

The Role of Domestic Tourism in Pro-Poor Tourism

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Poverty reduction is one of the major development goals of today's society and tourism is recognized as a relevant tool to do so. Many researchers have pointed out its potential (e.g. Harrison and Schipani, 2007; Mensah & Amugandoh, 2010) but there has also been a lot of criticism. Most cited problems are concerned with the large outflow of money, the unequal participation of locals and distribution of the benefits among the communities as well as the high dependency on the developed world (Chock et al., 2007; Harrison and Schipani, 2007; Zapataa, Hallb & Lindoc, 2011).

To overcome many of these obstacles several researchers suggest to focus more on the often neglected, though highly potential domestic tourism (Ashley, Boyd & Goodwin, 2000; Rogerson & Letsie, 2013; Scheyvens, 2007; Zapataa et al., 2011; Zhao & Li, 2006). This new emphasis is seen to fight poverty more effectively having many positive impacts on the economic, social and environmental sustainability of developing nations. According to Scheyvens (2007, p.308) researchers "should be very interested in domestic tourism because it makes up the vast majority of tourism flows and thus many claims for tourism's ability to contribute to poverty alleviation must apply to domestic tourism".

Indeed accounts domestic tourism for approximately 80% of tourist flows worldwide (Scheyvens, 2007) and particularly within developing countries the numbers have been increasing fast recently (Bigano, Hamilton & Tol, 2006; Rogerson & Letsie, 2007; Scheyvens, 2007). Rogerson and Letsie (2007) pointed out that alonedomestic tourist arrivals in India are more than three times higher than all annual international arrivals worldwide. Main reason for this increase are the rising middle-class, improved mobility and tourist facilities as well as the strong desire to travel (Rogerson & Letsie, 2007). Hence, there is a huge market potential and some researchers point out its advantages with regard to poverty alleviation.

From an economic perspective scholars argue that domestic tourism can be a significant contributor to the local economy (Rogerson & Letsie, 2007; Scheyvens, 2007). Despite the low purchasing power of domestic tourists, they are a crucial factor in the economic development of the local people and the balancing of the regional development (Mbaiwa, 2005; Rogerson & Letsie, 2007; Scheyvens, 2007; Zhao & Li, 2006). Studies in South East Asia claim that domestic tourists buy more locally produced goods and services than international tourists (Ashley et al., 2000; Scheyvens, 2007).

Furthermore, domestic tourism encourages locals' participation who can better understand and reply to the needs of their compatriots, whereas they often lack the skills and resources to cater for higher-end international tourists (Rogerson & Letsie, 2013; Scheyvens, 2007; Zapataa et al., 2011; Zhao & Li, 2006). Furthermore, domestic tourists visit more different places, stay longer (Rogerson & Letsie, 2013; Yang & Liu, 2013) and offset seasonality of the international tourists (Mbaiwa, 2005; Scheyvens, 2007; Seckelmann, 2002). Thus, domestic tourism is especially important for local entrepreneurs and small businesses (Ashley et al., 2000; Scheyvens, 2007; Zhao, 2009) and can avoid outflows of profits (Seckelmann, 2002). Additionally, it does not require large investments and can avoid external investments and control (Scheyvens, 2007; Seckelmann, 2002).

Considering the cultural domain, domestic tourism has also several advantages over international tourism. Firstly, over-commercialization and the loss of culture can be avoided (Seckelmann, 2002). Secondly, national integration, the building of a national identity and social ties is strengthened through the exchange between fellow countrymen (Rogerson & Letsie, 2013; Scheyvens, 2007). Thirdly, there are less cross-cultural misunderstandings; for example, a study found out that locals in Samoa believe that "Samoan tourists are particularly desirable as they understand cultural norms" (Scheyvens, 2007, p. 323).

Looking at climate change literature, there are also reasons to focus more on domestic tourism from an environmental perspective. Researchers have recognized that climate change will have very negative consequences in developing countries and could undermine poverty alleviation (Peeters, 2014). In the discussion about climate change mitigation in tourism it is often seen as unethical to restrict air transport because it would harm the development in poor countries (Peeters, 2014). However, a recent study from Peeters (2014) suggests that the impacts of such restrictions on developing countries would be neutral on average and losses could be compensated for example by emphasizing more on less carbon-intensive domestic flights. With this measure the claimed coherence between strategies of poverty alleviation and air transport emission reduction could be maintained (Peeters, 2014).

In sum, there are various reasons in literature which suggest that strengthening the domestic market could help to fight poverty sustainably through tourism. Researchers suggest that therefore governments have to create long-term plans and policies for encouraging domestic tourism and empowering local businesses (Mbaiwa, 2005). To do so, however, more research is required.

There are generally only few studies about domestic tourism in developing countries (Bigano et al., 2006; Rogerson & Letsie, 2013). Gladstone (2005, p.195) even calls it a neglected theme and states that "for most Western scholars and even those who write extensively about tourism, people in low-income countries do not seem to qualify as tourists". Scholars claim that most research concerning the developing world is about how to respond to needs of rather upscale travelers from the First World (Gladstone, 2005; Rogerson & Letsie, 2013).

One field of research that needs more attention is the market size of domestic tourism. Although there is evidence that the potential domestic market is huge (Bigano, Hamilton & Tol, 2006; Rogerson & Letsie, 2007; Scheyvens, 2007) various studies suggest that this is

only true for rich countries. On the contrary, third world countries have very small domestic markets due to poverty, lack of infrastructure and cultural factors (Bigano et al., 2006). For example, a study in Ghana found out that Ghanaians do not travel because they lack knowledge of places to visit and cannot afford accommodation (Adutwum & Boakye, 2013).

Another under-researched theme is how the small buying power of domestic tourists can alter the well-being of a poor country. Although there is evidence that domestic tourism contributes positively to the economy of poor countries (Mbaiwa, 2005; Rogerson & Letsie, 2007; Scheyvens, 2007; Zhao & Li, 2006), some studies point out that domestic tourism has fewer development benefits and brings less income to the economy than international tourism. Scheyvens (2007, p. 308), for example, calls domestic tourism the “poor cousin of the more glamorous international tourism market”.

To conclude it can be said that domestic tourism in developing countries could be an effective tool for poverty alleviation. However, to use this currently neglected tool, more research is needed. Firstly, the size of the market has to be identified and secondly, the purchasing power of this market and its effect on the development has to be studied. This additional research is urgently needed so that the potential of domestic tourism as tool of poverty alleviation will be recognized and implemented.

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