

Social capital a means of enhancing rural tourism: A Papua New Guinea perspective

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Abstract

This study argues that social capital has always been part of Papua New Guinea's (PNG) cultural practices. This practice has encouraged the idea of rural tourism in PNG. For this study to be carried out, an indigenous research tool was employed to explore the value of social capital in empowering rural tourism. Twelve communities involved in tourism were invited to participate in this study to share their experiences and aspirations of tourism as an economic activity. They were encouraged to also share their thoughts on how tourism could be improved at their level. This study revealed that the communities/villages visited already had in existence a key ingredient that supports tourism. This is the family and clan system that forms the basic foundation of traditional societies in PNG. In rural PNG, social capital is an important asset that facilitates community survival and livelihood. The value of kinship is deeply rooted in PNG's traditional culture. Hence, the concept of social capital has prompted communities to work together and promote tourism as a community initiative.

Keywords: Social capital, rural tourism, indigenous research.

Introduction

The tourism industry is being embraced globally as an alternative to other industries in boosting the economy of destinations. Tourism allows people to travel and provide the opportunity to share resources. One motivation for tourism is typical - people from more advanced economies travel to underdeveloped economies for recreational purposes. The pull factors for the advanced economies are mainly, cultural experiences and natural wonders such as flora and fauna both on land and at sea. This paper aims to demonstrate that social capital is an essential ingredient for enhancing tourism in rural communities.

Background

This study is focused on Papua New Guinea (PNG) and in particular, local villages, where many ways are different from the urban areas. Having the luxury of electricity, clean running water through pipes, good road conditions and better health facilities are features associated with urban areas. These features are also important in supporting the growth of tourism in PNG. Tourism has been in PNG as early as 1884. The opportunity for tourism aroused when a shipping company, Burns Philp (BP), advertised a five-week trip to PNG via Thursday Island from Australia. Burns Philp had been given a mail delivery contract by the Australian administration to deliver mail throughout PNG. The company while delivering mail capitalized on the opportunity to include cruise tourism, as there was abundant space on the ship for passengers (Douglas, 1997). PNG was advertised as savage, exotic and primitive by

foreigners who had come to PNG for various reasons, as illustrated by the following quote from Burns Philp:

Nowadays, when every 'Arry has done what not so many years ago was known as the 'Grand Tour', when alligator shooting on the Nile, lion hunting in Nubia, or tiger potting in the Punjab can be done by contract with Cook's tickets; when the Holy Land, Mecca or Khiva are all accessible to tourists; when every mountain in the Alps has been scaled, and even the Himalayas made the scene of mountaineering triumphs when shooting buffaloes in the 'Rockies' is almost as common as potting grouse on the moors; it comes almost with a sense of relief to visit a country really new, about which but little is known – a country of real cannibals and genuine savages... (Burns Philp, cited in Douglas (1997, p.56))

Drawing from the array of exotic adventures that one may have experienced with the kind of activity that is known in a particular area, PNG would have fallen into one of the categories given. Should an emphasis be on the natural beauty of the environment or the people? If little is known then, it is all the more, clear that neither the environment nor the people have much that is yet to be exposed. The niche that determines such resemblance is the relationship that exists between the environment and the people, not only in the natural circle but one that extends into the supernatural. Since little is known, the first experience would rather canvas not only the beauty but the reality as a tourist attraction. From the hind side, the inundated phenomena that may have captivated the attention would simply of tourists that in most instances portray an ideological juxtaposition. The latter reflects such an overarching perplexity by which certain significant items may not be overly exposed as a tourist destination, be it its people or the environment, Moreover, their coexistence is unimaginably enriching.

Literature review

Tourism

Despite tourism's relatively small contribution to PNG's economy compared to the extractive industries, tourism is promoted as a potential development strategy, especially in rural areas where there is much need for development since tourism can encourage sustainable development if managed well (PNGTPA, 2006). The PNG Tourism Promotion Authority (TPA) has since used different marketing slogans to promote PNG internationally including PNG as the land of the unexpected (Fitzpatrick, 2011) and currently as the land of a million different journeys (<https://www.papuanewguinea.travel/corporate-site>). To encourage tourism, cultural festivals are also marked as national events on the calendar, which enforces community cooperation (Whitford & Dunn, 2014). Cruise tourism is another tourism sector that PNG has embarked on as a platform to increase its revenue. However, Gibson (2012) warns that governments encouraging tourism ventures to be owned by local indigenous people must also empower them with the skills and knowledge to effectively manage their tourism affairs.

