Host Population Well-Being through Community-Based Tourism and Local Control: Issues and Ways Forward

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Abstract: The importance and role of tourism around the world is not new; it is enough to mention that tourism represents one of the fastest-growing and most profitable global economic sectors. However, tourism has negative impacts in destinations, such as the displacement and relocation of communities and disruption of economic systems, socio-political processes and organizations. It must be recognized that new strategies are required, because growth itself is not sufficient to fight poverty and inequality. Local people, especially the disadvantaged sections of the communities, need to be protagonists and able to control the tourism sector and benefit from it. The aim of this paper is to contribute to wellbeing, sustainability, and tourism research by proposing issues and ways forward related to enhancing well-being through community-based tourism (CBT). The paper is divided into three sections. The first focuses on CBT approaches. The second concerns the conceptual framework of wellbeing, with special emphasis on wellbeing in tourism, including host/guest relations; we present different evaluations of wellbeing, e.g., (socio-cultural, psychological, economic, and environmental). The third section discusses how wellbeing is presented in CBT and proposes ways forward for research. The paper is theoretical, and is based on previous literature and institutional and organizational documents.

Keywords: tourism; well-being; community-based tourism; local tourism; local population; host population

1. Introduction

Tourism represents one of the fastest growing and most profitable global economic sectors today [1], directly generating “services, products, foreign currency, employment and investment” [2]. As such, tourism has become the motivation behind economic development efforts in urban and rural contexts [3]. It is this global relevance that makes it “reasonable to advance that the tourism sector should be a protagonist in the struggle against poverty and inequality” [4–6]. However, tourism has negative impacts in destinations, such as “displacement and relocation of communities, disrupting economic systems, socio-political processes and organizations” [7].

It is not surprising that the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development propose new directions indicating “the need to rethink the current economic growth ideology in the context of social and environmental needs in development” [8]. However, contradictions are present. While the UN Agenda 2030 supposedly advances steps to end extreme poverty and to fight inequality, injustice, and climate change at the same time, “growth-led, extractive, profit-driven economics continues to exacerbate an inter-connected global environmental, climate and development crisis” [9].
While various policies and strategies have been advanced following the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, the current economic and political systems continue to obstruct real change towards a more sustainable tourism development [9]. While the current hegemonic framework shows the intention to change, these changes are often camouflaged and not directed to change the basic structure of the tourism system associated with neoliberalism. For example, the “current hegemonic notions of sustainable tourism are often quite similar to responsible tourism thinking: they both highlight the role of the industry and the markets” [8]. Within this context, tourism continues to fail to fight poverty and inequality. A study of Petit [10] confirms previous results indicating that “the development of tourism seemed to increase wage inequality and that this was at the expense of the poorest individuals”. Tourism continues to exacerbate problems such as land dispossession and environmental destruction, “with little discernable decrease in inequalities” [9]. There is failure of the UNWTO to “address, much less challenge, the systemic processes of accumulation and exploitation that shape and constitute the competitive dynamics and industrial structures of tourism capitalism” [9]. In this context studies negatively correlating tourism to inequality and/or poverty reduction within a neoliberal context are various and present in various settings; see for example [11–17]. It must be recognized that new strategies are required, because growth itself is not sufficient to fight poverty and inequality [18]. Inequality and poverty are correlated; while while economic growth may not be so fundamental, the decrease in inequality is a relevant poverty-reduction instrument, and “reductions in inequality can play a critical role in ensuring that growth will actually lead to a decline in poverty levels” [19]. Inequality therefore undercuts the fight on poverty [20].

New directions need be excogitated and implemented to make tourism a toll to effectively promote social justice, fighting inequality and poverty. As indicated by the UN, ref. [21] (p. 22) “Inequality is also an issue of social justice”. The change to decrease poverty and inequality should go beyond the ‘charity’ approach and it should include the “restructuring of the society towards the more just and equitable distribution of power/control, resources, knowledge, capacities and benefits” [22]. It is in this context that old strategies need to change. When it is recognized that neoliberalism has headed to social inequalities, it follows that solutions to resolve inequalities should not be based on the same neoliberalism system itself [23]. It is therefore fundamental to challenge current distribution patterns and structural inequality: thus prioritizing holistically fighting poverty [23]. In this same direction, a study [13] mentions that the tourism sector “should be reclaimed from an industry that has defined it as a business sector for their profit accumulation, to a human endeavour based on the rights and interests of local communities in welcoming tourists.” This article endorses the proposition that “any measure that supports a shift to a more redistributive, egalitarian and social justice oriented approach is seen as a step towards structural change towards a more egalitarian and just world” [5].

