

Research Article

Participation of Specially Abled People in Tourism: A Case of *Dharamshala*, Himachal Pradesh

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ABSTRACT

Tourism industry is presumed to be an industry which helps eradicating poverty and bring equity by generating employment opportunities to the marginalised people at the destinations. This is well emphasised by International Organization such as UNWTO by the dint of planning guidelines suggested frameworks and national equal tourism originations of the states. UNWTO has been a front runner in its efforts to bring in opportunities for all irrespective of their capabilities, gender and races. It augments its assertion by theming this year's World Tourism Day as '*Tourism for All- promoting universal accessibility*'. However, literature on the other hand emphasises on the participation of specially abled people on demand side only, that is 'tourist side' and ignores them completely when it comes to their participation on supply side, that is their participation in employment and entrepreneurship. Not only this, supply side perspective finds mention in the definition of accessible tourism proposed by various scholars. This study attempts to find out the extent of participation of specially abled people at the destination. The study reveals that there is mere inclusion of specially abled people in tourism destination; they lack participation opportunities in turns of infrastructure, training facilities and awareness of government schemes available to them. Besides, they find the perception of people about them very demotivating. Tourism can be successful only when they are considered in the supply side also, which is very low presently.

Keywords: Accessible tourism, Differently-abled people, Employment, Tourism impacts, Sustainability, Dharmshala, Inclusive Development

INTRODUCTION

About 21,906,769 people in India suffer from some kind of disability, this account for about 2.1% of the whole population India (India Census, 2001). The scholarly work on disability has an agreed upon view that disability is not mere a physical condition rather it has social factors as well. Social factors are capable of reducing the barriers to decrease the extent of disability by enabling a favourable environment to the physical disabled people (World Health Organization, 2011). This is also well supported by empirical examples, for instance the case of Manisha Philip, entrepreneurship has made her independent and has gifted a highly rejuvenating life (The Hindu, 2015). Thus, entrepreneurship and employability is a boon to the physically disabled people. Tourism in the local community meets these two-fold objectives. It promises to be the catalyst of enabling marginalised, at the same time it is principled on the ideology of providing maximum benefits to the local people [United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), 2001]. One of the most cited definition of accessible tourism as given by Darcy and Dickson (2009) is –

‘enables[ing] people with access requirements, including mobility, vision, hearing and cognitive dimensions of access, to function independently and with equity and dignity through the delivery of universally designed tourism products, services and environments. This definition is inclusive of all people including those travelling with children in prams, people with disabilities and seniors’.

This study is aligned with the theoretical framework of Arnstein (1969) with purpose of access the community, planning level participation and awareness of differently abled locals in Dharamshala. The operational definition for the physically disable is taken as per Indian Government norm of 40% disability.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature has little attention as far as the participation of local physically disabled community is concerned. Though there is comparatively large amount of literature devoted to the participation of specially abled people in undertaking tourist activities, while the literature on community participation in general is mountainous.

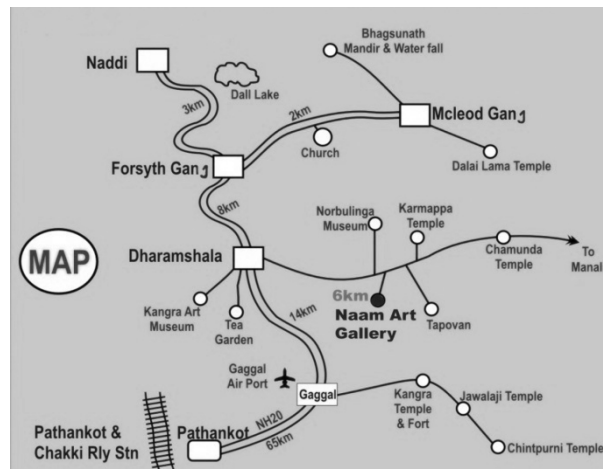
The participation has been theories into various forms and types. Arnstein (1969) presents a ladder of levels of participation which are namely manipulation, therapy, informing and consultation, placation, partnership, delegated power and citizen control (Arnstein, 1969). The first two ladders at bottom, that is manipulation and therapy are referred to non-participation, these don’t provide any place for locals to participate in the policy-making rather the power holders educate and cure the participants. Third, fourth and fifth rungs referred to tokenism that allows hearing

the voices of participants although their views may not be considered in the planning process. The upper levels allow the residents to have partnership and negotiate with the power holders. This follows the typological division of Pretty who asserts that his fifth level, that is functional participation is necessary if the destination is to be sustainable (Pretty, 1995). The functional participation requires the residents to participate in the preset goals by the power holders. In the line, Murphy (1985) in his ecological model of tourism planning places resident's participation in the centre of model.

Local community participation is generally classified, though not exclusively, having two goals: planning-oriented goals and community-oriented goals. The prior signifies the inclusion of locals in the planning process and decision-making while the later purposes to ensure the quality of life of the residents (Uysal *et al.*, 2012). This is more pertinent in the case of specially abled people. The inclusions of disabled people in tourism at a destination could have life changing positive effects (Gautam, 2016).

