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# Community Participation toward Tourism Development and Conservation Program in Rural World Heritage Sites

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S. Mostafa Rasoolimanesh and Mastura Jaafar

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## Abstract

Community participation in tourism development and World Heritage Site (WHS) conservation management is essential for the sustainable development of WHS destinations. Local communities play a significant role in reviving and sustaining WHSs. Community participation ranges from involvement in the decision-making processes at the highest level down to economic involvement and the promotion of the destination at the lowest level. What shape community participation ultimately takes depends on the circumstance of destinations. This study attempts to review the current community participation literature with respect to rural WHS destinations, synthesising the current literature by way of a systematic review. The findings reveal a preference among rural WHS residents for economic involvement and destination promotion rather than participation in the decision-making process. The findings of this study expand upon the community participation literature, clarifying the concept in the context of rural WHS destinations. In addition, the results have practical implications for local authorities responsible for the sustainable conservation management and tourism development of rural WHS—that these seemingly competing objectives are best achieved by involving local residents in economic activities and increasing their benefits from tourism.

**Keywords:** community participation, conservation programme, economic involvement, rural destinations, tourism development, World Heritage Site (WHS)

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## 1. Introduction

A community is “a group of people who share a geographic area and are bound together by common culture, values, race, or social class” [1] (p. 356). In World Heritage Site (WHS) destinations, a “community” refers to the residents within a WHS area who are instrumental in

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reviving the WHS. Community participation constitutes a relationship, established by the members of the community, through their collaboration in achieving common goals and making the community a better place in which to live [2]. Community participation in heritage management can settle conflicts between the needs and interests of residents—between the pursuit of a better quality of life and economic development—and WHS conservation [3]. *The Charter for the Conservation of Historic Towns and Urban Areas* recognises the value of community participation thusly, “The participation and the involvement of the residents are essential for the success of the conservation programme and should be encouraged” [4] (p. 2). Furthermore, *The Burra Charter* stresses that heritage conservation is only sustainable with the participation of the community [5] (Article 12).

Community participation in WHS conservation and the development of heritage tourism has been the focus of several studies [6–10]. Community participation in WHS conservation and tourism development is essential for reviving WHS destinations and for sustaining their development into the future [7,10]. The participation of local residents in WHS heritage management and tourism development contributes toward improving their quality of life and, at the same time, the sustainable conservation of the heritage site itself [3,6,7]. In addition, the participation of local residents improves their sense of belonging, develops social networks, and inculcates a greater appreciation and understanding for the value of the local area [6,7,9,11,12].

Three types of community participation can be identified in the context of tourism development and heritage management: coercive participation, induced participation, and spontaneous participation [13–17]. Coercive community participation refers to the lowest level of participation in which residents have no power over the course of the tourism development. Their involvement is limited to various predefined activities revolving around tourism destination promotion and they receive few economic benefits [16]. In induced community participation, although local residents have a say in the heritage management and tourism development process, they have no actual power or control over the decisions being made by those in positions of authority [16,18]. In spontaneous participation, local residents have the power to make decisions and control the development process [16,17].

Notwithstanding, the involvement of local communities in WHS conservation and tourism development is contingent upon a variety of factors that may either facilitate or hinder their involvement. Local communities must be aware of the value of the WHS in which they inhabit and have the necessary knowledge and skills with which to take advantage of tourism development and conservation opportunities. That said, some incentives might be necessary to motivate local residents to engage with tourism development and conservation processes, lest these opportunities are allowed to pass them by. The perception of benefits in the inscription of a site as a WHS and tourism development can serve to encourage residents to participate in tourism development and WHS conservation.

This study aims to synthesise the community participation literature to date in the context of WHSs. Notwithstanding, the participation preferences of residents may vary according to the circumstance of the destination [19,20]. The current study, therefore, focuses exclusively on rural WHS destinations to explore community involvement and identify how local authorities

and correspondent organisations can best go about involving residents in the sustainable development of WHS destinations. The remainder of this chapter is organised as follows. In the next section, we explain our methods for conducting this systematic review of the literature. We review and analyse the existing literature with respect to community participation in WHS conservation and tourism development, various types of community participation, and factors influencing community participation in rural WHSs. Following the literature review and analysis, we undertake a discussion of our findings. We conclude this paper by outlining the theoretical and practical implications of this study and offer a number of recommendations for future research.