Local people, especially the disadvantaged sections of communities, need to be protagonists and be able to control the tourism sector and benefit from it. A consequence of the recognition on the importance of the population in tourism community-based tourism (CBT) approach is gaining “recognition in the tourism literature as a strategy for environmental conservation and community development” [24]. Community-based tourism is always more “recognized as a crucial issue in the sustainable tourism context” [25]; therefore, its investigation in relation to local community well-being seems to be paramount.

The aim of this paper is to contribute to wellbeing, sustainability, and tourism research by proposing a CBT well-being model. The paper is divided into three sections, the first of which focuses on CBT approaches. The second part concerns the conceptual framework of wellbeing, with special emphasis on wellbeing in tourism, including host/guest relations. We present different evaluations of wellbeing, such as socio-cultural, psychological, economic, environmental, etc. The third section discusses how wellbeing is presented in CBT, and proposes a new model for research. This paper is a theoretical paper based on previous literature and institutional and organizational documents. It uses a desk research method
consisting of the use of pre-existing data and information sources which are analyzed and used to construct models or other forms of findings. The authors accept that the presented use of data and information can have weaknesses; however, they maintain that for the aims of this paper the use of the presented literature as a base to build their findings and model is acceptable. The article looks for a possible relationship between specific issues in CBT and local people well-being; therefore, the recognition and analysis of these issues in secondary sources is seen as satisfactory in order to learn to understand this relationship.

2. Literature Review

While tourism has positive impacts, it has various negative impacts as well, often affecting the local host community. Tourism destinations can suffer from negative impacts of the tourism sector, influencing the “destination’s sustainable development” [26]. Positive and negative impacts happen simultaneously and influence the quality of life of both the local population and the tourists [27]. Negative effects of tourism can include inflation, facilitation of crime, pressure on local infrastructures, environmental problems, and degradation of local culture [27], and impacts can vary from ‘socio-cultural to environmental devastation’ to the exclusion of local residents from tourism planning exercise [28]. In this context, “once a community becomes a tourism destination, the quality of life of the local residents is affected by the consequences of its development since the tourism product is produced and consumed in the destination” [29]. It can therefore be sustained that “a paradigm change is needed in relation to tourism’s sustainability, one that radically questions wellbeing in terms of GDP and economic growth” [30]. Importantly, this change needs to be outside the neoliberal paradigm, because if tourism businesses are managed within a neoliberal framework promoting “endless growth, tourism’s sustainability will inevitably be undermined” [30]. Sustainable tourism should not essentially relate to growth of tourism numbers and income “but also better serve the tourism industry to serve the broader development goals of local communities, regions and countries” [31]. The quality of life of community members, as main stakeholders, should be considered in the planning and management of tourism [27]. Tourism, in order to be long-term sustainable, must “greatly rely on support from the community, especially the community resident” [32]. It is therefore important that local residents are decisively involved and that local cooperation systems are set up for planning tourism [33]. The literature acknowledges the need to involve local community members in tourism development [24,34–36].

The requirement to involve more local community members and the need to decrease poverty and inequality has contributed to the understanding of the need to have a more inclusive tourism sector. A more inclusive approach to growth and development has been espoused in the global context. For example, a World Economic Forum [37] document mentions that the slow advancement in ‘living standards and widening inequality’ has given global impetus to advanced models of development that are more inclusive and sustainable and improve quality of life for all. In the tourism sector, the UNWTO advances fighting poverty and inequality as a matter of global urgency; however, “economic growth in itself is insufficient for fighting poverty and inequality unless it is both sustainable and inclusive” [38].

A possible risk is that the ‘inclusive’ tourism approach becomes circumscribed and manipulated by the hegemonic neoliberal system. This will not be a new phenomenon, as various alternative tourism approaches have been hijacked, circumscribed, manipulated, or coopted by neoliberalism, often losing their original alternativeness [39–43].

