

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT THROUGH TOURISM – THE CASE OF MARSTRAND IN WEST SWEDEN

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ABSTRACT

This article shows how tourism contributes to sustainable community development in a coastal community. An extensive study of local inhabitants and entrepreneurs in Marstrand in West Sweden was performed containing both quantitative and qualitative data. A community-based approach to sustainability was used (Saarinen, 2006; Moscardo, 2007) and the study show how a lack of collaboration between actors in the tourism system, a lack of knowledge on tourism and a lack of a holistic view to tourism development, hinders tourism development.

Key Words: coastal tourism, community development, tourism development, sustainability, community based approach.

INTRODUCTION

In tourism research and practice there is a growing awareness of the need to observe tourism in a broader community context (Saarinen, 2006). As Wall and Mathieson (2006) state, tourism destination development does not occur in isolation and traditional ways of dealing with tourism development in a narrow and specialized manner limits the understanding of the phenomenon in several different ways. Furthermore, the need for local anchoring of tourism development processes is often stressed in the field of sustainable tourism development (Hall, 2005; Moscardo, 2007; Okazaki, 2008).

Many Nordic coastal communities struggle with problems such as out-migration and a declining traditional industry, such as fishing. These coastal communities are often marginalised geographically, socially, economically and in terms of demography. Tourism in various forms has been seen as an alternative to traditional industries in coastal communities since it is geographically tied to a place and cannot be moved. Moreover, coastal communities often have natural resources attracting tourists, such as swimming, boating, recreational angling, and marine based ecotourism (Miller, 1993 in Hall, Muller and Saarinen, 2009). The majority of coastal destinations are small scale (Hall, Muller and Saarinen, 2009) with a tourism industry lacking in capital and knowledge. This hinders development although it can mean advantages such as flexibility and strong local anchoring. Thus, tourism is often seen as a means to hinder negative trends in coastal communities, such as out-migration and dismantling of public services such as schools and public transport. The purpose of the paper is to examine how tourism contributes to sustainable community development. How do local residents perceive tourism as a catalyst for positive community development? How do tourism entrepreneurs relate to the community?

This article focuses on Marstrand – a coastal community situated in the south part of the province of Bohuslän on the Swedish West Coast. The community is located on four islands, two of them are linked to each other and to the mainland through bridges, one is reached with cable ferry, and the fourth has no public transport artery. Marstrand has about 1400 inhabitants and is a part of the municipality of Kungälv, having 42 000 inhabitants. Marstrand's history as a tourist destination dates back to the 19th century. In addition to being a health spa destination, the Swedish king Oscar II (1829 – 1907) gave the coastal destination a royal image still very much vivid. In modern time, Marstrand's attractiveness as a tourist destination has its base in the yachting tradition of the community, but also in its very unique natural and cultural landscapes. However, at the same time as Marstrand is one of the most visited tourist destinations on the Swedish west coast, the local community suffers from classical seasonal peaks and dips, as well as backcountry issues. Tourism is restricted to a very

short season, about six weeks, with an over demand from tourists only during three weeks in the summer. In addition, it has a reputation of being a “community of conflicts”. Local inhabitants, summer guests, entrepreneurs, and the municipality often have different ideas on tourism development. Moreover, locals and entrepreneurs experience difficult political and administrative structures in dealing with the municipality. This is problematic since a condition for successful tourism development is that public and private organizations collaborate and act in favor for such development (Davidson and Maitland, 1997). Altogether, these were determinant factors, in the selection of Marstrand as an interesting case in this study.

METHODOLOGY

The empirical data consists of both quantitative and qualitative data. Personal interviews were made with local residents (20) and local entrepreneurs (20). The interviews lasted between 40 minutes to one and a half hour. They were recorded and transcribed. The quantitative survey was sent to the total population (locals and second home owners) of Marstrand (300 answers, 25% answering rate).

