

“Ecotourism as Community Development Tool – Development of an Evaluation Framework“

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Abstract

Ecotourism can be seen as a tool for community development, especially when focusing on community empowerment as essential core element as well as ecotourism and how it is influenced by a community-based project. The emphasis is on positive effects of ecotourism on a community as well as on the individual tourist. In order to create a research framework, system theory was used to include all stakeholders as well as inputs and outputs. It shows not only a clear connection between ecotourism and community empowerment but also the mutual influence of additional system elements such as the evaluation framework, internal stakeholders and system parameters such as weather and climate. For the evaluation framework for successful community empowerment through ecotourism projects a set of indicators has partly been adapted and created in order to be applicable to the evaluation of various kinds of ecotourism projects in diverse surroundings. Therefore, this framework can be applied to ecotourism projects with different geographical, historical and cultural background and is still able to deliver comparable results. The evaluation framework was tested through questionnaires and interviews in case studies in Nepal, which included three different target groups; community members, project workers and tourists. The main goals of this study are to show how ecotourism projects can positively contribute to community development, to create an evaluation framework that can help to identify common strengths and weaknesses of different projects and to improve the respective case study projects in Nepal.

Keywords: ecotourism; community development; community empowerment; evaluation framework; Nepal

Paper Type: Scientific paper

Introduction

Tourism is currently not only one of the biggest industries, but also has a very high potential for future growth. Hundreds of millions of people all around the world are already indirectly or directly involved and numbers are rising. International tourist numbers will reach around 1.8 billion by 2030 and emerging economies will experience an increase in tourism numbers by 30 million per year by 2015 (UNWTO, 2011). This industry contains high potentials to adapt to sustainable methods. Probably more than any other industry and especially since there is increasing demand for a more sustainable form of tourism. This demand has to come from individual tourists who want to travel with least possible environmental impact. The tourist has a very high capability of learning (about foreign cultures, customs, etc.) along his/her journey. Therefore education is crucial for sustainable tourism (Tisdell and Wilson, 2005). In general, it is essential to achieve a more sustainable development of tourism in the long term, because this might be necessary to preserve nature and landscapes for future generations. In order to achieve those goals it is important to conduct tourism

in a sustainable way to enhance community development and community empowerment. It is necessary to combine tourism with the ideas of sustainability embedded in community development (cp. Butler, 1999; Gössling, 1999; Mowforth and Munt, 2008).

The goal of the paper is to show how regional ecotourism projects can have a positive influence on community development through community empowerment. In order to achieve this goal several steps are necessary. First it is important to have a clear approach to be capable to design a conceptual model afterwards. After finalizing the conceptual model with all necessary variables it will be operationalized through a set of indicators. Finally, the conceptual model will be implemented in a specific case study in Nepal.

Ecotourism

Several tourism concepts are combined under the expressions such as 'environmentally friendly and socially compati-

ble' tourism. Sustainable tourism can be seen as a very similar concept as ecotourism, is mentioned in the Brundtland report (United Nations, 1987) and defined by the UNWTO in 1996 (Earth Summit, 2002). According to the UNEP & UNWTO (2005 as cited in Wearing and Neil, 2009), sustainable tourism requires strong political leadership and the active participation of all stakeholders. Additionally, it is mentioned that the development of sustainable tourism must be seen as a process which requires continuous monitoring of the effects and, if necessary, interference and implementation of correction measures (Weaver, 2006). A fairly new concept is pro-poor tourism which focuses on poverty and its eradication through tourism incomes (Pro-Poor Tourism Organization, 2011; Roe and Urquhart, 2001). Another concept used is responsible tourism. Responsible tourism minimizes the negative effects and maximizes the positive effects of tourism development through undertaking concrete actions in tourism destinations such as capacity building of involved stakeholders (Fabricius and Goodwin, 2002; The Responsible Tourism Partnership, 2011).

One of the biggest problems of most of those tourism forms is the lack of a clear definition. An effect of this missing definition is a lot of green washing within the tourism industry. Therefore, the scientific community as well as governments and tourism stakeholders need a clear definition (Mowforth and Munt, 2003). In order to apply this terminology it is essential to have a very precise description of ecotourism in this paper.

The most important tourism approach for this paper is ecotourism and it is connected with community empowerment and community development. In the 1960s Hetzer (1965) identified four principles of tourism, which can help to decrease environmental effects, respect local cultures, maximize tourist satisfaction and, additionally, bring economic wealth to locals. After this first try of ecotourism concepts Miller (1978 as cited in Honey, 2008) integrated the concepts of conservation and tourism in combination with local communities in his studies about national parks in Latin America. He coined the term 'ecodevelopment' and defined it, as the integration of economic, social and political factors into biological considerations to meet human and environmental needs. The term "ecotourism" was first mentioned by the Mexican environmentalist Ceballos-Lascuráin in 1983 (as cited in Honey, 2008).

The principles of ecotourism are to some extent connected to those of sustainable development. Bramwell (as cited in Butler, 1999) mentions «seven dimension of sustainability» (p. 29). Those are «environmental, cultural, political, economic, social, managerial and governmental» (p. 29). Moreover, Bramwell emphasizes the necessity of pre-existing value systems of a people or a community to be included in rural planning in order to ensure the sustainable development of a region and, therefore, its inclusion in ecotourism concepts. Mowforth and Munt (2003) describe several criteria for sustainable tourism, which are almost congruent with the dimensions Bramwell mentioned and show a very clear structure of the connections between sustainability and tourism. The authors refer not only to the three pillars of sustainability, but also to cultural sustain-

ability, education and participation (of communities). These three factors, additional to economic, ecologic and social factors are very similar to Friedmann's (1992) work about community empowerment.