The alternative conceptualisation of inclusivity must be emphasised and maintained to be able to effectively work towards redistribution and sustainability towards equality. An inclusive approach “considers creating productive employment opportunities for marginalized groups as the primary means to reduce inequality within countries” [18]; more specifically, inclusive tourism focuses on transformation and on disadvantaged people, and can be delineated as “transformative tourism in which marginalized groups are engaged in ethical production or consumption of tourism and the sharing of its bene-
Inclusive tourism is related to the ‘inclusion’ in the various aspects of the tourism sector of weak sections of society where the term ‘transformative’ “could mean addressing inequality, overcoming the separation of different groups living in different places, challenging stereotypes or generalized histories, and opening people up to understanding the situation of minorities” [44].

Inclusivity is foremost directed to the disadvantaged people in society to rebalance inequality and poverty patterns. It must be kept in consideration that “In order to implement processes of sustainable development in tourism, it is therefore necessary to apply a transparent and self-evidently fair governance which reflects community and social economy management methods based on participation, self-management of much of the development process, democratic decision-making, and the equitable distribution of resources and benefits” [45]. At the same time, the fundamental prioritization of disadvantaged groups should not stop us from seeing the more general issues involved in making the tourism sector more localized and entrenched in the local context. This issue is clearly presented in CBT, which, while certainly prioritizing disadvantaged people, can be scaled up to work to localize the whole tourism sector [22]. Thus, CBT principles and characteristics should be used as a based upon which to transform tourism. It can be generally expressed that the current tourism crisis (recognized in environmental, economically and socially issues and latterly in the COVID-19 pandemic) provides a window for tourism to reflect on how it can move on from the crisis. Lessons will need to be learned and, above all, models of tourism will need to be developed which follow the UN Agenda 2030 by putting well-being, inclusive prosperity and sustainability at the centre of their concerns—models in which local issues and cooperative forms of management typical of the social economy provide responses to the current problems and global trends” [45], seen as a possible new model based on cooperative principles. As in the proposed cooperative principles [45], CBT follows the direction of reconfiguring the tourism sector by, for example, working to shift control of the tourism sector in favor of the poorer in society [22].

3. Community-Based Tourism

Community-based tourism can be seen as having similar features to inclusive tourism approaches; however, CBT should be understood to go beyond mere inclusiveness and to possess its own specific attributes.

Similar to the concept of inclusive tourism as proposed above, CBT is originally meant for disadvantaged people and localities [44], intending to stimulate greater “community cooperation and participation, providing new roles and improved voice for unskilled youth, women, elderly, indigenous, marginalized, non-elite, poor and disadvantaged minority groups” [44].

Community-based tourism “should not be viewed as an end in itself, but as a means towards empowering poor communities to take control over their land and resources, to tap their potential, and to acquire the skills necessary for their own development” [46]. With its roots in the 1970s alternative development approach, CBT and the promotion of holistic development include issues such as “empowerment, self-reliance, social justice, sustainability, freedom and so on” [47]. Community-based tourism intends to holistically empower disadvantaged community members sustainably [44]. Community members’ empowerment process is understood to build the knowledge, capacities, and confidence required to “take control over their land and resources, to tap their potential and to direct tourism development in their communities” [44]. Community-based tourism must be seen as fundamental to sustainability by creating a more sustainable tourism sector [48].

Fundamentally, CBT entails local control of tourism/CBT development against external entities. That is, “CBT is characterized by the fact that it is the community itself which has control over tourism management and gets a significant proportion of the benefits generated by such activity” [49]. Therefore, CBT develops locally to counteract conventional laissez faire tourism investment of external entities; thus, “CBT management means firstly preservation and control of the tourist development process” [50]. Although difficult
to achieve, communities that have a high level of tourism control and management will preferably have (amongst other attributes) greater community participation and a high level of local ownership [51]. Thus, a fundamental principle of CBT consists of local instead of external control, with disallowing of “non-local communities to involve in the tourism management of the local communities”, having as a core objective helping local community members for their economic advantage [52]. In CBT development, the “community’s goods and resources should be locally controlled, community-based and community driven” [53]. The need for local control, ownership, and management is widely recognized in the literature [44,52,54–59]. Simultaneously, CBT must be seen as beyond mere economic matters and “should not be viewed as an end in itself, but as a means towards empowering poor communities to take control over their land and resources, to tap their potential, and to acquire the skills necessary for their own development” [60]. The local control of the land and its resources become fundamental, making CBT encourage a sustainable development approach by allowing “territorial appropriation, empowerment, conservation of natural and cultural heritage, and the generation of social and economic benefits to the host communities” [61]. Various CBT models have been proposed; for example, CBT models include the top-down and bottom-up approaches in CBT [62], the CBT model based on the level of community involvement [61], CBT linked to the Tourism Area Life Cycle (TALC) model [63], and CBT models related to ‘the ladder of participation’ [64].