Social Capital

Humans have had to collaborate to survive for as long as they have been around (Pretty & Ward, 2001). Social capital has a relational dimension (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998) consisting of ongoing relationships and reciprocal behaviours. Social capital is effective when

there is trust, reciprocity and cooperation (Flora, 1998). (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998) argue that because social capital has a relational dimension it makes it possible for members of communities to support each other when engaging in business opportunities where cooperation is an essential part of social capital (Davidsson & Honig, 2003). Social capital has influenced tourism as an economic activity in peripheral communities (Zhao, Ritchie & Echtner, 2011). Bourdieu (1986) identified the collective use of human efforts in organizing and using human labour in obtaining and accumulating resources either for economic gain or mere survival as a form of social capital.

The PNG culture enforces one asset that is often overlooked, social capital. This asset plays a role in facilitating successful community outcomes (Diedrich, Benham, Pandihau & Sheaves, 2019). PNG has survived as a society because of the *wantok* system and embraces it as a tool for progression and survival, which is a form of social capital. Franklin (2007) also speaks of Melanesian values:

- The value of the clan (*haus lain/wantok*) – the value of maintaining relationships within clans and tribes in PNG is vital for survival. It is a form of social security and a foundation for social capital within rural communities, which means that understanding tourism development requires an understanding of the clan and tribal networks.
- The value of reciprocity (*bekim, bekim bek*) – the concept of reciprocity is closely linked to the value of clan and translates into an ethic of helping one another in times of need and returning the favour.
- The value of food (*kaikai, mumu*) – the sharing of food is central to the PNG culture - being hospitable to visitors, families and friends as a token of friendship, appreciation and goodwill.
- The value of ancestors (*tumbuna, tambaran*) – acknowledging ancestors guides how people within a village relate to each other. Either they could be descendants of the same ancestor or their ancestors are related.
- The value of ritual (*taboo, singsing, lotu*) - involves the preparation leading to an event or ceremony and sets out the actions that must be performed by those who initiate and those who participate in an event so the desired outcomes of the event will be achieved.
- The value of leadership (*hetman*) – an important element in rural communities is respecting and acknowledging the local leadership.
- The value of education (*skul*) – in contemporary PNG, there is a belief that education can lead to better and improved ways of living.
- The value of compensation (*peibek, bekim, birua*) – compensation in the PNG context refers to giving some form of payment to someone or a group of people after causing grievance to them. The aim is to maintain peace so there are no tribal fights or ethnic clashes, which usually end in bloody situations.
- The value of work (*wok*) – refers to the importance of putting in effort and making sacrifices to achieve one's goal.

The Melanesian values as described by Franklin (2007) form the core fundamentals of PNG's cultural fabric. It is through such values that the essence of social capital within the PNG context stems from. The trait of lending a helping hand to a family member, friend or even a stranger is expected not only by a clan but also by the society at large.

Rural tourism

Tourists travel to non-urban areas to participate in recreational activities. Some travel to enhance the locals' livelihood through tourism and preserve the host community's physical environment and cultural heritage (Lane, 1994). Rural tourism is also being used to alleviate poverty in underdeveloped economies (Sharpley & Sharpley, 1997) because of the diverse culture and natural environment in rural areas that make them attractive destinations (Nair et al., 2015). Over the years, tourism has also been seen as an agent for rural development (Saarinen & Lenao 2014) providing employment, better road links and supporting facilities that enhance the growth of tourism (Gao, Huang & Huang, 2008). Rural tourism is also associated with sustainable tourism (Bramwell, 1994), a platform that encourages the preservation of old aged culture and natural attractions. The very essence of rural tourism attracts visitors and tourists.

