

ABSTRACT

Purpose: The aim of this thesis is to conceptualize ways in which the Cittàslow movement may directly and indirectly contribute to sustainable tourism development in Small Island Developing States (SIDS), with its unique approach to sustainability and local governance. The Cittàslow approach to sustainability as it relates to tourism are discussed within this thesis and by examining some of the essentials of the Cittàslow initiative, several concepts such as how quality of life and experience value in tourism can complement the Cittàslow approach to sustainable tourism development for SIDS are also introduced within this thesis.

The traditional approach to sustainability and tourism development within the Caribbean as discussed in this thesis have overlooked the social dimension of sustainability, however in addition to providing jobs and preserving the natural environment, the region also needs to promote sustainable production and consumption that are linked to the industry. While Antigua and Barbuda has been proactive to issues of resource management, other issues such as inclusive growth has not been given enough attention by policy makers, activist groups and other stakeholders. With the maturity of the tourism industry for Caribbean islands, countries such as Antigua and Barbuda are poised with an important opportunity to be forward thinking, and break the unfortunate cycle that have led to unsustainable tourism development within the region.

It is for this reason that the Cittàslow approach to sustainability and local governance is important to SIDS, particularly, Antigua and Barbuda. Current developments in Antigua and Barbuda have highlighted the negative environmental impacts of tourism developments and while these have proved essential for addressing the need for sustainable tourism practices, there is still a need to address how the balance of power can shift from external factors, thus reducing vulnerabilities of the local economy. The Cittàslow approach and its emphasis on socio-economic impacts has the potential to complement the contemporary forces at play in Antigua and Barbuda to propel the sustainable tourism development agenda. This has a further reaching ability to influence

other Caribbean and SIDS destinations, as a positive approach to development that seeks to minimize the negative impacts of the industry and maximize output from local resources.

Background: This thesis explores some of the key issues relating to sustainability in SIDS, while it also analyzes ways in which the Cittàslow approach can be seen as an opportunity for SIDS to use their unique characteristics, strengthen local networks and encourage further indigenous participation within the national tourism industry. There have been increasing pressures for sustainable development throughout the world since the Brundtland Report, and with this, there has been a further push towards sustainable tourism development. At the same time, the very nature of SIDS makes this move to sustainable tourism development an even more pertinent issue, and communities in SIDS need to implement flexible approaches to ongoing challenges.

The Cittàslow initiative began as a “grassroots” movement, with policies geared towards a model for sustainable local development and governance. With origins in Italy, the international network has grown significantly and now includes cities throughout Europe, North America, Asia, Latin America, and Africa. While the primary motivation for Cittàslow is to provide a better quality of life for its residents and visitors alike, communities also share new ideas, experiences and know-how as part of the overall goal of the movement. Given that the Cittàslow movement has shown great progress, it serves as a motivator in achieving social change and making communities self-sufficient. This initiative introduces small yet achievable goals that can bring about positive changes to the attitudes and involvements of residents in small islands, thus making sustainable tourism development more achievable in the long term.

Cittàslow from an island perspective is unique, and sustainable tourism development for islands have distinctive opportunities and challenges. If the Cittàslow movement is viewed as a process that requires three main components (Small size, Slow ethos and Sustainability), SIDS like any island destination are naturally fortunate to possess two of these elements, while sustainability and in effect sustainable tourism development is an

ongoing quandary. Nevertheless, the aim of the Cittàslow movement is to achieve varying levels of sustainability, and therefore sustainability in itself being a construct, may very well be an ongoing achievement to strive towards.

Design/Methodological Approach: This study was implemented using a three-phase research process. The research that goes into this thesis is collected from secondary data, in addition to primary data from a diverse group of stakeholders in Antigua and Barbuda and Japan. The research was conducted in a sequential manner, each phase enhancing the next to fulfill the research aims and objectives of the study.

Phase one – Document Study and Pilot Study

On the basis of the pilot study and case study results, the main study was carried out step by step from the conceptual process in the document study and expert interviews to actual data collection and observation to verify the practical Cittàslow experience.

Phase two – Supplementary Case Study

In the supplementary case study, key characteristics and indicators of the Cittàslow movement were addressed with the revision of actual data, such as verifying the status and level of awareness with the movement, policies, priority of the factors and indicators in the Cittàslow criteria process as well as interests and appropriateness of local businesses/products presence in the tourism industry.

Phase three – Main Study

The expert interviews conducted throughout the main study had been used for the pilot study to have a benchmark and initial understanding of the current situation in Antigua and Barbuda. These in-depth interviews consisted of seven main themes/topics that included i) issues and challenges concerning sustainable tourism ii) marketing and economic linkages between tourism and other supporting industries iii) Cittàslow (Slow City) awareness/familiarity iv) destination marketing v) stakeholder benefits and cooperation, vi) future outlook and potential issues and challenges together with vii) potential issues and challenges.