THEORETICAL FRAME OF REFERENCE

The fundamental idea behind this article is the notion of long-term and “healthy” development in coastal communities. Thus, in spite of its ambiguity, the notion of sustainable development and tourism has to be clarified. Following the trinity division of traditions in sustainability in tourism studies suggested in Saarinen (2006), a community-based approach is used as a theoretical base. In short, this means that neither the “search for the magical” limits of growth of the coastal destination (resource-based tradition), nor the notion of certain exploiting and sustainable tourism activities (activity-based tradition) are applied (Saarinen, 2006). Instead the empowerment of the local community through participation in the tourism development process is highlighted. Such a perspective disaffiliates with tourism-centric approaches to sustainable development and argues that the correct and critical questions to be raised are ‘if and how tourism may contribute to sustainable development in the community’, rather than suggesting sustainable tourism as a possible and obvious investment (Moscardo, 2007). Hence, in order to contribute to sustainable community development tourism should (in an ideal situation) encourage, not only economic, environmental, social and cultural positive processes, but also futurity, equity, and holism (Redcliff and Woodgate, 1997), and as stated by Mowforth and Munt (2009) educate, involve locals and conserve fragile natural and cultural environments. The latter is however not without its challenges due to its oxymoronic nature, i.e. conservation strategies must be seriously evaluated and equilibrated against the need for communities to develop and modernize (Wall and Mathiesen, 2006). This leads to the issue of the complexity of the community phenomenon, and the need for balancing local voices (Getz and Timur, 2005). As communities consist of different groups of residents, and other groups involved in tourism and community development, all with different knowledge-basis, ideological frames of references, and power to influence development, one challenge is the issue of equally representativeness (Kieti and Akama, 2005; Saarinen, 2006). Furthermore, the community-based approach is not without other challenges, such as the tension between local residents and external tourism experts, and the overall low level of knowledge about the actual notion of tourism and its consequences (Moscardo, 2007).

FINDINGS

The local residents in Marstrand emphasise the importance of remaining Marstrand as a living community where people from different generations can live and work. They point out that in order for this to happen reasonably priced housing must be provided, transportation infrastructure improved as well as workplaces for locals prioritised. The locals are positive to develop tourism in order to achieve this. According to them, tourism can bring about positive effects economically, socially and culturally in terms of for example more workplaces, higher incomes and more leisure activities.

The locals are impatient and worried since they believe that the work to develop the community is to slow. They have a feeling that the municipality do not prioritize Marstrand and that the officials at the municipality regard them as difficult. On the other hand, the respondents also points to other problematic actors who are hindering the development – the locals themselves often cause conflicts as well as the people having second homes at Marstrand.

At the same time as the locals view tourism as a positive potential, they have mixed views. Negative effects of tourism mentioned are the rising prices of housing, which is viewed as the most serious factor hindering a living community, expensive shopping, littering, noise, crowding, and increased adaptation to the tourists at the expense of locals.

Both locals and entrepreneurs point out the short season as the main challenge to develop tourism in Marstrand. Many entrepreneurs have overcapacity during low season, which they would like to use. Most actors state they want tourism development. However, not all entrepreneurs wish for more business – some say they use the calm months to recover from the hectic period and to renovate and develop their operations, whereas others have other businesses elsewhere during low season, thus, they have no incitement to take part in developing tourism in Marstrand. A generation divide seem to exist in the community, where, generally, the older entrepreneurs are satisfied with what they have and they do not want change, and the younger entrepreneurs want Marstrand to grow and that changes would occur.

This difference in attitude between entrepreneurs is reflected in the collaboration between businesses in the community. There exist collaboration, but mostly in-between the same kind of business and not so much in-between actors in the whole tourism system (hotels, restaurants, event companies, etc.). The collaboration is mostly based on personal contacts, and the respondents consider the actors in the industry to be highly opportunistic. A destination marketing organisation exist, Marstrandsföretagarna, however, it has limited resources.

The entrepreneurs also mention problems with collaborating with the municipality. They consider the officials to have lacking knowledge in tourism and event management. Explicit tensions between the municipality and the entrepreneurs in Marstrand exist, for example concerning destination marketing activities, issuing of permits of various kind, and supply and pricing for public services such as parking (both car and boat) and public transport.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed a number of interconnected key perceptions of importance for the understanding of development in a coastal community. Tourism in Marstrand is perceived as a positive force contributing to a healthy commercial life as well as an exiting place to live. However, it is evident that several problematic aspects exist: collaboration between actors in the tourism system is malfunctioning; the level of knowledge of the business of tourism is limited, and a holistic approach to destination development, including all actors in the tourism system, is lacking. We propose a rethinking of sustainable tourism development, more focused on the empowerment of community through participation in the tourism development process (Moscardo, 2007).

More research on similar coastal communities is needed in order to see similarities and differences in how tourism is used in developing a community. Within the Interreg IV project, “Coasts of the future”, more case studies of two other communities in Bohuslän are underway.

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