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Empowerment of communities for sustainable tourism development: Case of Croatia

Abstract

This paper deals with the possibilities of enhancement of the concept of empowerment of tourism oriented communities leading to participatory and hence sustainable tourism development. Although the term 'empowerment' is used by different disciplines, in the context of tourism development it is regarded as a multi-dimensional process that provides tourism oriented communities with a consultative process whose outcomes directly benefit the community and its members. The paper is based on the presumption that there are socio-political, legal, administrative and cultural limitations to empowerment enhancement in most of the developing countries. Although these limitations may vary among countries due to different contexts of their development, general framework can be outlined, which will be explained by the case of Croatia as a developing country. Hence the paper has set out to address the question of how to realize the potential of Croatian communities to participate in a meaningful way in deciding options for tourism as sustainable development, taking as its point of departure the concept of community empowerment. In constructing this framework it will be crucial to explore theoretical background of the concept of empowerment and its relationship with the sustainable development concept. Also the questions whether Croatian socio - political framework enables empowerment to be embedded in the local communities and whether it supports sustainability other than theoretically will be discussed. Second aspect of this research is focused on the local communities and their ability to initiate and undertake the processes leading to empowerment.

Keywords:

empowerment; social capital; tourism communities; sustainable development; Croatia

Introduction

The term 'empowerment' is used across a wide range of disciplines causing variations of its definitions and interpretations with destination discipline. Individual, family and community development and potential are enhanced by empowerment and it may be viewed as either process or an outcome (Rappaport, 1984).

In the context of tourism development it is proposed that empowerment be regarded as 'multi-dimensional process that provides communities with a consultative process often

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characterised by the input of outside expertise; the opportunity to learn and to choose; the ability to make decisions; the capacity to implement/apply those decisions; acceptance of responsibility for those decisions and actions and their consequences; and outcomes directly benefiting the community and its members, or diverted or channelled into other communities and/or their members' (Sofield, 2003, p. 112). The empowerment for tourism oriented communities will usually require social and institutional change to allow a reallocation of power to ensure appropriate changes. These changes must occur simultaneously on three levels, e.g. macro, mezzo and micro level. Such interrelatedness of different level activities causes troubles with the empowerment implementation and enhancement at the local level. Tourism development practice in Croatia, well-known tourist destination, but also a country with the heavy burdens of communist legacy, war destruction and transitional problems, makes a good example of such situation.

Hence this paper is aimed to critically discuss the issues of governance and community empowerment for sustainable tourism development on the case of Croatian communities. In pursuing this aim, the paper raises a number of issues of wider significance relating to:

- The nature and types of community empowerment in tourism development;
- Its relationships with the concept of social capital;
- The nature of tourism development in Croatian national/local economies;
- Structural and institutional (macro level) constraints to community empowerment and sustainable (tourism) development in Croatia;
- The role of the NGOs in the process of Croatian communities' empowerment;
- The implications of the accession of Croatia to the EU regarding community empowerment.

With this respect the following hypothesis is to be verified: social capital as a set of formal and informal rules and norms of behaviour is rather weak in Croatia (on macro, mezzo and micro levels) and therefore makes a key obstacle to the empowerment enhancement and consequently sustainability principles implementation in Croatian tourism - oriented communities.

Literature review

THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN THE PROCESS OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

A discussion on tourism and development first requires an examination of the role of the state, of government and its policies, and of their relationship to the many facets of the tourism system. The role of government will depend upon a range of variables of which a major determinant will be the set of values governing policy approaches. The government's power has generally been carried out by various institutions at different levels. They can all exercise the power of the state in various ways and most of them will be involved with policy formulation to a greater or lesser degree. Many of their policies will impact directly or indirectly upon tourism development and upon communities located within the boundaries of the state (Sofield, 2003).

However, despite its increasing importance, both economically and socially, some governments have failed to appreciate tourism as an important means of development. This is not only the case with the developing countries but also with some developed

ones, such as with the USA, whose federal government has started to withdraw from many of the fields regarding tourism industry as the process of privatization of government operations has been going on. Though quite a few governments have withdrawn from previously more active roles in tourism development, most nevertheless accept a major responsibility for environmental and social diminution of the possible impacts of this industry. To paraphrase C. M. Hall 'in our quest to bring governance and sustainable development together, we have arrived at a place in which the state still has an important role to play in terms of its intervention in tourism and steering towards certain policy goals' (2005, p.156).

