

**CONCEPTUALIZING A MODEL OF COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT IN ASIAN HERITAGE CONTEXT: RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND AGENDA**

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ABSTRACT – In the context of heritage tourism, community participation has been pinpointed as one of the essential factors influencing the outcome of sustainable development. While most government seek to engage the local community in this process, the approach may differ from country to country. Moreover, most relevant studies were conducted in Western contexts, which were too far away from Asia both geographically and culturally. Thus, they may not reflect the actual practice in the East. This article provides an overarching framework to synthesize current findings in community participation in sustainable development and proposes a research agenda to stimulate additional works that reflect the contextual characteristics of Asian sustainability.

Keywords: Community Participation, Sustainable Development, Research Framework

INTRODUCTION

Community participation has long been recommended as the fundamental tool to ensure the success of sustainable development (UNESCO, 2011). Even though there are many organization attempting to discuss community participation, the common guideline is to encourage the participation of many different types of stakeholders to mediate their conflicts and adjust their objectives in order to secure the local communities' interests and protect them from other interest groups (J. Li et al., 2020). Because of this adaptive characteristic, the practice of community participation has witnessed considerable different between the approaches to involve local residents in sustainable development in Western countries and those in the East (Fan, 2014; Tan & Altrock, 2016). Despite the growing literature addressing the role of community participation in Asia, such as in Vietnam or China, these articles a wrestling with the same set of distinctive factors that affect the nature and the outcome of sustainable development. For instance, Fan (2014) and Verdini (2015) both examined the Chinese approach to involve local people into cultural heritage preservation projects and found the government to be the primary actor instead of the local communities.

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While these articles provide a strong foundation for empirical research in this domain, the number of related studies still remains few. The current study seeks to identify the important research venues that need academic contribution and to propose a single research framework, which may hopefully stimulate researchers to examine more closely the phenomenon of community participation in Asia.

METHODOLOGY

Our literature review follows the data collection and reviewing methods suggested by (Boland et al., 2014), which consists of several phases. Firstly, we collect relevant studies from the available academic databases. Based on several important articles that relate directly to our subject (such as that of (J. Li et al., 2020)), we identified the relevant keywords: Vietnam, Asia, heritage; community, participation, tourism, management, cultural, residents, government, sustainable, development, company, and enterprise. We employed three search string: community participation heritage tourism Asia, community participation sustainable development Asia and community participation government enterprise Asia. These keywords were used on two database platforms: ProQuest and ResearchGate. The former is the standard database that is available for researchers, and the former is a popular social media platform for academic publication. Our search returned over 400 relevant documents. Based on the identified keywords, we devised a set of inclusion criteria to eliminate the low relevant publication. At the end, 23 articles were selected, 4 out of which were conducted in Vietnam. The most representative articles are chosen to present in Table 1. Since our main objective is to identify the impact of local characteristics on the way local community participate in sustainable development, particularly in heritage tourism, each article was presented to reflect these factors.

Table 1: Representative community participation articles			
Paper	Goal	Context	Findings
Abdul Halim, S., & Ishak, N. A., 2017	Examining Community Engagement in Heritage Conservation Through Geopark Experiences from The Asia Pacific Region	China, South Korea, Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia, Iran, Vietnam	The important of community participation in sustainable development is incorporated in the school curriculums, effectively encouraging the locals to take part in the region's activities.
Abdul Halim, S., Puay Liu, O., Yussof, N., & Choun Sian, L., 2011	Participation towards heritage conservation: case of a fishing community in langkawi geopark.	Malaysia	The local activities are heavily regulated by the government due to environmental and political reasons, thus the government policies dictate how these locals can participate in the development of the region
Chan et al., 2021	Community Participation and Sustainable	Sabah, Malaysia	Local community shows hesitation due to lack of government's intervention to

