

IMPACT OF TOURISM IN THE STRENGTHENING OF COMMUNITY SOCIAL CAPITAL IN SINALOA: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

**Dr. José Luis Hernández Juárez¹, Dr. Baltazar Pérez Cervantes², Lic. Juan Luis Gastélum Hernández³,
Lic. Sergio Vázquez Díaz⁴**

^{1 2 3 4} *Facultad de Ciencias Económicas y Sociales, Universidad Autónoma de Sinaloa, México*

Abstract

This research assesses the perception of the impact of tourism in community social capital in Sinaloa. An empirical research was conducted using structured questionnaires among 1,255 rural and semi-urban area residents. Results show that tourism strengthen trust and reciprocity based local social networks, promoting social cohesion. Integration of public policies for local development into social capital as a key component is suggested to promote sustainable development. This research contributes by emphasizing the importance of tourism in the strengthening of the community social tissue.

Keywords

Community social capital, Sustainable tourism, Local development, Community perception, Applied economics

1. Introduction

In the current context, the study of the social tourism-capital binomial has acquired relevance in the social and economic sciences, due to the complexity and diversity inherent to interactions between touristic development and receiving communities. Research on this topic has generated a broad spectrum of theoretical and empirical approaches, that explores how tourism not only works as a key economic activity, but also as a motor of social transformation that can have a significant impact on cohesion and community development.

From an interdisciplinary perspective, the roll of interactions between the actors involved in tourism has been stressed, as well as its influence in the local economic dynamics and social interactions in the communities (Barbini, 2010; Park et al., 2012; Mura y Tavakoli, 2014).

The most recent studies have focused on identifying the factors that determine the creation and strengthening of social capital in receiving communities. In particular, research has been carried out about how tourism can act as a catalyst for this capital, promoting stronger relationships and greater social cohesion, or how can it contribute to its weakening in case of lack of planning or proper management. In this context, there is a consensus among scholars on the transforming potential of tourism that not only affects local economy but also community social structures, which can have direct implications for its sustainable development.

Under this framework, both tourism and local development focus into the need of designing practices and strategies oriented towards an efficient and sustainable use of resources. In these strategies, active participation of local actors is recognized as an essential component for the success of projects development, and its direct implication in decision-making ensures a constant adaptation of the territories to human and economic needs. As has been found in previous research, training and professionalization of human resources in tourism industry is vital to ensure that receiving communities are able to maximize the benefits of tourism, while at the same time strengthening its social cohesion (Palafox, 2005).

The purpose of this research is to assess the perception of local actors with respect to the impact that tourism has over community social capital. In particular, the aim is to analyze the conditions and factors that affect the availability of such capital, and also to identify the key elements that contribute to its consolidation. This analysis also intends to set the groundwork for the development of strategies that within social economic and environmental sustainability criteria, support the development of a more robust social capital with a view to foster an overall well-being promoting tourism in the receiving communities.

Finally, this document is organized into five sections. The first one provides a theoretical panorama of the social tourism-capital binomial, followed by a review of relevant studies. The second section describes the methodology used for the data collection and analysis. In the third section, survey and interview obtained data are presented. The fourth section discusses the findings with respect to existing literature and contains conclusions and recommendations for strengthening social capital in touristic communities.

2. Literature review

Tourism has been identified as a catalyst for the economic and social development in diverse communities, especially in those facing structural constraints and profound economic crisis (Andrés, 2000; Plaza, 2002). The capacity of rural regions to capitalize on their natural and cultural resources has allowed tourism to emerge as a viable alternative to stimulate their local economies. This local tourism-development relation is based on the premise that development is not only a matter of economic growth, but also implies the creation of a sustainable environment where the benefits are equally distributed between the local inhabitants. (Dagostino et al., 2010). To achieve such development, it is crucial the active involvement of local actors, who must be empowered to lead the structural change process, according to Bojórquez et al. (2015).

In this regard, tourism is not only an economic activity, but also social and cultural phenomena that shapes dynamics in the receiving communities. Wall and Mathieson (2006) point out that the impact of tourism in local communities depends to a great extent on the characteristics of visitors and the capacity of communities to adapt to new demands. However, it is also important to stress that tourism is not a magical solution for structural problems in marginal regions (Bringas, 1997; Calderón, 2008). The success of tourism as a development strategy depends on a critical approach that assesses specific conditions under which it is being implemented and available resources to ensure long term sustainability (Monterrubio et al., 2011).

