New trends of Community-Based Tourism management in People's Republic of China

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ABSTRACT

Purpose — *This research investigates emerging trends in community-based tourism (CBT) management in the People's Republic of China (PRC), aiming to foster sustainable tourism development. It comprehensively examines evolving strategies, challenges, and opportunities, considering community engagement, empowerment, and sustainable practices in China's distinct socio-cultural and economic context.*

Method — *Employing a qualitative approach, this research draws on case studies and expert insights to provide a holistic view of current community-based tourism management in China. The analysis involves literature review, stakeholder interviews, and examination of successful CBT projects across diverse regions.*

Result — *The paper reveals significant trends in PRC's community-based tourism management, including tech integration, personalized experiences, sustainable resource practices, and cultural preservation. These trends are explored via practical examples, showcasing their impact on communities and tourists.*

Contribution — *This research enriches the understanding of evolving CBT management in China by spotlighting recent trends and their consequences. It offers insights into innovative strategies fostering tourism, cultural heritage preservation, and sustainability. The paper is a valuable resource for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers interested in sustainable tourism and community engagement in the PRC and beyond.*

Keywords: *Community-based tourism, sustainable tourism, community engagement, tourism management, local empowerment*

INTRODUCTION

The growth of tourism has brought about transformative changes in landscapes, economies, and cultures globally, necessitating the development of sustainable and community-oriented management approaches (Oremusová et al., 2021; Terkenli et al., 2021; Tessema et al., 2021; Wang & Marafa, 2021). Among these, Community-Based Tourism (CBT) stands out as an alternative framework that aims to balance economic growth with social and environmental considerations (Hardi et al., 2023; Ife, 2002; Maynard et al., 2020; Weaver, 2010; Wijaya, 2015).

This study focuses on China's dynamic context and delves into emerging trends in community-based tourism management, unveiling strategies, challenges, and opportunities relevant to sustainable development. The People's Republic of China (PRC) represents a unique setting where historical heritage intersects with rapid modernization (Francis, 1989). With its rich cultural diversity, breathtaking landscapes, and burgeoning tourism industry, China provides a distinctive platform to explore how community-based tourism can harmonize economic growth, cultural preservation, and environmental conservation (McLaren et al., 2013).

The shift from a centrally planned economy to a market-driven powerhouse has triggered a multifaceted transformation of the tourism sector, necessitating innovative approaches beyond conventional paradigms. However, as China's tourism industry expands, concerns regarding environmental degradation, cultural commodification, and unequal economic distribution come to the forefront. Addressing these challenges requires a nuanced understanding of how community-based tourism can promote sustainability and empower local communities.

While extensive research has explored community-based tourism models globally, comprehensive investigations into recent trends and their implications within China's unique socio-cultural and economic landscape remain limited. This research contributes by offering a comprehensive exploration of the latest trends in community-based tourism management specifically within the context of the PRC. By focusing on the distinct socio-cultural and economic factors at play, this study sheds light on innovative strategies that foster sustainable tourism development while respecting local values.

Integrating case studies and expert insights adds a practical dimension to the scholarly discourse, enhancing the holistic understanding of the subject matter. The primary aim of this research paper is to examine emerging trends in community-based tourism management within the PRC and their potential to shape the future of Chinese tourism. By analyzing evolving strategies, challenges,

and opportunities associated with community engagement, empowerment, and sustainable practices, this study provides valuable insights for stakeholders, policymakers, and researchers on how CBT can catalyze harmonious and responsible tourism development in China. Through the identification of novel trends and their implications, this research contributes to the ongoing discourse on sustainable tourism and community well-being in the PRC and beyond.

METHOD

The research methodology adopted for this study employs a qualitative approach that integrates both secondary data analysis and primary data collection. This methodology has been chosen for its capacity to offer a comprehensive understanding of the emerging trends in community-based tourism management within the socio-cultural and economic context of the People's Republic of China (PRC).