At the same time, CBT and other models associated with and/or including CBT, such as community-based diffused tourism (CBDT), can be seen proposed in works towards these objectives about social justice and the control of local tourism/CBT and benefits from it [5].

Community-based tourism works towards redistributive measures and social justice by breaking dependency and the unequal configuration of the tourism sector [65]. A fundamental principle of CBT is equity in the sharing of “income and wealth, avoiding losers and winners (winners usually outsiders, exploiters)” [44]. Community-based tourism clearly identifies itself with equity, distribution, social justice and ethical perspectives, and it has its “rootedness in the locale/community” [44,53,63,66,67]. Cost and benefits in CBT development should be equally distributed among all people participating in the venture [68]. Importantly, CBT should be seen in a geographical/space context where the local community members in the area, such as a region, equally benefit from CBT [68]. Redistribution happens through direct and indirect beneficiaries in CBT; see [69–72]. The link of CBT with more democratic forms of governance and sharing of benefits can be associated with the fact that CBT is often based on collective enterprise models such as cooperatives and trusts that automatically include principles of equity and sharing [22]. In this context, there could be possible links with the proposed shift of tourism associated with the implementation of cooperative principles [45].

While external entities can assist/facilitate the CBT development process, CBT should not be understood to be about “participation (or involvement) if such participation is organised or directed by external entities” [63]. In CBT, community members “should participate in its self-originated, owned and managed CBT development” [63]. Therefore, “perhaps the only forms of local participation that are likely to break existing patterns of power and unequal development are those which originate from within the local communities themselves” [73].

The local cultural context is another fundamental issue in CBT. Community-based tourism works within the local cultural context, where “local culture is not static and should be the substratum on which to build CBT development” [22] and specific local traditions can “facilitate CBT development through collective entrepreneurship” [22].

4. Well-Being

The concept of Wellbeing is very complex and very roomy. It is talked about in many disciplines (economics, social sciences, environmental sciences, biology, etc.). Due to the different perspectives of these disciplines, however, it is clear that wellbeing is
understood completely differently. It can be said that the concept of wellbeing is, in general, discipline-specific [74].

The term ‘wellbeing’ originally appeared in the economic sciences. In the 1930s, it was identified with the amount of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The prevailing belief was that the higher the GDP of an area, the higher the wellbeing of its inhabitants [75]. This relationship between GDP and wellbeing is an obviously exaggerated conclusion, even if we look at wellbeing from a purely economic perspective. First of all, the amount of GDP says nothing about the nature of income distribution in a given country (after all, there are many areas where despite statistically high GDP, a significant part of the population lives in poverty). Secondly, GDP does not indicate the real purchasing power of money (USD 100 in some countries is sufficient for a prosperous life, while in others it barely covers the cost of going to a restaurant). It is not obvious that a high GDP will lead to the enrichment of all inhabitants, or even to poverty reduction [76,77]; e.g., studies in many areas around the world point to enormous disparities in income distribution in tourism. Even when looking at the budget of a country, this does not necessarily equate to benefit to the hosting community itself [78–82].

Wellbeing research quickly grew along with various indices, manifested in the Human Development Index; in addition to GDP, wellbeing has been related to the level of education and life expectancy. An even more holistic vision is proposed by the economist Amartya Sen [83] in the ‘concept of capabilities’, in which wellbeing includes economic, social, and politic indices. Wellbeing of each individual should be built by aspects such as functioning, capabilities, and agency. Following Sen’s concept, numerous theories and measures based on social indicators have emerged [84]. A wide perspective was offered by Diener [85] in his index of life quality (wellbeing) based on 45 universal values (QoL). Diener aimed to create a universal set of indices dedicated to measuring people’s wellbeing independently from their economy, culture, religion, and any other local factors. Obviously, such an ambitious index meets many difficulties with being implemented in practice. First, it is extremely difficult to truly indicate which indices should be taken in consideration. Second, an even more difficult challenge relates to the adjustment of the weighs for given factors. In consequence of slightly changing the weights, measuring wellbeing even in the same context leads to contradictory results and conclusions [86].