Ecotourism as an economic incentive for conservation is an ideal strategy for achieving ecologic success for biodiversity protection (Bookbinder et al., 1998; Gössling, 1999). Kiss gets to the heart of the value by putting it this way: "Ecotourism can generate support for conservation among communities as long as they see some benefit" (Kiss, 2004, p. 234). Furthermore, it generates jobs in the field of nature preservation.

In theory these claims are means of solving environmental problems through ecotourism. However, solving these problems is not easy due to the different areas where problems may arise. These problems highly depend on the community, the institutional setting and the habitat. Kerley et al (2003), for example, mention that on the one hand ecotourism can be seen as strong instrument to conserve biodiversity and spread wealth. On the other hand, however, they state that "biodiversity per se is of little interest" (p. 13) to tourists. However, it is very dangerous to state that ecotourism is a panacea for biodiversity protection. Tourism in its original form is one of the biggest threats for biodiversity (IUCN, 1992 as cited in Gössling, 1999). Unregulated tourism can lead to pollution, less benefits through increases in local prices and depletion in natural resources (Jetmore, 2004 as cited in Schloegel, 2007). Ecotourism, if carefully planned, is one way to avoid negative effects (Gössling, 1999).

The International Ecotourism Society characterizes ecotourism as "*Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people*" (TIES, 2012). The essence of ecotourism can be described in three core principles. If it is practiced in as defined it can: (1) protect the environment and enhance biodiversity protection; (2) lead to financial benefits in local communities without disrespect to their culture; and (3) provide education for indigenous communities as well as for visitors (Blangy and Metha, 2006). Honey (2008) mentions seven characteristics for 'real ecotourism', which can be seen as a stricter version of the above mentioned definition:

1. Travel to natural destinations;
2. Impact minimization on environment as well as on local culture;
3. Environmental awareness building for locals and tourists;
4. Direct financial benefit for conservation through ecotourism;
5. Financial benefit and empowerment for locals should be provided if ecotourism is seen as a tool for community development;
6. Respects for local culture as in learning local customs and accepting certain cultural differences;
7. Human rights support and encouragement of democratic movements.

The main aspects of ecotourism for this paper are based on TIES (2012) and Honey (2008).

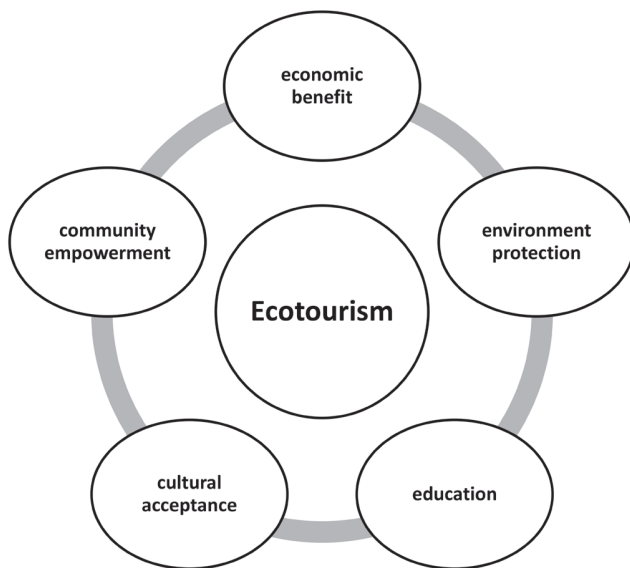


Figure 1. Five core elements of ecotourism.

Source: based upon TIES, 2012 and Honey, 2008.

However, something that should not be forgotten is the travel to and from the tourist destination, which is very often not conducted in a sustainable way. As this paper will focus on tourist destinations the journey to this destination will not be included in the discussion or the results.

Community Development

Characterizing a community is a difficult task as the community is always self-defining (Community Development Foundation, 2011). Community has several meanings (Merriam Webster, 2012) but in our understanding a community is a group of people with the same interests (social, economic, ecological, and political) and characteristics (history, culture, political) living together in the same region (within a bigger society).

Community development is described in many different ways. However, the core essence of all approaches is the improvement of communities and its members (Head, 1979; Chekki, 1979). "Community Development is a process designed to create conditions of economic and social progress for the whole community with its active participation and fullest possible reliance upon the community's initiative" (Head, 1979, p. 101). A recent characterization for community development is delivered by the National Occupational Standards (2009). It is argued that community development is a long-term process which enables people to organize themselves and work together. It is a procedure which addresses social justice, equality, inclusion and imbalance in power in order to improve the economic and social framework of a society. This whole process needs sufficient and appropriate resources (knowledge and money) and needs to be able to adapt to new factors arising (Community Development Exchange, 2011a).

In the center of this approach are several core principles of community development such as equality, anti-discrimination, collective action, working and learning, social justice and community empowerment (Community Development Exchange, 2011b). Furthermore, it seems clear that one of the main goals

is to (re)build communities according to these core principles (Community Development Exchange, 2011b).

Anyhow, it is clear that this topic bears a certain complexity and that a practical definition of community development might help to disentangle the complexity to a certain degree. The Community Development Foundation (2011) provides such a practical definition of community development. It argues that community development combines six characteristics. One main characteristic is a (1) common cause which is shared by community members and can lead to (2) more cooperation. Furthermore, (3) building strengths and independence of community groups as well as (4) building equity and inclusiveness amongst community members are cornerstones of community development (Head, 1979). (5) Participation and the way to (6) empower people are very important characteristics of community development and it can be argued, that these two influences somehow include the other four characteristics (Friedmann, 1992; Scheyvens, 1999).



Figure 2. Six core elements of community development.

