is altering traditional ways of living.

1.1. Tourism as development

Tourism is a rapidly evolving global industry and it has grown to become a large and powerful economic sector worldwide (UNWTO, 2004). Many authors have discussed (and advocated) for tourism development as a potential response to declining resources and/or weak economies such as those characteristic of coastal fishing communities in lesser-developed nations (e.g., Bunce et al., 2008; Croes and Vanegas, 2008; Laws, 2009; UNWTO, 2004). This approach is justified by a significant overlap in equipment used by fishers and marine tour operators (Cheong, 2005; Mensah and Antwi, 2002). From an economic standpoint the introduction of tourism as a supplemental activity to fishing could serve to maximise capital investments. Cheong (2005) suggested the benefits of the industry overlap, where the skills necessary for fishing (e.g., captaining and crewing of vessels, knowledge of local marine fauna) are of potential benefit to the tourism industry. Access to a tourism economy by fishing households has the capability to provide a valuable supplemental economic activity and to contribute to improved livelihoods.

The integration of marine tourism into fishing communities can potentially serve as a resource management strategy when it adds value to the marine resources by providing an alternate non-extractive use of those resources. However, despite numerous proposals and suggestions for pro-poor tourism or tourism as a development strategy (e.g., Armada et al., 2009; Bauer, 2005; Croes and Vanegas, 2008; Laws, 2009; Mensah and Amuquandoh, 2010;

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Mograbi and Rogerson, 2007), cases of successful, transferable models remain rare. Many examples of fisherfolk participation in marine tourism and more specifically surf-riding tourism exist. For example, in the Mentawais, a popular surf-riding tourism destination in Indonesia, some of the tour vessels that carry surfers are converted fishing vessels (Ponting, 2001). Likewise, fisherfolk in Lombok, Indonesia, offer ad hoc charters to the Gili Islands (personal observation, April 8, 2003). While some examples such as these are available, there remains a lack of applicable marine tourism development models. Fabinyi (2010) describes the current trajectory of tourism development in the Philippines as having an "ambiguous" effect on the fishers. This gap of applicable tourism development models may be a consequence of research interests responding to conflicts created by a shift to tourism or the difficulty of documenting a gradual absorption of fisherfolk into the tourism sector. Thus, there remains a need to document plausible models for tourism development with specific benefits for fisherfolk communities (Fabinyi, 2010).

1.2. Surf-riding tourism

Surf-riding tourism has been slow to gain recognition in the academic literature (e.g., Buckley, 2002a, 2002b; Ponting et al., 2005); however, there has been a recent surge of attention (e.g., Martin & Assenov, 2012, 2014; Orams and Towner, 2013; Ponting and McDonald, 2013; Ponting & O'Brien, 2014; Shuman and Hodgeson, 2009; Usher and Kerstetter, 2014). Buckley (2002a & 2002b) offered an early description of the economic, environmental and social effects of surf-riding tourism development on Indo-Pacific island communities. He notes social marginalisation as a significant social risk, describing the effect as "second class citizens" where community members are displaced by tourism development and can no longer afford to live in the area (Buckley, 2002a, p. 421). More recently, Usher and Kerstetter (2014) used ethnographic research to explore the perceptions of surf-riding tourism development in coastal Nicaragua. They found community perceptions to be overall positive; however, describe the importance of appropriate planning for sustainable development. Martin and Assenov (2012) "placed surf tourism research into three conceptual stages for discussion: an *Early Period* (1997–2000); a *Formative Period* (2001–2006); and a *Progressive Period* (2007–2011)" (p. 271).

The work of Orams and Towner (2013) emphasises the diversity of the surf-riding industry offering descriptive definitions of relevant activities, while Martin and Assenov (2014) suggest a conservation matrix for surf-riding resources based on environmental, economic, and governance indicators. Drivers for surf-riding tourism (production and consumption) have also been explored in the research (Ponting and McDonald, 2013). Rendle and Rodwell (2014) investigated the multiple functions of artificial surfing reefs (ASRs) noting that they are designed to contribute to the local community. However, they caution that there is a lack of research supporting this claim. For example, Di Tota and Lück (2015) report that the ASR in Mount Maunganui, New Zealand failed to deliver the expected community benefits. Subsequently, the local council announced to remove the ASR. Overall, sustainability of the surf-riding tourism industry remains a predominant theme in much of the research (Martin & Assenov, 2014; Ponting & O'Brien, 2014; Shuman and Hodgeson, 2009; Usher and Kerstetter, 2014).

2. Rationale

Towner (2013) states there is a need for more research exploring surf tourism development, specifically studies, "which investigate emerging tourism destinations and tourism types," including surf tourism in less developed countries (p. 53).

The aim of this paper is to provide an overview of two surf-riding tourism models currently being applied in the Philippines. In doing so, this research draws attention to the potential role of surf-riding tourism as a development strategy and adds the Philippines to the currently limited number of published research cases on surf tourism (Martin and Assenov, 2012). Apart from common issues associated with any form of tourism, surf-riding tourism carries its own set of unique characteristics and contingencies. While the general characteristics of the surf-riding tourist vary, many surf-riding tourists will sacrifice comfort for "good" surf (e.g., low numbers of surfers and good, clean waves), as Buckley (2002a) explains, "surf tourists are surfers first and tourists second" (p. 414). This minimalism (in terms of expected infrastructure and services typically found in tourism destinations) associated with surf-riders can be viewed as beneficial to development projects seeking to involve artisanal fisherfolk where service skills, as well as tourism infrastructure and services, may be limited. Additionally, the self-interest of surfers seeks to limit tourism growth as surf-riders prioritise uncrowded surf breaks (Buckley, 2002a,b; Orams and Towner, 2013; Ponting, 2014; Towner, 2013). The two models proposed in this paper have diverse functional characteristics; however, both reveal commonalities that may increase the potential transferability of the models to other settings. Therefore, this comparative case study analysis seeks to explore the relevance of surf-riding tourism as a development strategy and in doing so identify potentially beneficial components of existing surf-riding tourism models being applied in remote fishing communities.

3. Research design

This research was qualitative, interpretive and based on a case study approach. Flyvbjerg (2006) advocates the importance of a case study stating:

> One can often generalise on the basis of a single case, and the case study may be central to scientific development via generalisation as supplement or alternative to other methods. But formal generalisation is overvalued as a source of scientific development, whereas 'the force of example' is underestimated. (p.12)

Our analysis was guided by Buckley's (2002a, b) documentation of Indo-Pacific surf tourism in the sense that it provides an "introductory overview" of two models worthy of "academic attention" (p. 406). Pragmatism was adopted as the research paradigm (James, 1907; Schuh and Barab, 2007). James (1907) states that researchers should be "interested in no conclusions but those, which our minds and our experiences work out together" (p. 22). This justification does not condone a loose methodology; instead James (1907) suggests that validity be improved by choosing appropriate theologies as fitting for the benefit of the data. Schuh and Barab (2007) argue pragmatism as "neither an epistemology or an ontology," and instead describe knowledge as being, "derived from interaction among groups of individuals and the artefacts in their environment, both of which create a reality" (p. 72). Within the pragmatic approach, a constructivist paradigm was adopted. Proponents of constructivism understand that the interactions between the researcher and the participants contribute to the knowledge construct, thus, affecting the research outcomes adopted (Racher and Robinson, 2003). Such a paradigm is appropriate here to accomplish the research goal of describing cases of surf-riding tourism development projects.

The key informants (KI) in this study are the operators/founders of the surf-riding tourism development projects. Thus, the choice to