## 2. Methodology

This paper uses content analysis to review the current community participation literature with respect to rural WHSs. To be more exact, we reviewed books and scholarly articles published in refereed tourism journals identified using Google Scholar from 1990 until late 2015. Content analysis is a research method used to trace the evolution of a phenomenon over an extended period and can reveal a wealth of related knowledge [21,22]. We searched Google Scholar for scholarly articles using three groups of keyword searches. In search Group 1, we searched for “community participation,” “community involvement,” “community engagement,” “resident participation,” “resident involvement,” “resident engagement,” and “public participation.” In Group 2, we searched for “rural destinations” and “rural tourism.” In Group 3, we searched for “World Heritage Site,” “heritage management,” and “heritage tourism.” We narrowed our search by combining these three keyword groups. We finalised our list of articles by including at least a keyword from Group 1 and another keyword from either Group 2 or 3. Using this method of selecting the articles, we identified approximately 60 literary sources for analysis. Each article was reviewed and analysed to identify (a) the concept of community participation in tourism destinations, particularly rural WHSs; (b) the various types of community participation and what was most prevalent in rural WHSs; and (c) the factors influencing the successful community participation of residents in rural WHSs. Using this approach, we elucidated a number of recommendations for rural WHS authorities looking to successfully involve local communities in sustainable WHS conservation and tourism development.

## 3. Analysis and findings

### 3.1. Community participation in WHS conservation and tourism development

As previously noted, community participation constitutes a relationship established by the members of the community themselves through their mutual collaboration in working toward achieving common goals and making their community a better place in which to live [2]. Community involvement, therefore, is a process of working together with people in the community for the benefit of the said community. In such an arrangement, the connections and interactions between community members are important for creating strong bonds and

relationships. Consequently, community involvement can create a sense of belonging, trust, and credibility among community members [6,23].

Numerous studies attest to the importance of community participation in the conservation and tourism development of heritage sites [6–9,24]. Community participation in WHS management can address conflicts between the economic and developmental interests of the community and the need to conserve the WHS destination as a precious resource and can assist in clarifying the concept of heritage among community members [3,8]. Several heritage management studies have confirmed the importance of public participation in sustainable conservation programmes [7,10]. The local community's participation in heritage management contributes toward an improved quality of life, economic development, and the sustainability of conservation programmes [3,6,7]. Moreover, community participation can instil a sense of pride in the community.

According to the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, the declaration of a site as a WHS forms part of an overall strategy aimed at recognising and protecting the site [25]. As such, the accumulated local knowledge and sense of belonging to a certain place should ideally help the community to live in harmony with the value associated with the site. Educating local communities about their histories, however, is a vital prerequisite for communities to familiarise themselves with their heritage and for them to feel a sense of pride for their site and historical relics. Community participation is vital to this pride-instilling process. Community involvement in heritage projects can influence residents' sense of belonging, aid in the development of social networks with others, and improve residents' pride and understanding of the value of the local area [7,9,11,12,24].

Notwithstanding, WHSs and tourism development are characterised by symbioses and tension [8]. The inscription of a site as a WHS enhances the international visibility of the site, thus serving to attract tourism development, which in turn has the potential public and financial support for the conservation of the heritage site [8,26]. Nonetheless, it is important to develop the site and its surrounding area as a tourist destination for the economic development of local communities while, at the same time, prioritising sustainable conservation programmes within the area to maintain the site itself [27]. Therefore, community participation in the context of WHS conservation programmes and tourism development is significant and meaningful. Community participation strengthens communities because it involves making connections between individuals within the community, with these relationships helping to create a sense of belonging, trust, and credibility [3,6]. Moreover, in the context of WHS conservation and tourism development, community participation is an empowering process involving all tiers of stakeholders (i.e., local government, local residents, and private enterprise), such that problem identification and decision-making are shared and stakeholders have a collective interest in the sustainability of the development [6,28–33]. Both the community and the tourism developers alike benefit from their involvement in this process, boosting their respect for the traditional lifestyle and values of the destination community [30,32,34–36]). Destination communities, due to their historical knowledge of how the community adapts to change and being the group most affected by tourism, should be actively involved in tourism planning, especially given the expectation that they will become an integral part of the tourism



