

SOCIO-CULTURAL DIMENSION OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

Socio-Cultural Tourism Impacts (Page & Connell, 2020)

Tourism involves direct contact between hosts and guests; hence, interactions are unavoidable. Society and culture play a key role in promoting tourism by being presented or "packaged" as an attraction to tourists seeking meaningful experiences within a destination's society. **Society** focuses on how people behave, interact, and relate to each other in groups, while **culture** refers to social interactions, relationships, and physical objects. Various cultural elements can serve as tourist attractions, such as handicrafts, traditions, local cuisine, art, music, and historical sites.

Cultural Heritage

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) defines cultural heritage as "the legacy of physical artifacts and intangible attributes of a group or society inherited from past generations, maintained in the present, and passed on for the benefit of future generations." According to the UNESCO Framework for Cultural Statistics, cultural heritage is categorized into two (2) main types:

- *Tangible cultural heritage* includes physical cultural assets that are significant for the archaeology, architecture, and scientific/technological heritage of a culture. These are preserved to benefit future generations and can include historic buildings, monuments, sites, and artifacts.
- *Intangible cultural heritage* includes the practices, representations, knowledge, and skills that are recognized as part of a community, group, or individual's cultural identity. Examples include traditional festivals, ways of life, oral traditions, and traditional crafts.

Relationship Between Tourists and Local Communities

The nature of both tourists visiting a destination and the host population can significantly influence each other. When tourists visit a place and interact with the local people, they can have a big impact on each other. This interaction can lead to positive experiences, like learning about different cultures and gaining new understanding, which benefits both the tourists and the locals. However, it can also cause problems, especially if there are differences in values or behaviors. This mix of tourists and locals can either lead to great experiences or create misunderstandings and conflicts, underscoring the need for responsible and respectful tourism.

Positive Socio-Cultural Impacts of Tourism (Stainton, 2023)

Tourism offers opportunities for understanding and appreciating others' cultures and societies. The following are some of the socio-cultural benefits of tourism:

Improved Well-Being and Empowerment

Tourism can create new job opportunities and income sources for residents, leading to increased social engagement. People with stable employment tend to be happier and more socially connected than those without income. Stable employment gives a sense of security and purpose, which leads to improved mental health because there is a constant income expected for personal needs, wants, and emergencies. This allows individuals to have better personal and social relationships without the worry of unemployment.

For example, tourism in Lake Sebu, South Cotabato, has created stable jobs for locals, especially women, who produce traditional T'nalak cloth (textiles made from abaca fibers). These textiles are sold to tourists to gain consistent income, which allows them to support their families. These economic

opportunities allow them to preserve their heritage and contribute to job satisfaction and empowerment of the indigenous tribe (Garcia, n.d.).

Every destination has unique cultural elements that can be leveraged to attract tourists. These cultural assets, often provided by residents, not only enhance the tourist experience but also generate demand for local goods and services. This demand creates jobs and provides a livelihood for locals, including women, marginalized groups, and Indigenous people, which empowers them because everyone has a fair chance when it comes to their jobs and responsibilities.

Preservation of Cultural Heritage

Cultural heritage is an asset for tourism, and its preservation is crucial for future generations. Tourism plays a key role in maintaining and revitalizing traditional art forms and cultural practices. By showcasing these cultural elements to visitors, tourism can foster a greater appreciation and understanding of local traditions, leading to stronger connections between residents and tourists.

For instance, the influx of tourists during festivals in the Philippines significantly boosts the local economy. This revenue can be reinvested in organizing the festivals and supporting various cultural groups that participate. This financial support allows the host provinces to maintain their traditional elements (local music, costumes, and rituals) while improving their infrastructure to accommodate the growing number of tourists.

Properly managed tourism can support the preservation of cultural heritage regardless of the number of visitors. It helps conserve important aspects of local culture, such as archaeological sites, traditional arts, handicrafts, dance, music, drama, customs, ceremonies, and traditional clothing. Additionally, tourism can provide financial support for the upkeep of museums, theaters, and other cultural facilities.

