COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The objective of this study is to investigate how rural communities facing the problems of ageing population and lack of economic opportunities can be revived by adopting the approach of sustainable community-based tourism.

Theoretical Framework: The study was guided by theories related to community development, placemaking, and community-based tourism.

Method: The research used the case analysis method to analyze a community revitalization project in rural Taipei, Taiwan. Data were collected through field observation and interviews. The researcher was invited to participate in the related meetings and observe the practices of the community revitalization project. The researcher also interviewed the leader and volunteers of the community development project.

Results and Discussion: It is found that a placemaking process mixed with top-down (facilitated) and bottom-up engagement approaches can effectively generate a sense of place among various groups of constituents. The research also found that it is critical to identify and leverage the cultural and ecological assets of the community in an innovative and integrated way so as to effectively connect the community and the society. To revive a community, volunteers played a mediating role in fulfilling the needs of the community and connecting the community with the society.

Research Implications: The findings of the research can be applied to rural communities with similar problems and ecological/cultural assets. For policy makers, the study suggests that community revitalization requires an engagement process balanced with top-down (facilitated) and bottom-up approaches.

Originality/Value: This study contributes to the micro-view of sustainability literature by analyzing sustainability at a community level through the aspects of community placemaking and sustainable community-based tourism.

Keywords: Community Sustainability, Regional Revitalization, Placemaking, Community-Based Tourism, Sustainability.

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SUSTENTABILIDADE DA COMUNIDADE POR MEIO DO TURISMO SUSTENTÁVEL BASEADO NA COMUNIDADE

RESUMO

Objetivo: O objetivo deste estudo é investigar como as comunidades rurais que enfrentam os problemas do envelhecimento da população e da falta de oportunidades econômicas podem ser revitalizadas com a adoção da abordagem do turismo sustentável baseado na comunidade.

Estrutura Teórica: O estudo foi orientado por teorias relacionadas ao desenvolvimento comunitário, placemaking e turismo comunitário.

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Método: A pesquisa usou o método de análise de caso para analisar um projeto de revitalização comunitária na zona rural de Taipei, Taiwan. Os dados foram coletados por meio de observação de campo e entrevistas. O pesquisador foi convidado a participar das reuniões relacionadas e a observar as práticas do projeto de revitalização da comunidade. O pesquisador também entrevistou o líder e os voluntários do projeto de desenvolvimento comunitário.

Resultados e Discussão: Descobriu-se que um processo de placemaking combinado com abordagens de engajamento de cima para baixo (facilitadas) e de baixo para cima pode efetivamente gerar um senso de lugar entre vários grupos de constituintes. A pesquisa também constatou que é fundamental identificar e aproveitar os ativos culturais e ecológicos da comunidade de forma inovadora e integrada para conectar efetivamente a comunidade e a sociedade. Para reavivar uma comunidade, os voluntários desempenharam um papel de mediador na satisfação das necessidades da comunidade e na conexão da comunidade com a sociedade.

Implicações da Pesquisa: Os resultados da pesquisa podem ser aplicados a comunidades rurais com problemas semelhantes e ativos ecológicos/culturais. Para os formuladores de políticas, o estudo sugere que a revitalização da comunidade exige um processo de engajamento equilibrado com abordagens de cima para baixo (facilitadas) e de baixo para cima.

Originalidade/Valor: Este estudo contribui para a microvisão da literatura sobre sustentabilidade ao analisar a sustentabilidade em nível comunitário por meio dos aspectos de placemaking comunitário e turismo sustentável baseado na comunidade.

Palavras-chave: Sustentabilidade Comunitária, Revitalização Regional, Placemaking, Turismo de Base Comunitária, Sustentabilidade.

SOSTENIBILIDAD DE LA COMUNIDAD MEDIANTE UN TURISMO COMUNITARIO SOSTENIBLE

RESUMEN

Objetivo: El objetivo de este estudio es investigar cómo pueden reactivarse las comunidades rurales que se enfrentan a los problemas del envejecimiento de la población y la falta de oportunidades económicas adoptando el enfoque del turismo sostenible basado en la comunidad.