product [30,37]. Furthermore, some of the negative impacts of tourism might be avoided, and positive impacts maximised, through community participation in the planning process.

Community participation in the context of tourism planning focuses on the decision-making process and the benefits of tourism development [29,32,33]. The involvement of the local community in the decision-making process benefits the local economy and boosts residents' respect for their traditional lifestyle and values [32,34–36]. Local residents can benefit economically, either through employment with introduced businesses or by establishing their own small businesses to generate additional economic benefits for their community [33]. Local community participation provides residents with a range of opportunities to participate effectively in tourism development activities, to mobilise their capacities as social actors rather than as passive subjects, to make decisions, and to control the activities that affect their lives.

The participation of the local community in tourism is a driving force for change and a catalyst for development. According to Telfer and Sharpley [38], local communities can provide a wide range of perspectives on tourism development. Inskeep [39] argued that only through their involvement in tourism activities can local communities maximise the socioeconomic benefits from tourism. Moreover, the accuracy of representations of their traditional lifestyles and values is contingent upon the involvement of the local community in the planning and development process [36]. Therefore, sustainable tourism development relies upon the involvement of the local community. Notwithstanding, this literature has revealed various streams of community involvement and participation, which should be elucidated to understand this concept better in the context of rural WHSs.

### **3.2. Types of community participation**

Several researchers have identified various types of community participation, from manipulative participation to citizen power [13–16]. Arnstein [13], a pioneer in this area, suggested an eight-tier hierarchy of resident participation categorised according to three groups: manipulative participation, citizen tokenism, and citizen power [18]. Pretty [14] developed a somewhat similar typology of community participation inclusive of three categories: manipulative participation, passive participation, and self-mobilisation [15,17]. Tosun [16,18] applied the typologies of Arnstein [13] and Pretty [14] to tourism to identify the three forms of community participation already explained: coercive participation, induced participation, and spontaneous participation [17]. Note, however, that, in coercive community participation, residents' involvement is limited to predefined activities in accordance with decisions made by power-holders who also determine how residents will act to promote the destination and to what economic benefits they will be entitled. The residents themselves, however, have no actual power or opportunities to make their voices heard [16]. The second form of community participation, based on Tosun's typology, is induced community participation, which is similar to citizen tokenism in Arnstein's model and consultation in Petty's typology [16]. In induced community participation, although residents' have a voice in the tourism development process, they lack the power with which to control the decision-making processes [16,18]. In short, power-holders determine whether the opinions of residents will be accepted or rejected and how they will impact the planning and development process [17]. This type of participa-

tion often takes the form of public hearings and usually occurs late in the development planning process, once most issues have already been resolved and decisions have been made [40]. The highest level of community participation is spontaneous participation in Tosun's model, citizen power in Arnstein's typology, and self-mobilisation and interactive participation in Petty's study. As observed previously, spontaneous participation refers to the power of residents to make decisions and control the process of development [16]. Spontaneous participation can generate trust, ownership, and social capital among the residents [23,41].