In this way, tourism can be a powerful tool for preserving and promoting cultural heritage, ensuring that traditional practices and sites are valued and maintained for the enjoyment and education of future generations.

Enhanced Quality of Life

Tourism development can significantly improve the quality of life for local communities by introducing various projects and enhancements. These improvements often include upgrades to public services and infrastructure that benefit both residents and tourists. Examples include improved transportation networks, enhanced facilities, and more reliable utilities like electricity.

Vigan City in Ilocos Sur has enhanced its tourism infrastructure with well-preserved heritage sites, improved roads, and accommodations to attract visitors to its colonial charm. These improvements also benefit the locals.

Beyond these tangible benefits, tourism also provides valuable experiences that broaden perspectives. Tourism fosters cultural awareness and mutual understanding, allowing both tourists and residents to explore and appreciate diverse ways of life. This exposure helps people gain a deeper appreciation for their own culture and identity as they compare with others.

Tourism can also encourage greater self-awareness and reflection on cultural values and practices. By engaging with different cultures and seeing various ways of living, individuals often develop a richer understanding of their heritage and a greater respect for the traditions and values of others.

Cultural Reaffirmation

Residents' pride can be boosted when tourists show appreciation for the local culture of a destination. This occurs during interactions between tourists and locals. As tourists express interest in learning about and experiencing the host community's traditions, residents feel a deeper connection to their own culture.

For example, when locals perform their traditional dance and music, tourists become interested in their history and significance. This gives locals a renewed sense of pride, which encourages them to preserve these unique traditions.

This positive cultural exchange can enhance the emotional well-being of locals, giving them a sense of validation and pride in their heritage. Tourism, in this way, encourages locals to preserve and celebrate their cultural identity, reinforcing its importance not only for themselves but also for visitors. It highlights the socio-cultural impact of tourism in fostering a shared understanding and respect between different cultures, strengthening the host community's connection to their traditions.

Cross-cultural Exchange

Tourism encourages cross-cultural exchange by allowing tourists and residents to learn about each other's cultures, values, and traditions. This interaction fosters mutual understanding and respect as both groups gain insight into different ways of life.

For instance, locals and tourists celebrate fiestas together in the Philippines. Tourists can participate in traditional dance performances and taste local delicacies while locals can share stories about their practices in their country. This allows them to both appreciate their culture, which can create bonds between them.

Through these exchanges, tourists can deepen their appreciation of the host culture while residents can share and celebrate their heritage. This can lead to more meaningful interactions and stronger connections between diverse communities. The socio-cultural impact of cross-cultural exchange is significant, as it promotes greater cultural awareness, reduces stereotypes, and helps build mutual respect across different cultures.

Negative Socio-Cultural Impacts of Tourism (Stainton, 2023)

Tourism plays a positive role in society by enabling cross-cultural interactions, but it can also disrupt local cultures and social dynamics. Some of the negative socio-cultural impacts of tourism are the following:

Overcrowding and Deficiency of Amenities for Residents

When tourism leads to overcrowding in public amenities, shopping areas, and community facilities, locals may find it difficult to access these resources themselves. Additionally, congestion in transportation systems caused by an influx of tourists can disrupt daily life for locals. As a result, residents may become frustrated and develop resentment toward tourism.

For instance, during the Panagbenga Festival and Holy Week, tourists frequent Baguio City. This can make it difficult for locals to access public places such as parks, markets, and public transportation since tourists will compete with them.

This negative socio-cultural impact occurs when tourism growth is not properly managed, leading to tension between locals and visitors. Overcrowding can diminish the quality of life for residents, as their access to essential services and spaces becomes limited due to high tourist demand.

Commodification of Culture

The commodification of culture occurs when traditional arts, crafts, customs, and ceremonies are altered or performed to meet tourist expectations, often losing their authenticity in the process.

