Strategies to promote sustainable community tourism development in Casas Viejas Commune, Manabí, Ecuador

DOI: 10.46932/sfjdv4n7-017

Received on: September 11th, 2023
Accepted on: October 10th, 2023

Héctor Simón Pinargote Vélez
Master in Education and Social Development
Institution: Southern State University of Manabí
Address: Vía Jipijapa-Noboa, Campus Los Ángeles, Ecuador
E-mail: hector.pinargote@unesum.edu.ec

Dayana Jazmin Chiquito Toala
Bachelor of Tourism
Institution: State University of the South of Manabí
Address: Vía Jipijapa-Noboa, Campus Los Ángeles, Ecuador
E-mail: chiquito-dayana0659@unesum.edu.ec

Alexandra Isabel Leones Montalvan
Bachelor of Science in Education
Institution: Junta Parroquial de San Isidro
Address: Parroquia San Isidro, Calle Valentín Alcivar, Entre Luz de América y 10 de Agosto
E-mail: alexandraleonesm@gmail.com

Romina Stephania Saenz Veliz
Master in Local Development and Territorial Innovation
Institution: Southern State University of Manabí
Address: Vía Jipijapa-Noboa, Campus Los Ángeles, Ecuador
E-mail: romina.saenz@unesum.edu.ec

ABSTRACT
This study investigates strategies to promote sustainable development of community-based tourism in Comuna Casas Viejas. Community-based tourism aims to enhance local quality of life through participation and equitable income distribution. However, the community has faced economic challenges due to deteriorating tourism infrastructure. This article proposes strategies to address these issues. The influence of key stakeholders such as local institutions, governments, and organizations was analyzed. Additionally, benefits in economic, environmental, and socio-cultural domains were examined. Citizen participation was deemed essential for decision-making and community integration. To revitalize tourism, infrastructure restoration and sustainable waste management and conservation practices are suggested. Collaboration with governmental and non-governmental organizations is paramount to ensure long-term success. It is concluded that the effective implementation of these strategies can contribute to economic recovery, environmental conservation, and the strengthening of local cultural identity. Collaboration among the community, institutions, and external actors is crucial to achieving sustainable community-based tourism in Comuna Casas Viejas. This study offers a holistic approach to addressing community-based tourism challenges and can serve as a guide for other communities interested in developing sustainable and beneficial tourism practices for all stakeholders involved.
Keywords: sustainable development, local empowerment, citizen participation, natural resources, community-based tourism.

1 INTRODUCTION

Community-based tourism has emerged as a viable strategy to drive economic and social development in various regions around the world. In this context, the Comuna Casas Viejas, located in the Pedro Pablo Gómez Parish, has not been an exception. This small community, nestled in a rural setting, has faced economic and social challenges throughout its history. However, as local communities seek sustainable alternatives to conventional tourism, community-based tourism has become an attractive approach that promotes active resident participation in the management and benefit of tourism resources (Smith, 2012; Gursoy & Rutherford, 2004).

The adoption of community-based tourism as an economic and social development strategy in Casas Viejas is framed within a broader context of changing perceptions and practices in tourism. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), sustainable and responsible tourism has become increasingly important in the global tourism industry (UNWTO, 2020). This has led to a heightened focus on local communities and their active involvement in the planning, implementation, and management of tourism initiatives. In this regard, Casas Viejas has taken significant steps to align its tourism development with the principles of sustainability and social responsibility, making it a relevant case study in this field.

This study aims to comprehensively analyze the impact of community-based tourism on the economic and social development of the Comuna Casas Viejas. Through a multidisciplinary approach encompassing economic, sociocultural, and environmental aspects, this work intends to shed light on how this community has transformed its reality through the implementation of community-based tourism practices. Furthermore, it seeks to identify lessons learned and best practices that can serve as a guide for other communities looking to harness the potential of community-based tourism as a driver of sustainable development in the 21st century.

2 METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted in this research was carefully designed to ensure the acquisition of precise and relevant data. The methodological steps undertaken played an essential role in conducting a comprehensive and rigorous study. To begin with, the research process was initiated by obtaining necessary permissions from individuals and organizations involved. Through this request, the purpose,
scope, and methodology of the study were presented, ensuring confidentiality and protection of participants' identities, thereby establishing an environment of trust and respect.

