

Empowering Communities: Unraveling the Nexus between Active Participation in Tourism Programs

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the role of tourism in community development, with a focus on Kasibu, Nueva Vizcaya. Building on the concept of tourism as a "silver bullet" for local communities, this research delved deeper to provide a comprehensive understanding on the community involvement in tourism programs of Kasibu Nueva Vizcaya. This research utilized the dual application of qualitative research design, involving interviews and document scanning, alongside a quantitative-descriptive research method utilizing survey questionnaires. This study examined the tourism programs in Kasibu, Nueva Vizcaya, the extent of community involvement in these initiatives, concerns that exist in community involvement on tourism programs, and the recommendations that may be crafted in relation to community involvement on tourism programs. Through interviews with local officials, residents, and other stakeholders, the research reveals that Kasibu has implemented comprehensive and well-structured tourism programs, ensuring sustainable development and community engagement. On the extent of community involvement, residents are shown to be actively involved in tourism programs of Kasibu. However, challenges persist, including improving accessibility and infrastructure. The study highlights the importance of community involvement, identifying areas for improvement, and addressing concerns such as awareness, management, and infrastructure inadequacies. Recommendations for enhancing community involvement include local training, cultural preservation, job creation, community engagement, and infrastructure development. It is also suggested that by involving residents in tourism activities, Kasibu can promote sustainable economic growth while preserving its unique culture and identity.

Keywords: Community involvement, decent work and economic growth, industry, innovation, and infrastructure, partnership for the goals, sustainable tourism, sustainable cities and communities, tourism program.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism has been characterized as a "silver bullet" for local communities, offering a range of economic, social, and cultural benefits (Lopez et al., 2018). This chapter explores the rationale behind the significance of community involvement in tourism by identifying various models of community participation. Specifically, it seeks to determine various tourism programs in Kasibu, Nueva Vizcaya, the extent of local residents' participation in these initiatives, identifies existing concerns regarding community involvement and proposes recommendations to enhance participation in tourism programs.

This chapter delves into various community participation models in tourism, particularly in the context of Kasibu, Nueva Vizcaya, and evaluates their effectiveness through best practices and existing challenges.

One prevalent model is the top-down approach, where tourism initiatives are primarily designed and implemented by government authorities or external stakeholders, with minimal input from local communities. While this approach can lead to rapid development and infrastructure improvements, it often results in a disconnect between the needs of the community and the tourism offerings. However, this model can be effective

only in the short term, as it often fails to foster long-term community engagement and ownership, leading to resentment and resistance from local residents (Revita et al., 2023).

In contrast, the bottom-up approach emphasizes grassroots involvement, allowing local residents to actively participate in the planning and management of tourism initiatives. Successful implementations of this model can be seen in the Visayas region, where community-led tourism initiatives have empowered local residents to take charge of their cultural heritage and tourism offerings (Mundo, 2019). The bottom-up approach has proven to be more sustainable, fostering a sense of ownership among community members, enhancing cultural preservation, and ensuring that economic benefits are equitably distributed (Wijayanto et al., 2023).

Another effective model is the collaborative approach, which involves partnerships between local communities, government agencies, and private sector stakeholders, promoting shared decision-making and resource allocation (Carges, 2021). This model has shown to be effective in balancing economic growth with social and environmental sustainability, as it encourages dialogue and cooperation among all parties involved (Global Environment Facility, 2024).

Community-Based Tourism (CBT) focuses on local community involvement in tourism development, where the community directly benefits from tourism activities (Kubickova & Campbell, 2018). CBT has been effective in enhancing local livelihoods, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting environmental sustainability (Sapkota et al., 2024).

The multifaceted nature of tourism extends beyond mere economic benefits; it serves as a catalyst for cultural preservation and community well-being (Theobald, 2018). Community involvement is pivotal for the success of global tourism, enhancing the tourist experience and fostering authentic cultural exchanges. Active engagement of residents not only contributes to economic benefits through local businesses but also strengthens community bonds and promotes sustainable tourism practices (Lo & Janta, 2020). Despite the potential benefits of community involvement in tourism, several challenges persist. Many local residents may not be aware of the opportunities and benefits associated with tourism, leading to low participation rates. The use of top-down approach was successfully done by the government-led initiatives in Batangas, where local governments have provided funding and resources for tourism development. In some cases, local leaders may exploit tourism initiatives for personal gain, undermining community trust and participation which supports the idea of Revita et al. (2023). Effective community engagement requires strong leadership and facilitation skills, which may be lacking in some regions (Andrias & Ngxongo, 2018).

