

WEBQUEST [BASIC LEVEL]

THEME ALLOCATED:	Involving local communities
PARTNER ORGANISATION:	MROT
TITLE OF THE WEBQUEST:	Engaging local communities: benefits and challenges
INTRODUCTION:	
<p>The host community is a fundamental component of any tourism system, playing a big part in protecting the authenticity of the destination as well as its natural environment. The support of the local population is essential for the development, successful operation, and sustainability of tourism.</p> <p>Local people are affected by tourism activities in many ways, both positive and negative. If they are affected negatively, there might be resentment to new initiatives as well as hostility and conflict with tourism decision makers, tourism and non-tourism businesses and with tourists. It is crucial to involve them in tourism planning and development of the destination to get to know (and respond to) their needs, concerns and worries but also to benefit from their local knowledge and expertise.</p> <p>Engaging communities does not mean that all issues will be resolved and all decisions will be accepted. Nor it means that a community will always get what it wants. However, the majority of the literature emphasises that hosts cannot be excluded, that they are a crucial element in the sustainability of any tourism venture, and that there are many factors that influence their attitudes toward and satisfaction with an attraction.</p> <p>If they are not engaged in a project, the project is unlikely to be legitimate and accepted by the communities. Only by promoting shared ownership of decisions, it is more likely that stakeholders will be willing to contribute to the joint implementation or co-production of results, and that long-term support is secured. Only then potential conflicts can be avoided or at least minimised, the long-term harmony can be sustained, and the natural and cultural heritage of the destination can be preserved.</p>	
TASKS	
<p>Imagine you have a new project you want to implement in a tourism destination – a new wildlife tourism attraction. You know you need to consult the local community to get their buy-in and build support for the project, but also to reduce potential friction, mitigate the potential conflict and enhance harmony between the community members and other stakeholders, including tourists.</p> <p>Designing a community consultation process is not easy, there are many elements to it that need to be taken into consideration. You will learn more about this process in Webquest Advanced. However, before you start any consultation, you should have a good understanding of why you want to engage – specifically, what benefits the community will get from your project but also what you can gain from engaging this community. You will also need to assess all the challenges you might come across, and how to respond to them to ensure the consultation will go smoothly.</p> <p>The two WEBQUESTS on the topic of 'Involving local communities' provide a broad overview of what to think about when planning a project and designing a community consultation. Your task in this Webquest (basic) is to write a list of these mutual benefits as well of the challenges, and how to address them. You will be guided through three steps that will help you with this task:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Understand why engage?2. Understand the challenges of engagement?3. Understand the links between engagement and protection of the environment	

You hope that through this exercise you will be able to explain the reasons and the benefits for carrying out the project in your community, get the community-buy in, listen to the fears and potential objections/fears and hopefully clarify the uncertainties, but also encourage the community to further participate in the roll out of the project (if implemented). This process will also enable the local community to feel more valued and appreciated, and empower them to take more ownership for tourism development in their destination. Let's get started!

PROCESS

Step 1: Why engage local communities in tourism development?

As a first step, you will need to conduct some research to gain a deeper insight on the reasons and benefits of community engagement:

- [Benefits and importance of community engagement](#)
- [Why involve local communities for sustainable tourism development](#)
- [Why is community engagement important?](#)

Watch these two short videos – they don't mention tourism specifically but apply to the tourism context too:

- [Benefits of community engagement](#)
- [The importance of community engagement during a crisis](#)

You may want to read a short blog on the first ever community consultation for a tourism project – to build a hiking trail – in the remote mountains of Svaneti in Georgia:

- [First community consultation in Svaneti](#)

It is also important to know that even if there is willingness to involve communities and the communities want to participate, there are various factors such as lack of finance, education, knowledge, time, power that limit or even prevent local residents from engagement. For more information click on these links:

- [Barriers for local communities to participate tourism](#) (scroll down to 'factors influencing Local Community participation in Tourism Development')
- [Hindering Factors to community participation in tourism development \(read the abstract and p. 3 for the barriers\)](#)

Step 2: Challenges related to community engagement

If you are planning to run a community consultation as part of your engagement, you should also be aware of the challenges that you may come across. Remember that as a community is not homogenous but consists of many individuals with different interests, the expectations from consultation by different stakeholders might also be different. Or there might be some individuals who shout louder than others, so it is important to make sure all voices are heard equally and one group is not disadvantaged or marginalised.

It is also important to remember that consultation does not necessarily mean that the community gets what it wants, and that handling various situations might be tricky. Those who conduct consultations need to be clear and consistent about the aims of consultations and what's negotiable; need to be good and inclusive listeners; and need to be able to respond to unexpected situations in a respectful way. Click here for some examples:

- [Top 10 challenges in community engagement and how to address them](#)
- [Tips on how to set the expectations and avoid conflict in consultations](#)
- [How to identify and reduce risks in community engagement](#)
- [When a community member cries...](#)

3. Role of the community in protecting natural environment – a case study

You should now have a better understanding of why engage local communities in tourism development. This case study from Lancelin Island (near Perth, Australia) will show you how involving locals helps in the conservation of the environment of the local area. It will also show you a few ways how to engage.

The way the island was being used was unsustainable. The residents' increasing concerns for the welfare and conservation of the flora as well as their involvement have led to changes that are likely to enhance sustainability of the wildlife on the island.

- [Community engagement in Lancelin Island](#) (read p. 22-26)

EVALUATION

Now think of your destination again, of your community and of your project, and write a list of the specific benefits as well as the challenges of engagement for you community. Think about the following questions:

1. Which of the benefits for engagement you have read about will be most effective in your community, and why?
2. What will be the easiest, and what most difficult part to ensure their support?
3. What would be the consequences of not engaging the community?
4. What difficulties are you likely to come across in the consultation?
5. What financial, political, personal (or any other) challenges are you likely to encounter?
6. Thinking of the case study from Lancelin Island, how do you think the residents' knowledge about your destination will help protect the natural environment of the place?

CONCLUSION

Congratulations! You have just completed your first assignment on the topic of involving communities, that has given you a good overview of the reasons, benefits as well as of challenges to engage. The process helps build mutual trust and support that is necessary for the success of any tourism project, no matter how big or small.

Unfortunately, many tourist destinations still don't engage with its stakeholders, or don't see local residents as important enough. They are usually the ones who bear the cost of tourism. Destination managers need to understand that choosing not to engage will result in the failures of too many projects and initiatives, the growing antagonisms between hosts and tourists, and in a bad reputation of the destination.

As mentioned above, handling various situations might be tricky and the consultation is not an easy process. However, as community engagement is one of the core building blocks of sustainable tourism, it needs to be part of any responsible destination management.