Subsequently, interviews were conducted with pre-selected key participants possessing knowledge and expertise relevant to the study's subject. The interview guide, meticulously crafted, incorporated open-ended and specific questions to delve deep into the study's objectives. These individual interviews took place in confidential settings, with detailed notes taken to accurately capture participants' responses and perspectives. In addition to interviews, participatory workshops were planned and carried out involving experts and stakeholders, facilitating professional interaction and idea exchange.

Upon data collection, a thorough analysis was conducted. Interview responses and workshop outcomes were transcribed and accurately organized. Qualitative analysis techniques were employed to identify patterns, trends, and points of convergence within the data. Triangulation of data obtained from various methods and sources provided a holistic understanding of the subject.

Several methods were employed:

- Theoretical-level method: Comprehensive bibliographic research supported every stage of the work, utilizing diverse sources such as the Plan de Desarrollo y Ordenamiento Territorial (PDOT, 2015) and references concerning tourism and its activities (OMG, 2015).
- Empirical method: Structured surveys and identification sheets were implemented to gather accurate and reliable data about the study area.
- Analytical-synthetic method: A meticulous problem analysis was undertaken, employing observation and joint analysis to identify potential tourism activities.
- Statistical method: After data collection via surveys, results were tabulated and graphed for interpretation.

Specific techniques were applied:

- Bibliographic review: Exhaustive review was conducted to obtain up-to-date information about the study area.
- Survey: A survey was conducted targeting inhabitants of the parish to structure the development of a tourism product.

The population of interest comprised 66 inhabitants with experience in visiting the parish under study. The sample size formula was employed to determine a representative and efficient size, considering crucial factors such as confidence level, expected proportion, and desired precision (Cochran, 1977).
3 FINDINGS/RESULTS DISCUSSION

3.1 IDENTIFICATION OF THE CURRENT SITUATION OF COMMUNITY TOURISM IN CASAS VIEJAS COMMUNE

The central objective lies in understanding the current state of Community Tourism in Casas Viejas Commune. To achieve this goal, a comprehensive research effort was undertaken, encompassing the generalities and key components of local Community Tourism. The obtained results are summarized and analyzed below:

Casas Viejas, as a Commune with a productive agroforestry base, plays a vital role in the rural landscape. Agriculture and crops such as maize, carob trees, pastures, rice, passion fruit, beans, bananas, and mahogany form the core of its economy, occupying approximately 90% of its activity. This agricultural focus reflects the community's deep connection with the land and its traditions rooted in sustainable production.

The natural resources of the Commune are diverse and essential to its identity. From barbasco plantations to the valuable protective forest of Machalilla Park, along with beekeeping practices and agroforestry methods, the community values and uses its environment sensitively. These elements support not only subsistence but also the foundation of tourist attractions that are being developed.

In terms of tourism resources, Casas Viejas presents a range of hidden gems that can be explored for tourism purposes. The Community House, for instance, houses archaeological treasures dating back to pre-Columbian times, revealing the historical and cultural richness of the place. Additionally, the ecological trail and the Piñas and Ayangue rivers offer opportunities for ecotourism and observation of local flora and fauna. The tropical climate, though challenging during the winter period due to increased Ayangue River flow, adds authenticity and a sense of adventure to the tourist experience.

An interesting perspective provided by residents is the community's adaptation during the El Niño phenomenon when rivers reach considerable depths. This reality demonstrates Casas Viejas' resilience and ability to face environmental challenges and ensure visitor safety.

Casas Viejas Commune presents a complex intersection between traditional agricultural activity, valuable natural resources, and an emerging focus on Community Tourism. The results of this study shed light on how these aspects are interconnected and how the community is working to preserve its heritage while embarking on sustainable tourism promotion.

The following components are described:

- Component: Location - Casas Viejas is a commune located in Machalilla National Park, within the Puerto López Canton. Surrounded by a forest of ceibos and rivers, it is 27 km from the Pan-American Highway.
Component: Access Routes - To access Casas Viejas, there are two main routes. One starts from Pedro Pablo Gómez, the parish headquarters, via a dirt road that takes around 40 minutes and offers panoramic views of the Chongón Colonche mountain range. The other route originates from Route 15 in La Rinconada, between Olón and Puerto López. Along this road, a natural viewpoint provides vistas of Montañita, Olón, and on clear days, Puerto Ayangue. The passability of these routes is affected during the rainy season, especially from February to May, when rivers like the Ayangue River experience a significant increase in flow, allowing for refreshing baths.