Source: based upon Community Development Foundation, 2011.

Community Empowerment

Community empowerment is not just one part of the core elements of community development, but also one of the key factors of this paper. Therefore, a definition of this term will be more complex than ordinary definitions offered by community development organizations. One of those definitions provided by Community Development Exchange and Changes (2008) describes the characteristics of community empowerment as «confident, inclusive, organized, co-operative and influential» (Changes, 2008). Another yet more practical definition is provided by an UK Government Department and defines community empowerment as a shift of «power, influence and responsibility away from existing centers of power and into the hands of communities and citizens» (Local Govern-

ment, 2010) and about convincing community members that they can make a difference (Local Government, 2010). It is crucial for a community to have the right to determine itself and its behavior in order to start the long-term process of community empowerment.

In summary, there are two important factors in community development and empowerment - external and internal factors. On one side there are development workers and organizations who bring financial input and knowledge transfer and on the other side there are individual community members who need to take action in their own hands and start the process of community development.

Community empowerment factors. The factors for community empowerment, which subsequently represent the community empowerment framework, are essential to the upcoming model of successful community development. Those factors not only deal with well know empowerment topics such as economics, social, psychological and political aspects but also include the environment and one of the most important players in the field of tourism - the tourist.

Friedmann (1992) introduced three factors of community empowerment and laid a structural basis for research in this field. Scheyvens (1999, 2011), who refers in her work about fighting poverty through empowerment to Friedmann's empowerment factors as a way to overcome poverty and added the an economic empowerment factor. In order to adress all aspects of community development and ecotourism two additional empowerment factors will be introduced in this paper. These factors help to categorize and identify the impact of ecotourism on community development.

Friedmann claims that households of a community have to be seen as markets and political units with all the power within the communities and that these markets require cooperation with other markets (households, communities, governments). In order to empower a community three types of power are available to the households - political, social and psychological power. Social power is seen as necessary because it gains "access to certain 'bases' of household production, such as information, knowledge and skill, participation in social organizations, and financial resources" (Friedmann, 1992, p. 31).

Scheyvens introduced a fourth empowerment factor - economic empowerment - in order to include financial benefits of ecotourism projects (Scheyvens, 2011). The success of an ecotourism project and the distribution of the economic benefits are important in measuring the sustainability of the project. Scheyvens' framework helps scientists to distinguish between successful ecotourism project and greenwashing. She argues that her framework can help communities to start ecotourism projects and to develop in the future (Wilkinson and Pratiwi, 1995).

Empowerment can be seen as a development process which leads to actions that allow poor people to (re)claim their rights (Mowforth and Munt, 2009 as cited in Scheyvens, 2011). Similarly, Zhao and Richie (2007 as cited in Scheyvens, 2011) "specify empowerment as a key condition for tourism to be able to contribute to poverty alleviation as it aims to enhance and strengthen people's participation in political processes (...) as well as removing barriers that work against the poor" (p. 37).

Furthermore, Friedmann (1992 as cited in Scheyvens, 2011) highlights that "genuine empowerment can never be conferred from the outside" (p. 37). Sofield (2003 as cited in Scheyvens, 2011) argues that "empowerment is a key to achieving sustainable tourism" (p. 37).

As mentioned before, in addition to the four empowerment factors of Friedmann and Scheyvens two more factors, which are vital in dealing with ecotourism projects. First, an ecological empowerment factor should not be forgotten especially considering the (positive) effect that ecotourism can have on biodiversity conservation (Gössling, 1999). In a best-case scenario ecotourism projects have to protect the environment and preserve biodiversity as well as to teach tourists about the destination and the local customs. Second, visitor empowerment includes the tourist as another key element to the framework. The tourist is a key element in ecotourism projects and has influence on the empowerment of communities, which highly depends on the attitude of the tourists.

1. Economic Empowerment

Economic empowerment refers to Scheyvens' (1999) work on poverty eradication based on work of Friedmann (1992). In a very broad sense, economic empowerment is not just about gaining profits from ecotourism projects, but also about a long-term solution to unemployment and development of the whole area including a variety of stakeholders. Another important factor of economic empowerment is an equal share of incomes within the households of the community. It should have a long-lasting effect on the community's infrastructure so that every community member and household can benefit from it. If profit from ecotourism is not evenly distributed, but is given to single organizations in the community, this indicates economic disempowerment of the community. However, as a community cannot be seen as one homogenous entity, it is very hard to 'discover' and to define economic empowerment in a project (Scheyvens, 1999).

2. Social Empowerment

The implementation of ecotourism projects and social empowerment go side by side. Following the definition delivered by Scheyvens "social empowerment refers to a situation in which a community's sense of cohesion and integrity has been confirmed or strengthened by an activity such as ecotourism" (Scheyvens, 1999, p. 248). Social empowerment is concentrated towards knowledge, participation in organizations, information and resources. If an individual or household can increase those 'necessities', an increase in social power is possible (Friedmann, 1992). However, ecotourism projects can also disrupt communities and lead to disharmony. Therefore, it is necessary that all groups within the community cooperate and that the benefits are shared equally. An inequality of the economic power, such as an unfair distribution of incomes, can lead to social disempowerment (Scheyvens, 1999).

Education is a core element of ecotourism and also a key contributor to social empowerment, but is neither mentioned by Friedmann nor by Scheyvens. Community members and tourists can learn from each other if ecotourism is conducted in the right way. However, this is only possible if both groups are willing to do so.