METHODOLOGY

The study has been referenced to Dharamshala, Himachal Pradesh and India. Dharamshala is one of the famous hill stations in India. It is also the headquarters of his holiness the Dalai Lama. Dharamshala is located at the altitude of 1,380 m and its population consists of about 53,543 individuals (About us, n.d.). It is also the home of a large number of Tibetans. Tourist attractions in Dharamshala includes Mcleodganj (often called the little Lhasa), Dal lake, Bhagsunath, Chinmaya Tapovan, Kunal Pathri, St. John's Church, War Memorial, Kangra Art Museum and others as depicted in the picture below. The nearby tourist destinations include Manali, Kullu, Shimla, Jasur, Chamunda Devi, Jwalaji, Chintpurni and others.



Map source: <http://naamartgallery.com/how.htm>

This study utilises heuristic approach and survey method together, wherein the data have been collected from the people living in or frequently visiting Dharamshala. The people have been asked about the observation in context of disabled people in this destination. Purposive sampling has been used for collecting the data from six respondents. Besides, a survey of 16 hotels have been carried out by mail to find out the number of working disabled employees in the hotels. To access the degree of inclusion of disabled people, three specially abled local residents have been interviewed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The literature analysis and results of the study appear to be dull in front of participation of differently abled people in tourism. There are rare studies devoted to find out the status of participation of specially abled people in tourism in both the levels, that is community and planning levels. Even the most definitions of accessible tourism avoid mentions of their participation in the destination (refer to the definition cited in the introduction section).

Survey of the hotels reveal that there are no physically disabled employees working therein and it is not a different story in the part of local residents (heuristic data collection), stating that they have also not seen any physically disabled person working in Dharamshala area.

The interview of three physically disabled people finds that they have never been consulted by any official nor they have been provided any training. Further, when they were asked whether they have any knowledge of any entrepreneurship funding institution such as National Handicapped Finance and Development Corporation (NHFDC), they answered with a 'NO', however, they said they are aware only of banks where they can avail financial assistance. On the part of problems they face, it was asserted that they find it very demotivating when they are said that they cannot do some specific tasks. Contradicting this, they reinforced that they are disabled but not as much as people think about them. These could be considered amongst the social factors that negatively affect specially-abled people and are profoundly downgrading.

The above discussion beckons that the participation of specially abled people could be placed on the bottom rungs of the ladder, that is on manipulation and therapy levels which indicate no-participation at the destination.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

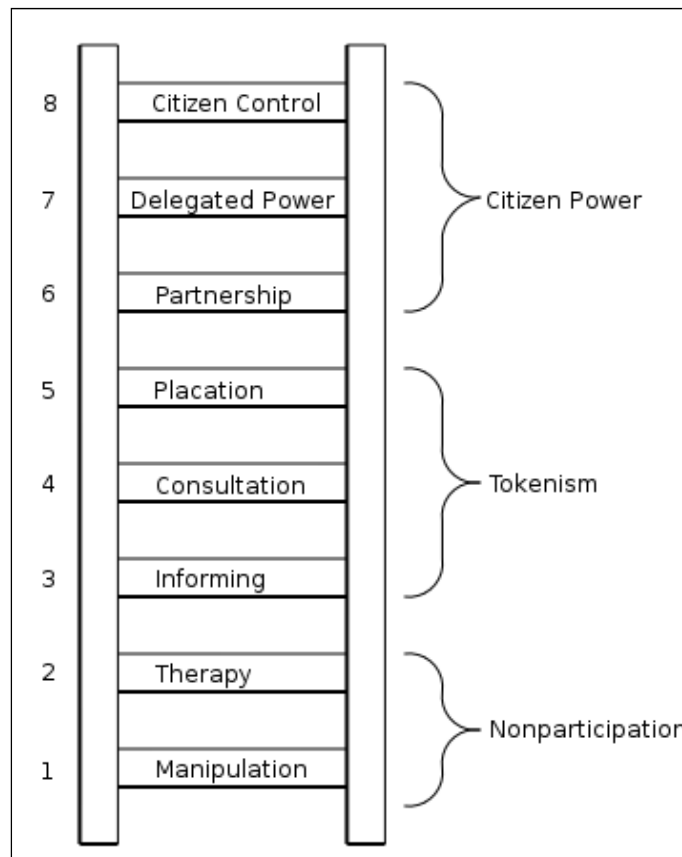
As the literature and results indicate differently abled people have rarely been taken in to account while considering their participation on the supply side, that is local community participation which is necessary if the destination has to be sustainable and tourism has to be truly held on its principles.

There are plenty of opportunities for the destinations to include disabled people. The destinations and hotels can be branded as specially abled managed destination which would require a large number of such people, creating huge employment and entrepreneurship opportunities. Starbucks and Northrop Grumman both fortune 500 companies are some of the top specially abled employers in the world. This though necessitates imparting training to those specially abled people, providing support and create awareness of Government schemes such as financial support of the NHFDC, training programmes by National Institute for Empowerment of Persons with Multiple Disabilities, Composite Regional Centres for Persons with Disabilities and others.

This study is limited by a small survey, thus restraining its generability. Large scale studies are required for better planning and implementation.

APPENDIX

Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation.



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