However, more emphasis in tourism literature has recently been put on the need to decentralise tourism development and integrate it into overall community - defined development goals (Murphy, 1985; Simmons, 1994; Hall, 2000; Tosun, 2000; Wilson, Fesenmeier. Fesenmeier & John, 2001; Petrić & Mrnjavac, 2003). Based on these premises a new approach to development has been adopted, known in the literature as alternative development paradigm within which sustainability is often discussed as the most important issue (Telfer, 2002; Timothy, 2002; Sofield, 2003).

Alternative tourism development paradigm focuses on the content rather than the form of development, and its main constituent parts, according to Nerfin (as cited in Sofield, 2003; p. 63), are:

- "It is needs - oriented (being geared to meeting human needs both material and non-material);
- It is endogenous (stemming from the heart of each society, which defines in sovereignty its values and the vision of its future);
- It is self - reliant (that is, each society relies primarily on its own resources, its members' energies and its natural and cultural environment);
- It is ecologically sound (utilizing rationally the resources of the biosphere in full awareness of the potential of local ecosystems as well as the global and local outer limits imposed on present and future generations);
- It is based on self - management and participation in decision - making by all those affected by it, from the rural or urban community to the world as a whole, without which the goals above could not be achieved."

The appeal of this new approach has been much greater in developed than in developing countries. Namely it is obvious that the achievement of the above cited goals asks from governments which used to be the most responsible agent of development to give up or at least to share a part of their responsibilities with the local level stakeholders, e.g. local communities. In most of the developed countries community consultative arrangements are normative parts of development while in developing countries such a concept may be opposed by the elites running such countries due to the element of power sharing (Tosun, 2000).

Apart from the question whether governments want to get communities involved in the process of decision making and planning tourism development, not less important is the question whether communities (its members) are capable to decide and manage their own future?

These are the crucial questions of the so called "concept of empowerment".

COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

The notion of empowerment has entered literature as a generic term denoting a capacity by individuals or a group to determine their own affairs. Recently it has been used across a wide range of disciplines. The issue of empowerment in the non-management literature has largely been centred on women, minorities, education, and politics and viewed from the perspective of powerlessness and oppression. According to Simmons and Parsons empowerment is the process of enabling persons to master their environment and achieve self-determination (as cited in Sofield, 2003, p. 81) through individual, interpersonal change, or change of social structures affecting the life and behaviour of an individual.

When located within the discourse of community development, it is connected to concepts of self-help, equity, cooperation, participation and networking. These concepts, particularly participation in the process of decision making, is a vital part of empowerment since it makes people more confident, strengthens their self-esteem, widens their knowledge and enables them to develop new skills. Murphy (1985, p. 153) argues that tourism "relies on the goodwill and cooperation of local people because they are part of its product. Where development and planning does not fit in with local aspirations and capacity, resistance and hostility can...destroy the industry's potential altogether." The concept of empowerment by and of communities is at once a process and an outcome whose benefits become evident in economic, psychological, social and political sphere. Following is the table with the summary of these benefits.

Table 1
TYPES OF COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT IN TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Type	Signs of empowerment
Economic	Tourism brings long-term financial benefits to a destination community. Money is spread throughout the community. There are notable improvements in local services and infrastructure.
Psychological	Self-esteem is enhanced because of outside recognition of the uniqueness and value of their culture, natural resources, and traditional knowledge. Increasing confidence in the community leads members to seek out further education and training opportunities. Access to jobs and cash leads to an increase in status for usually low-status residents, such as women and youth.
Social	Tourism maintains or enhances the local community's equilibrium. Community cohesion is improved as individuals and families cooperate to build a successful industry. Some funds raised are used for community development initiatives like education and roads.
Political	The community's political structure provides a representational forum through which people can raise questions and concerns pertaining to tourism initiatives. Agencies initiating or implementing the tourism ventures seek out the opinions of community groups and individual community members, and provide chances for them to be represented on decision-making bodies.