Tourism, in its original function, should bring outsiders to a new surrounding in a new area (Jafari and Ritchie, 1981) and satisfy their needs for recreation and exploration. Conventional tourism, or mass tourism, is not able to fulfill these needs any longer as there is hardly any contact between locals and the tourists. Ecotourism enables the tourist to explore foreign cultures, costumes and environments. As Tisdell and Wilson stated “Educational activity is necessary to provide meanings and relationships to people about the places they visit and about the things they see and do there” (Tisdell and Wilson, 2005, p. 292). This new knowledge about a people and communities will form a connection between the tourist and the community, which can boost the awareness of certain problems in a region.

3. Psychological Empowerment

Psychological power can be seen as self-confidence and “as an individual sense of potency” (Friedmann, 1992, p. 33). It results from successful political, social and economic actions. Self-esteem of locals rises through the recognition of their culture and psychological empowerment and can also lead to an increase in self-respect of traditionally low-status groups such as youth and women. Anyhow, ecotourism projects can also result in psychological disempowerment and frustration if the tourists interfere with local customs or disturb the relationship between natives and nature (Scheyvens, 1999).

4. Political Empowerment

Friedmann (1992) states that political power has to give the opportunity of decision making for the future of a community. Therefore, it is a power to participate in collective action and decision process in the community. Political empowerment of communities results from an equal right for everyone to have a say in the ecotourism project and to bring in personal ideas and suggestions. If there is some kind of self-interested leadership in a community or if the ecotourism project leaders do not consider suggestions and opinions from community members’ political disempowerment is the case (Scheyvens, 1999).

5. Ecological Empowerment

The four empowerment factors mentioned above do not address all the core principles of ecotourism and therefore, two more factors were necessary. either Friedmann nor Scheyvens included an ecologic parameter in their frameworks even though all the, so far mentioned empowerment factors somehow depend on a functioning environment. Biodiversity conservation and environmental protection is essential for human survival on the long-term. Especially we have to consider that many ecosystem services are not yet fully understood or even discovered by humans. It could be observed that biodiversity conservation leads to positive trade-offs for humans and that sustainable use of resources creates synergies with different needs in society. However, very often a lack of necessary funds resulted in not-establishing protected areas or reserves (Dullo et al., 2005).

One of the biggest problems of biodiversity protection are the different measurements and indicators in calculating biodiversity such as species-diversity, -richness or -uniqueness (Schloegel, 2007). A clear definition of the value of species and life itself is missing (which is not negative). Therefore, it is impossible to calculate biodiversity loss in an ethical way. In this paper indicators for ecologic empowerment focus on an increase or decrease

in environmental awareness within the community, protection of the environment and biodiversity statistics (if available). Signs of ecological disempowerment are negative effects of the ecotourism project on the environment such as more car traffic within a region because of a higher number of visitors.

6. Visitor Empowerment

Visitor empowerment contains many elements of the other empowerment factors specifically dealing with the tourist. As the tourist is the most important stakeholder of tourism projects it is necessary to include him/her in a community empowerment framework even though visitor empowerment is not officially recognized in the existing literature. In order to measure visitor empowerment it is necessary to find out tourists’ expectations, characteristics, time of visit, etc.

A rise in visitor empowerment in communities can result from appreciation of local culture and religion by visitors (which is closely connected to psychological empowerment). The biggest danger in visitor empowerment is a wrong behavior of the tourist such as showing their wealth and treating locals as of minor value. The emotional connection between the tourist and the locals is very important and can either lead to a boost in self-esteem or to disillusion and frustration. If tourists and locals respect each other and each other’s culture and customs visitor empowerment can lead to a two-way education between tourists and community members. However, there are many highly subjective influences which can change tourists’ expectations such as bad weather, illnesses, etc.



Figure 3. Community empowerment factors.

Source: based upon Friedmann, 1992 and Scheyvens, 1999, 2011.

Stakeholders essential for community development. Stakeholders which are essential for community development consist of external and internal stakeholders. Financial input and knowledge transfer to the project derives mainly from external stakeholders. Even though, sometimes their influence on the project is limited. Very often one of the main problems is the differentia-

tion of external and internal stakeholders because some institutions can be both. Ecotourism projects can have all kind of external stakeholders but in most cases they provide scientific knowledge, financial and/or juridical support and resources.

Internal stakeholders are important members of the community and have a direct influence on the system, thus on the project outcome. Most of the time a case-by-case stakeholder-identification is necessary. Therefore, the following extraction of a list of external and internal stakeholders by the UNEP and the WTO is just a suggestion and support.

Table 1. External and internal stakeholders

External stakeholders	Internal stakeholders
Development cooperatives	Enterprises (local)
Regional and national governments	Community members
Enterprises	Project workers
Tourism industry	Tourists

Source: UNEP and UNWTO, 2005

System parameters. The system parameters are elements which cannot be changed by the researcher in the short run. These factors are defined as constant parameters or time-variant parameters (Bossel, 2004). In the conceptual model they have a certain influence on the community empowerment framework. The system parameters can vary highly in different locations and cultures. Therefore, the influence of it has to be taken seriously. In order to minimize certain 'surprising' effects on the system it is very important to gain as much information as possible about specific regional factors.

Those factors are among others: political stability, available infrastructure, weather patterns, the climate, economic situation, general hospitality, etc. There is a large variety in this short list of examples for factors within the system parameters. It clearly shows that it includes almost every probability which can have an influence on the ecotourism project. Anyhow, it will never be possible to assess all the necessary information about the system parameters to get absolute certainty, but the more

information is assessed the more accurate the outcome of the project can be.