	Management case study		initiate action and the area's unfavorable natural conditions
D. T. N. Nguyen et al., 2022	Barriers and opportunities to empower community	Vietnam	Empowering community is only feasible when community power is recognized, and the local people are given the rights to exercise such power
Damastuti, E., & de Groot, R., 2017	Effectiveness of community-based mangrove management for sustainable resource use and livelihood support: A case study of four villages in Central Java, Indonesia	Indonesia	External supports, such as governmental aids, are very effective in encouraging community participation. However, such activities cannot sustain without these aids. This emphasizes the importance of community's independence.
Fan, 2014	International influence to local community involvement	China	Adopted international approach to community participation is limited by the local regulations
J. Li et al., 2020	Comparing Chinese practice vs international	China	Heritage management is a governmental
Lestari, S., Kotani, K., & Kakinaka, M., 2015	Enhancing voluntary participation in community collaborative forest management: A case of Central Java, Indonesia		Communication plays a vital role in encouraging the local communities to take part in the forest conservation activities in the area. However, the effectiveness of this information sharing depends greatly on the demographical characteristics of its audience.
Tan & Altrock, 2016	Discourse analysis of different stakeholders	China	Stakeholders form discourse coalitions to protect their interests, and their interaction strategy adapts to the situations.
Verdini et al., 2017	The discourse surrounding heritage conservation in china	China	The public sector can act as the main player of the sustainable development process to stimulate investment and mobilize resources from other sectors. This provides ample opportunities to involve a large number of local stakeholders.
Verdini, 2015	Examine the influence of heterogeneous citizen groups	China	Top-down and bottom-up approaches to community participation can coexists as

	(community) on development		long as they serve the government's purposes
Xu et al., 2019	Evolving path of community participation	China	Community participation is unlikely to change due to power structure already established
Yuhora, K., Yamashita, S., & Takahashi, S., 2016	Geopark Education Adopts a Geographical Viewpoint at Muroto Senior High School.	Korea	The local resources are better utilized with proper guidance from external experts.

Community participation in sustainable development

The notion of community participation has its root in Arnstein (1969)'s citizen participation, in which the stakeholders negotiate their rights and their interests in a society. Even though there is no official definition for the term community participation, related studies have been adopting Arnstein's conceptualization to the point of them being used interchangeably. The central idea of community participation is that the rights are equally distributed among the stakeholders and that the local community is involved in the decision-making process. Because it concerns a community, which is a collective of individuals, their participation can occur simultaneously at different levels (Arnstein, 1969). This can vary from direct involvement at the management level to passive obedience of regulations in the area. Depend on the approach, community participation can be divided into multiple levels. Tosun (2005) identifies three types of community participation: spontaneous participation, in which the local people take part in the process willingly; induced participation, where the local people act as collaborator and not as decision maker; and coercive participation, which refers to when the local people is manipulated. Similarly, Pretty (1995) saw community participation as a spectrum, ranging from manipulative participation to self-mobilization, with the former corresponding to the local people being influenced by external actors; and the latter to their free will. Arnstein's approach (1969) differs from these two previous ones in his categorization of a non-participation category. In other words, the local people do have an option to stay out of the development process, something the other two straight out reject.

Community participation is an essential element in the effort to reach sustainable development, especially in heritage tourism. The concept of sustainable development was first recognized in the Brundtland Report by WCED (World Council for Economic Development, 1987). Basically, sustainable development refers to how we can satisfy the current demands and preserve the capacity of our future generations to do the same. Sustainable development needs to ensure an equilibrium of interests to all of its stakeholders in economic, social, and environmental terms at the same time. In theory, sustainable tourism development has to be harmonious between several dimensions: Economy – bringing prosperity to the local economy and financial profits for the stakeholders, Socio-Culture – respect equality, promoting peace and development, recognize and respect different culture, reserve cultural values, and finally Environment – Protect the natural resources, minimize pollution, and preserve biodiversity and natural heritage.

The extant literature provides ample evidences to the link between Community Participation and Sustainable Development. The local communities' attitude and awareness are one of the critical factors influencing the sustainable development (Choi & Sirakaya, 2006). Certain communities do not support tourism, even to the point of protesting against such activities and banning tourists, but many other regard tourism as a mean to elevate their economic

condition (T. T. M. Nguyen, 2009). These communities also participate in the development process to protect their interest (Muganda et al., 2013), either voluntarily or under government initiatives (J. Li et al., 2020). The outcome of their participation is very well examined. There is a consensus that community participation has a positive impact on sustainable development in many different contexts, such as suburban tourism (Fong & Lo, 2015; Mak et al., 2017) or coastal destination (Birkié et al., 2019). In heritage tourism, for example, we also observe similar relationship between community participation and the sustainability of the management of touristic activities surrounding a heritage site (Y. Li & Hunter, 2014).