Marco Teórico: El estudio se guió por teorías relacionadas con el desarrollo comunitario, la creación de lugares y el turismo comunitario.

Método: La investigación utilizó el método de análisis de casos para analizar un proyecto de revitalización comunitaria en la zona rural de Taipei (Taiwán). Los datos se recogieron mediante observación sobre el terreno y entrevistas. El investigador fue invitado a participar en las reuniones relacionadas y a observar las prácticas del proyecto de revitalización comunitaria. El investigador también entrevistó al líder y a los voluntarios del proyecto de desarrollo comunitario.

Resultados y Debate: Se ha constatado que un proceso de creación de lugares que combine enfoques de participación descendentes (facilitados) y ascendentes puede generar eficazmente un sentido del lugar entre diversos grupos de electores. La investigación también reveló que es fundamental identificar y aprovechar los activos culturales y ecológicos de la comunidad de forma innovadora e integrada para conectar eficazmente a la comunidad y a la sociedad. Para revitalizar una comunidad, los voluntarios desempeñan un papel mediador en la satisfacción de las necesidades de la comunidad y en la conexión de ésta con la sociedad.

Implicaciones de la Investigación: Las conclusiones de la investigación pueden aplicarse a comunidades rurales con problemas y activos ecológicos/culturales similares. Para los responsables políticos, el estudio sugiere que la revitalización de la comunidad requiere un proceso de compromiso equilibrado con enfoques descendentes (facilitados) y ascendentes.

Originalidad/Valor: Este estudio contribuye a la literatura sobre la micro-sostenibilidad analizando la sostenibilidad a nivel comunitario a través de los aspectos de la creación de espacios comunitarios y el turismo sostenible basado en la comunidad.
Community sustainability has become a critical issue in Taiwan as many rural communities suffer from problems resulting from aging and decreasing population, lacking job opportunities, and environmental deterioration. The concern for community sustainability may trace back to the 1970s and 1980s, as Taiwan’s rapid economic development, industrialization, and urbanization led to environmental pollution, rising house prices, and urban-rural disparity. In this context, community development in rural areas became the focus as people expected a better living environment (Tseng, 2007). In 2002, nine ministries cooperated for community development, resulting in the establishment of the “Community Overall Development Promotion Coordination Committee,” and various community development plans were implemented in the 21st century (Huang, 2016).

Broadly looking at the community sustainability history in Taiwan, government policies were mainly focusing on the landscape, preservation of local history, and support for the agriculture and tourism industries (Tseng, 2007). Nevertheless, the labor market remained condensed in urban areas. Although community sustainability had been promoted for many years, the issue of urban-rural disparity is still not resolved. In recent years, the regional revitalization policy emerged to tackle this issue of in-sustainability.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 REGIONAL REVITALIZATION

The idea of regional revitalization first originated in Japan. Japanese population continuously flow into metropolitan cities such as Tokyo which caused overpopulation in the urban environment (Zhang, 2017). The population in the countryside was reducing every year, worsening the urban-rural disparity. In 2014, Hiroya Masuda, former Minister of Internal Affairs and Communications of Japan warned the government that 900 countryside towns...
would disappear in 2040 if nothing were done to solve the issue. This statement attracted the attention of the Japanese government (Zhang, 2018). In 2015, Abe Cabinet founded the “Town, People, Work Creation Headquarters” to maintain the local population, boost local economies, and strengthen Japan’s economic vitality. The government adopted three strategies for placemaking: Information support, talent support, and financial support. (Zhang, 2017).

Due to the increasingly serious problem of uneven population and regional development, Taiwan learned from Japan and began to implement the policy of regional revitalization (Liu, 2018). Regional revitalization takes the population problem as the starting point and focused on solving several relevant issues: the aging population, the decline of the total population, the excessive concentrated population in the cities, and the gradual decline of local towns. Through policy promotion, the national resources will be directed to the relatively disadvantaged regions and people to achieve the goal of a "balanced Taiwan" and ensure the total population would not be less than 20 million in the future (National Development Commission, 2017).