Conceptual model for successful community development

The conceptual model for successful community development (based on Vermeulen et al., 2011) is the outcome of the discussed factors and will be the basis of an evaluation framework. Systems, according to system sciences, need inputs, system-elements, a system-border and an output (Ossimitz and Lapp, 2006). The external stakeholders are giving input to the system, which is defined through the black dotted line, in form of financial support or knowledge. The input is incorporated into the element ecotourism, as it is defined in the paper and is directly linked to the community empowerment framework in a positive feedback loop. The internal stakeholders and the system parameters provide input for the community empowerment framework as well as the evaluation framework. The system output here is successful community development. When the output is reached (e.g. after a project phase) the system itself has changed and is then on a new level. There might still be the same system elements and external stakeholders as before, but now they act on a different level (e.g. more experienced). Ideally, this output should be monitored and the results should influence the evaluation framework and, furthermore the whole system. However, it is necessary to consider that in the case of this study the evaluation framework is adapted from literature as there was no suitable monitoring process.

The main problems in the implementation of the conceptual model for successful community development are the definition of ecotourism by a specific project, which can differ from the definition of this paper, the demarcation of the system border, which is sometimes hard to define if the researcher is within the system, and defining the internal stakeholders, which needs a lot of information and can probably not be achieved completely. Additionally, it is necessary to understand, that this conceptual model needs to be adapted separately for each and every ecotourism project. Anyhow, it serves as a good foundation for comparing different projects in different areas of the world. The adaptation of the conceptual model to a specific project be presented in the case study.

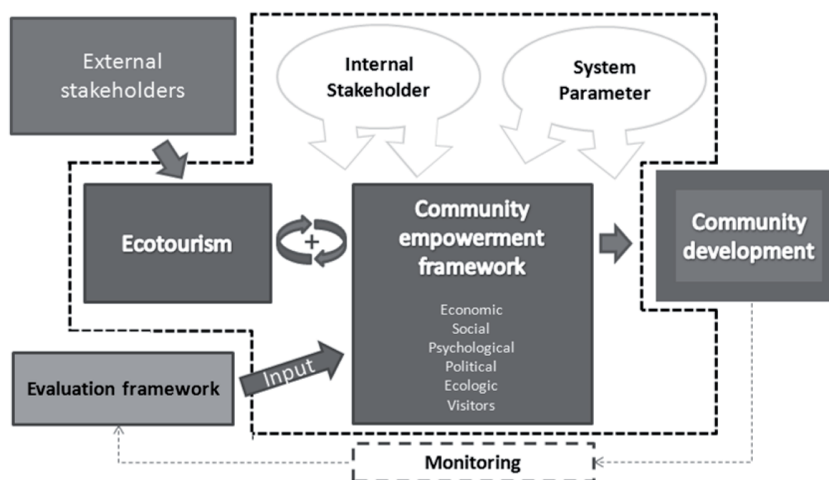


Figure 4. Conceptual model for successful community development.

Source: own figure

Operationalization

The operationalization of the conceptual model happens through an evaluation framework. The aim of this framework is giving data input for the community empowerment framework and it is the basis for the questionnaires for community members and tourists. The evaluation framework was created to deal with the needs of community-based ecotourism projects. Indicators are used to measure the effect of ecotourism projects on community empowerment and, subsequently community development. Some of those indicators are based on already existing indicators for sustainable development for tourist destinations (UNEP and UNWTO, 2005; UNWTO, 2004). In order to bring structure to the evaluation framework the indicators were arranged and classified according to the six community empowerment factors and the so-called twelve aims for an agenda of sustainable tourism (UNEP and UNWTO, 2005):

1. Economic Viability;
2. Local Prosperity;
3. Employment Quality
4. Social Equity
5. Visitor Fulfillment
6. Local Control
7. Community Wellbeing
8. Cultural Richness
9. Physical Integrity
10. Biological Diversity
11. Resource Efficiency
12. Environmental Purity.

Not all of these twelve aims are used and some are renamed to fit the empowerment factors; additionally one factor - Impact of ecotourism development - is added to evaluate the political empowerment of ecotourism projects.

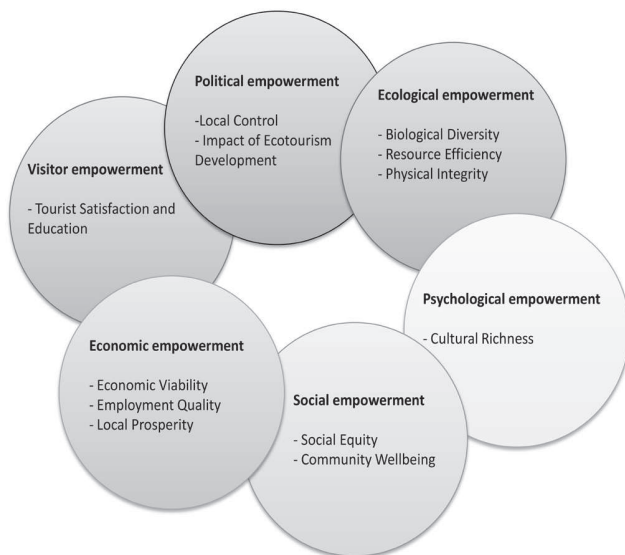


Figure 5. Main indicators for the evaluation framework.

Source: based upon UNEP and UNWTO, 2005.

The following table gives an overview of the main indicators with their main questions in connection with the six different empowerment factors. For example, to assess data about the

economic empowerment of a community, three different indicators are available - economic viability, local prosperity and employment quality. Employment quality is assessed through questions about the satisfaction of the job quality and the salary. It is necessary to keep in mind that this table is a suggestion for indicators and not all of them can be used with every project. Sometimes it might be necessary to implement new indicators. However, the list is a basic structure to help evaluating ecotourism projects in different phases and different regions.

Table 2. Empowerment factors, main indicators and main questions.