Eastern approach to community participation

In principle, there is not much difference in community participation practices between the West and the East. Both employ the same concepts, from community participation to sustainable development. But in practice, the Eastern countries seem to engage the local community differently to better fit the contextual characteristics of their countries. For instance, the West has a stronger organizational culture, as well as a more relaxed attitude towards social organization. This enables a healthy stream of knowledge and resources available to aid the local communities to realize sustainable development. The primary approach to involve the local community is, hence, bottom-up (J. Li et al., 2020). The local communities are involved since the initial phase of the project to determine their interest, values, and issues (Bruku, 2015). Partnership is set up so that they are trained and funded as the local professionals (Ferreira, 2018). The East, or China as a prime example, is at a lower level of standard of living, on average. They also adopt a more reserved attitude towards non-government organization such as NGOs or association. Therefore, the government prefers a top-down approach, in which the government assume the responsibility to stimulate and direct sustainable development and force the local residents to follow suite. While this may help the local communities overcome the initial difficulty, various reports suggest that development is very likely to lean towards economic development rather than sustainable development (V. M. Bui, 2020; J. Li et al., 2020). Moreover, such deviation from the original objectives of sustainable development is not without any merit. Without the initial support from the local government, many project might not even exist at all, as seen with several tourism project in Vietnam (Pham Hong et al., 2021) or in China (Zhai & Ng, 2013). Therefore, it is very important that we understand how sustainable development and community participation could be adapted in the Asian context.

With this article, we seek to offer thought leadership by highlighting the relevant understanding of community participation in sustainable development in several Asian countries. We emphasize the important research questions that need additional attention, such as:

- *Which factors related to government intervention may determine the level of community participation?*
- *How government-led participation compare with bottom-up approach in the West?*
- *How to evaluate sustainable development outcome in government-led community participation?*

The next section develops and presents a research framework for community participation in Asian sustainable development contexts, which include strong governmental intervention and new perspective to evaluate their outcomes. We discuss the prior studies on community participation done in Asian countries and identify the relevant research issues that demand additional attention to extend our understanding of how sustainable development can be achieved by engaging the local residents in the East.

Community Participation framework

Our proposed framework has three main components. The first one is the Government Intervention, which is the antecedent of Community Participation. We discuss the role of the

Government in determining how a community participate in sustainable development, both in the supporting roles as well as a conflict arbitrator. Next, we consider the level of Community Participation that is the direct consequence on Government Intervention. Their level of participation and the characteristics of these communities are our main interest. Finally, we look into how sustainable development is targeted. While the principles of sustainable development call for an equilibrium of three factors: social, economic and environmental outcomes, an adaptation at the local level may differ.

Figure 1 - Government-led community participation framework



Government intervention as antecedents of community participation

Similar to the Western approach, the Eastern countries are also moving to actively involve the local community in their effort to develop their heritage tourism sustainably (J. Li et al., 2020). While their goals are essentially the same, they differ in their methods to stimulate participation at the local level. Studies conducted on the Chinese contexts show that the management of heritage management is handled mostly at the local government level, which communicate with the local residents and guiding them towards the predetermined goals set by the central government (Verdini, 2015a). In other words, they are a detached part of the state that is dedicated the task of heritage management. Since these governmental agencies wield the authority to dictate the course of development, it is very difficult for the residents to actually have a voice in these decisions. Part of the reason is that the policies are not made at the local level but rather at the central government far away from the heritage site (Fan, 2014). These interventions can be direct and observable like in the case in China (Verdini, 2015), or in Langkawi, Malaysia (Abdul Halim et al., 2011). In the latter case, the activities of the local fishing communities are regulated by the government due to the complexity of their activities. Thus, any resource preservation efforts need cooperation at the government level, even international one. Moreover, they can be indirect via other means as observed in Asia-Pacific regions, such as school curriculums (Abdul Halim & Ishak, 2017). In the latter case, the students are stimulated by their educational programs and participate in the tourism activities in the region, as proven with Geopark tours in Japan (Yuhora et al., 2016). The local people are, most of the time, information providers to the real decision makers elsewhere (Verdini et al., 2017). The centralization of power are reinforced by the strict regulation of the civil organizations, such as association or NGOs, effectively turning them into a sub type of government authority and not an independent representative of the local residents (Fan, 2014).