A real turn in wellbeing research was the publication of the Millennium Assessment (MA) documents [87,88], which provided a basis for different supranational and national strategies of development (e.g., the Global Code of Ethics in Tourism, Sustainable Tourism Guidelines by the UNWTO, and the application documents of the Ministries of Economy, Health or the Environment in European Union countries). Under these guidelines, wellbeing consists of five elements:

1. basic material for a good life (economic);
2. health (medical);
3. good social relations (social);
4. security (social and political);
5. freedom of choice and action (social and political).

It could be argued that a sixth point related to education could be included. Education is relevant for the general wellbeing of society; therefore, as mentioned, “If the observable correlation between level of education and level of general physical well-being is recognized, the indispensable influence that educational opportunities (especially those directed toward women) can have on preventative health care can go a long way to achieving general sustainable social well-being and to alleviating a significant portion of the public health burden” [89].

Moreover, although MA does not mention the environment in determining wellbeing, the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment [87,88] document closely links these issues. From the perspective of the MEA, wellbeing is strictly related to ecosystem services and sustainable development, and all are seen as inseparable elements of a larger need to properly lead our common future. Thus, the better condition of ecosystems leads to the better wellbeing
of individuals. In practice, environmental sciences have begun to play a role in wellbeing research, if not a dominant one.

Despite the very wide spectrum of indices adopted, the main disadvantage of all the above-mentioned strategies and measures is the fact that they completely ignore what people think about their lives. One cannot tell someone that he or she is happy based on external, “objective” indicators. What is more, numerous studies carried out in the frame of the social and psychological sciences confirm that objectively measurable high wellbeing indicators reflect the views of people about their own life and the resulting happiness only to a small extent [90–92].

One should therefore talk about subjective wellbeing (SWB), which is much closer to happiness. Looking at SWB, different perspectives can be pointed out. There are usually three approaches to SWB [92,93]. In the first approach, SWB is associated with religious and cultural norms. In this context, seemingly harmful activities, e.g., dedication to the good of others, may increase the level of SWB (happiness) of the individual [92]. The second strand emphasizes the fact that people differ from each other. Something that, in the same life situation, makes one man happy, for someone else can mean a life defeat (e.g., pregnancy). Thirdly and finally, the assessments submitted by the interested parties themselves must be taken into account. If a person claims to be happy, this should be considered conclusive [94]. The question this arises, whether what makes a person happy is what happens to them (a passive approach) or what they are able to do for themself and for others (an active approach) [95]. The multidimensional wellbeing model of Ryff and Keyes [96] (1995) indicates the positive impact of pro-social activities. In this approach, wellbeing is based on six elements that are necessary for the successful psychological development of each individual, namely, purpose in life, environmental mastery, self-acceptance, personal growth, autonomy, and positive relations with others. In turn, Ryan and Deci [97] in the Self-Determination Theory point to the three primary needs and ingredients that shape each person’s happiness/wellbeing, namely, competence, autonomy, and relatedness. If one of those is not fulfilled, it leads to ill-being, and even to pathological behaviors.

Cummins and Nistico [98] talk about subjective wellbeing homeostasis. Wellbeing is related to the simple question of how satisfied a person is with their life in total. The key factor is to compare yourself with others. The comparisons relate to many levels (wealth, life situation, and even morality). Only by comparing can we determine whether it is better or worse, rich or poor. This theory confirms a previous finding called the “Easterlin paradox”. Easterlin [99,100] was the first to examine the relationship between economic indicators and subjective wellbeing. Research has shown that: 1. within the same community, rich people are happier than poor people; 2. citizens of wealthy countries are not happier than citizens of poor countries; 3. if countries increase their wealth, the level of happiness of their inhabitants is not raised [99,100] Easterlin explains these results with a social comparison and hedonic adaptation (i.e., ‘things have improved for everyone except me’). The most important point is therefore the reference point.

Researchers from Bath University, in a study on wellbeing in developing countries [101,102] (White 2009, Copestake, Campfield 2009), pointed out the importance of differences related to cultural contexts. The sharpest discrepancies exist between developed countries, where material status is paramount, and developing countries, where a “good life” is understood as gaining the respect of others, family happiness, or faith [102]. White [102] even proposed two opposing wellbeing models:

1. doing well means feeling good, characteristic of Western societies;
2. doing good means feeling well, found in developing countries.