Empowerment factor	Main Question	Main Indicator
Economic empowerment	Does the community as a whole benefit from the ecotourism project?	Economic viability
	Are the benefits from the ecotourism project shared equally within the community?	Local prosperity
	Is the quality of the job (in the tourism industry) satisfying?	Employment quality
	Is the salary fair and without discrimination?	Employment quality
Social empowerment	Did social equity in the community rise since the introduction of the ecotourism project?	Social equity
	Is the ecotourism project contribution to the wellbeing of the community?	Community wellbeing
Psychological empowerment	Does the ecotourism project boost local values and culture?	Cultural richness
Political empowerment	Is the ecotourism project increasing the political participation of community members?	Local control
	Are community members aware of the ecotourism project's values and goals?	Impact of ecotourism development
Ecological empowerment	Is the ecotourism project influencing the physical integrity of the community's and its surrounding environment?	Physical integrity
	Is the ecotourism project contribution to a rise in biological diversity in the area surrounding the community?	Biological diversity
	Is the ecotourism project supporting efficient energy use?	Resource efficiency
Visitor empowerment	Are tourists satisfied with a stay at the community?	Tourist satisfaction and education
	Is the ecotourism project providing enough information about the community and its environment?	
	Are tourists aware of the local culture?	

Source: based upon UNEP and UNWTO, 2005

Indicators

Operationalization of the indicators should be effective and easy enough for everyone to reproduce. Therefore, the best way of operationalization the indicators was using a four-step ordinal scale to assess the state-of-the-art and to combine three different data-gathering methods - questionnaires, interviews and personal observation. The scale was either from one to four or/and in 25%-steps depending on the interview or questionnaire. All %-questions will be answered in increments of 25% while an ordinal scale from one to four will be used for the other questions, with "one" indicating 'highly agree' and "four" indicating

'disagree'. In order to obtain to this four-step scale, it was necessary to calculate the median for every question asked in the questionnaires. Additionally there are a few yes/no questions in order to assess background information of the project. By using this method the results are both quantitative and qualitative as they do not only include data from the questionnaires with the target groups but also personal opinions of the respondents as well as personal observation by the researcher. Furthermore, interviews with the head of the NGO, responsible for the project, as well as with one former researcher of the NGO were conducted.

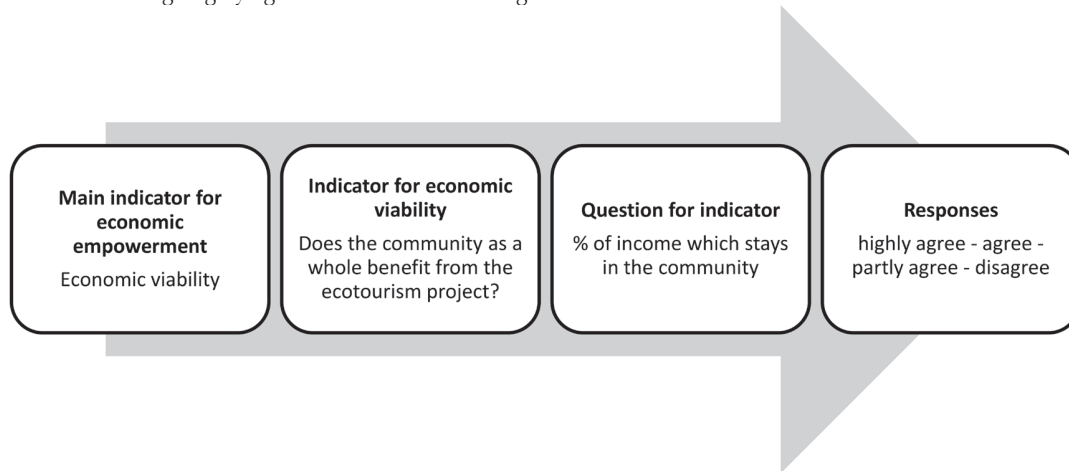


Figure 6. Operationalization of the indicators.

Source: own figure

Output of the conceptual model

As community development is a very broad term in order to evaluate the success of the outcome it is best to split it into three separate categories. These three categories - social, economic and ecological - are not by coincidence based on the concept of sustainable development and make a very good connection with ecotourism. All three aspects are independent to each other and it is necessary that all of these aspects are fulfilled in order to achieve successful community development.

Social aspects of community development connect the willingness of a community to work for a more sustainable future and the education that can be received through knowledge transfers from external stakeholders. For example, locals can be trained to become guides which leads not only to increasing household incomes for the community but also to a knowledge transfer between locals and tourists (Kerley et al., 2003; Bookbinder et al., 1998). Furthermore, the ecotourism project has to create a positive inner image in the community. It is essential that community members are behind the project and that they can identify themselves with it. Ecotourism projects can have an influence on the cultural identity of a community, integration of subgroups into community life. This leads subsequently to more social cohesion and to a possible decrease in social discrepancies.

Economic effects of community development occur when the value of community development is higher than the opportunity costs. As the value of community development is hard to measure the focus lies on economic effects as incentives. Creat-

ing new jobs in the area of the ecotourism project will subsequently lead to financial benefits for communities and a higher degree of independence.

The ecological aspects of community development mainly depend on the target of the ecotourism project. An increase in renewable resources and conservation efforts can enhance environmental purity. Preserving flora and fauna is a core activity of ecotourism projects. One main ecological aspect of ecotourism projects is recycling and limiting waste.

The implementation of the evaluation framework on a case study project in Nepal

In Nepal mostly all ecotourism projects are community based therefore, it provided perfect conditions for the implementation of the evaluation framework. The Kathmandu Valley Culture Trekking Trail was one of two projects which were evaluated. It is situated north of Nepal's capital Kathmandu and is partly in the Shivapuri-Nagarjun National Park. This section explains the implementation of the research framework to a specific project and delivers the results from the evaluation framework and, subsequently, for the conceptual model.