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At the end of the day, the government seems to have a major role to stimulate investment and directing development in the area towards sustainability (Verdini et al., 2017). By looking at the issue of sustainable urban conservation, pro-growth strategies equally challenge the physical environment and the maintenance of sociocultural continuities. The question as to how to tackle the materiality of the heritage has not found a definitive answer, for instance, as to how to keep the heritage alive economically while still be able to preserve the environment and the sociocultural continuity around the heritage. This should be linked to a deeper consideration of who is legitimately admitted to engage in local decision making and whether local people are necessarily interested in that engagement.

- *What is the best possible intervention of the government to lead the community participation?*
- *What are the necessary conditions / factors influence the success of a government-led participation?*
- *How is government-led participation perceived at different stage of the development?*

Active community participation under restraint

No matter whether the government chooses to lead the project or leave the initiatives to the local communities, these residents always strive to communicate their agendas through every mean available. Studies in China recognized the informal protests from the local residents and other civil groups as an effort to influence the government-led decision makers (Verdini, 2015a; Zhai & Ng, 2013). For instance, the community in Enning Road, Guangzhou, China, sent petition letters and held public protests to express their discontent regarding their interests not being met in a recent preservation project. These citizens aimed to gather public's support and pressure the government's decisions through social discourses (Tan & Altrock, 2016). In another similar example, local residents in Nanjing, China, chose to distribute fliers and mobilize social media to communicate their requests to the government, who eventually alter the original project to meet these demands (Verdini, 2015a).

The common factor in these chaotic scenarios is a disconnection between the government and the local community. While the heritage projects are always consulted with the local residents before publishing, there is a gap between the goals of the government and the expectation of the local communities. On one hand, these gaps might be the result of consulting local residents' ideas from a non-representative sample, as it happened to the Chinese (Fan, 2014; Tan & Altrock, 2016). If the government is willing to involve the local, reconciliation is possible through either public participatory processes, in which the government chooses to involve the local communities at a higher level into the development process (Fan, 2014), or informal opposition that forces the relevant authority to reconsider different solutions (Fan, 2014). However, it is much more complicated when the government agendas are not in line with that of the local communities. The Vietnamese heritage management is no stranger to the conflicts of interests between the stakeholders and the authority (D. D. Nguyen et al., 2000). Directives from the central government are not always respected and understood at the local level, making all the efforts to involve the local to appear as only lip service because there is no concrete action to pursue such objective (H. S. Bui, 2013). This is often severe where it directly relates to heritage preservation and development, creating a big gap between policies and realities (V. H. Nguyen, 2012). The consequence is, unfortunately, over focus on economic development at the expense of heritage conservation (Lloyd & Morgan, 2008).

On the other hands, the local communities lack a comprehension of the prospective benefits they would get out of sustainable development, and even when they have a grasp of the vision, it is very complicated to get them to act due to their lack of skills and capital (D. T. N. Nguyen et al., 2022). Without proper support from the government, process towards sustainable development is not expected. Even in developed countries such as Japan, capable specialists are required to guide the local residents to achieve sustainable objectives (Yuhora et al.,

2016). A recent study in Hoi An, Vietnam (Pham Hong et al., 2021), shows that the lack of resources combined with the fierce competition from industrial products impede the development of community-based tourism. In this case, we can argue that sustainable development is very fragile at the beginning and thus requires special assistance in order to stay competitive. It is also unreasonable to assume that the market would not give special

treatment to sustainable products without certain preconditions. One of the preconditions of the success of community-based tourism is the availability of knowledge and resources within these communities themselves (Mathieson & Wall, 1982). Unfortunately, these resources are not always readily available to the local communities and need to be given, either via governmental investment (Abdul Halim et al., 2011) or by sponsored experts (Yuhora et al., 2016). Arstein (1969) also assumes that by mobilizing the local community, we can utilize better their resources. Ironically, when the residents are not capable, the participation of the local community itself, has become the obstacle to sustainable development. The solution is not a simple one. The Chinese government has been doing a very good job in leading the local communities to participate in sustainable development, as long as they found a common ground in terms of interests (Fan, 2014; Verdini, 2015a). But under the pressure of economic development, sustainability may get strayed away from their original objectives (J. Li et al., 2020). The developers face the paradox of balancing government-led projects and community-based initiatives in a context that both sides are not entirely competent to realize sustainability alone. What is the appropriate method of intervention from the government, and how to determine if the community is competent enough to lead sustainable development.