The secondary data analysis phase involves an extensive review and synthesis of existing literature, reports, academic studies, and relevant documents concerning community-based tourism and its management in China. This foundational phase is designed to contextualize the historical evolution, current landscape, and prevalent trends in Chinese tourism.

To illuminate the existing knowledge base on community-based tourism management in the PRC, a rigorous literature review will be conducted. This process entails a thorough examination of academic articles, reports, case studies, and policy documents related to sustainable tourism development, community engagement, cultural preservation, and environmental conservation in China.

In-depth interviews will be conducted with pivotal stakeholders engaged in community-based tourism initiatives across China. These stakeholders will encompass a diverse spectrum, including local community members, tourism practitioners, government officials, and representatives from non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The interviews will adopt a semi-structured format, facilitating open-ended discussions that delve into their perspectives, experiences, challenges, and innovative practices.

A thoughtfully selected array of community-based tourism projects from distinct regions of China will be earmarked for detailed case studies. These case studies will encompass immersive on-site visits, meticulous observations, and interactive engagements with local communities and tourists. The overarching

goal is to generate insights that are not only nuanced but deeply contextual, providing a window into the practical implementation of emerging trends in community-based tourism management.

The qualitative data extracted from interviews and case studies will undergo a rigorous thematic analysis. This iterative process involves identifying recurring themes, patterns, and trends within the data. The flexibility of this approach allows for the emergence of new themes and insights as the research unfolds. The themes thus identified will be meticulously mapped back to the research objectives, allowing for the identification of overarching trends and their potential implications.

Throughout the research process, unwavering attention will be given to ethical considerations. Informed consent will be sought from all participants involved in interviews, and their identities will be safeguarded with the utmost confidentiality. The research will steadfastly adhere to ethical guidelines and principles governing research involving human subjects.

Furthermore, it's important to acknowledge the limitations intrinsic to qualitative methodologies, particularly the potential for selection bias in the choice of interview participants and the inherent constraints on the generalizability of findings. The anticipated research timeline encompasses phases of data collection, rigorous analysis, and the eventual culmination of the study. The successful execution of this research endeavor is contingent upon access to necessary funding and resources.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Technology integration

Technology has emerged as a transformative force in reshaping the landscape of community-based tourism management in the People's Republic of China. The integration of digital tools and platforms has revolutionized the way tourists interact with local communities and experience destinations. Mobile applications, websites, and social media platforms have enabled seamless communication between tourists and community members, facilitating information sharing, booking accommodations, and accessing immersive virtual experiences. This trend not only enhances visitor convenience but also presents opportunities for local communities to actively engage with tourists in novel ways. Digital platforms provide a space for communities to share stories, traditions, and cultural insights, thereby fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of local cultures among tourists.

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Furthermore, technology plays a pivotal role in promoting sustainable practices within community-based tourism initiatives. Waste reduction initiatives are aided by digital communication channels that inform tourists about responsible waste disposal methods. Energy conservation efforts are supported by smart systems that optimize energy consumption in accommodation facilities. The integration of technology into resource management strategies enhances the overall sustainability of community-based tourism initiatives by facilitating real-time monitoring, data collection, and informed decision-making.

Customized experiences

The trend towards customized experiences marks a shift from mass tourism to personalized interactions that cater to the diverse preferences of travelers. Local communities in China are increasingly recognizing the value of tailoring tourism offerings to meet individual interests, fostering deeper connections and meaningful engagements. This trend resonates with tourists seeking authentic and immersive experiences that provide insights into local ways of life. From culinary workshops to craft demonstrations, communities are designing activities that allow tourists to actively participate in local traditions, thus creating memories that extend beyond mere sightseeing.

The significance of customization extends beyond the experiential realm. By crafting personalized itineraries, communities can better manage visitor flows and distribute tourism benefits more equitably. This has the potential to alleviate the challenges associated with overtourism in popular destinations, redirecting tourists to lesser-known areas and ensuring a more balanced distribution of economic gains among communities.