These incompatible perceptions of wellbeing have tremendous impact on host and guest relationships in tourism. Adding to the culture gap often visible between tourists and locals, those two opposite perceptions elevate the culture shock of hosts dealing with the behavior of visitors [103–105]. Locals often cannot understand how tourist can act well (e.g., being in a fake relationship, behaving immorally, etc.), as well as the opposite (e.g., tourists often have no respect for “poor, stupid” people, and judge them as lazy).
Looking at wellbeing in terms of the tourism relationship from the perspective of the social sciences, it is important to understand how tourism is perceived by the locals and whether it occurs with respect towards local values and culture. The subjective judgement by individuals is of prime importance; many issues and hypothesis are subsequently discussed in an attempt to answer the question of what has the greatest impact on good or bad perceptions. The question is not “if” tourism has an impact on wellbeing in both groups, but “what are the factors” that emerge given the reactions. Consideration include the geographical distance of local communities from tourist such the local will not witness dysfunctional behavior [105–111]; level of annoyance related to ratio of tourists to locals [112]; cultural and religious values represented by tourists and within local communities [105–107,113–117]; community attachment [105,107,113,115,117,118]; place and context of meetings between locals and tourists [119,120]; and the level of profit from tourism by the involved individuals or their families [76,105,107,111,116,119,121]. The host–guest relationship is of key significance here as it always has a concrete impact on wellbeing, increasing or decreasing the wellbeing of both groups [120,122–127].

While looking at the impact of tourism on subjective wellbeing, it is important to consider the Theory of Subjective Wellbeing Homeostasis [98], supported by Appadurai’s ‘capacity to aspire’ studies [128], in which a crucial aspect is comparing oneself to others. The presence of tourists obviously shifts the point of reference for locals; comparison is now to a new and different group, from a different reality which is not that of the local population [129,130]. As a result, individuals who deemed themselves wealthy and to have succeeded in life (as they had enough food to eat, shoes for all their family members, and a place to live) may feel inferior and bad in comparison to tourists. Lower self-esteem due to comparison occurs even when independent objective measures indicate an increase in life quality [74], and can be explained with Easterlin paradox. The literature from the very beginning of tourism development shows many examples of such a process due to tourism, even where the word wellbeing is not explicitly mentioned [103,120,131,132]. It should be noted that the impact of tourism on the host community can be very diverse, and can incentive ambivalent feelings. Comparisons may lead to, e.g., the imitation of tourist behaviors by members of the host community, denying tourism in total, stronger attachment to local culture, etc. Peake’s [103]. (1989) research on the impact of tourism in Waswahili society (Kenya) lists four contradictory group, none of which is normal without tourism: the elderly, playboys, hustlers, and clergy. We must note that tourism often leads to division between various groups in the host community, and even a split in the culture and society; e.g., at the same time, people can feel both worse (as they are less rich) and superior (as they are moral or religious). In turn, these mixed emotions bring the feeling of social inequality, as the amoral and “worse” people seem to have better lives [104].

In this context, the negative relationship between inequality and well-being can be of paramount relevance. Inequality and distribution are correlated to well-being. A study on European contexts concluded that “people in Europe are negatively affected by income inequality, while redistribution has a positive impact on well-being” [133]. The same research [133] specifically showed “clear evidence that reduction of income inequality has a positive effect on individual life satisfaction. Since we simultaneously estimate the effects of inequality and its reduction, our results indicate that not only the perceived income inequality what influences subjective well-being, but also the process (the extent of redistribution) what has led to that outcome”. As noted, “from the subjective well-being perspective alone, economic growth with increasing inequality would not deserve to be classified as pure progress” [134]. Well-being, inequality and redistribution, and local contexts are all correlated; thus, “The empirical literature about inequality and subjective well-being shows that the impact of income inequality depends on the vision that citizens have of their society, their preferences concerning this society and their beliefs about the way it functions and the groups that compose it” [134]. Therefore, the connection of well-being with the locality and local community become relevant. An example is the sharing or solidarity economy, which links well-being with localism and equity, such that the sharing
economy “stands for more equitable and democratic forms of business ownership and management styles (co-ops, community land trusts, and others), workplace democracy, and less income inequality. It strongly supports localism e community banks and businesses that are owned and operated locally e and holds that economic development should have human wellbeing as its ultimate goal, and not be predicated on infinite economic growth” [135]. Again, “Community development communal services, community capacity building, neighborhood link and cooperation, community development planning are essential in the contemporary society in order to develop civic well-being, economic well-being, cultural and environmental restoration and justice in the neighborhood” [136].