- *Which factors determine a community's competence to participate in sustainable development?*
- *How should the government approach the community participation to achieve the most effective sustainable development outcome?*

How to evaluate sustainable development outcome of community participation

Because the definition of sustainable development is basically achieving all three social, economic and environmental criteria (World Council for Economic Development, 1987), most related studies criticize the Chinese government's priority on economic development (J. Li et al., 2020; Verdini et al., 2017). While these criticisms are valid, community participation in sustainable development needs local adaptation too. The effectiveness of community participation can vary depending on the context of the deploying country (Tosun, 2000). And unlike in the developed West, the developing countries are more concerned with economic situation of the people than their political or democratic rights (Ying and Zhou, 2000). As we observed in the collected articles, many communities evaluated the success of a development project by looking at the economic outcomes first (Pham Hong et al., 2021) or protest because their economic interests were affected (Verdini et al., 2017; Zhai & Ng, 2013). For example, in the Tianzifang project in Shanghai, the local community partnered with different businesses to preserve their rights and to ensure their social and economic benefits from the areas (Yung et al., 2014). In another case, one very important factor that contributes to the success of an urban sustainable community development in Taipei was the cost-effective design of the administration that help avoid potential failure (Fu & Ma, 2020). Clearly, their primary concern is economic and the government are trying to satisfy these demands. We pose the question of how to raise awareness among local people of the necessity of retaining the environmental and social aspect of development in order to achieve true sustainability.

- *What are the potential factors that can change the economic centric mindset of both government and the local community?*

There is no doubt that eventually, in order to be sustainable, community participation should have achieved all three. However, in practice, a community is restrained by many factors that may prevent it to reach, for example, environmental sustainability in short or medium terms. Looking at the pottery village example in Vietnam (Pham Hong et al., 2021), one of the major obstacles to community participation is not whether the production is environmental friendly or the tradition is preserved, it is the lack of qualified artisans to make the work economic viable. In the whole village, there are only four families with qualified level of workmanship, and the rest are average. Because government support is not finite, the village' business is threatened from fierce competition in the market, should it failed to produce quality products.

The question is whether the government is aware of such risk and how they can support the local. External help can support the local communities' sustainable development, but it is not infinite, as we saw with the case of several villages in Java, Indonesia, who failed to sustain their development after their aids were cut (Damastuti & de Groot, 2017). Another example from Indonesia shows that local communities participation in local sustainable development can be boosted by effective information sharing, but its effectiveness depends on the characteristics of each community (Lestari et al., 2015). On the other hand, the Guangzhou project in China (Zhai & Ng, 2013), the problems stem from the lack of a discussion platform that can communicate the interests of the local to the other stakeholders. Once the problem was addressed, the project progressed smoothly. This suggests that to ensure the success of a sustainable development project requires the participation of both experts and local residents. While the former possesses the expertise, they lack the social and cultural insights of the latter. The cooperation between these two parties requires smooth communication in order to achieve the desired outcomes. To extend our understanding in this regard, we call for additional research to explore the following questions:

- *How does the communication between government and the local community influence the outcome of sustainable development in the area?*

CONCLUSION

The current study has summarized the current understanding of community participation in sustainable development in Asia and suggested several potential research venues. As the suggested research questions and framework reveal, the government has a significant impact on how local community can participate in the development of their own area. This influence is rather complicated with various interactions and negotiations from various stakeholders. The local community is also not the passive followers after the governmental authority but rather a very active participants, who are capable of negotiating their interests via both formal and informal means. We highlight the factors that can define the nature of these interactions as well as determine their outcomes.

Although this study only focused on community participation to general sustainable development, we hope that the future studies would apply the proposed framework in more specific settings. We expect that by examining community participation in well-defined fields, the role of government and how people perceive the outcome of sustainability would be highlighted more clearly. We are confident that such finding can contribute positively to the wellbeing of the concerned local people, who are struggling to develop their homeland.

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