Source: after Scheyvens 1999, according to Timothy, 2003; 152

Economic empowerment is important because it allows residents and entire communities to benefit financially from tourism (Table 1). Psychological empowerment contributes to developing self-esteem and pride in local cultures and traditional knowledge. Social empowerment helps maintain a community's social equilibrium and has the

power to lead to cooperation and networking. Political empowerment includes representational democracy wherein residents can voice opinions and raise concerns about development initiatives (Timothy, 2003).

To what extent should community and its members be empowered, or how much empowerment would they experience depends on the level of the social capital development in the country and the community itself. In *The Forms of Capital* Pierre Bourdieu (1983, p.249) defines social capital as the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition.

Social capital as a set of formal rules/institutions and informal norms of behaviour create environment in which the process of empowerment is performed. Grootaert and Bastelaar (as cited in Vehovec, 2002, p. 36) speak on three dimensions/levels of social capital, referring to micro, mezzo and macro levels. Micro level refers to the networks of individuals and households that create positive externalities for the local community. Mezzo level is created by vertical associations. Macro level refers to social and political environment that shapes social structure and enables development of the norms of behaviour (laws and regulations).

On micro level, networks of individuals and households are created. This is social capital in its most basic form and it represents very essence of a community life. Besides informal cooperation between individuals and households, formal cooperation at this level is most often articulated through the Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs). They have developed to emphasize humanitarian issues, developmental aid and sustainable development. Apart from 'NGO' often alternative terms are used as for example independent sector, volunteer sector, civil society etc. According to Hall and Richards (as cited in Hall, D., 2000; 446), the empowerment that NGOs may nurture is based on the concept of generative rather than distributive power. Namely, most current power structures are distributive, in that they presuppose a scarcity of resources for which individuals are forced to compete. On the other hand the generative view of power assumes that everyone has power, or skills and capabilities.

As a small contribution to the exchange of experiences regarding informal models/methods of empowerment enhancement at the local level, following is the brief elaboration of the good practices from the UK. Thus, Timothy (2002) mentions Gill's idea published in 1996, known as 'living room meetings', which involves informal gatherings of small groups of community members in a moderated, yet relaxed situation throughout the community. He also explains benefits of the Fitton's 'planning for real' method (appeared in 1996), which is a form of town meeting that involves bringing the community together before the planning process begins. Another method that has found considerable success is household questionnaires, whose benefits are already explained in 1994 by Simmons. These methods help identifying issues that are important to an area, focus on the needs of the community and highlight opportunities for improvement. It gives everyone in the community an opportunity to participate and encourages them to think about tourism, local issues and the environment in depth (Timothy, 2002), or help spreading, as Porter said "social glue" (Porter, 1998a).

Networks comprised of business owners and various private or public organisations (or between individual businesses themselves) aiming at collaboration in production, marketing, purchasing or product development, are created on mezzo level. They can be either informal or soft networks or formal/hard ones (Franičević & Bartlet, 2000).

Informal networking is easy to achieve, especially within small communities/destinations (such as rural ones) as different types of cooperation and partnership have always been embedded in their tradition and culture. On the other hand creation of formal or so called "hard networks" is somewhat harder to achieve as it depends a great deal on the institutional premises.

The third level of social capital, so called macro level that refers to socio-economic and political environment, affects the overall life of a community/destination. It creates framework within which tourist destinations act and decisions on development are made. In other words, this level strongly affects other two levels of social capital and it is crucial in the process of enabling individuals and communities to master their environment and to manage their future. It is only if this level is "friendly" towards other two levels, individual, interpersonal or interactional change at a community level may occur.

Discussion

COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN CROATIA

Croatian tourism development model

Croatian tourism development started in 1960-ties, at a time when the country's competitiveness was largely defined by its comparative advantages within the long-dominant developmental paradigm of mass tourism. Exclusive reliance on natural comparative advantages led to stagnation in the development of the Croatian tourism 'package'. Consequently, the growing influx of tourists did not result in proportionally higher foreign exchange earnings from their spending, and Croatia was on its way to becoming a "low-cost" destination. Today however, it is not low cost anymore, nor necessarily good value for money. What caused such an image change?