Measuring host wellbeing is definitely not an easy issue. Without a doubt, subjective wellbeing and individual estimation plays an important role. However, certain objective measures are of great value. Probably the most contradictory indices are related to the environment. Tourism introduces new patterns of behavior, challenges traditional restrictions, dethrones local authorities, weakens social bonds, etc. There is no doubt that these are important factors in the wellbeing of hosting communities.

5. Discussion: Proposing a CBT Well-Being Relationship

Based on the above literature review, this section shows the commonalities, and therefore the relationship, between CBT and well-being in terms of favoring community development. The relevance and connection with locality and the emphasis on redistribution can contribute to local community well-being. Thus, “a basic premise of CBT is its foundation in “community development”, development by promoting community involvement and participation, improvement of the quality of life for communities, protecting the community and the environment and by employing social equity and environmental responsibility” [137]. A study [138] “shows that the people involved in CBT have better individual wellbeing. They are satisfied with their life and exhibit better community attachment. In terms of financial wellbeing and psychological needs, CBT seems to fulfill these requirements”. The same study [138] indicated that “in developing countries like Nepal, CBT is one of the activities brought in by national and international community to uplift livelihood of the places, and this study shows CBT to be a right solution for community development and can have transformative effect on individual, community and society as a whole". Brohman [139] established a link between CBT and well-being by proposing that community-based tourism development would seek to strengthen institutions designed to enhance local participation and promote the economic, social, and cultural well-being of the popular majority. It would seek to strike a balanced and harmonious approach to development that would stress considerations such as the compatibility of various forms of development with other components of the local economy, the quality of development, both culturally and environmentally, and the divergent needs, interests and potentials of the community and its inhabitants.

The strengthening of institutions or organizations embedded or involved in CBT is fundamental. To enhance its chances of success and in order to have long-term sustainability and advance community well-being, CBT needs intuitional support and a collaborative framework with other entities (as much as such entities will have their specific roles and limits in the collaborative framework). In this context, the facilitative roles of government entities in CBT development remains essential; for instance, only government can promote policies and legislation to facilitate and sustain various aspects of CBT development. Other entities, such as private companies and NGOs in facilitative roles can, within specific roles and limits, be very important, especially with more practical issues such as marketing.

The ability of a community “to become involved in tourism at the destination is increased through CBT, thus, local participation that fosters economic, social and cultural well-being is established” [140]. The issue of local well-being is recognized in CBT definitions, such as in the ASEAN CBT standard document [61]: “Community Based Tourism (CBT) is tourism activity, community owned and operated, and managed or coordinated at the community level that contributes to the well-being of communities through supporting
sustainable livelihoods and protecting valued socio-cultural traditions and natural and cultural heritage resources”.

Based on the above, specific commonalities between CBT and positive well-being can be extrapolated. Table 1 and Figure 1 show the common issues and, thereafter, the relationship between CBT and well-being. Two main issues are recognized: redistribution of wealth (although distribution of other material and non-material benefits could be included as well), and locality (meaning per locality local ownership/control of a specific territory and of the tourism development process). Locality means local culture, CBT, and well-being; both recognize the relevance of the local cultural context. Table 1 indicates the commonality between well-being and CBT.

**Table 1. Commonality between CBT and well-being.**

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Source: Authors’ elaboration.

![Figure 1. CBT–local population well-being relationship. Source: Authors’ elaboration.](image)

Theoretically, CBT would be ideal for wellbeing for all common points (local control, redistributions, culture, etc.). Community-based tourism can minimize negative impacts, enhance redistribution of wealth and other material and non-material things, and can enhance local self-esteem and pride. which if properly understood and managed could be valuable for community well-being. Local control includes the control of local natural resources and the natural environment in general, to which local people could or could not translate economic value. As Figure 1 shows, the association of CBT with redistribution, local control, and culture can facilitate the well-being of the local population. In addition, because CBT is specifically designed for the disadvantaged section of the local population, it is this section of society which will specifically benefit from the CBT–well-being positive relationship.

Figure 1 implicitly underlines how the possible development of CBT as a widespread development approach can enhance the well-being of local populations. The growth of CBT away from a niche type of tourism towards the mainstream is seen as a basis for increased local well-being.

The bottom-up CBT model [141] includes local entrepreneurship, local control (and thus locality), and redistribution. Local control, the value of local culture, and redistribution
(although internal conflict can arise), intended as a “strong multiplier effect into agriculture and other local activities”, are again proposed in as a part of CBT characteristics [142]. A proposed novel community-based diffused tourism (CBDT) model links and brings together the characteristics of CBT and ‘Albergo Diffuso’ within the context of Local Economic Development (LED). The CBDT model in which LED favors local well-being shows how CBDT is intrinsically embedded in the locality (local control) and favors redistribution: “CBDT entities should also owned and managed so as to support redistribution” [5].