The "Design Return, Regional Revitalization" project started in 2016 (National Development Commission, 2017). The project organized local featured resources of "land, product, and people" in various places, and used innovation and entrepreneurship strategies to create businesses with local characteristics and attract talents to give back to their hometowns. Year 2019 is known as the first year of regional revitalization in Taiwan. In 2019, the National Development Commission set up the “Regional Revitalization Association", which is composed of central ministries, local governments, leaders from the private sectors, and scholars. The association organizes resources related to regional revitalization and assists the working process. In 2019, the Executive Yuan released the National Strategic Plan for regional revitalization, which included the vision, goals and development strategies of regional revitalization. Based on factors such as population changes and residents' income, 134 critical communities were identified and prioritized in Taiwan.

The National Development Council launched "Regional Revitalization 2.0" in 2021, to connect local youth teams in Taiwan, set up youth training workstations, promote youth returning to their hometowns and staying there for employment or entrepreneurship, and bring new energy into the local communities. By 2022, there are 60 workstations located in towns and villages in Taiwan. The National Development Council has also launched a multi-proposal approach to encourage local government offices and organizations to develop development proposals for policy resources to accelerate regional revitalization. In order to alleviate the impact of the epidemic on the economy in remote villages, the National Development Council
has launched regional revitalization vouchers for consumption at partner stores. In 2024, the National Development Council extended the master plan of regional revitalization to the "Regional Revitalization 3.0" for 2024 to 2028.

In both Japan and Taiwan, the policies on regional revitalization were mainly based on the top-down model of government support and subsidies; however, the driving force of revitalization and community sustainability still relies on local action teams and high-quality projects. Thus, this research aims to present the practices of local teams in a specific case study.

2.2 LOCAL COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Louis-Joseph Lebret, French economist and priest, first proposed the approach of local community development (LCD) to solve community sustainability problems (Culebro Juárez & Gasper, 2021; Lebret, 1966; Migliaro, 2023). The LCD approach emphasizes the creation of connections among economic, social, cultural factors to enhance community identity, resilience, and capabilities for sustainability (Migliaro, 2023). A strong belief under the LCD approach is that most people care about others; thus, community sustainability requires the care and participation of both the people in the community and those who live outside the community (Culebro Juárez & Gasper, 2021). The cooperation among various groups of people with various motives are critical for the development of community (Migliaro, 2023).

2.3 PLACEMAKING

Placemaking is an important approach to community sustainability (Turvey, 2019). Placemaking is defined as a process of designing and making community spaces to create social, economic, or cultural activities with the intent to improve the quality of life in the community (Turvey, 2019). Thus, it is crucial to get community members’ involvement in the placemaking process to create connection and attachment between community members and the place (Ellery & Ellery, 2019). Matsunobu (2018) emphasizes that a sense of place in the community often generated from shared experiences and memories with emotional attachment, sense of history, and rootedness. In the case of the Eighteen-Hill Creek community at Shiding, the founder of the Shiding Firefly Book House, who return from abroad and saw the place he grew up in been abandoned, he determined to make the place lively again.

It is noted that placemaking can adopt either top-down or bottom-up approaches, or a combination of both (Balassiano & Maldonado, 2015; Ellery et al., 2019). Bodirsky (2017)
highlights that the success of placemaking relies on the design and coherence of “use value” and “exchange value.” The “use value” is what community members see important in their daily life, while the exchange value” what outsiders such as government, customers, and tourists see the community can offer.

2.4 SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY-BASED TOURISM

Sustainable community-based tourism, an approach to achieve community sustainability through sustainable, community-based tourism, has received increasing attention among community development scholars (Dangi & Jamal, 2016). Sustainable tourism, originated from the challenges of sustainable development, aims to make tourism a way to achieve the sustainable development goals (SDGs) (Samdin et al., 2022). It is suggested that sustainable tourism can create tourism-related jobs and income so as to contribute to the SDG 8: Decent work and economic growth. While communities with scenery might want to maximize tourist economy, the principle of sustainable tourism is to find a suitable balance between economy and environment (Dangi & Jamal, 2016). To achieve this goal, community involvement is a keystone (Samdin et al., 2022).