A considerable part of the "blame" lies in the political and macroeconomic circumstances (former Yugoslav communist regime) to which the Croatian tourism industry was then subject. This, however, does not provide fully satisfactory explanation. In the most recent period (after Croatia gained its independence) we have often witnessed merely cosmetic attempts to change the developmental paradigm, meaning the shift from valorisation of comparative advantages (predominantly based on exquisite natural resources) of Croatian tourism to building and promoting its competitive advantages. According to Porter (1998b), competitiveness is a multidimensional phenomenon that must be achieved not only at the level of the firm, but also at the level of the individual, sector and state in general. The problems of the Croatian tourism industry originate mainly from the lack of understanding at the macro level of the true meaning of tourism and its effects and significance on the national economy. Namely, tourism has frequently been discussed as if it were constituted solely by the hotel sector which in turn gives a wholly inaccurate image of the diverse economic and other effects of the tourist industry.

However though not the only relevant factor for the success of the tourist industry, accommodation facilities seem to be its foundations. Therefore, a brief insight into sector's present state of art is about to be given so as to understand the main problems. The capacity structure in Croatia is very unfavourable; namely, the hotel accommodation capacities account for as little as 12 per cent in the total accommodation structure. Tourist resorts represent 6 per cent of a total share, while households account for 44 per cent and camping sites 23 per cent of the total beds. Besides, the share of high-

quality hotel and resort facilities is extremely low. Thus, four and five star hotels make only 14 % of the total number of hotels. The average number of tourist overnights in Croatian tourist accommodation is, generally speaking rather low. Hence, hotels are used only 129 days or 35.9 per cent on an annual scale, while the use of other forms of accommodation capacities remains even lower (tourist resorts 21.07 per cent, 17.08 per cent for camping sites, 9.61 per cent for private accommodation) (Croatian Bureau for Statistics, 2007).

It was not until 2006 that the number of tourists in Croatia has (for the first time after 1988), passed 10 mil, and the number of overnights passed 50 mil after a long period of stagnation caused by both the war consequences and change of trends in tourist demand which Croatia has not been able to adapt to. As for the regional distribution of foreign tourists, it is not even. The most predominant in the terms of the number of tourist arrivals and overnights are the coastal counties (6 out of 21 counties), while the continental ones are still not equally relevant parts of the Croatian tourist offer.

Data on tourists' opinions and spending during the summer holidays in Croatia in 2004 (Institute for tourism Zagreb, 2005) reveal that tourists still mainly come to Croatia because of its natural beauty and its relaxing pace of life and express a low level of satisfaction with regard to sports, recreation and cultural facilities.

In financial year 2006, revenues from tourism reached €6.3 billion (representing a 5 per cent growth over the previous year) making up an extremely important contribution to the Croatian economy, as these receipts have been covering 55-70 per cent of the foreign trade deficit in the past five years. Another significant indicator of the effect of tourist spending as a key category is its impact on GDP. According to Croatian Bureau for statistics (2007) contribution of tourism in the country's GDP is 18.4%. In order to consider the overall effects of tourism on the national economy, it is also important to identify the leakages of resources related to tourism from the country (referring to the import of goods, raw materials and capital equipment for the tourist industry). The Tourism Satellite Accounts for Croatia estimates that direct leakages of the overall tourist economy account for about 36.5 per cent of its total GDP, which trend is in contradiction with the importance tourism has been given by the government policy (WTTC, 2006).

It is obvious that in Croatia, as in many other developing countries, government has seen tourism as a relatively easy, effective and cheap instrument to achieve export-led industrialisation as a core principle of free market economy recommended by international donor agencies. That is why it recognises that tourism is too important to leave to the market, and governmental posts at the cabinet level were created to develop, monitor and administer tourism policy (Tosun, 1998). In other words, planning and management of tourism has been rather centralised in a way that can contribute to achieving pre-determined governments' objectives. Although the process of decentralisation of government functions (including planning) has recently started, it has resulted with lots of misinterpretations and misuse at the local level so far. Hence it is often the case that local authorities support the interests of different profit seeking entrepreneurs and/or local owners of houses and apartments aimed at tourist accommodation without taking into consideration common interests and goals (such as protection of natural and cultural resources). Moreover, the struggle between different exogenous interest groups and local people to control resources has often been ignored by both local and central governments. Thus, we have the situation that in Croatian tourist destinations where local population is not empowered in a real sense, involvement is restricted to elites in

the community, resulting in their interests being considered rather than the interests of the community itself. Therefore, it is not surprising that such a dichotomy of interests has given birth to many negative phenomena in the Croatian tourism environment, which are to be discussed later on.