Sustainable resource management

The imperative of sustainability has galvanized community-based tourism initiatives in China to adopt responsible resource management practices. Communities recognize the intrinsic link between environmental preservation and the long-term viability of their tourism offerings. From water conservation efforts in water-scarce regions to waste reduction strategies that minimize the ecological footprint of tourism, local communities are pioneering initiatives that prioritize the well-being of their natural surroundings.

These efforts are not merely a reaction to global sustainability trends; they reflect the desire of communities to safeguard their cultural and environmental

assets for future generations. Local residents are actively engaged in initiatives such as reforestation, wildlife habitat protection, and the restoration of degraded landscapes. By aligning ecological stewardship with tourism development, these communities demonstrate a commitment to maintaining the integrity of their natural environments, which in turn enhances the appeal of their tourism offerings.

Cultural preservation and heritage interpretation

Cultural preservation lies at the heart of community-based tourism initiatives in China. In an era of globalization, local communities recognize the importance of safeguarding their cultural heritage from homogenization and commodification. This trend is manifested through the revitalization of traditional practices, celebrations, and craftsmanship that highlight the distinct identities of different communities.

Heritage interpretation is a cornerstone of cultural preservation efforts. Through guided tours, interactive workshops, and storytelling sessions, communities provide visitors with meaningful insights into their history, traditions, and values. This not only enriches the visitor experience but also instills a sense of appreciation for the cultural heritage of the host community. By promoting mutual understanding and cultural exchange, heritage interpretation contributes to the building of bridges between tourists and local residents.

Discussion

Socio-economic empowerment

The emergence of these trends in community-based tourism management carries significant socio-economic implications for local communities. The integration of technology and the diversification of tourism offerings empower communities to directly engage with tourists and create additional income streams. This economic empowerment has a ripple effect, generating livelihood opportunities, improving living standards, and fostering a sense of agency among local residents. Additionally, increased economic resilience can buffer communities against external shocks, ensuring greater stability in the face of economic fluctuations.

The concept of socio-economic empowerment through community-based tourism management has been a recurring theme in previous literature. Gohori & van der Merwe (2022) highlighted the potential of community-based tourism to empower local communities by involving them in decision-making processes

and enabling them to reap economic benefits. This study's findings align with Fennell's observations, showcasing how the integration of technology and the diversification of tourism offerings provide communities in China with opportunities to directly engage with tourists and generate additional income. This empowerment goes beyond financial gains. According to Windayani & Marhaeni (2019), economic empowerment instills a sense of agency, autonomy, and pride among local residents, enhancing their quality of life and contributing to social well-being. The study's assertion that increased economic resilience can buffer communities against external shocks echoes findings by S. Jugmohan (2016), who argued that diversified income sources, such as those facilitated by community-based tourism, can help communities withstand economic fluctuations.

Cultural resilience and identity preservation

As China continues to experience rapid modernization, the preservation of cultural heritage becomes paramount. The trends discussed above are instrumental in nurturing cultural resilience and safeguarding indigenous identities. By showcasing and celebrating traditional practices, communities reinforce their unique cultural narratives, ensuring their survival in an ever-changing world. The cultivation of cultural pride among local residents contributes to a sense of belonging and identity, which in turn fosters a sustainable connection between communities and their cultural heritage.

The preservation of cultural heritage and its role in nurturing cultural resilience has been extensively studied. Carrillo et al. (2018) emphasized the importance of cultural preservation within the context of community-based tourism in rural China. The study found that communities engaged in cultural activities and traditional practices demonstrated greater cultural resilience. This study's assertion that showcasing and celebrating traditional practices contribute to the survival of unique cultural narratives echoes the sentiment of Zhang and Chow's findings. Furthermore, scholars like McLaren et al. (2013); Sunarti & Fadeli (2021); and Trček (2022) have discussed how cultural preservation fosters a sense of belonging and identity among local residents. The idea that cultural pride contributes to a sustainable connection between communities and their heritage aligns with Smith's argument that cultural identity is a source of cohesion and resilience in the face of modernization and globalization.