Community-based tourism, or CBT, is a community development tool that helps rural communities take charge of tourism and actively participate in the experience they offer visitors (Haines, 2014). The benefits of CBT include income for local residents, preservation of cultural traditions, educational opportunities for both visitors and locals, and a balance of the positive impacts of tourism and the negative effects on the environment and local way of life (García, 2020). It focuses on the strengths and assets of community, turning local cultural heritage and ecology into tourist attraction. From the perspective of asset-based community development, six community assets are essential to be integrated into community-based tourism: Individuals, cultural stories, local economy, associations, institutions, physical assets (García, 2020). In short, sustainable community-based tourism connect the locals with the world, through a system that facilitates responsive tourism and community development.
3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 CASE SELECTION

The study chose the Eighteen-Hill Creek community as the case for analysis because the community is considered as a successful story of the grand project of regional revitalization in Taiwan. The Shiding Firefly Book House at this community played a catalyst role in the revitalization process and was recognized and sponsored by the National Development Council as one of the sixty workstations in Taiwan dedicated to the goal of community sustainability.

3.2 THE CASE CONTEXT

The Eighteen-Hill Creek village is located in Shiding District in New Taipei City, within the Shiding’s water source protection area, surrounded by mountains, with beautiful scenery of mountains and plenty of natural ecological resources (Liu, 2016). In the early years, the coal mines brought a large number of jobs and prosperity to this region, but the coal mining industry declined 30 years ago, and only the remains of the mines, trolleys and miners' houses remain (Shiding District Office, 2018). Due to the decline of industries, many people migrated to urban areas, schools were closed, and the Eighteen-Hill Creek village became a declining village on the edge of a metropolis where many people left their households or industrial waste here.

The Shiding Firefly Book House is located in this beautiful yet gradually declining place. Because the founder of the bookstore, who has spent his childhood in this community, felt that he couldn't passively wait for change to happen, he harbored a desire to rediscover his childhood memories and to revive the community. He organized activities such as mountain cleaning, stream protection, and firefly rehabilitation. With the participation of the community members, volunteers and students from various universities, two abandoned houses were renovated to become the "Firefly Book House" as the focus of placemaking and the base for community revitalization in the Eighteen-Hill Creek community. The mission of the book house is to encourage people to share ancestors’ stories and to encourage young people to return. The vision is to drive the revitalization of Shiding by using placemaking approach and sustainable community-based tourism. The establishment of the book house has brought hope and vitality to the village. The book house not only serves as a book house for children, but also as a base for ecological and economic revitalization.
3.3 DATA COLLECTION

This study applied participatory observation and in-depth interviews as the main methods for data collection. The researcher was consultant to Shiding’s community revitalization empowerment project sponsored by the National Development Commission. Hence, the researcher was invited to participate in the related meetings and observe the practices of the community revitalization project. The researcher also used in-depth interviews for data collection. The interviewees shared their motivation, experiences, reflections related their engagement in the community sustainability project and activities. The following is a list of interviewees. Each interview lasted from 20 to 60 minutes.

Table 1
List of interviewees

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Founder of Book House</td>
<td>35-39</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B1</td>
<td>Book House Volunteer</td>
<td>40-44</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B2</td>
<td>Book House Volunteer</td>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B3</td>
<td>Book House Volunteer</td>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>Activity Participant</td>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>Activity Participant</td>
<td>30-34</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 AFTER-SCHOOL TUTORING AND EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING PROGRAM

The interviewees expressed the importance of accompanying community children. Due to the shortage of educational resources in the local area of Shiding, many children have limited opportunities to access extracurricular reading materials outside of their school textbooks. The Firefly Book House, through various fundraising efforts, hopes to serve as a supplement to the lack of educational resources in rural areas and help rebuild the community's network, restore the functions of education and cultural heritage. With the book house as a base, they provide tutoring services for local children, with the aim of achieving educational goals through accompanying learning. The book house helped children enhance their self-understanding, appreciate and cherish their own strengths, and further develop their personal potential through the stories in the books.