Social capital macro level constraints to community empowerment for sustainable tourism development

It is very hard to capture all the relevant factors that could explain why there is a lack of communication and synergy between different stakeholders in the process of Croatian tourism development. To fully understand this, following factors are to be taken into consideration:

- The legacy of almost half a century of centralised, top-down civil administration, affording local people little real opportunity to participate in meaningful local decision-making;
- The often pejorative equating of any form of collective action with the collectivised organisation of communist days; and
- The well recognised ambivalence of community as a concept, embracing notions of spatial contiguity, social cohesion and interaction, reflexivity, overlain with often misplaced assumptions of shared aspirations and values" (Hall, 2000, p. 449).

Apart from the legacies of the communist regime, a number of other interrelated macro level factors constraining 'progressive' community development and empowerment in contemporary Croatia may be listed:

- War consequences (physical destruction, mass population displacement, authoritarian nationalism);
- Economic and social crises and transition causing widening, regional gaps between the affluent, largely urban areas and many of the war-affected areas, now designated as 'areas of special state concern' marked by high unemployment, low human capital, an ageing population, and tensions between settler, returnee, and domicile groups (Stubbs, 2006);
- A strong impact of rapid urbanization, de-industrialisation and the shifting fortunes of tourism industry thus preventing tourism to get embedded within the local population and culture of much of the Adriatic coastal destinations. According to Jordan the main cause lie in a fact that Croatian tourism has been experiencing high spatial and seasonal concentrations resulting in inadequate finance to re-invest in structural and infrastructural refurbishment and upgrading and low quality seasonal labour imported from other, particularly interior regions (as cited in Hall, 2003, p. 290);
- The proliferation of numerous local government units (127 cities and 429 municipalities) causing appearance of many municipalities, understaffed and unable to raise revenues locally to be sustainable, meaning that decentralisation is increasingly spoken of rhetorically but rarely pursued in practice;
- Above all, perhaps the most important constraint on 'progressive' community development and empowerment in contemporary Croatia is not so much 'the new social stratification of Croatian society, accompanied by a significant redistribution of social wealth, social power and social esteem', as the deeper meta-level crisis in values and trust which can be seen as both a cause and effect of this redistribution (Malenica, 2003; as cited in Stubbs, 2006, p. 5)

The above listed constraints have led to a number of negative trends concerning sustainable (tourism) development issues. They have been explored and confirmed by some recent multidisciplinary researches on sustainable development on Croatian coast (with

the special stress on tourism), based a great deal on interviews and questionnaires, and run by international donors such as UNDP, GEF, WWF (Fredotović et al., 2003; Petrić, 2003; Petrić, Fredotović, Grubišić & Baučić, 2004; Petrić, 2005; Vukonić, 2005). The results of these studies can be summarized as follows:

- The proliferation of an enormous number of national and regional level agencies, institutes, committees, and such like, all charged with developing and overseeing strategies and programmes in different areas with overlapping, competing and multiple mandates causes difficulties to small understaffed and underfinanced communities to choose the right strategic direction;
- Environmental policies are usually not reflected enough in most of the economic sector strategies, plans and programmes, such as in tourism. There are not efficient institutional, economic or management tools to implement environmentally friendly behaviour;
- Plans are technically competent, but often unrealistic and not responding to the local needs. The public most usually have no faith in official procedures and do not make an effort to influence them. On the other hand, efforts to involve the public have been ineffective. A key reason is the way that information is presented, largely in a technical and inaccessible form. Hence, although there is a formal policy to account for public interest and participation, no real attempts are made to achieve it (Fredotović et al., 2003);
- Specifically with regards to biodiversity protection and conservation, local inhabitants and/or (tourist) enterprises do not recognize how they may gain from it. Protected areas are designed and managed to respond to national and international needs, not local concerns. There are many examples of confrontations between the management of protected areas and local population that have properties within the PAs, such as in National park Kornati, park of nature Vransko Lake, Biokovo etc. There is little faith that the benefits of conservation will flow to locals (Petrić, 2006). These findings correspond to the Hall's statement (2000, p. 449) that in post-communist countries "any ecologically inspired restriction of personal freedom, such as exclusion from environmentally sensitive areas or the banning of such pursuits as hunting, may be seen to echo the half-century of post-war communist imposition, and thereby meet resistance";
- Previously mentioned researches have also revealed that due to the heavy bureaucratic obstacles concerning building permits, local communities show high tolerance to illegal building of accommodations and other facilities for tourist purposes, thus threatening the aesthetic and historical image of the coastline, and strengthening the grey economy sector performance.
- Generally speaking, though there is a commitment of the Croatian government to the principles of Agenda 21, explicit institutional response to the needs of Agenda at local and regional levels appeared not to be sufficient (<http://www.un.org/esa/earthsummit/croat-cp.htm>; accessed 8 May, 2007).