For example, traditional dances or music might be performed outside their cultural context to satisfy tourist demand, losing their true cultural significance.

As tourism grows, cultural elements can become commercialized, turning something once authentic and meaningful into a product for mass consumption. This shift assigns a material value to the local culture and the destination itself, making it feel less genuine. The socio-cultural impact of this commodification is that the deep cultural heritage of a community becomes diluted, as its original meaning is overshadowed by the need to cater to tourists' desires, often at the expense of cultural integrity.

Cultural Clashes

Cultural clashes arise from differences in cultures, ethnicities, religions, values, lifestyles, and languages between tourists and locals. These conflicts can be intensified by fundamental cultural misunderstandings.

For example, in Japan, leaving a tip is seen as disrespectful, which can lead to confusion or even tension between tourists and the locals.

Such clashes represent a negative socio-cultural impact of tourism, as they can create friction between the host community and visitors. When tourists unknowingly disrespect local customs or cultural norms, it can lead to resentment, misunderstandings, and strained relationships, highlighting the importance of cultural sensitivity in tourism interactions.

Moral Decadence

Moral decadence refers to the negative influence of certain immoral or illegal activities brought in by foreign tourists, such as prostitution and drug or human trafficking. Local communities, particularly in economically vulnerable areas, may become susceptible to exploitation by tourists engaging in these activities. In some cases, residents, out of desperation for income, may become involved in illegal trades, especially during peak tourist seasons.

For example, due to the influx of foreigners in Angeles City, Pampanga, illegal prostitution became prominent, where teenage Filipinas are trafficked or pushed into human trafficking due to family pressure (The Washington Post, 2019).

This socio-cultural impact reflects how tourism can sometimes fuel harmful behaviors in a destination, eroding local values and leading to social problems. When economic pressures push people toward illegal or unethical means of making a living, it undermines the moral fabric of the community and tarnishes the long-term benefits of tourism.

Acculturation

Acculturation occurs when two (2) cultures come into contact over time, leading to an exchange of ideas, products, and practices. As this interaction continues, elements of both cultures begin to merge, often resulting in similarities between them. However, the process is usually unbalanced, with the stronger or more dominant culture exerting a greater influence over the other.

For example, locals who often interact with tourists are exposed to their fashion trends, which they eventually copy later.

A negative impact of acculturation in tourism is the gradual loss of cultural diversity. As foreign cultures influence local traditions and customs, the uniqueness of a destination's cultural identity can be diminished, leading to a more homogenized global culture. This socio-cultural impact threatens the preservation of distinct cultural heritages, as those of the dominant culture may replace local values and practices.

Social Change

Social change refers to shifts in the behavior, values, or customs of a society. In the context of tourism, these changes can often be undesirable. Tourism has the power to influence local communities in various ways, sometimes leading to negative outcomes.

For example, locals might adopt new ways of speaking or dressing to cater to tourists, or they may be exposed to alcohol and other behaviors that were not previously part of their culture. In some cases, resentment toward wealthier tourists can lead to increased crime. These are examples of how tourism can disrupt traditional lifestyles and bring about negative social impacts, affecting the cultural integrity and social fabric of local communities.

Understanding the socio-cultural impacts of tourism on a country will enable each stakeholder to make correct decisions that balance economic benefits with cultural preservation. This will, in turn, help ensure that tourism contributes positively to society's well-being and cultural integrity.