Local development, understood as a multidimensional process, involves the construction of community social capital, a key factor to facilitate cooperation, organization and collective decision-making processes (Burbano, 2005; Barbini, 2010). According to Hernández et al. (2016), social capital strengthening is fundamental to effectively mobilize the available resources and ensuring that development projects adapt to the contemporary needs of the receiving communities.

This approach highlights the important active participation of local actors in the planification and management of touristic development to ensure that economic, social and environmental benefits are equitable distributed.

Social capital has been extensively researched as a fundamental resource for sustainable economic development, since it facilitates the creation of cooperation networks, strengthens social institutions and enhances the productivity of other types of capital (Villalba, 2006). In the field of tourism, Luyando; Sandoval & Ortega (2016) emphasize that community social capital can guide communities towards objectives that generate benefits beyond economy, including social and environmental improvements. Furthermore, Mack (2003) stresses that cohesive communities have greater possibilities to generate resources necessary for their development, which reinforces the role of social capital in the management of territories.

Alternatively, from an international perspective, Woolcock & Narayan (2000) warn that a strong social cohesion does not by itself guarantee economic success, particularly in the development context. Nevertheless, when social capital integrates effectively with local institutions and collective decision-making processes, is able to accelerate the economic and social development while being deeply rooted in the network of community relations (Mendoza, 2006). In this context, research on social capital and tourism has pointed out the need to address both the opportunities and risks that may arise when local social and economic dynamics are transformed by tourism (Jiménez & Prado, 2009; Alarcón & Bosch, 2003).

In conclusion, reviewed literature suggests that tourism, when managed in a responsible manner, has the potential to significantly contribute to local development, particularly in vulnerable rural contexts. Nonetheless, for this to be possible it is fundamental to strengthen social capital of receiving communities, since this is a key resource for social cohesion, collective decision-making and long term sustainability of the touristic development.

3. Methods and Techniques

The present study was conducted in the state of Sinaloa, located in the northwest of Mexico, a region remarkable for its great wealth of natural resources and touristic infrastructure. Sinaloa, has a 656 km coastline on the Gulf of California, considered one of the most relevant beach destinations of the country. The objective of this research was to analyze the relation between tourism and community social capital, evaluating its impact in local communities and proposing strategies to foster a sustainable tourism that benefits residents.

The methodological approach of this research was based on a data survey carried out between July 5 and 15 of 2022, using a structured survey as a measuring instrument. A 1,255 person representative sample was selected by a simple random sampling method, ensuring a level of confidence of 95 % and a theoretical margin of

error of $\pm 3\%$ at state level, under the assumption of a 0.25 population proportion. Survey respondents, men and women older than 18 years of age, were permanent private housing residents located in diverse communities in Sinaloa, including rural, semi-urban, urban and metropolitan areas. The survey was designed to diagnose the state of the community social capital and its relation with sustainable tourism at the local level.

The survey was divided into two main blocks:

- General Data: Basic socio-demographic data like gender, age, educational level and type of residence place were collected. This data provided essential contextual information for the variance analyses of social capital and sustainable tourism.
- Tourism and Social Capital Perception: Analysis of citizen perceptions of the relation between tourism and social capital, availability and quality of touristic services, as well as use and valuation of such services offered by residents.

Main variables selected for analysis included:

- Community social capital: Factors that affect availability and development at local level, like social networks, trust and cooperation between residents.
- Sustainable tourism: Keys for touristic development under the principles of economic, social and environmental sustainability.
- Gender: Differences in availability of social capital and touristic opportunities depending if the head of the household is male or female.
- Age: Impact of the age of the decision-maker in the community on the touristic development and social cohesion.
- Educational level: Influence of education on the access to touristic opportunities and the participation on community networks.
- Type de locality: Observed differences between rural, semi-urban, urban and metropolitan areas, in terms of social capital and touristic activity.

Obtained data were initially processed through simple and cross-tabulations to identify patterns and trends. Subsequently, univariate and multivariate statistical techniques were used to examine the interaction between variables. 23 version SPSS software was used for data analysis, allowing to carry out descriptive and inferential statistics, providing a profound understanding of the relations between tourism and social capital in the local context.