Findings: Sustainability in the context of the Cittàslow model from an island perspective is conceptualized within this thesis, and varying elements that can be seen as contributors to sustainable tourism development in SIDS are discussed. These include marketing potential, environmental and agricultural benefits, as well as the definitive socio economic advances that could come about from implementing such an initiative. The research findings also revealed that different initiatives that were implemented in Antigua and Barbuda has allowed for substantial benefits to the country by appealing to the unique characteristics of the destination. Two of such community initiatives are the Mango Festival and the Seafood Festival as annual events that have also gained the attention of tourists and regional markets, now trying to imitate the initiative.

While the Cittàslow movement is currently absent in the SIDS group, stakeholders in Antigua and Barbuda were generally open and optimistic for a model of sustainable tourism that encourages more input of residents, given the historical development of tourism in Antigua and Barbuda. Several issues were raised through interviews with members from twelve (12) stakeholder groups in Antigua and Barbuda. These issues included, the need for greater support of small businesses, increase in public awareness to issues of sustainability, and the role of the media in disseminating information as well as, providing a platform for various stakeholders to connect with each other. Other findings involved the changing mind-sets of various stakeholders towards locally produced agricultural products and the incorporation of community led initiatives in the tourism product.

Ultimately, this thesis illustrates SIDS specific impacts that the strategies of the Cittàslow model facilitate, while also highlighting some of the potential barriers to SIDS seamlessly adopting such a concept. Findings of this research also emphasize current and potential challenges of the Cittàslow approach. Lessons from the Kesennuma experience also reveal Cittàslow policy criteria areas that hold significance for both visitors (the opportunity to try local food/drink) and residents (energy/water quality/conservation and convenient public transportation access). This allows for a closer look into the Cittàslow process of implementation, indicators, priorities and key characteristics for the conceptual

application leading to a better understanding about the Cittàslow impact on tourism in small places. Exploring the Cittàslow (Slow City) Kesenuma case study experience provides real-life lessons for any SIDS that aspires to implement such an initiative. Additionally, in accordance with the participating stakeholders, the research also discovered that potential challenges could include a reluctant attitude from government officials to changes, and a lack of resources that could indirectly and negatively affect motivation and optimism concerning the movement.

Practical Implications: By exploring and identifying a unique and emerging approach to sustainability and local governance, this research has significant theoretical and practical implications in adding to the sustainable tourism discourse. The uniqueness of this study is evident in that it emphasizes the potential impact of an innovative and inclusive approach to sustainability and local governance on the sustainable tourism agenda of island economies in marginalized locations. The theoretical considerations explored throughout the body of this study helps in explaining the phenomenon. The marketing of the tourism product in Antigua and Barbuda can benefit from strategies that satisfy the changing needs of consumers and position itself as a socially responsible tourism destination. By focusing on socially desirable practices and outcomes, Antigua and Barbuda can implement an inclusive approach such as the Cittàslow approach to not only serve as a contributory factor in promoting economic linkages and stakeholder cooperation, but also offers a strong and established brand image.

The timing of this thesis is also important, as the Cittàslow movement has been steadily gaining the attention of the academic community across several areas. By examining the Cittàslow movement and its impact on tourism in SIDS, this study serve as a foundation for creating an effective planning and management framework for aspiring Cittàslow destinations. This study also provides concrete evidence of the SIDS specific issues being faced by key stakeholders in Antigua and Barbuda, in addition to Cittàslow specific issues being faced by key stakeholders in Cittàslow Kesenuma, Japan. The findings of this study strongly suggests that the Cittàslow approach to sustainability and local governance positively impact on small places directly and indirectly, and by emphasizing

the unique characteristics of the destination, Cittàslow designated destinations are motivated by shared values and opportunities.

Stakeholder challenges have emerged as the most pressing issue being faced by those who participated in this study and include a lack of resources in efficiently delivering and promoting local products to the tourism industry. From these findings, this thesis therefore recommends that industry stakeholders focus on contributing to the overall development of sustainable tourism development in Antigua and Barbuda by addressing the current challenges being faced by key stakeholders, make improvements into the business climate, pay attention to attractive marketing opportunities and implement a comprehensive Cittàslow assessment for as part of a feasibility study necessary for planning and development.

Originality/Value: The academic discourse on the Cittàslow movement unquestionably offers an open discussion, but it has yet addressed how this concept may impact small island economies or countries in a marginalized location. Predominantly European focused, with some literature on the Asia Pacific, the wide range of slow cities around the world, gives credence to the adaptability of the movement. This thesis provides a further analysis that is needed to understand the value of how the underlying philosophy could assist SIDS. Whereas Antigua and Barbuda and in extension the SIDS group of islands are traditionally 3S (sun, sea and sand) destinations, there are opportunities for sustainable growth and development. Diversification into a niche offering that moves away from mass tourism to a model focused on improvements in quality over quantity can be a viable alternative for a small country that embraces tourism as its main industry. Essentially, this thesis could be useful for those planning and developing sustainable tourism initiatives wherever diverse institutions and stakeholders with conflicting interests are involved.

Keywords: Cittàslow; sustainability; tourism; development; islands