Component: Temperature - The average temperature in Casas Viejas ranges from 25 to 22°C.

Component: Population - The population of Casas Viejas and its surroundings comprises approximately 400 inhabitants distributed among over 90 families.

Component: Population Division - The commune is subdivided into various sectors, including San Francisco, San Isidro, La Colombia, Río Plátano, Los Manantiales, El Caucho, Vuelta Perdida, and Río Chico.

Component: Productive System - The productive system of Casas Viejas is characterized by an agroforestry approach that accounts for around 90% of activity. Crops such as maize, carob trees, mahogany, watermelons, and papayas are prioritized in this system.

Component: Tourism Resources - The tourism resources of the commune are found both within and around it. These include a Community Museum, an Ecological/Ecotourism Trail, Agroecological Farms, the Piñas, Ayangue, and La Vaca rivers, as well as the Protective Forest of Machalilla Park.

Component: Availability of Activities - The community offers a variety of activities, including nature tours, horseback riding, mountaineering, visits to neighboring communities, river exploration, camping, community integration, cultural participation, archaeological interpretation, and lodging options. These activities reflect the rich tourism offering and authentic interaction with the local community.

3.2 BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY TOURISM IN CASAS VIEJAS COMMUNE

To fully comprehend the benefits of Community Tourism in Casas Viejas Commune, it's essential to delve into its historical context. Initially, Casas Viejas had its origins as a modest "ramadita" (shelter) that, over time, transformed into a welcoming house for tagua gatherers, hunters, and Ayangue River fishermen. These antecedents are crucial for charting the evolving change experienced by the Commune,
wherein the contribution and cooperation of all its components have been fundamental. This progress has redefined the community, laying the foundation for Community Tourism as an opportunity for sustainable development.

Consequently, the intersection of elements present in the current internal and external situation has culminated in a harmonized development process. Citizen participation has played a pivotal role in all aspects: economic, recipient, cultural, environmental, and institutional. This comprehensive collaboration has allowed for the establishment of regulations, coordinated efforts, defined goals, and regulated practices on the path to Community Tourism. The result has been a fruitful and effective approach where benefits have become tangible within the community and its broader surroundings.

This progress in the implementation of Community Tourism has not only transformed the local economy but has also enriched visitors' experiences and highlighted the rich cultural and natural heritage of the Commune. The active participation of residents and consistency in planning have led to a significant balance between tourism progress and preservation of local identity. The achievements realized in the implementation of Community Tourism in Casas Viejas stand as a testament to how collaboration and shared vision can become catalysts for sustainable development and lasting benefits. The sectors, authors, and associated benefits are detailed below:

- **Economic Sector:** The economic sector of Casas Viejas Commune is influenced by a diversity of key actors who play fundamental roles in its development. These actors include the reference institution (Central Bank of Ecuador), the Parish Council, the Decentralized Autonomous Government (GAD), Social Security Funds, the Public Administration, the Provincial Council, Local Governments, the Latin American Center for Rural Development (RIMISP), and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (FIDA). Through their participation, these actors contribute to direct resource generation, creation of job opportunities, and support for the community's sustainable development. The involvement of these entities also drives local economic development, promoting sustainable improvements locally, financial and social inclusion, greater operational efficiency, and expansion into intelligent markets. In this context, a noticeable improvement has been observed in accessibility to economic benefits that translate into broader and more significant progress for Casas Viejas Commune.

- **Local/Population Sector:** The local sector and population of Casas Viejas Commune are influenced by a diverse network of actors playing crucial roles in its evolution. Among these actors are civil society, local and investment institutions, the recipient community, local governments, specialized training centers, the National System of Protected Areas (SNAP), local authorities, public administration, and the Latin American Center for Rural Development (RIMISP). Through
their involvement, these actors contribute to decision-making within the community, empower tourism recipients, enhance both collective and individual capacities, stimulate entrepreneurial activities, raise the quality of life for the population, reduce vulnerability, strengthen social fabric, and facilitate access to essential services. Additionally, they play a fundamental role in the protection and conservation of local resources, ensuring long-term sustainability and overall community well-being.