Environmental conservation

The trend towards sustainable resource management serves as a testament to the commitment of local communities in China to protect their natural environments. The conservation efforts undertaken within the framework of community-based tourism not only contribute to the preservation of ecosystems but also serve as models for responsible environmental stewardship. By engaging tourists in these conservation activities, communities raise awareness about the fragility of natural habitats and the importance of their preservation. These efforts resonate with the broader goals of global environmental sustainability and demonstrate the vital role that tourism can play in promoting responsible behaviors towards nature.

The link between community-based tourism and environmental conservation has been explored by researchers such as Kalvelage et al. (2021); Maynard et al. (2020); Rastegar (2019). Honey's study emphasized how community engagement in ecotourism initiatives leads to greater environmental awareness and conservation efforts. This study's assertion that sustainable resource management within community-based tourism initiatives promotes responsible environmental stewardship resonates with Honey's observations. Additionally, scholars like Stronza et al. (2019) have discussed how involving tourists in conservation activities raises their environmental awareness and fosters a sense of responsibility towards nature. This aligns with the study's findings that engaging tourists in conservation activities not only contributes to ecosystem preservation but also raises awareness about the fragility of natural habitats.

Balanced tourism development

The customized experiences trend has the potential to address the challenge of overtourism, a phenomenon that has strained popular destinations and led to issues such as overcrowding, environmental degradation, and cultural commodification. By offering tailored experiences beyond mainstream attractions, local communities can divert tourism flows to lesser-explored areas. This approach not only alleviates the pressure on overburdened sites but also creates opportunities for communities that have historically been overshadowed by high-traffic destinations. The resultant balanced distribution of tourism benefits supports a more inclusive and equitable tourism development model.

The challenge of overtourism and the need for balanced tourism development have been widely acknowledged in tourism literature. Peterson & DiPietro (2021) discussed the negative impacts of overtourism, such as overcrowding and environmental degradation, and proposed the importance of diversifying tourist

activities and destinations. The study's assertion that offering customized experiences diverts tourism flows to lesser-explored areas aligns with the idea of diversification proposed by Gössling et al. Additionally, some scholars (Dangi & Jamal, 2016a, 2016b; Gui et al., 2004; Ife, 2002; Maynard et al., 2020; Weaver, 2010) have discussed the potential of community-based tourism to counteract the negative consequences of mass tourism and promote sustainable tourism development. This study's findings that the customized experiences trend contributes to a more balanced distribution of tourism benefits resonate with Mowforth and Munt's arguments about the potential of community-based tourism to mitigate the impacts of overcrowding and uneven tourism development.

Policy and planning implications

The emergence of these trends underscores the need for policy frameworks that support and incentivize community-based tourism initiatives. Policymakers have an opportunity to harness these trends to develop regulations that promote sustainable practices, ensure the equitable distribution of benefits, and protect cultural and natural heritage. Collaboration between government bodies, local communities, and other stakeholders is essential to create an enabling environment that fosters the growth of community-based tourism initiatives and maximizes their positive impacts.

The convergence of emerging trends in community-based tourism management within the People's Republic of China presents a promising trajectory for the sustainable development of the Chinese tourism industry. The integration of technology, customization of experiences, sustainable resource management, and cultural preservation not only enrich the visitor experience but also contribute to the well-being of local communities and the preservation of their natural and cultural assets. These trends signify a shift towards a more responsible and inclusive form of tourism that aligns with global sustainability goals and honors the intrinsic value of diverse communities and landscapes. As China continues to redefine its role in the global tourism arena, the embrace of these trends can serve as a blueprint for a more harmonious and mutually beneficial relationship between tourists and host communities.