Kathmandu Valley Culture Trekking Trail (KVCTT)

The Kathmandu Valley Culture Trekking Trail (KVCTT) is an ecotourism project launched by the Nepal Environment and Tourism Initiative Foundation (NETIF) in 2009. The first phase of the project was finished in 2011 after implementing local tourism committees in all the four major villages along

the trekking trail. NETIF's main goals contained raising awareness about environmental conservation, implementation of the mentioned tourism committees, maintenance and constructions of tourist shelters as well as cleaning campaigns and several tourism and livelihood trainings (NETIF-Nepal, 2012a). Furthermore, several events, such as organized hiking trips with government officials, lead to promotion of the area. The second project phase started in 2011 and will last till the end of 2013. In this phase the emphasis lies on the integration of responsible tourism principles through capacity building, waste- and water management and several initiatives following Nepal's national 'Sanitation and Hygiene Masterplan' (NETIF-Nepal, 2012b; Sahih, 2011). The main goal will be the handing over of the project to the local tourism committees by the end of the second phase.

Model for successful community Development along the KVCTT

Data gathering along the KVCTT took place within a period of nine days in all the four major villages in the area (the author conducted the field work during a research stay in Nepal in 2012). 42 questionnaires from households, which represent roughly 13% of all households in the area - around 40% of all household connected to the tourism project - (Shrestha S., personal communication, March 13, 2012), 21 questionnaires from tourists, which represent about two percent of the visitors of the whole Shivapuri-Nagarjun National Park in the month of Chaitra (mid-March to mid-April) (DNPWC, 2010) and questionnaires from four village coordinators were received. Additionally, the president of NETIF Arun Shrestha was interviewed after the survey in the project region, as well as a former researcher of the NGO (Suhata Shrestha).

The adapted model for successful community development for the KVCTT as shown in figure 8 needs some explanation. The external stakeholders are NETIF and Suomen Latu which is a Finnish NGO and the funding organization behind NETIF. Additional external stakeholders are travel agencies which bring tourists to this trekking trail even without cooperating with NETIF. The element 'Ecotourism' is substituted by 'Ecotourism along the KVCTT' because the definition of ecotourism by NETIF differs in some parts from the definition in this paper. All the internal stakeholders in the different villages are combined under the tourism development committees which represent all community members who are, to some extent, connected to the ecotourism project. The system parameters contain mainly the political conditions in Nepal, the language barrier and also the level of education in rural areas. The input for the community empowerment framework is delivered by the evaluation of the different empowerment factors and has high effects not only on the output but also on 'Ecotourism along the KVCTT'.

The overall evaluation of the project can be rated positively with a value of 1.87 out of 4 ($[1.81 + 1.36 + 1.75 + 2.50 + 1.86] / 5 = 1.87$) where 1 is the best and 4 the worst. Additionally, the indicator for visitor empowerment is rated with 2.40 out of 4. When taking a closer look at the results, they show that the inner image of the ecotourism project in all four villages is very good and that the cooperation between the NGO

and internal stakeholder works well. Most of the community members are thankful for NETIF's help and can financially benefit from the project. This leads to more self-confidence within the community and even more respect for their own culture. However, there are also a few negative results which can be seen in a lack of tourist information boards about the project along the trail. Furthermore, the result of the questionnaires shows, that up to 75% of the incomes achieved is not spend in the villages but somewhere else in the Kathmandu Valley. Table 3 summarizes the results of this case study, for more detailed results see Annex.

The output of the conceptual model is divided into three different aspects - economic, ecologic and social. The success in the economic area is shown through an overall financial benefit through the project in the area, especially when considering that three of the four villages along the trail are highly dependent to incomes from tourism. However, a boost in promotion is definitely needed as overall numbers in trekkers did not rise significantly since the project started (Shrestha A., personal communication, April 2, 2012) and the evaluation results show that many tourists did not know about the ecotourism project.

The ecological aspect is satisfied through various activities conducted by NETIF and the local tourism committees. NETIF organized cleaning campaigns, afforestation programs, awareness campaigns, and built incinerators and one small wind turbine. The biggest effect on the local communities had the various trainings conducted by NETIF. Locals from the whole area had and still have the opportunity to take part in trainings about tourism management, biological farming, hygiene, waste management, handicraft making, etc. These trainings were received extremely positive in the whole area and almost every respondent of the survey mentioned their appreciation.

NETIF's biggest success story is in raising awareness about social responsibility for nature and its connection to sustainable tourism development. Furthermore, NETIF was very successful in changing the institutional system in the villages by implementing local tourism development committees and in encouraging the different communities in working together. However, the evaluation of the project also shows some weaknesses and topics were NETIF have still some work to do. These obstacles are mainly about the missing knowledge of locals and tourists about sustainable tourism principles; the main problem is a lack of education. It is necessary for NETIF to provide educational trainings about sustainable tourism (which are part of their second project phase). After the evaluation the preliminary results were handed over to NETIF in 2012 and caused an immediate effect as in April 2013 the first information boards for tourists about the flora and fauna of the region as well as about the NGO itself were installed along the KVCTT (Shrestha A., personal communication, April 27, 2013). However, the main goal as well as the main challenge for the year 2013 is the preparation to hand over of the project to the local tourism development committees. NETIF will still provide knowledge but the villages and the project should finance itself by tourism incomes from hotels as well as from incomes through newly constructed tea-houses and souvenir shops. By the beginning of 2014 the villages should get the full responsibility for the KVCTT project

(Shrestha A., personal communication, April 2, 2012). Before handing over the project to the local tourism development committees it would make sense to evaluate the project again considering inputs from a monitoring process. However, this case

study did not include the monitoring process as the evaluation was just done once. It would be very useful for this study and the results to go back to Nepal for another survey for a longer period of time.