The internal consistency of the survey was evaluated through Cronbach alpha coefficient, which showed a general value of 0.873, indicating a high degree of reliance on the used scales according to the criteria of George & Mallery (2003). Diverse specific dimensions of the survey were analyzed with results also showing a suitable reliability:

- Touristic Activity and Environmental Conservation: *0.759 Alfa (acceptable)*.
- Planification and Touristic Development Management: *0.709 Alfa (acceptable)*.
- Information and Communication: *0.809 Alfa (good)*.
- Groups and Networks: *0.884 Alfa (very good)*.
- Trust and Solidarity: *0.859 Alfa (good)*.
- Participation and Cooperation: *0.873 Alfa (good)*.
- Social Cohesion and Collective Action: *0.845 Alfa (good)*.

The use of simple random sampling allowed to ensure all adult citizens in Sinaloa had the same probability to be selected, which is a key factor to obtain generalizable results. The structured survey was chosen as a data collection tool since it is capable to standardize answers, which facilitates comparison and analysis of perception between different demographic groups. The use of multivariate statistical techniques was necessary to clarify the complex interactions between tourism and social capital, to identify patterns that could be useful to formulate policies.

The utilized methodological approach allowed to obtain an integral vision of the state of community social capital in Sinaloa and its relation with touristic development. The combination of a representative sample, a structured survey, and robust statistical techniques, together with high reliability of the scales ensures the validity and consistence of the findings. This results offer a solid base for the design of local strategies and public policies that promote a more inclusive and sustainable tourism, reinforcing social capital in the communities Sinaloa.

4. Results and Discussion

The obtained results in this research reveal a series of social and civic demographic characteristics, which provide a solid framework for understanding the dynamics of social capital and civic participation in the analyzed communities. The sample of 1,255 citizens is equally distributed between men and women, but there is a sharp difference between the average age of both groups: 44 years for women and 54 for men. This age disparity could suggest implications in the security perception, civic participation and social cohesion, according Barbini (2010), Jiménez García & Prado Matamoros (2009), who have found linkages between demographic structures and social stability. This finding offers a perspective about how difference in age can influence the dynamic of social relations in the community.

The analysis of years of residence reveals the majority of respondents have remained in their localities for long periods of time, suggesting a significative residence stability. Durston (2002) establishes that the permanence in a place is positively correlated with the formation of social capital, an observation that this research supports indicating that prolonged residence favors the creation of trust and reciprocity among networks. Woolcock & Narayan (2000) also stress that interpersonal relations consolidate with time, contributing to a stronger social cohesion, which is reflected in this research.

In terms of educational level, the sample shows a wide variability, persons without any formal education or those with higher education. This educative aspect is a key to comprehend the differences in the access to social capital and the opportunities deriving from tourism. Bringas Rábago (1997) & Mack Echeverría (2003) claim that the educational level directly influences the ability of citizens to participate in social networks and to seize the opportunities afforded by tourism. The heterogeneity in the academic training observed in this research reinforces this perspective, underlining the need for policies that promote a more equitable access to educational and touristic opportunities.

Indicator	Percentage
Percentage of interviewed women	53.07%
Percentage of interviewed men	46.93%
Average age of interviewed women	44 years
Average age of interviewed men	54 years
Percentage of residents averaging between 1 to 10 years in the locality	29.88%
Percentage of residents averaging between 11 to 20 years in the locality	14.34%
Percentage of residents averaging between 21 to 30 years in the locality	19.44%
Percentage of residents averaging between 31 to 40 years in the locality	18.17%
Percentage of residents averaging between 41 to 50 years in the locality	12.99%
Percentage of residents averaging between 51 to 60 years in the locality	5.18%
Percentage of respondents without formal education	10.12%
Percentage of respondents with primary education	27.41%
Percentage of respondents with secondary education	30.12%
Percentage of respondents with higher secondary education	18.96%
Percentage of respondents with higher education	13.39%
Percentage of respondents who live in metropolitan areas	38.01%
Percentage of respondents who live in rural areas	30.04%
Percentage of respondents who live in semi-urban areas	21.99%
Percentage of respondents who live in urban areas	9.96%

Table 1: Main socio demographic indicators

Source: Elaborated by the authors

The geographic distribution of the respondents exhibits interesting differences between metropolitan, rural, semi-urban and urban areas. Previous studies, like those of Monterrubio et al. (2011) & Plaza (2002), note that rural areas often develop stronger social networks based on trust and cooperation. This research reinforces such idea, suggesting that rural communities can have higher social capital levels, especially those in which tourism plays an important role in the local economy. The relation between tourism and social capital has been widely discussed by Witt (1991), Wall & Mathieson (2006), who argue that tourism not only generates economic opportunities, but also promotes intercultural exchange and trust based relations.