In the Philippine context, studies have highlighted the importance of community engagement in tourism, particularly in regions like Batangas and the Visayas (Abanilla-Del Mundo, 2019; Pollnac et al., 2020). These studies emphasize the need for local residents to be actively involved in tourism planning and management to ensure sustainable growth and equitable distribution of benefits. The current research aims to fill the gap in understanding community involvement in tourism programs in Kasibu, Nueva Vizcaya, a region rich in cultural heritage and natural beauty.

Tourism programs are organized initiatives aimed at promoting and managing tourism in specific destinations. These programs encompass a range of strategies, including marketing campaigns, infrastructure development, community engagement, and environmental conservation (Econsult Solutions, Inc., 2021). In Kasibu, Nueva Vizcaya, tourism programs are designed to attract visitors while ensuring sustainable development and minimizing negative impacts on the environment and local communities. Through a collaborative tourism initiatives in regions like Kasibu can leverage the strengths of various stakeholders, leading to comprehensive tourism strategies that address both community needs and tourist expectations.

Community involvement plays a vital role in promoting social responsibility and fostering individual development (Jasper & Jasper, 2020). By actively engaging local residents in tourism initiatives, we not only enhance their quality of life but also create economic opportunities and support cultural preservation. However, challenges such as a lack of knowledge regarding sustainable tourism practices and inconsistent fee collection methods can hinder effective community participation (Loverio, 2022; Alzamora & Barros, 2020). To address these challenges, the Community-Based Tourism (CBT) approach can be particularly effective. Successful CBT

initiatives typically incorporate training programs for local residents, celebrate and promote local culture, and ensure that a substantial portion of tourism revenue is reinvested in the community. This holistic approach not only empowers residents but also fosters a sustainable tourism model that benefits all stakeholders involved.

This study aims to determine the various tourism programs, the extent of community involvement, the concerns existing, and possible recommendations for enhancing community involvement among the residents of Kasibu, Nueva Vizcaya during the second semester of AY 2023-2024. Specifically, the study will address the following questions:

1. What are the different tourism programs in the town of Kasibu, Nueva Vizcaya?
2. What is the extent of community involvement of the residents in the tourism programs of the town?
3. What concerns exist in the community involvement of residents in the tourism programs of the town?
4. What recommendations may be crafted concerning community involvement in the Tourism Program?

METHODS

This chapter outlines the research methodology employed in this study, detailing the research design, locale, respondents, instruments, data gathering procedures, data treatment, and ethical considerations.

This study utilized a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative-descriptive research methodologies. The qualitative component involved interviews and document scanning to uncover tourism programs and residents' concerns regarding community involvement in Kasibu. The quantitative aspect employed survey questionnaires to quantify the extent of community involvement in tourism.

The qualitative design facilitated an in-depth exploration of Kasibu's tourism programs through document analysis and interviews, while the quantitative method assessed community involvement levels through structured surveys.

The research was conducted in Kasibu, a municipality in Nueva Vizcaya, Philippines, located at approximately 16° 19' North and 121° 18' East. Kasibu covers 318.80 square kilometers and had a population of 41,776 as of the 2020 Census. The study focused on four barangays known for their tourist attractions: Antutot, Capisaan, Malabing, and Papaya.

Respondents included male and female residents aged 20 to 60 years who had lived in the selected barangays for at least 10 years, along with Barangay Captains. Exclusion criteria ensured a representative sample by omitting those who did not meet residency or age requirements. A total of 100 respondents were surveyed, with 20 selected for qualitative interviews.

The study utilized survey questionnaires adapted from Lopez et al. (2018) to assess community involvement, employing a Likert-type scale with four categories: No Involvement (1.00-1.49), Little Involvement (1.50-2.49), Active Involvement (2.50-3.49), and High Involvement (3.50-4.00). Structured interviews were also conducted to gather qualitative data.