Local community members do not necessarily place economic value on their surrounding natural environment; its value is recognized to be beyond monetary value, as it belongs to the local heritage. In this context, the negative impact of tourism on the local context can be beyond monetary terms, and include matters of community identity. However, issues related to the environment are more complex. Sometimes, as locals obtain more money due to tourism, they are happy, feel influenced, and, for example, exchange traditional roofs for a “magic” tin one, or become able to afford new items such as plastic objects, and overproduce littering. While it is fundamental to maintain consideration and attention to avoid western-based conceptualization and bias, certain issues can be understood as objective; for example plastics pollute in the same way everywhere, and the ecosystem should not be destroyed anywhere.

At the same time, the different degrees of CBT have economic impacts and can favor a decrease or increase in well-being. If CBT increases local income, people will feel better, whereas if CBT is unsuccessful, the well-being of local people will decrease. The same is true of local control; the actions, capacity, and attitude towards locally-controlled CBT (and tourism in general) confirms most subjective wellbeing needs (action, capacity, etc.); it is the ‘togetherness’ of local control, local culture, and redistribution in CBT that favors local community well-being. It is difficult to improve well-being with high local control of the tourism sector and very low redistribution of benefits or to the detriment of local culture. The three elements have to work together, and in CBT they should all be present in order to favor local community well-being. Community-based tourism, if conceptualized and practiced as originally understood, could be valuable source of transformation in the tourism sector in a way more favorable to individual and community well-being. Specific CBT issues, such as redistribution and the relevance of locality in various aspects, can enhance the well-being of the host community as well.

6. Conclusions

Community-based tourism is not a panacea. Disappointment with the prospects of CBT can distress communities and “can endanger the well-being of the locals, which may already be under the threat of disappearing due to unfavorable socioeconomic conditions” [44]. Before starting CBT, it is important to judge its potential, because although “its holistic goals of community well-being, empowerment and development, CBT, as other tourism development models, has its weaknesses steering away from the accomplishment of ideal goals” [44]. As widely asserted, “problems encountered in the community-based tourism approach stem from the methods and techniques employed in its implementation” [142]. However, this article proposes that if the tourism sector wants to contribute to local people’s well-being, tourism must go in the direction of CBT in order to be able to enhance the chances of well-being in the local host population.

Community-based tourism needs a collaborative framework in order to enhance its chances of success. Thus, to achieve success it is important that the people involved, such as policymakers, planners and other government officials, facilitate and assist CBT projects and ventures. In particular, those involved in the tourism sector should be aware of the working connections between CBT and well-being. In this context, this paper is relevant for policymakers, planners, practitioners, and researchers in order to spread consciousness about the possible relevance of CBT in favoring local people’s well-being. Without proper knowledge and awareness of CBT, it is difficult to properly facilitate it in the right direction. Specifically, government personnel such as policymakers and planners
should be at the forefront of understanding and facilitating CBT in a way that enhances the local population’s well-being. Government officials should work to create a favorable substratum for CBT to allow local people to become more involved in and increase their benefit from tourism. In this context, explicit policy and legislation such as that related to funding, training, and local ownership of tourism businesses should be advanced in order to better facilitate CBT development for community well-being.

This article specifically suggests that the basic principles of CBT are well in line with favoring local community wellbeing in term of redistribution of wealth, ownership, and control of the local tourism sector as well as in relation to the recognition and respect of local cultural contexts. The positive relationship between CBT and local people’s well-being should always be kept in consideration when advancing tourism policies and strategies. The local community is part of the local context (the tourism attraction). And it is therefore obvious that it is fundamental to promote the well-being of the local community to enhance its positive attitude towards tourism; CBT, if properly managed, can serve exactly this aim.

While the article has limitation based on, for example, the exclusive use of past literature as a source of data/information, we maintain that this is enough for the aim of this paper. Furthermore, in consideration of the paper’s novelty, the building and examination of a relationship model between CBT and well-being is a novel topic. Future research to improve the model, for example, through more empirical work, is certainly welcome. Future research could investigate in detail the dynamics of a comparative approach between CBT and other forms of alternative tourism and well-being.


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