The book house highlighted the motto "Drinking Water and Remembering its Source" to foster a sense of belonging towards their hometown among children. The book house
designed activities for children to get to know one's hometown with "hometown" as the core theme, with the hope of enhancing children's identification with their hometown, and using their influence to change the bad habits of local residents and establish a concept of cherishing the environment.

The only way for local development is to connect with the land. Through the activities and ecological education, we hope to let the children at Shiding know their hometown, land, and past history. Only by connecting with their own land can children have the opportunity to return to their hometowns in the future. (A)

The practices of after-school tutoring and experiential learning for environmental education illustrated the importance of cultural and educational factors for community sustainability informed by local community development theory (Matsunobu, 2018; Migliaro, 2023). In addition, the local community development approach suggested to bring together the community members and outside groups, to create projects for various groups to work together for a better community. The educational projects vividly showed how outsiders can contribute to the community as volunteering tutors and experiential educators for community children.

4.2 MOUNTAIN CLEANING VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

Liu (2016) emphasized that environmental education can be implemented in the current universal education system, and gradually link children with schools and communities from kindergarten, and start with environmental education that cares about the community, Taiwan's safety issues related to clothing, food, housing, and transportation may avoid the basic sense of fear caused by environmental degradation. Pollution caused by industrialization has not only caused external environmental pollution but also affected people's ideology. To change these problems, environmental education is necessary to strengthen the connection between humans and nature, deepen the feelings between humans and nature, and develop a natural love for the environment.

The residents at Shiding community and volunteers shared the spirit of respecting the mountains and work towards the vision of coexisting with nature. Through the activity of cleaning up the mountains and following the guidelines of sustainable agriculture, they help the fireflies find their way home.
Shiding not only suffers from severe outflow of labor force but also faces an important issue of garbage disposal. Some residents have developed a bad habit of littering. We need to raise awareness of the importance of environmental conservation among residents and children. (B2)

We use tongs, brooms, garbage bags, dustpans, gloves to clean along the road. Most of the cleaning is done along the waterways nearby, and it doesn't take long to collect four or five large bags of garbage. (B1)

The book house continues its ongoing mountain-cleaning activities and shares environmental protection concepts through children's character education. The book house also regularly held one-day life experience camp for participants to experience mountain-cleaning activities and, through the hands-on experiences, to understand the importance of environmental conservation.

From the aspect of placemaking (Ellery & Ellery, 2019), the mountain-cleaning volunteering activities by community members and outsiders facilitated community participation and created a sense of place as they worked so hard together to make it a better place. The collective volunteering efforts successfully transformed the individual founder’s childhood memories into a shared new memory, a vision and commitment for a healthy community and environment. It is worth noting that, on the one hand, the volunteering activities can be understood as a bottom-up practice which is not commanded by the government; on the other hand, the presence and leadership of the founder of the book house is crucial so that the founder plays a top-down, facilitating role to organize and guide the activities.

4.3 ONE-DAY CULTURAL EXPERIENTIAL TOUR

The book house developed the one-day cultural experiential tour to promote the preservation of local cultures. The main elements of the cultural tour are local temple culture and the weaving grass crafts. The participants appreciated the cultural tour very much.

We can learn about the cultural value of a temple in the local community. The speaker talked about how their ancestors built a small temple in the area, and the inheritor stayed there to take care of it for their entire life, which embodies the cultural value of inheritance. Through the sharing of the elderly and the subsequent tour, the cultural value of the local community was further revealed and spread outwards. (C2)

The book house invited a famous craft teacher who specializes in weaving grass to teach participants. Using local materials such as reed stems, big green leaves, phoenix tail bamboo,
and other unidentified plant materials, the teacher weaved various objects, including small goldfish, peacocks, butterflies, and even daily necessities such as toothbrushes. The teacher led the participants outdoors to collect materials and gave detailed explanations and demonstrations when selecting and weaving the plant materials. The teacher provided a great learning experience. With just a few materials, amazing works of art were created. This experience made people realize that art comes from life, and art in life can bring a lot of joy.