PNG as a tourist destination has a lot to offer in rural tourism (Imbal, 2010: Reggers et al., 2016: Ford et al., 2019). It has the potential to promote sustainable tourism (N'Drower, 2014). Within the umbrella of rural tourism, the following niche markets can be tapped into: community-based tourism (Wearing & McDonald, 2002), eco-tourism (Guaigu, 2014: Jones, 2005), cultural tourism (Whitford & Dunn, 2014), agri-tourism (Ammirato & Felicitti, 2014) and indigenous tourism (Zeppel, 2006: Hinch & Butler, 1996: Taylor, 2017).

Methodology

Melanesian Research Framework (MRF) (N'Drower, 2020) was employed for the study where twelve tourism communities were invited to share their experiences as tourism entrepreneurs operating within their local village communities in rural PNG. Discussions of indigenous research methodology exist outside of tourism and offer insights into this aspect of tourism research. Meyer (2008) states that for current issues affecting indigenous people to be addressed effectively, new theories must be drawn from their ancient ways of knowing. It must be noted that one element that links diverse places and connects indigenous methodologies is the concept of colonisation; in many cases, these places have been dominated by Western approaches, which may not be appropriate for them. "Indigenous methodologies tend to approach cultural protocols, values and behaviours as an integral part of methodology" (Smith, 1999 p. 15).

Urion, Norton, and Porter (1995) argued that indigenous research methodologies should not be defined as this could prevent studies from being benchmarked inappropriately against European models. Story-telling was the instrument used in engaging with the participants. The Melanesian Research Framework is an indigenous research approach that integrates PNG's cultural values and practices.

Informal conversations in the form of storytelling were held for almost an hour. The shortest conversation took about 40 minutes while the longest was approximately an hour and 30 minutes. Connelly & Clandinin (1990) assert that storytelling allows people to express the different ways they experience the world. This can be particularly useful in indigenous research. Bishop (1999) argues that stories allow people to share meanings and unravel the truth, and stresses the importance of collaborative storytelling in indigenous research to help avoid researcher bias.

The importance of using a research instrument that is comfortable and convenient for indigenous people was also stressed by Hart (2010), who noted that storytelling is an everyday experience for indigenous people. The contrast between an embraced or developed method and spontaneous activity of people as in the form of storytelling is not as systematic or established. The storytelling can come from different conversational angles, thus allowing the listener to tie in neatly within the broader scope for one's relevance. If storytelling is a medium of expressing socio-political, cultural or economic insights, indigenous people have over time used that as a conduit nowadays for economic progress that befits the immediate communities. It is all the more relevant that the ideological position must always be for the good of the community and in that regard, social capital is expressively viable here.

The approach for the conversations was to make it as in-depth as possible with the help of four main theme questions, which guided the conversations: considerations when preparing for community-based tourism (CBT), structures and systems for operating a CBT operation, resourcing CBT and developing skills and local capacity to deliver CBT. With the help of key informants, the snowball technique was adopted to identify potential research participants. Storytelling being the main research instrument was used to engage with the participants in informal conversations. Participants were given the freedom to tell their stories at their own pace and the way they wanted to tell them. A voice recorder was used to capture the different stories shared by the participants. This was also considered an important process in ensuring trustworthiness and avoiding data misrepresentation. The recorded stories were then replayed and transcribed. The transcripts were analysed manually using thematic analysis.

Results

Data collected for this research is considered important in encouraging tourism in rural communities. Results obtained are presented in the form of direct quotes. This process is deemed appropriate as it embraces the purpose of the Melanesian Research Framework and that is to allow indigenous people to truly represent themselves by sharing their experiences and stories willingly without being encrypted, which could allow for the possibility of being misinterpreted. Shared in the following paragraphs are some conversations by the participants in light of the purpose of this paper.

The communities visited were friendly and sincere in sharing their experiences including the struggles they encountered, the excitement and motivations for embarking on tourism and

their hopes for better tourism set up in their respective communities. The highlight of the stories by the participants was the support they received from each other to build their tourism ideas as an economic activity into reality. They also shared that tourism is a community effort, for instance, one participant commented that “different clans are engaged to act as tour guides/porters and carriers, so in that way, the benefits of tourism trickle down to the community”. Rural communities rely on family ties to sustain themselves in order to survive as a family/clan/tribe and community; not just for the sake of tourism but other activities such as bride price and compensation.