In spite of the positive results related to social capital and tourism, some challenges remain in relation to civic engagement. Only 18% of the respondents have participated in some organization in the last three years, which reflects a civic apathy that may be related to a pervasive mistrust in governmental institutions. Bourdieu

(2000) argues that this mistrust can act as a barrier for the creation of social networks and active participation in the community. Furthermore, only 38% of the respondents consider themselves well informed about community affairs, which points out that there is a disconnection between citizens and local decision-making processes, limiting the opportunities for a greater civic compromise.

Indicator	Percentage
Percentage of respondents with a positive opinion of their place of residence	84%
Percentage of respondents who have participated in organizations in the last 3 years	18%
Percentage of respondents who trust in most of their neighbors	21%
Percentage of respondents who trust in many persons	30%
Percentage of respondents who trust in a few neighbors	37%
Percentage of respondents who do not trust in any neighbor	12%
Percentage of respondents who believe their opinions do not have an impact in the decisions of local government	56%
Percentage of respondents who are informed about their community affairs	38%
Percentage of respondents who feel mistrust towards government, manifesting apathy and lack initiative	81%

Table 2: Main indicators for the Impact of Tourism in Social Capital

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The level of trust among neighbors is another indicator of social capital. With a 51% of the respondents expressing trust towards most of the persons in their community, this research suggests the existence of a basis to strengthen trust networks and reciprocity. Nonetheless, 37% only trust in a few persons and 13% do not trust anyone, which indicates there are barriers yet to overcome in order to reach the optimum level of community cohesion. Arosteguy (2007) underlines that interpersonal trust is fundamental for the efficient functioning of communities, and its absence may hinder cooperation and development initiatives.

In conclusion, the findings of this research confirm that tourism can be an important catalyst for strengthening social capital. However, its impact is constrained by low civic participation and distrust in institutions. To maximize the benefits of tourism in local communities, it is necessary to promote a better integration of citizens in the decision-making processes and to reinforce trust networks and cooperation. As pointed out by Moreno (2002) and Oseguera (2007), the strengthening of social capital requires not only the development of economic activities, but also a concerted effort to build trust and foster active participation of citizens.

5. Conclusions

This research offers an integral vision about the relation between tourism and community social capital in households in Sinaloa, highlighting how the perception about this impact is influenced by several sociodemographic variables. Throughout this document, a detailed analysis of the role of factors as gender, age, educational level and type of locality in the training and consolidation of social capital is presented. Findings reveal that rural and semi urban localities present stronger social networks, based on trust and reciprocity relations, essential elements for social cohesion. These characteristics strengthen community social capital and underline its relevance in local development.

A novel contribution of this research is the identification of residential stability as a key factor in the construction of social capital. Those residents with longer time of residence in their locality, particularly home owners, show a higher tendency to trust in their neighbors and to establish long lasting relations, in contrast with people who live in rental or borrowed housing. This phenomenon highlights the importance of policies that promote residential stability to reinforce local cooperation dynamics.

Tourism, has been analyzed as a catalyst for social capital, able to foster interactions between residents and visitors, and to build social networks that promote trust and reciprocity. This document provides solid evidence that tourism not only is able to generate economic benefits, but has also the capacity to boost social cohesion and civic participation, contributing to local development from a more holistic perspective.

Nevertheless, this research also presents some limitations that must be acknowledged. The analysis focus in a single federal entity, which restricts the possibility of generalizing results to other geographical contexts. Furthermore, although the quantitative approach has allowed to obtain a clear picture about the perception of citizens, the research would benefit from a mixed approach, complementing the findings with interviews and qualitative studies that explore social dynamics in a more detailed manner.

Looking into the future, several lines of research are suggested. In first place, it would be valuable to expand the analysis to other regions of México, comparing how tourism impacts social capital in different contexts.

Additionally, it would be interesting to explore the evolution of social capital in communities with different types of predominant economic activity, to determine if tourism generates specific effects in comparison to other productive sectors. Lastly, it is recommended to research the impact of concrete public policies in relation to sustainable tourism integration and social capital, evaluating its effectiveness in the promotion of an inclusive and sustainable territorial development.

Summarizing, this research contributes to the field by highlighting the significance of considering social capital as a core pillar of local development strategies. Tourism, when managed properly, can act as a growth engine for social cohesion and community well-being, strengthening trust networks and cooperation in communities. This suggests that public policies must incorporate an integrating vision which takes touristic, economic and social concerns into account, ensuring a more equitable and sustainable development over the long term.

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