The grass weaving teacher said that fewer and fewer people are learning this craft now, and it is on the verge of being lost. Do you think this is a witness of the times? (C1)

Modernization and industrialization have increasingly devalued the substance of life, and it seems that culture derived from life has become more and more distant. In the past, people didn't have toys like we do now, they would play with natural things like catching grasshoppers or playing with mud. It's not like now where everything is made of plastic. Actually, we also find these natural things very interesting, but times have changed. Nowadays, there are fewer and fewer of these interesting things, and it's a bit regrettable. (B3)

The cultural tour is a good example of community-based tourism. It integrated local culture and grass weaving art into the tour. The temple culture is an asset of cultural stories (García, 2020). The grass-made crafting is an embodiment of traditional wisdom of living. These cultural elements made the tours attractive to tourists who value culture.

4.4 FIREFLY CONSERVATION

Fireflies need a clean ecological environment to survive, and their presence or absence can serve as an indicator of environmental ecology. By cleaning up the community and using the guidelines for caring for agricultural land in a circular manner, bringing back fireflies also represents the regeneration of the environment. Therefore, the book house started with firefly conservation and work towards environmental protection at Shiding. The community thus became a site famous for firefly conservation and received recommendation as one of the best places for firefly watching in the great Taipei area. From mid April to mid May, the community’s ecological firefly watching tours were fully booked.

Giving fireflies a way back home, let's light up the environment at Shiding together, and also light a lamp for our own life journey. We hope to start with small-scale environmental improvements and gradually influence the transformation of the entire village's environment, eventually becoming a demonstration village for firefly
conservation and leading the development of tourism and leisure agriculture at the Shiding area. (A)

The firefly conservation project and the associated ecological tourism demonstrated the approach of community-based, sustainable tourism. It integrated various community assets into the design of the tour (Haines, 2014). It connects the people with the land, the community members with the visitors, the physical assets with cultural stories, and the environment with the tourist economy.

4.5 INTERNATIONAL VOLUNTEER

A French young volunteer came to Shiding through work-for-accommodation opportunities and became interested in the sustainability project initiated by the book house. His volunteering work was to make bread to help the community. He also taught English and shared French history and culture to the community's children. He majored in microbiology, which is relevant to the microbiology background of the founder of the book house. The founder and the French volunteer searched together for natural yeast in the nearby forest and isolated strains in the laboratory of the Ganoderma farm near the book house. They used the natural yeast and made bread together. Interestingly, French bread is like Taiwan's rice, both having historical and cultural significance. They incorporated the characteristics of Taiwan's rice culture and the mushroom produced by the community into the making of French bread, resulting in a special mushroom rice bread. Through this process, French bread culture and Taiwanese rice culture were exchanged through the community sustainability initiatives.

The presence of international volunteer in the community is both an accident and destiny. It echoed the local community development approach that emphasizes to connect the local culture with the world, and it will empower the people involved in the networking (Migliaro, 2023).

5 CONCLUSION

This article analyzed the case of the regional revitalization of the Eighteen-Hill Creek community in the rural area of Taipei, Taiwan. This study offered several insights. First, sustainable community-based tourism is a powerful overarching method to connect the people in the community with the world. Second, education is crucial for community development, as
witnessed by the pivotal role played by the book house to provide tutoring program for community children and to design ecological experiential program for community members and visitors. Third, the study confirmed the theory of placemaking that a sense of place can be enhanced through the participation of community constituents in the placemaking process.

Further, the study contributed to the placemaking and regional revitalization theories that the community revitalization was achieved through both top-down and bottom-up approaches with the involvement of various groups of people. Fourth, the case revealed the importance of leveraging community assets to develop community-based tourism. The founder of the book house played a leadership role in preaching the value of sustainability and organizing the community assets to achieve the sustainability goal. Last but not the least, community sustainability is not just the community’s responsibility. It requires citizens’ belief and commitment to the values of sustainability. Volunteers from the city participating in the community sustainability activities fostered positive and meaningful connection between rural communities and the city. In brief, community sustainability is a societal project. It needs everybody in the society.

REFERENCES