Pooling of resources by community members is a vital element of community survival and success. This was demonstrated by a community invited to participate in this study. “In 2015, we as a village decided to go into tourism, we built rooms for tourists and a conference room. We also dug the road and cleared the path that leads to the rooms.” These communities are aware that tourism alone will not be their saving grace but yet they enjoy being part of tourism activities: “we like to show other people our culture and at the same time meet new people and learn new things”. A topic raised during the conversations was the tourism challenges experienced by tourism resource owners. One participant commented, “I’d like to learn how to do online marketing so I do not have to rely on other people to market for me”, while another commented, “the tour operators make more money than us even though we own the attraction sites and do cultural performances”. The tour operators being referred to, are foreign-owned. It was stressed again that these communities continue to promote because they are related either through family ties or speak the same local vernacular. One commented, “the cultural group we formed consists of members from the two main clans”. This quote is taken from one of few female participants, “It’s good to help each other. My cousins helped me cut grass along the track, we help each other”.

The cultural practice of collectivism by Papua New Guineans mirrors the comments of the participants stating that tourism is a community effort. (Davidsson & Honig, 2003) also share similar sentiments saying that cooperation by members of disadvantaged communities towards business start-ups is a form of social capital.

Discussion

Melanesian values and social capital

The value of maintaining relationships within clans and tribes in PNG is vital for survival. It is a form of social security and a foundation for social capital within rural communities, which means that understanding tourism development requires an understanding of the clan and tribal networks (Taylor, 2017; Hwang & Stewart, 2016).

The value of reciprocity (*bekim, bekim bek*) – the concept of reciprocity is closely linked to the value of clan and translates into an ethic of helping one another in times of need and returning the favour (Diedrich et al., 2019; Hwang & Stewart, 2016).

The value of food (*kaikai, mumu*) – the sharing of food is central to the PNG culture, being hospitable to visitors, families and friends as a token of friendship, appreciation and goodwill. The sharing of food is an important protocol for researchers seeking to establish rapport, negotiation, consultation and during the storytelling moments.

The value of ancestors (*tumbuna, tambaran*) – acknowledging ancestors guides how people within a village relate to each other. Either they could be descendants of the same ancestor or their ancestors are related. Having a common ancestor strengthens the relational ties amongst clan members, which contributes to working together and enforces the already established network, therefore manifesting as social capital.

The value of ritual (*taboo, singsing, lotu*) involves the preparation leading to an event or ceremony and sets out the actions that must be performed by those who initiate and those who participate in an event so the desired outcomes of the event will be achieved. The PNG diverse culture is a draw card for tourists, hence, the display of traditional songs and dances by villages for the sake of tourism is a community effort. Different members of a village join to either prepare the traditional attire (*bilas*) or participate as dancers.

The value of leadership (*hetman*) – an important element in rural communities is respecting and acknowledging the local leadership. Hence, an important promoter of effective tourism is good governance. Leadership portrayed by an individual who has the support of the community to venture into tourism is essential in promoting and sustaining tourism.

The value of education (*skul*) – in contemporary PNG, there is a belief that education can lead to better and improved ways of living. Tourism is an introduced concept, which requires tourism resource owners to learn the skills in managing their tourism activities.

The value of compensation (*peibek, bekim, birua*) – compensation refers to giving some form of payment to someone or a group of people after causing grievance to them. It aims to maintain peace so there are no tribal fights or ethnic clashes which usually end in bloody situations. Awareness of the importance of compensation would be critical to understanding patterns of interaction between communities involved in tourism. The value of work (*wok*) – refers to the importance of putting in effort and making sacrifices to achieve one's goal.

In rural PNG social capital is an important asset that facilitates community survival and livelihood. The value of kinship is deeply rooted in PNG's traditional culture. Thus, the concept of social capital has prompted communities to work together and promote tourism as a community initiative. In ensuring that there is a promotion of unity in the community, vital elements such as maintaining relationships, reciprocity among the people and embracing kinship patterns are considered irreducible indigenous essentialism (Scott, 2007).