The role of NGOs in Croatian communities' empowerment for sustainable (tourism) development

In an attempt to counterbalance macro level shortcomings, there has been an enormous growth of the number of NGOs in the country, representing type of formal cooperation at the social capital micro level.

According to the data for 2002 (Bagić, Škrabalo & Narančić, 2004) Croatia had over 20.000 registered associations of citizens, with 18.000 of these registered at the local

level, but only between 1.000 and 1.500 active ones (excluding sport clubs and cultural associations). Many of the NGOs in Croatia have seen multi-sectoral working as a panacea for many of the problems of Croatian society. The most recent 'List of the non-governmental organisations', published by the Ministry of environmental protection, physical planning and construction speak of 268 NGOs dealing with environmental issues. Most of these are focused on ecological problems while a few, such as ODRAZ, a Zagreb-based NGO, are focused on sustainable development of communities in Croatia. ODRAZ is strongly committed to the revitalization of the Croatian islands through cross-sector cooperation, including local community organizations, entrepreneurs, and tourist associations, placed within the framework of the National Program for the Revitalization of Islands, and supervised by the Ministry of Sea, Transport, Tourism and Development (Bagić et al., 2004). In Croatia there is no legislative obligation for the cooperation of governmental and non-governmental organizations or for the participation of NGOs in decision-making. Most recently an interesting trend of growth has been noticed of what have been termed 'meta-NGOs', whose primary purpose is to provide information and assistance to other NGOs" (Stubbs, 2006, p. 11). Hence these larger, more successful, but increasingly bureaucratized or meta-NGOs growingly suppress emerging, under-funded, localised initiatives which are true sources of contemporary 'social energy' in Croatia, alongside informal community leaders and local activists.

In Croatia it is still the case that there are relatively few examples of long-term, consistent, multi-sectoral partnerships for community development, between local governments, associations and NGOs, and particularly businesses, amongst other stakeholders (Franičević & Bartlet, 2001; Petrić & Mrnjavac, 2003). However, a report on Corporate Social Responsibility points out a number of positive examples of growing corporate social responsibility and business - NGO collaboration (Bagić et. al., 2004, p. 57). Unfortunately, no examples from tourism industry have been evidenced in this report, though recently some informal attempts made by the Sunčani Hvar company, member of the ORCO group from the island of Hvar have been evidenced, in terms of collaborating with the local NGOs and creating loose partnership with the local food and vine producers (to be seen at the company's website: <http://www.suncanihvar.com/hrv/korporativne-informacije-vijesti/drustvenaodgovo>; accessed 8 May, 2007). Creation of such types of partnership and/or networks of the firms (primarily vertical ones) at a community level, could help in developing and imposing service standards that will raise the competitiveness of the network and destination tourism brand (Mansfeld, 2002). In this case we should talk about empowerment enhancement at the social capital mezzo level.

As far as hard networking in Croatian tourism is concerned, except for the national level where we find certain horizontal types of networks such as Association of small and family-run hotels, there is no example of hard networking at a local level, neither horizontal nor vertical ones.

