

The Local Product in the Paradox of Sustainable Tourism: Unintended Impacts on Local Quality of Life

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ABSTRACT

The document analyses the relationship between sustainable tourism and local products, highlighting an emerging paradox. There is growing tourist interest in local gastronomy and fresh products, linked to territorial and cultural authenticity. Hotel establishments play a fundamental role in this development, contributing through their corporate social responsibility. Despite the apparent mutual benefits between local suppliers and tourist establishments, a significant contradiction emerges. Tourist demand generates inflationary pressures that affect local population's access to their traditional products, especially in destinations where tourism is economically dominant. The effects intensify when tourist establishments establish contracts that monopolise local production. This primarily affects low-income residents, causing changes in consumption patterns and eroding traditional cultural practices. Effective management requires a coordinated multi-stakeholder approach, where each participant in the tourism ecosystem assumes specific responsibilities. Strategies such as shared information systems, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and governance frameworks that facilitate negotiation between stakeholders are proposed. These tools seek to balance divergent interests and maintain the accessibility of local products for all sectors of the population.

Keywords: Sustainable tourism; Local products; Tourism paradox; Stakeholder collaboration; Community wellbeing

INTRODUCTION

There is a growing interest among tourists in gastronomy and the consumption of fresh local products, linking them to territory, culture and identity. From a consumer perspective, this consumption adds a perception of authenticity to their travel experience [1], even in mass tourism destinations where most activities are located within or mediated by accommodation establishments or tour operators [2]. Accommodation establishments have emerged as key players in local product development.

Beyond mandatory contributions through taxes, fees and wages, companies contribute to the socio-economic and socio-cultural development of their operating environment through the implementation of corporate social responsibility, albeit with significant variations among them [3]. This is evident in the interdependence between hotels and local retailers and suppliers, particularly in the primary sector, where there appears

to be room for improvement. Research has shown that larger hotels, with higher categories and more sophisticated management strategies, show a greater tendency towards this type of positive collaboration [4]. Smaller establishments also promote sustainability through positive local collaboration, which benefits their reputation, although its impact on the destination is less perceptible.

DESCRIPTION

Initial benefits and apparent success

In principle, this appears to be a win-win situation, with advantages for local suppliers (higher demand for local products and higher added value) and hotels, which obtain local products at fair prices and higher quality ingredients for their dishes, while tourists report higher levels of satisfaction [5]. However, this seemingly positive correlation for sustainable destination

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development presents a paradox [6]. In economies of scale, tourism demand for local products generates inflationary pressures that directly affect the ability of local populations to access their traditional products. The situation becomes especially critical in destinations where tourism represents a significant part of economic activity [6,7].

In contexts of higher demand and purchasing power, local producers and traders tend to adjust their prices upwards, seeking to maximise profits during periods of high demand (or permanently in non-seasonal destinations). This behaviour, although economically rational from the seller's perspective, generates distortions in the local market that negatively affect residents with lower purchasing power [8]. The situation becomes more complex when tourist establishments, especially higher-end hotels, enter into supply contracts that monopolise a significant share of local production. These agreements, while guaranteeing stable incomes for producers, can reduce the availability of products in traditional local markets [9].

The paradox emerges and socio-economics impacts

Lower-income residents are particularly affected, as rising prices of basic and traditional products can outstrip their income growth, even in cases where tourism generates employment opportunities. This situation can lead to changes in local consumption patterns, where households are forced to substitute traditional products with cheaper alternatives that are less connected to their food culture or, directly, less healthy [10]. Experience in various tourist destinations shows that this phenomenon can have long-term consequences for the social and cultural fabric of communities, especially relevant in those where local food production and consumption are an integral part of cultural identity [11].

Effective management of the inflationary effects of tourism on local products requires a coordinated multi-stakeholder approach. Traditionally, public administrations have been primarily responsible for addressing this issue. However, evidence shows that a sustainable balance between tourism development and the well-being of local populations can only be achieved through the active and coordinated participation of all stakeholders within the tourism ecosystem [12]. This approach recognizes that each actor, from local producers to hotel establishments, has both the capacity and the responsibility to contribute to mitigating inflationary pressures.