Data collection involved identifying barangays with notable tourist spots, conducting ocular visits, and obtaining permission from local authorities. Informed consent was secured from participants before conducting surveys and interviews.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including mean values and standard deviations. Qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and themes, with validation sought from a language expert to ensure credibility.

The study was reviewed by the Saint Mary's University Research Ethics Board (SMUREB). Ethical standards were upheld by ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, and data security. Participants were informed of the potential benefits of their involvement, fostering trust and collaboration within the community. The results were disseminated within the university and submitted for publication in academic journals.

RESULTS

Section 1: Different Tourism Programs in Kasibu

Kasibu offers a variety of tourism programs aimed at showcasing its natural resources and cultural heritage while promoting community involvement and environmental sustainability. One of the key initiatives is the Tourism Planning and Research Program, which seeks to enhance sustainable tourism development by integrating local culture, environmental preservation, and economic feasibility. This program identifies key attractions and potential tourist markets through research and stakeholder involvement. The Tourism Officer emphasized the importance of data-driven research for informed decision-making, stating, "Tourism planning and research program... includes activities like budget preparation and benchmarking to enhance our local product offerings."

Another critical aspect is Tourism Operations and Management, which plays a vital role in maintaining the quality of Kasibu's tourism industry. Regular monitoring and inspection of eco-tourism sites ensure safety and sustainability. Informant 1 noted, "We conduct monitoring and inspection of our existing eco-tourism sites," highlighting the proactive approach to safeguarding the environment and enhancing visitor experiences.

The Tourism Promotions and Marketing Program is also essential for attracting visitors. The municipality relies on the Kasibu Tourism Development Plan 2022-2024 to guide its marketing strategies. Informant 1 stated, "Promotion and marketing... is a big bulk of our work," indicating the significance of these efforts in enhancing the visibility of tourism products.

Additionally, the Primary & Secondary Tourism Enterprises Support Program aims to boost the local economy by providing financial and skills support to tourism-related businesses. The Tourism Officer mentioned, "A comprehensive plan was done last year to be implemented throughout 2024," emphasizing the focus on training local workers and ensuring quality service.

Section 2: Extent of Community Involvement

Table 1: Community Involvement

Statements	Mean	SD	Qualitative Description
The community people are given the chance to actively support and engage in research efforts aimed at enhancing tourism in Kasibu, Nueva Vizcaya.	3.43	0.63	Active Involvement
The community people are given the chance to actively participate in various tourism-related activities organized within Kasibu, Nueva Vizcaya.	3.49	0.68	Active Involvement
The community people are given the chance to take an active role in influencing the decision-making processes concerning tourism development in Kasibu, Nueva Vizcaya.	3.36	0.73	Active Involvement
The community people are given the chance to actively contribute to the planning and strategic management of tourism initiatives in Kasibu, Nueva Vizcaya.	3.33	0.70	Active Involvement
The community people are given the chance to collaborate with local organizations and authorities to promote sustainable tourism practices in Kasibu, Nueva Vizcaya.	3.43	0.64	Active Involvement
The community people are given the chance to volunteer their time and expertise to support community-driven tourism projects in Kasibu, Nueva Vizcaya.	3.30	0.68	Active Involvement

The community people are given the chance to participate in discussions and forums focused on the responsible and eco-friendly growth of tourism in Kasibu, Nueva Vizcaya.	3.42	0.66	Active Involvement
The community people are given the chance to advocate for the preservation of cultural heritage and natural resources in Kasibu, Nueva Vizcaya through tourism.	3.47	0.73	Active Involvement
The community people are given the chance to work alongside local businesses to promote and support sustainable tourism practices within Nueva Vizcaya.	3.35	0.64	Active Involvement
The community people are given the chance to actively engage in educational initiatives aimed at raising awareness about the importance of responsible tourism in Kasibu, Nueva Vizcaya.	3.43	0.66	Active Involvement
OVERALL COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT	3.41	0.67	Active Involvement

Table 1 above shows the survey-based analysis which revealed that residents of Kasibu are actively involved in tourism initiatives, with an overall mean score of 3.41 (SD=0.67), indicating "Active Involvement." The highest level of involvement was observed in participation in tourism-related activities (mean = 3.49), while the lowest was in volunteering for community-driven projects (mean = 3.30). This suggests that while residents are engaged, there is room for improvement in volunteerism.