The EU context of Croatian communities' empowerment

Gradually, the European Union context is becoming the most important in structuring development policy in Croatia, after a long period in which the World Bank, USAID, and a host of other bilateral donors (including international NGOs such as WWF), held sway (Stubbs, 2006, p. 8). The European Commission has initiated in 2000 so called CARDS programme (Community Assistance for Reconstruction, Development and Stabilization) for the countries of the Western Balkan. Through the programme € 4.6 billion has been provided to this region in the period 2000 to 2006 for investment, institution-building, and other measures to achieve four main objectives:

- Reconstruction, democratic stabilisation, reconciliation and the return of refugees
- Institutional and legislative development, including harmonisation with European Union norms and approaches, to underpin democracy and the rule of law, human rights, civil society and the media, and the operation of a free market economy
- Sustainable economic and social development, including structural reform
- Promotion of closer relations and regional cooperation among countries and between them, the EU and the candidate countries of central Europe (posted at web:http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/financial_assistance/cards/index_en.htm; accessed 6 May, 2007).

17 different projects related to the above objectives have been implemented in Croatia through the CARDS initiative. Their results as well as the results of the initiatives and projects run by a number of the international (such as GEF, UNDP, WWF), national and local NGOs have already initiated changes in terms of empowerment enhancement at a community level in Croatia. Discussing these measures, initiatives and projects one could argue that they have little to do with empowerment of communities for sustainable tourism development. However it should not be forgotten that tourism is not a sector but an amalgam of sectors and activities and as such enjoys benefits of the activities/projects regarding biodiversity protection, cultural heritage valuation, social inclusion, human rights, promotion of closer cooperation etc...European Union also recognizes that there is no specific tourism policy and consequently no specific tourism instruments and measures. Most of EU funding of potential benefit to tourism is provided through various support instruments which are not sector based, being designed to achieve one or other of the principal Community objectives such as employment, cohesion, inclusion, sustainability, etc. (European Commission, 2004).

Conclusions and recommendations

This paper has discussed the limits to community empowerment enhancement in Croatian tourist destinations and their consequences on sustainable tourism development. Clearly, the described limitations may not be specific only to participatory tourism development strategy but can be seen as common problems of development and empowerment enhancement in general. Hence it should be accepted that they may be an extension of the prevailing social, political and economic framework (or social capital macro level development).

Community empowerment enhancement in the process of sustainable tourism development in Croatia cannot become reality unless specific strategies at local, regional and national levels are adopted to tackle with the outlined limitations. In seeking to draw policy recommendations, it is important to stress, yet again, that there are no institutional or practice models from elsewhere which can be transplanted in Croatia as a kind of panacea promoting community (tourism) development. Rather, what is needed is the creation of networks, arenas and spaces, locally, nationally, and internationally, for exchanges of experiences and the elaboration of good practice, not in terms of set formulae, but in terms of attempting to grapple with why certain initiatives appear to have had positive effects and others less so (Stubbs, 2006). However, some broadly defined recommendations could be outlined, which may function as policy implications for empowerment enhancement and participatory tourism development approach as well as a summary of this paper.

- First, community empowerment in tourism development must be considered in the very process of decision-making as well as in distribution of the benefits of tourism development.

- Second, this process requires decentralisation of public administration system including tourism planning activities. Hence, local governments should be re-organised to defend, protect and reflect concerns and interests of local people in their administrative territories, implying the need for additional financial resources, as well as for special education and training process (Tosun, 2000).
- Third, education and training programs should also include local people aiming to help them become more involved in the tourism development process as both entrepreneurs and employees, but also as those who have the right to live in the high quality environment.
- In this process the role of the NGOs seems to be inevitable; therefore their work and initiatives mustn't be stopped by the political conditions and bureaucratic procedures of government authorities, which is the fourth issue to be stressed in this agenda.
- Formal and informal networking enhancement (at the social capital micro and mezzo level) is the fifth issue to be considered.
- The last but not the least in this list is the need for the better implementation of different EU initiatives and programmes in Croatian communities especially those aiming at local population empowerment and consequently participation enhancement.

Finally it must be noted that with an increase in political, social, economic and psychological empowerment among residents and other stakeholders within a community, tourism will have the potential to help meet local needs for development, bringing to fruition many of the goals of sustainability, including balance, cultural and social integrity and equity, and ecological conservation.

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