- Environmental Sector: The environmental sector in Casas Viejas Commune is influenced by a diverse network of actors playing fundamental roles in the preservation and care of the natural environment. Among these actors are local and investment institutions, the recipient community, local governments, public administration, private organizations, population participation, the Latin American Center for Rural Development (RIMISP), the Ministry of Environment and Natural Resources (SEMARNAT), and the National System of Protected Areas (SNAP). Through their commitment and action, these actors contribute to a significant improvement in the community's environmental surroundings. This translates to reduced degradation and deforestation, conservation of the valuable natural resources and assets present in the region, and an increase in knowledge and appreciation for nature. Community Tourism also promotes responsible consumption and adds value to flora and fauna resources. Moreover, this approach facilitates balanced development, minimizes the environmental impact of tourism activities, and establishes mechanisms to alert, identify, and manage any impact on the ecosystem, thereby ensuring long-term sustainability.

- Socio-Cultural Sector: The socio-cultural sector of Casas Viejas Commune is influenced by a series of actors playing essential roles in promoting cultural and social enrichment within the community. Among these actors are the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Aquaculture, and Fisheries (MAGAP), the Ministry of Economic and Social Inclusion (MIES), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), third-level institutions, and the Latin American Center for Rural Development (RIMISP). Through their contribution, Community Tourism has become a tool that leads to intercultural understanding and tolerance, fostering community integration as a whole. Additionally, it promotes sustainable and responsible practices that contribute to infrastructure restoration, reactivates zoning, supports human waste management, drives improvements in local infrastructure, and creates tangible benefits through construction projects. Ultimately, these collaborative efforts significantly enhance the quality of life in the community while enriching its cultural identity and social fabric.
3.3 STRATEGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN COMUNA CASAS VIEJAS

In line with the core purpose of community tourism to enhance the quality of life for local populations, the need to strengthen internal organization and ensure an equitable, fair, and distributive distribution of income has been identified. Furthermore, the vital importance of maintaining inclusive participation of all involved communities, while preserving and revitalizing their natural and cultural environments, has been recognized. Over the course of several decades, Comuna Casas Viejas has undertaken efforts in the tourism sector with notable economic dynamics. However, during the past decade, it has faced a decline in income, largely due to the widespread deterioration of tourist facilities and infrastructure, presenting significant challenges in the sector.

To address these issues, the current research process has been oriented toward defining strategies with the purpose of promoting sustainable and enduring community tourism in Comuna Casas Viejas (Table 1). These strategies are being collaboratively conceived, actively involving the three key stakeholders in this process (Ovando, 2020). The constructive interaction between research and these key actors will enable the formulation of solutions tailored to the unique characteristics and potential of the community. Consequently, these strategies emerge as a pathway toward a tourism model that significantly contributes to the holistic well-being of the Commune and provides a solid foundation for its long-term sustainable development.

The strategies for sustainable community tourism development in Comuna Casas Viejas are essential to ensure continuous improvement in the quality of life for local residents and the preservation of natural and cultural resources. These strategies are being developed in collaboration with key stakeholders, including the local community, local authorities, and relevant organizations. Below are some of the proposed strategies:

- **Strengthening Community Organization:** The aim is to strengthen the community's internal organization for efficient and equitable management of community tourism. This involves creating local committees or associations responsible for planning, implementation, and supervision of tourism activities. Additionally, training and capacity-building opportunities will be promoted for community members involved in tourism.

- **Diversification of Tourism Offerings:** The goal is to diversify tourism offerings to attract different types of visitors. This could involve creating thematic tourist routes such as hiking, bird watching, craft workshops, local cuisine experiences, among others. Diversification allows for longer stays and increased tourist spending.
• Investment in Infrastructure and Services: Improving and maintaining existing tourist infrastructure, such as trails, viewpoints, rest areas, and community accommodations, is proposed. Furthermore, the implementation of sustainable practices in waste management, efficient water and energy use, and conservation of natural resources will be promoted.

• Community Participation in Decision-Making: Active participation of the community in decision-making related to tourism will be encouraged. This could include establishing community assemblies, public consultations, and dialogue spaces where residents can express their opinions and contribute to tourism planning.

• Promotion and Marketing: Promotion and marketing strategies will be designed to showcase the community's tourism offerings at regional, national, and international levels. This may involve creating websites, social media platforms, promotional materials, and participating in tourism fairs and events.

• Training and Sensitization: Training programs will be conducted for community members in areas such as customer service, heritage interpretation, environmental conservation, and business management. Additionally, raising awareness about the importance of sustainable tourism and its positive impact on the community will be encouraged.