Section 3: Concerns in Community Involvement

Several challenges hinder active participation in tourism programs. A significant concern among residents is their limited understanding of tourism and how they can engage with it. Informant 1 highlighted that "Kasibu is not yet a fully developed tourism destination," indicating the need for educational initiatives to bridge this knowledge gap. Another challenge is the management of tourism sites, particularly regarding fee collection and the allocation of responsibilities. Informant 2 raised concerns about the complexities surrounding fee management, stating, "One concern is the fees collection... how will it be managed."

Operational readiness and infrastructure inadequacies also pose significant barriers. Informant 3 pointed out the lack of essential facilities, such as restrooms, which limits participation in tourism activities. Environmental issues, such as deforestation and the need for sustainable development, are key concerns for the community. Informant 4 expressed worries about the impact of tourism development on natural resources, emphasizing the importance of environmental regulations. Lastly, Informant 5 noted that time constraints limit residents' involvement, stating, "the people lack time," which affects their participation in tourism activities.

Section 4: Recommendations for Enhancing Community Involvement

To improve community involvement in Kasibu's tourism programs, several recommendations are proposed. First, local training programs should be developed to equip residents with skills necessary for tourism-related activities, such as tour guiding and event organization. Informant 1 emphasized the need for community training, stating, "We can host meetings or workshops... to develop local training programs."

Second, organizing events that promote cultural preservation while providing economic benefits is essential. Informant 2 highlighted the importance of integrating traditional practices into tourism activities, stating, "It is good to continuously organize events that help the residents by providing them with income opportunities."

Third, creating job opportunities by hiring locals to manage tourism sites and eco-projects can serve as an additional source of income. Informant 3 suggested, "They can hire people to take care of the crops as an extra source of income."

Fourth, establishing regular community meetings and feedback sessions will ensure that residents are

continuously involved in the decision-making process. Informant 4 expressed the need for ongoing dialogue, stating, "There should be regular forums or meetings... to get feedback and ideas from them."

Fifth, introducing incentives for active participation can motivate residents to engage in tourism programs. Informant 5 recommended, "There should be tokens for active participation to encourage everyone to attend."

Lastly, focusing on environmental sustainability and infrastructure development is crucial. Informant 9 noted, "Cleanliness is the number one concern... we focus on waste management to ensure that tourists have a pleasant experience."

DISCUSSION

The results underscore the importance of community engagement in tourism development. While residents are engaged in tourism activities, there is a need for improved volunteerism and support for community-driven initiatives. Addressing concerns related to awareness, infrastructure, and management will be essential for fostering greater participation. The recommendations provided aim to enhance community involvement, promote sustainable practices, and improve the overall tourism experience in Kasibu.

To further enhance volunteerism and support for community-driven initiatives, a more practical and actionable multifaceted strategy can be developed. First, creating a user-friendly online platform or mobile app for a community engagement calendar will allow residents to easily access information about upcoming events, volunteer opportunities, and initiatives. This platform can include interactive features such as event reminders, RSVP options, and the ability for residents to submit their own events, fostering a sense of ownership and participation. Additionally, establishing a structured mentorship program that pairs experienced volunteers with newcomers can help build connections, with regular check-ins to ensure ongoing support and engagement.

Offering tailored training workshops that address specific community needs—such as digital marketing for local initiatives or conflict resolution in community organizing—will empower residents with essential skills. Recording these workshops and making them available online will ensure wider access. To address infrastructure needs, communities can formalize partnerships with local businesses, providing incentives for their participation, such as tax breaks or public recognition. Hosting design charrettes will allow community members to collaborate with architects and planners to envision and design community spaces.

