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Coping with Change: Livelihood Diversification through Tourism in Rural Coastal Communities

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Title: Coping with Change: Livelihood Diversification through Tourism in Rural Coastal Communities

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Abstract:

There is a dearth of academic literature and research on livelihood diversification to tourism with an emphasis on reducing poverty (SDG 1), promoting gender equality (SDG 5) and stimulating local economic development through decent work (SDG 8) in marginalised and/or rural areas (see Christie et al., 2014) in times of economic pressures and declining natural resources (Baum, 2015; Robbins, 2011; Saarinen et al., 2017). These issues are topical vis-à-vis an emerging focus on the topic of resilience in tourism studies (Bulter, 2017; Saarinen et al., 2017). Within tourism, research has mainly focused on the role of tourism as a tool for local/community development (see e.g. Kimbu & Ngoasong, 2013; Tosun, 2006), but the role of tourism as a tool for sustainable livelihood diversification in rural coastal communities has been largely overlooked with very few studies dedicated to investigating this subject area (Salmi, 2005; Urquhart and Acott, 2014). The aim of our study is therefore to undertake an initial exploration of livelihoods diversification from fishing into tourism in two rural coastal communities: Paternoster (South Africa) and Padstow (United Kingdom) which have experienced marginalisation of traditional fishing activities often leading to economic challenges (Morgan, 2013; Sowman, 2011; Welman and Ferreira, 2017). This study answers three main questions: (1) How do communities cope, and if so what are their coping strategies? (2) What is the role of tourism in diversifying local livelihoods and how are obstacles to participating in tourism overcome? and (3) What are the influences of diversification on gender and community relations?

In order to meet the aim, we apply the sustainable livelihood framework (SLF) (GLOPP, 2008) which, though rarely used in tourism, is people-centred, dynamic and holistic emphasizing micro-macro-micro linkages between different sectors/actors. The framework enables researchers, planners and managers to assess the contribution to livelihood sustainability made by existing activities. Additionally, it serves as tool for use in planning new development activities in communities undergoing transition (DFID, 1999). Addressing the above questions within this industry can have major societal impacts especially in terms of ensuring sustainable livelihoods through decent job transitions and development in marginalised communities (Baum, 2013).

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Empirically we draw on 12 semi-structured interviews and two half-day stakeholder workshops in Padstow (UK) and Paternoster (South Africa). The data was complemented by rapid participant observation as two of the co-authors stayed in Padstow (six days) and Paternoster (five days), using restaurants and facilities, and holding (in)formal discussions with local residents and representatives of related organisations.

The findings reveal the circumstances under which the transition from fishing into H&T can be an asset and/or a liability for communities (and their members) in transition seeking to create alternative sources of income by diversifying into H&T. Additionally deeply rooted socio-cultural traditions and practices which discourage and/or prevent them from embracing alternative opportunities are uncovered.

In both communities, fishing was seen as a way of life, enabling flexibility and independence. Whilst the socio-economic context and wider issues in the two research sites differ, small-scale fishing was perceived as under threat in both, but there was limited evidence of concerted efforts to plan and manage the potential diversification processes into tourism. Effectively managing the diversification process ultimately ensures the adoption of better livelihood strategies which will produce sustainable outcomes instead of outcomes that may not be sufficient to reverse livelihood crisis resulting from the uncertainties and complexities associated with diversification.

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