Enhancing social relationships through tourism

Indigenous people may not have had a developed process that could be aligned to the rigorous cognitive development as is seen elsewhere (western societies). However, their way

of thinking and explanation was never conclusive but intrinsically relational. By way of coherence it would have seemed incongruent (had it not been for a process) and illogical. Implicitly, the trajectory that lies in the formulation of concepts and expression for an indigenous may not have consistency or rationality but there was a certain level of thinking involved as Kincheloe notes “There have to be modes of thinking that transcend the formal operational ability to formulate abstract conclusions, understand cause-effect relationships, and employ the traditional scientific method to explain reality” (Kincheloe, 2000, p.24). Such reality of the cause-effect relationship of indigenous people is implicit, meaning there is no systematic process of knowing (epistemological approach) as yet but it is not that there is no formal interrogation to accumulate knowledge.

Moreover, on the vantage point of being explicit, the reality (natural as well as supernatural) by which an indigenous begins to enquire in fact, draws from the array of information in existence to ascertain one’s relationship. That type of relationship here extends beyond the formal taxonomy and does not necessarily portray the bond and trust that it tends to exemplify. Similarly, concepts such as affection, cognition and self in the classical epistemological development would still fall short in the indigenous context. At that juncture, how is it possible that tourism can still enhance the social relationship? We need not mix the economy of tourism with the social relationship but the fact remains obvious, despite its entrepreneurial linchpin, its social responsibility will continue to be maintained. Tourism exists for the sake of the people and they are the sole construct of the activity by which they benefit economically or in the words of Marti Siisiäinen it impacts the “sociological essence of communal vitality.” Therefore, seeing under such current, it is all the more visible to note that economic benefit knits the mutual relationship among the people since it is a joint venture that they have initiated. At the outset, it is indeed verifiable that social relationship is a residue in the tourism industry. Maintaining a collegial approach and sustaining familial ties are expressive in the form of relationships.

Social capital in as much as social relationship threads on the same vein to maintain “moral obligations and norms, social values, (especially trust) and social networks (especially voluntary associations)” (Siisiainen, 2000). Relationships as in social capital must embrace the crux of enhancing social value especially trust because it will deteriorate when there is no trust established between the various individuals or community organizations. Trust must rid itself of bias and disparity should there be the sustainability of livelihood and the combination of capital assets like social, human, natural, physical and financial capital (Diedrich et al., 2019), which are basic elements that ought to be in existence should it be in economics, social structure, or politics.

The researched communities were optimistic about tourism and the potential for conflicting interests amongst community members arising from competition in CBT and other tourism-related activities were not reported in the present study, despite it being suggested as a problem by some of the early anthropological analyses (Halvaksz, 2006: Martin, 2008). In this study, it seemed that each of the tourism ventures, especially in the Highlands, was established by either an individual and/or his or her family unit. The development of tourism

did not, however, create competition or conflict, rather it triggered more enthusiasm from the collective social group to ensure success. For instance, if Betty's Lodge had tourists at her place, she would arrange with other tourism operators to benefit by showing their traditional dance or selling their artifacts so that the benefits through tourism are shared between the lodge's owner and others who are involved in tourism.

In Chimbu, the two main lodges that could bring in tourists without relying on tour operators were Betty's Lodge and Camp Jehovah Jireh. However, they relied on the other tourism providers within their community to facilitate the tourism activities for the tourists. In this scenario, social capital is being relied upon to enhance tourism within the area. It must be noted that the tourism providers including Betty's Lodge and Camp Jehovah Jireh are related through genealogy ties and speak the same mother tongue. The concept of involving everyone is driven not only by profit but also the importance of maintaining cultural ties and relationships. However, if, outside tour operators were involved, the purpose and outcome of tourism in this particular scenario might not be empowering for the locals. McCannell (1992, p. 28) commented that successful tourism is "profit without exploitation".