Implementing a simplified application process for a small grants program will encourage grassroots initiatives, and showcasing successful projects funded by these grants can inspire others. Organizing thematic community resource fairs with interactive booths will connect residents with local organizations and services, making the information more engaging. To mitigate community resistance to tourism projects, conducting workshops to discuss the findings of impact assessments will allow residents to voice their concerns and suggestions, while pilot projects can demonstrate the benefits of tourism initiatives.

Community clean-up days and cultural festivals can be enhanced by offering incentives for participation, such as free meals or local business discounts. Involving local artists and cultural leaders in the planning process will ensure that these events reflect community values and heritage. Encouraging local businesses to support community initiatives by offering employee volunteer days can create a sense of community investment, and recognition programs for businesses that actively participate can further enhance engagement.

Regular feedback mechanisms, such as surveys and community forums, will help gather input from residents about their needs and concerns, ensuring that initiatives remain relevant and effective. Launching social media campaigns that feature storytelling series about volunteers and their experiences can inspire others to get involved, while engagement challenges can encourage residents to share their volunteer experiences online. Offering peer-led workshops on fundraising and grant writing will equip community members with the skills needed to secure financial support for their initiatives, and developing a resource library with templates and guides will provide additional assistance.

Establishing a transparent community fund that residents can contribute to, with a clear process for how funds

are allocated, will ensure that decisions reflect community priorities. Finally, partnering with local media to create regular segments that spotlight community initiatives and volunteer opportunities will increase visibility and engagement. By implementing these comprehensive solutions, communities can cultivate a vibrant culture of volunteerism and support for initiatives that benefit everyone, ultimately fostering a more engaged and resilient community.

The tourism programs in Kasibu, Nueva Vizcaya, play a vital role in promoting sustainable tourism development. By integrating local culture, environmental preservation, and economic feasibility, these programs can benefit both the local community and visitors. The study highlights the need for ongoing training, infrastructure improvements, and community engagement to enhance the effectiveness of tourism initiatives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Provincial Tourism and Cultural Office:** Implement training and capacity-building programs to enhance residents' skills and knowledge. Address challenges in volunteerism and promote community-driven tourism projects. Establish feedback mechanisms for resident concerns. It is also recommended to join in international events to showcase not just the pride of Kasibu but the entire Philippines. Develop a comprehensive marketing strategy that highlights Kasibu's unique cultural heritage, festivals, and culinary experiences to attract tourists. Additionally, enhancing accessibility by improving transportation options and infrastructure will ensure that tourist sites are easily reachable year-round. Investing in the preservation and promotion of historical sites and museums will further enrich the visitor experience, while maintaining an updated calendar of local festivals and events will encourage both tourism and community participation.
2. **Kasibu Local Government Unit:** Prioritize infrastructure improvements, focusing on basic utilities such as clean water, waste management, and reliable internet services to support both residents and tourists. Facilitating regular town hall meetings will allow for community engagement and input on tourism development and local needs. Furthermore, implementing programs that provide financial incentives or grants to local businesses contributing to tourism initiatives will foster economic growth. Promoting sustainability practices in tourism will protect the local environment and enhance the overall visitor experience.
3. **Hospitality and Tourism Industry of Kasibu:** Establishing and promoting quality standards for accommodations and food services will ensure a consistent and enjoyable experience for visitors. Offering training programs for hospitality staff on customer service, cultural sensitivity, and local history will enhance interactions with tourists. Additionally, creating collaborative tourism packages that combine local attractions, accommodations, and dining options will provide a comprehensive experience for visitors. Implementing systems for collecting feedback from tourists will allow for continuous improvement of services and offerings.
4. **Kasibu Residents:** Residents can play a vital role in enhancing community engagement by participating in tourism-related volunteer programs, fostering a sense of ownership and pride in their community. Organizing cultural workshops that allow residents to share their skills and traditions will promote local culture and attract interest from visitors. Hosting regular community clean-up events will help maintain the area's beauty, enhancing both the local environment and its appeal to tourists. Providing incentives for residents who engage in community initiatives, such as discounts at local businesses or recognition programs, will further encourage participation and strengthen community ties.

By implementing these recommendations, Kasibu can cultivate a vibrant culture of volunteerism and support for initiatives that benefit everyone, ultimately fostering a more empowered, engaged, and resilient community.

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