The Role of Tourism in the Society (Pongponrat, 2022)

To ensure sustainable tourism, it is essential to understand how tourism can positively shape and manage the economy, like how it needs to protect the environment. Below are how tourism should play a significant role in economic management:

- **Cultural Advocate.** Tourism serves as a significant promoter of cultural heritage and traditions by showcasing and celebrating local cultures, arts, and customs. It supports and funds local festivals, traditional ceremonies, and artistic endeavors, which helps to preserve and promote these cultural practices. By attracting visitors to historical and cultural landmarks, tourism generates interest and investment in maintaining these heritage sites. Additionally, tourism boosts the market for local crafts and traditional goods, encouraging the continuation of these practices and sustaining cultural traditions.
- **Catalyst for Social Advancement.** Tourism plays a vital role in social development by creating job opportunities and supporting local businesses. It generates employment across various sectors, including hospitality, transportation, and retail, thereby providing jobs for residents. Moreover, tourism contributes to economic diversification by offering additional income sources, which reduces reliance on single industries and fosters a more resilient local economy.
- **Knowledge Facilitator.** Tourism acts as an educator and awareness builder by offering both visitors and locals insights into different cultures and global perspectives. Through cultural education, tourists gain knowledge about local customs, history, and traditions, which fosters greater understanding and respect. Furthermore, tourism exposes individuals to diverse ways of life, promoting cross-cultural understanding and tolerance and enhancing global perspectives.
- **Cultural and Social Mediator.** Tourism influences and regulates cultural and social dynamics by shaping local attitudes and behaviors. It promotes cultural sensitivity by encouraging respectful interactions between visitors and locals, which helps to reduce cultural misunderstandings. Effective tourism management also involves local communities in decision-making processes, ensuring that their needs and cultural values are respected and integrated into tourism practices.
- **Social Impact Assessor.** Tourism monitors and assesses social changes within communities because of increased visitor interactions. Through impact assessments, tourism evaluates its effects on local societies and cultures, identifying areas that require improvement. Feedback mechanisms engage with local communities and tourists to gather insights, guiding the development of policies that

mitigate negative impacts and enhance positive outcomes. This ongoing monitoring ensures that tourism contributes constructively to social and cultural dynamics.

By emphasizing these roles, tourism can contribute to sustainable socio-cultural development, maximizing cultural benefits while addressing social and environmental concerns. Balancing cultural preservation with economic growth helps ensure that tourism remains a positive force for both community well-being and cultural integrity.

References:

- Cruz, R. G. (2019). *Sustainable Tourism*. Rex Bookstore.
- Garcia, A. (n.d.). *How T'nalak looms the threads of T'boli traditions*. Retrieved October 1, 2024, from <https://thelasallian.com/2022/02/24/how-tnalak-loom-the-threads-of-tboli-traditions/>
- Lopez, E. Osorno, R., & Bajao, G. (2023). *Sustainable tourism*. Wiseman.
- Mason, P. (2020). *Tourism impacts, planning and management* (4th ed.). Routledge.
- McCool, S. F., & Bosak, K. (2016). *Reframing sustainable tourism*. Springer.
- Page, S. & Connell, J. (2020). *Tourism: A modern synthesis*. Routledge.
- Pongponrat, K. (2022). *Sustainability in tourism: Understanding sustainable solutions for the tourism industry*. Hospitality, Tourism, and Marketing Studies.
- Roditism L. (2021). *Tourism as a drive of development: An evidence from selected tourism stakeholders in Vigan City*. Retrieved October 1, 2024, from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/350510714_Tourism_as_A_Driver_of_Development_An_Evidence_from_Selected_Tourism_Stakeholders_in_Vigan_City
- Santos, M. (2023). *Sustainable tourism*. Mindshapers
- Slocum, S. (2020). *The business of sustainable tourism*. Routledge.
- Stainton, H. (2023, September 1). *Social impacts of tourism*. Tourism Teacher. Retrieved September 13, 2024, from <https://tourismteacher.com/social-impacts-of-tourism/>
- The Washington Post. (2019, November 18). *In Philippine red-light district, an uphill struggle to battle trafficking and abuses*. Retrieved October 1, 2023, from https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia-pacific/in-philippine-red-light-district-an-uphill-struggle-to-battle-trafficking-and-abuses/2019/11/17/43a6470a-bad3-11e9-b3b4-2bb69e8c4e39_story.html