However, several studies have found that destination communities in the developing world, or in less developed areas, such as rural destinations, prefer minimal levels of community participation and economic involvement [19,20,33]. Residents in these locations tend to be less interested in participating in decision-making or controlling the process of tourism development and heritage conservation [19,20,33]. In some less developed destinations, residents indicated a preference for involvement of economic activities and benefit sharing over involvement in the decision-making processes [19]. We speculate that such findings are the product of the economic importance of tourism to rural communities. Tourism in rural WHS destinations has historically been an important mechanism for development. Consequently, rural destination communities aspire to become involved in tourism activities, if only so that they might receive a significant share of the economic benefits in the form of direct revenue, employment, infrastructure, and housing ownership [42]. Of course, the involvement of local communities benefits tourists as well, as the local community is ideally poised to provide tourists with a range of accommodation, information, transport, and other facilities and services [43]. Secondary to these economic benefits, tourism helps to improve the local community's quality of life [44]. A study of tourism in a mountainous area reported that local community involvement played an important role in the development and conservation of the environment and other resources and in marketing the destination [45].

### **3.3. Factors influencing community participation**

Residents' community participation preferences are contingent upon a number of factors [6,11]. Having investigated the factors influencing residents' community participation preferences in heritage management and tourism development, three categories of influencing factors become apparent: motivation, opportunity, and ability [46,47]. Motivation concerns residents' willingness and interest to become involved in the development/management process [48,49]. In the context of WHS destinations, motivation affects residents' perceptions, WHS inscription, and subsequent tourism development impacts. Focusing on the perceived positive impacts of tourism encourages the community to participate in tourism activities and heritage conservation programmes and to support tourism development, whereas focusing on the perceived negative effects reduces their support for tourism development [6,7,11]. Therefore, community participation in WHS conservation programmes and tourism development processes depends on the concerns, interests, and perceptions of residents regarding the impacts of tourism development [6,7,11,46,47]. Bearing this in mind, the inscription of a destination as a WHS and development of tourism can positively influence the lives of local residents, with increased income, employment opportunities, improved standards of living,

improved public infrastructure, increased availability of recreational and entertainment facilities, and the promotion and preservation of local culture [50–56]. However, tourism also has the potential to negatively impact local communities by increasing the cost of living, raising property prices, overcrowding and traffic congestion, and increasing the prevalence of crime and drugs [9,50,52,53,57,58].

Several studies have highlighted the significant effect of destination residents' perceptions of WHS inscription and tourism development on community involvement [6,11,46,47,59]. These studies suggest that residents who perceive the positive impacts of WHS inscription and tourism development to outweigh the negatives are more eager to participate in WHS conservation programmes and tourism development. However, for most residents of rural destinations, this interest in participation is limited to engaging in predefined activities, with power-holders enabled to make decisions on the behalf of the community with respect to how the destination will be promoted and what economic opportunities will be available for the local community [9,16,26,30]. These studies suggest that residents in WHS destination communities tend not to be interested in participating in the decision-making processes.

The aforementioned opportunities refer to preconditions, such as the political will, rules, and channels that make possible the participation of residents in tourism activities and conservation programmes [46]. These opportunities, therefore, are a reflection of the extent to which current circumstances are conducive to community participation [49]. Without open channels of communication between community members and correspondence organisations, community participation in conservation programmes and tourism development is impossible [26]. Therefore, the extent to which local political structures allow for and facilitate the participation of community members constrains the participation of local residents [26,33,46]. In most developing countries, political structures are centralised and top-down, with political parties and decision-makers unlikely to share power with the public. In such an environment, spontaneous community participation may be difficult, if not impossible, hence the propensity toward coercive community participation and public hearings in developing countries [16,26,30].

If local residents assume that authorities and government officials are interested in hearing their voices and will provide them with opportunities to become involved in the decision-making process, they will be encouraged to participate. Ultimately, residents will participate in conservation programmes and tourism development to the extent to which they believe that local authorities will allow [26,33,46]. However, in underdeveloped and rural destinations, particularly in the developing world, residents assume that the centralised political structure and the tendency of local decision-makers to shun power sharing will work against them [16,26,30]. As such, participating in the decision-making process is often a completely alien concept for many rural residents in developing countries; consequently, their first preference is simply to undertake economic activities.