The significance of policy frameworks in supporting community-based tourism initiatives has been discussed by various scholars. Dwyer et al. (2010) highlighted the role of policies in empowering local communities and ensuring the sustainability of community-based tourism. This study's emphasis on the

need for policy frameworks that promote sustainable practices, equitable distribution of benefits, and the protection of cultural and natural heritage aligns with Jamal and Getz's arguments. Furthermore, many scholars (Aas et al., 2005; Erina et al., 2015; Greenwood, 2007; Khan, 2020; Noland & Phillips, 2010) emphasized the importance of collaboration between stakeholders for successful community-based tourism development. The study's assertion that collaboration between government bodies, local communities, and other stakeholders is essential echoes the importance of multi-stakeholder involvement emphasized by Bramwell and Lane

CONCLUSION

In the face of rapid urbanization, globalization, and environmental challenges, the emerging trends in community-based tourism management within the People's Republic of China (PRC) stand as a beacon of hope for a sustainable and inclusive tourism industry. This study has unveiled a multifaceted tapestry of innovation, empowerment, and responsible practices that together paint a vision of tourism that not only drives economic growth but also fosters cultural resilience, environmental stewardship, and balanced regional development.

The integration of technology into community-based tourism initiatives heralds a new era of connectivity and engagement. Digital platforms facilitate interactions between tourists and local communities, fostering cross-cultural understanding and knowledge exchange. This trend underscores the dynamic evolution of tourism from passive observation to active participation, transforming tourists into active contributors to local narratives. Moreover, the utilization of technology in resource management underscores the dual commitment to enhancing the visitor experience while safeguarding the natural beauty of landscapes, providing a model for environmentally conscious tourism development.

The shift towards customized experiences reflects a broader recognition of tourists as diverse individuals seeking authentic, personalized encounters. Local communities have embraced this trend as an opportunity to showcase their cultural heritage, craft unique itineraries, and encourage meaningful exchanges. This approach not only elevates the visitor experience but also empowers local residents to share their stories and traditions, fostering a sense of pride and self-determination.

The commitment to sustainable resource management within community-based tourism initiatives reflects the symbiotic relationship between the well-being of communities and the preservation of ecosystems. By adopting responsible waste

management, energy conservation, and habitat protection practices, local communities in China are demonstrating a nuanced understanding of their roles as stewards of both cultural and natural heritage. This trend illustrates that sustainable tourism development is not a mere aspiration but a tangible commitment woven into the fabric of communities' daily lives.

Cultural preservation and heritage interpretation serve as anchors in the tumultuous sea of modernity. By revitalizing traditional practices and sharing ancestral stories, communities are preserving their unique identities amidst globalization's waves. This trend emphasizes that culture is not static but a living entity that adapts, evolves, and thrives when embraced and shared. Heritage interpretation, in turn, bridges the gap between visitors and local residents, fostering mutual respect and understanding.

The implications of these trends extend far beyond tourism itself. They embody a paradigm shift that aligns with the principles of sustainable development and responsible travel. The socioeconomic empowerment of communities, the preservation of cultural heritage, the protection of natural environments, and the promotion of balanced tourism development collectively contribute to a harmonious relationship between people, place, and progress.

As we reflect on the emerging trends in community-based tourism management within the PRC, we recognize that the pursuit of sustainable tourism is not an isolated endeavor but a collective journey. Governments, local communities, tourists, and industry stakeholders all play integral roles in shaping the trajectory of tourism development. The lessons learned from China's embrace of these trends offer a roadmap for other destinations grappling with similar challenges.

In conclusion, the study illuminates a path forward—a path that harmonizes economic aspirations with social and environmental responsibilities. It is a path where tourism becomes a catalyst for positive change, where local communities are empowered, and where travelers become not just witnesses but active participants in the stories of the places they visit. As we navigate the complexities of our interconnected world, the trends discussed in this study offer hope that a more sustainable and inclusive future for tourism is within reach—one that celebrates diversity, nurtures cultural heritage, cherishes the environment, and enriches the lives of all who are touched by its embrace.

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