Having at least two major tourism outlets that were indigenous to the community that directly brought in tourists also minimised the impact of economic leakage within the community. This experience was quite different to the other communities visited who relied entirely on other stakeholders, mainly tour operators, who were seen as the major key players in tourism being operationalized in the communities. For any community to share a similar experience with that of Chimbu, at least one tourism operator from within the community must have the resources to source tourists directly. Tourism will then be embraced by the rest of the community, as social capital is already an existing asset, emphasizing that tourism is not only a profit-driven industry but also a social-cultural phenomenon. Oakes (2005), and Stronza (2001) commented that locals are also part of the tourism encounter and in all fairness, have agency and control, however, when tourism is being dictated to them and there is an imbalance of power, locals become spectators in their own communities. A participant commented "the tour operators need us to make tourism happen in PNG, they don't own the tourism resources/sites/activities. But yet they make us feel like we need them to survive. We, the local tourism resource owners, are being cheated and exploited because we do not have the capacity and resources to market ourselves effectively." Hence, utilising social capital through CBT can lead to a more fruitful tourism encounter. Another person shared similar sentiments, "We should be able to market ourselves and get tourists without relying on tour operators. In our community, we plan to rebuild what was lost in the fire, build a proper hut that will host the selling of our arts and crafts and bilums." These were not just spoken words but words put into action. Eight months after visiting this particular community, I was sent a photograph of a newly built hut, which the women use as the designated space to sell their bilums and other arts and crafts when tourists visit (Figure 1), which was achieved through community cooperation.



Figure 1: Newly built hut for arts and crafts

Recommendation

For tourism to survive in rural communities in PNG, the local cultural system of the community must be understood such as the different clans that make up the community. The relationship within the clans and between the clans, the different roles each clan is responsible for within the community. The relationship between neighbouring communities is equally important because of the multiplier effect tourism has on society.

Tourism should be an initiative suggested from within the community and not imposed on the community by an outside source. This study has shown that social capital is a key element in sustaining tourism in rural communities. Hence, social capital is the collective pulling of resources by community members in achieving a common purpose. Social capital can only be drawn from within the community and not from an outsider. Therefore, it is recommended that tourism stakeholders allow rural communities to take leadership and ownership of their tourism affairs and not dictate tourism to them.

Conclusion

PNG's cultural practices have been an enabler of tourism, especially in the rural communities where in some remote areas basic infrastructure is still lacking to facilitate progress in both human and economic development. Cultural practices in the form of maintaining relational ties for thousands of years has indeed been the foundation of clans and tribes. Social capital in the form of a clan member helping another is a common inter-generational practice, which has also allowed individual members of clans, tribes and villages to survive. This concept is now being adopted to suit the needs of contemporary PNG as more rural dwellers venture into tourism within their local communities.

The communities visited were optimistic about tourism despite the low turnover of tourists. They are aware that their livelihood must not depend on tourism alone. But despite this, they see tourism as an avenue to share their culture with the rest of the world and to learn about other cultures and meet new people. Tourism not only allows them to meet the outside world

but also presents the opportunity for them to work together as a community, which in turn strengthens their relational ties and deepens the bond amongst clan/tribe/village/community members. This in turn empowers future tourism initiatives and other community projects. Figure 2 illustrates the connection between social capital and tourism. It reveals that social capital in PNG's context is embedded in genealogical ties.

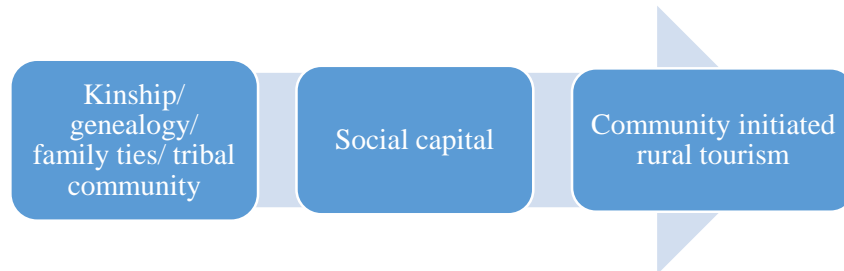


Figure 2: Social capital and rural tourism

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