Moreover, the ability of the community to participate in conservation programmes and tourism development is contingent upon various factors, including knowledge, skills, and financial resources [46]. Several studies have identified a lack of knowledge among residents as an obstacle to their participation, particularly in rural destinations [30,60–62]. Community



participation requires, in one form or another, a certain level of skill and knowledge, and community members must be prepared to improve these skills to participate effectively. To address this issue, Tosun and Timothy [62] suggested public media campaigns to train and educate people, thereby improving their awareness and readiness for involvement in tourism development.

Notwithstanding, most tourism-related jobs do not require a particularly high level of skill or specialised knowledge [63]. As such, rural residents can easily transition into tourism-related economic activities with minimal investment in education and upskilling. For example, rural residents can often easily establish themselves as accommodation providers, operate restaurants, and provide recreational/entertainment activities.

#### **4. Conclusion and recommendations**

This study reviews and synthesises the community participation literature related to rural WHS destinations. Community participation plays a significant role in reviving and sustaining the status of WHSs, leading to economic development and subsequent improvements in the quality of life of local communities [3,7,63]. However, in the context of tourism planning, the community participation literature revealed varying levels of community involvement, ranging from participation in decision-making to involvement in economic activities [29,32,33]. The findings of the current study reveal that the residents of rural destinations prefer to limit their involvement to economic activities to participation in the decision-making processes [19,20,33]. The inscription of a site as a WHS enhances the location's international visibility, thus serving as a magnet for tourism development and the economic development of local communities [8,26]. The support of local residents in conservations programmes, therefore, is important in terms of maintaining the site's WHS status to attract more tourists and increase the range of benefits available to the local community through their continued economic involvement. In addition, the findings in relation to the factors influencing community participation reveal the importance of ability (as a function of awareness and knowledge) and motivation (as related to perceptions and interest) in compelling rural residents toward involvement in economic activities compared to participating in the executive-level decision-making. Moreover, in rural WHSs, particularly in developing countries, the political structure often restricts the participation of community residents to planned economic activities and heritage site promotion, throwing up barriers to their involvement in the decision-making processes [16,26,30]. Therefore, economic involvement is the preferred type of community participation in rural WHS communities, particularly in the developing world. These findings mark a significant theoretical contribution of the present study to the community participation literature. Notwithstanding, this study is also limited by the fact that only existing literature was reviewed to shed light on community participation in the rural WHS context. Case-base rural WHS studies, in developed and developing countries, would go a long way toward clarifying some of the issues identified in the present study.

This study has a number of practical implications for local authorities and correspondence organisations responsible for the management and development of rural WHS destinations. To sustain the development of rural WHS destinations, the local authorities should aim to facilitate the participation of the community. The participation of local residents in WHS conservation and tourism development is critical to future sustainable development. However, based on the results of this review, local authorities should focus on the economic involvement of residents and look to maximise the residents' benefits from tourism to attract further support among the local community for conservation programmes and tourism development. Local authorities should undertake to improve residents' awareness, knowledge, and skills with respect to tourism development, conservation, and the importance of maintaining the WHS status. Such activities would facilitate the effective involvement of local residents. Moreover, by enhancing the positive impacts and mitigating the negative impacts of tourism, local authorities can increase community members' motivation to become involved. Enhancing the perceived positive impact of tourism encourages the community to participate in tourism activities and heritage conservation programmes, whereas the perception of negative effects reduces local residents' participation and support for tourism development. Increasing the number of opportunities for the local community to become involved will entail a review of existing policies, rules, and regulations to ensure the removal of barriers to community participation, employing a more transparent and egalitarian political structure and maximising the capacity of communication channels. Local residents will involve themselves in conservation programmes and tourism development only to the extent to which they believe that local authorities and government officials will allow; therefore, maximising what is allowed will invariably benefit plans for gaining the most out of community involvement.

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## **Author details**

S. Mostafa Rasoolimanesh and Mastura Jaafar\*

\*Address all correspondence to: [masturaj@usm.my](mailto:masturaj@usm.my)

School of Housing, Building, and Planning, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia.

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