• Equitable Income Generation: Mechanisms will be established to ensure equitable and fair distribution of income generated by tourism. This could include implementing fair pricing systems for tourism activities and allocating a portion of the income to community projects.

• Conservation and Valuation of Cultural Heritage: Efforts will be directed toward conserving and valuing the community's cultural heritage, involving residents in the preservation of traditions, customs, and historic sites. This could involve organizing cultural festivals and creating spaces for intergenerational knowledge transmission.

• Collaboration with External Institutions and Organizations: Partnerships will be formed with governmental institutions, non-governmental organizations, and development entities to gain technical, financial, and training support. External collaboration can enhance local capacities and expand growth opportunities.

• Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation: Monitoring and evaluation systems will be implemented to measure the impact of the implemented strategies. This will enable adjustments as needed and ensure that community tourism remains sustainable and beneficial over time.
These strategies are designed to be adaptable and flexible, considering changing conditions and community needs. Collaboration among the various stakeholders is crucial for the long-term success of community tourism in Comuna Casas Viejas.

Table 1. Strategies for Community Tourism Development in Comuna Casas Viejas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Involved Actors</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Community       | Facilitation of spaces: Providing spaces like gardens, farms, and estates to families from urban areas, allowing them to immerse in rural life and encouraging the exchange of knowledge and experiences. Diversification of business lines: Exploring and communicating diverse business opportunities available in the community, offering residents a broad and motivating view to undertake new economic activities. Quality assurance and uniqueness: Ensuring exceptional quality of products and the distinction of services offered, highlighting the unique attributes that characterize the rural region. Preservation of values and environment: Safeguarding the cultural and environmental values of the rural environment, promoting practices and activities that respect and enrich the local identity. Channeling opinions and suggestions: Establishing effective channels for the expression of opinions, complaints, and suggestions towards authorities, institutions, and relevant entities, facilitating participation and continuous improvement. |}

| Authorities     | Infrastructure improvement: Make investments in infrastructure that optimize local conditions, fostering a more attractive and comfortable environment for both residents and visitors. Creation of accessible and competitive business models: Develop business models that are competitive in the market while remaining affordable for the local population, enabling active participation and economic benefit for all. Ensuring basic services: Implement and complete necessary infrastructure to provide essential basic services, enhancing the quality of life and well-being of the community. Opening of new markets: Seek opportunities to open productive markets that allow for the marketing and sale of local products, expanding economic horizons and strengthening the local economy. Enhancement of training and education: Increase training and education efforts directed towards the population, empowering residents with relevant and updated skills that they can apply in their economic activities. Balancing development, innovation, and sustainability: Establish a solid balance between economic development, innovation, and sustainability, ensuring that undertaken actions benefit the community without compromising resources or the environment in the long term. |}

| Institutions    | Governmental and non-governmental organizations. Connection between rural suppliers and urban ecological cooperatives: Establish collaborative links between rural suppliers and urban cooperatives with an ecological focus, promoting cooperation between different sectors and leveraging synergies between rural production and urban demand. Financial support for entrepreneurs: Provide economic collaboration through microfinancing to facilitate rural entrepreneurs in acquiring materials, equipment, and necessary products for the development of their activities, thus driving local economic growth. Balance between development, innovation, and sustainability: Maintain a careful balance between economic development, innovation, and sustainability, ensuring that implemented initiatives contribute to the improvement of the rural environment without compromising natural |
resources and the community's future.

Inclusion of rural suppliers in successful initiatives: Provide opportunities for rural suppliers to participate in successful initiatives and projects in more developed areas, allowing them to expand their reach and leverage new growth opportunities.

Addressing concerns and desires of the rural environment: Demonstrate genuine interest in the concerns and desires of each sector in the rural environment, involving the community in decision-making and adapting strategies to real needs.

Commitment to a sustainable future: Commit and trust in a sustainable present and future for the rural environment, working on community conservation and development to prevent abandonment and promote long-term prosperity.

Source: Own elaboration.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this work was made possible through the research efforts of Universidad Estatal del Sur de Manabí (UNESUM), as part of the Ecotourism-Forest Program within the project 'Biodiversity of interest for tourism in the coastal region of Ecuador.' Presently, this study aligns seamlessly with the objectives of the Tourism Career, encompassing the commitments within the research area of Conscious Tourism.
REFERENCES