Tourism-induced inflation is not only a consequence of imbalances between supply and demand, but also involves social, cultural and economic factors that are complexly intertwined. Public administrations, for example, can implement regulatory frameworks, but without the active collaboration of local producers and hotel establishments, such regulations risk being ineffective or counterproductive. This multidimensionality makes it clear that unilateral actions by a single actor are insufficient to address the problem. As Hall and Gössling [10] argue, sustainable tourism practices must integrate diverse perspectives and expertise to achieve systemic solutions.

Empirical evidence also highlights the pitfalls of unilateral initiatives. Attempts by public administrations to control prices,

for example, can have unintended consequences, such as the emergence of parallel markets or reduced availability of local products. In contrast, collaborative approaches have shown more promising results. Success stories demonstrate that partnerships between stakeholders enable innovative and sustainable solutions that balance local supply and demand, while protecting affordability for residents [13]. These partnerships have demonstrated how shared responsibility fosters resilience in tourism-dependent economies.

Multi-stakeholder management approach

The complexity of modern tourism value chains further underlines the need for collaboration. Producers need financial support to expand their capacity, while hotels depend on cooperation with tour operators to implement responsible sourcing policies. This interdependence means that no single actor can deal effectively with inflationary pressures without coordinated efforts. Vallejo and Hauselmann [14] stress that multi-stakeholder governance frameworks are essential to reconcile competing interests and create synergies that enhance collective action.

A major challenge in this context is to align divergent priorities. Hoteliers seek a stable and competitively priced supply of local products to meet tourist demand, while producers aim to maintain profitability and residents demand affordable access to traditional goods. These dynamics often create tensions between stakeholders, requiring governance models that prioritise negotiation and compromise. Aligned incentives and shared decision-making mechanisms are key to managing these competing interests in ways that promote equity and sustainability [15].

Strategies to overcome these challenges include the development of shared information systems, which facilitate coordinated decision-making by providing real-time information on market trends. Also vital are monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, which allow stakeholders to adjust policies and practices as necessary. An illustrative example of these approaches can be found in the study by Santana-Talavera and González-Morales [16], which assessed the consumption of local products in luxury hotels. The study highlighted the potential of indices reflecting the consumption of local products to create balanced outcomes among stakeholders. Incorporating factors such as pricing, production and demand into shared monitoring systems would allow for timely intervention to address inflationary pressures.

Addressing the paradox of sustainability-oriented policies that inadvertently harm local quality of life requires rethinking the functioning of tourism systems. For example, efforts to protect the environment may restrict traditional practices, while urban regeneration projects may lead to gentrification and over-tourism. Similarly, promoting cultural authenticity may trivialise or commercialise local traditions. These contradictions, as Bianchi and de Man [12] point out, challenge conventional notions of sustainability and call for approaches that prioritise the well-being of local populations as a fundamental condition for long-term resilience.

Ultimately, managing tourism-induced inflationary effects on local products requires a redefinition of sustainability in tourism. This redefinition must emphasise shared responsibilities among all stakeholders, with the well-being of local populations as the basis for sustainable development. This approach ensures that the benefits of tourism are spread equitably to all stakeholders, while safeguarding the cultural and economic fabric of host communities.

CONCLUSION

The research reveals a complex relationship between sustainable tourism development and local community wellbeing, particularly regarding traditional food products. This paradox emerges as tourist demand for local products increases, creating inflationary pressures that affect local populations' access to their traditional products. Well-intentioned initiatives to promote local product consumption in the tourism sector often generate unforeseen adverse effects, disproportionately impacting lower-income residents. This situation not only threatens access to traditional foods but also risks eroding established cultural practices and community traditions.

The effective resolution of this challenge requires a sophisticated approach combining collaborative governance and comprehensive monitoring systems. A multi-stakeholder framework that actively involves all participants in the tourism ecosystem has proven more effective than unilateral solutions, offering greater potential for balancing commercial interests with community wellbeing. This must be supported by advanced monitoring and evaluation systems that incorporate both economic and socio-cultural indicators, enabling swift responses to negative impacts. The key to long-term success lies in redefining tourism sustainability from the perspective of local population wellbeing, ensuring that cultural preservation and equitable access to local resources remain central to tourism development strategies.

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