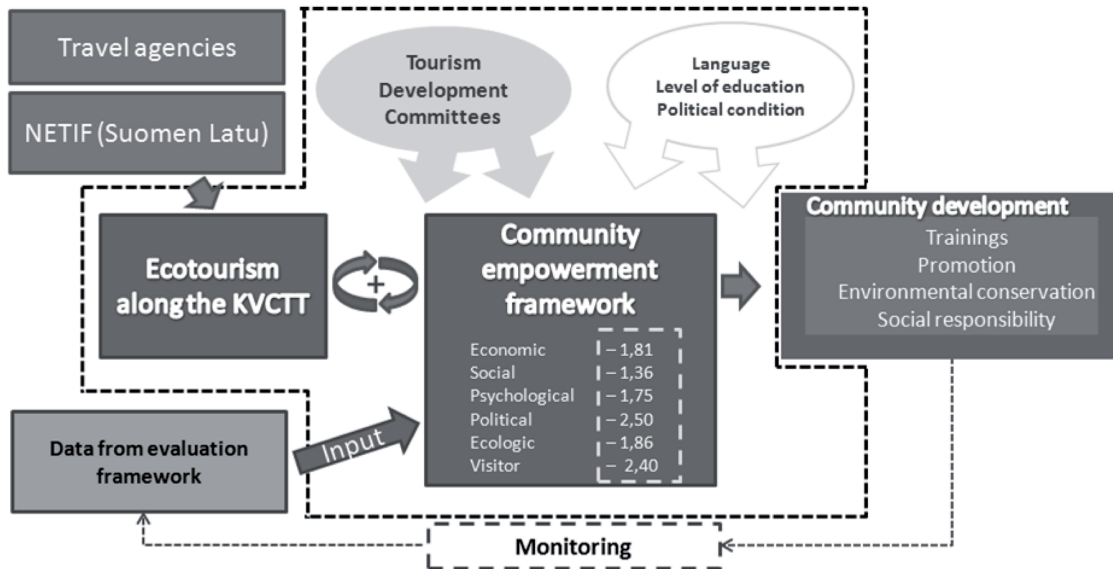


Figure 7. Model for successful community development along the KVCTT.

Source: own figure

Table 3. Summarized results of KVCTT case study.

Survey	Empowerment factors	Results	
- 42 households - 21 tourists - 4 village coordinators - 2 additional project employees + interview with NETIF CEO	Economic empowerment:	1,81 (out of 4)	New jobs were created, most community members benefit from the project, profit is shared equally, 50–75% of incomes are not spend in the villages
	Social empowerment:	1,36	Good cooperation between NETIF and local groups, very good image of NETIF in the area, missing knowledge about ecotourism
	Psychological empowerment:	1,75	High self-confidence in the villages, uniqueness of the own culture is appreciated, women are integrated in village life
	Political empowerment:	2,50	Community members are satisfied with their level of participation, tourism development committees make decisions
	Ecological empowerment:	1,86	NETIF contributes to environmental protection with: trash picking, incinerators, new stoves, awareness programs,
	Visitor empowerment:	2,40	Missing information boards, tourists did not know about the ecotourism project,

Source: own table

Conclusion

The main goals of this paper are to show under which conditions ecotourism projects result in successful community development and to create an evaluation framework for ecotourism projects, which can be used for various kinds of projects all around the world, and compare them to each other. It is very important that communities get a financial benefit because without that even the best ecotourism project cannot last. This study shows that small development efforts through ecotourism can have a big effect on community empowerment, especially in terms of protecting the pristine nature of the environment through such easy actions like garbage picking. In order to get

this effect it is necessary to mobilize enough community members and to educate them in sustainable tourism development and environmental protection. In the case study it could be observed that almost every community member interviewed was very eager to learn. Everyone who took the trainings provided by NETIF was very thankful for this chance. Involvement and participation of locals in the project planning is as important as trainings and environmental protection. It is essential that, during the implementation of a project, everyone involved had the chance to speak his/her mind and to take an active part in decision making, otherwise discrimination of individuals or groups cannot be avoided.

Additionally, the tourist is an important factor which, unfortunately, is not always considered in such projects. Along the KVCTT more knowledge and time was invested in trainings and environment protection than in tourist management and tourism information. However, the tourist is the most important stakeholder as without it there will not be any income and therefore, no project. The promotion of an ecotourism project needs to be considered as very important and should also increase with the project's progress.

The second main goal of the study was the creation of an evaluation framework for ecotourism projects in different countries. The implementation of the evaluation framework in Nepal resulted in astonishing results: On the one hand it can give a very good overview of the impact of an ecotourism project on community development but, on the other hand, it also showed some weaknesses in comparing projects which are at different

project phases. A certain amount of data is necessary to gain reasonable results and a closer look on the results 'behind the indicator values' is essential. Another situation with which the evaluation framework had troubles to cope was the lack of education in rural Nepal. The interview partners had to have a certain level of education in order to differentiate sustainable tourism from conventional tourism. Furthermore, most of the time it was necessary to be supported by a translator (we need to stress that he might have had an influence on the answers of community members due to his (personal) translation and often simply due to his presence).

Anyhow, the evaluation framework would need more case studies for empirical testing and to eradicate the problems with the comparison of different projects. Such a set of indicators, if it would be standardized, would help future as well as present ecotourism projects to locate strengths and weaknesses.

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