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## STAKEHOLDERS' EXPERIENCES WITH PARTICIPATIVE APPROACH IN TOURISM

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**Abstract:** Tourism stakeholders' participation is mostly needed for planning purposes because they have better insights regarding various issues present on a local level. A participative approach enables tourism stakeholders to influence and control, to a certain degree, the development of tourism in their community. However, there is a lack of research on stakeholders' understanding of a participative approach that has been identified. This study uses a qualitative research approach where a focus group (FG) with key stakeholders was employed to examine the mechanism behind the participative approach. Namely, this paper presents the findings about the local stakeholders' experiences with a participative approach and their opinions regarding how to foster this type of initiatives in tourism settings. Data presented in this paper were collected during a discussion with an FG and processed using thematic analysis. The thoughts and opinions of stakeholders were analyzed by taking into consideration barriers and enablers related to the implementation of a participative approach. The main focus was placed on bottom-up initiatives, but other types were included as well. Identified barriers and enablers were categorized into four themes: approach necessity, appropriate stakeholders selection, correct application of the approach, and stakeholders' motivation.

**Keywords:** bottom-up approach; barriers and enablers; tourism development; focus group

### 1. Introduction

A participative approach is becoming an integral part of sustainable tourism development (Lindström & Larson, 2016). Sustainability takes into account three aspects of tourist destination development, namely economic, environmental, and social. In this way, the irreversible degradation of tourist destination resources, in particular environmental ones, is reduced (Krce Miočić et al., 2016). In the sustainable tourism development context, there are various studies that deal with a participative approach starting with theoretical conceptualizations and considerations and ending with different empirical applications.

However, a lack of research on stakeholders' understanding of a participative approach has been identified. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to examine the mechanism behind the implementation of a participative approach to tourism planning. With this in mind, the goal of this paper is to present the findings about the stakeholders' experiences with a participative approach and their opinion on how to foster this type of initiatives in tourism settings. Initiatives

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based on a bottom-up approach were the main focus of this research, but other types of initiatives were also included. Therefore, this research contributes to theory and practice by determining issues and enablers of tourism-related initiatives applying a participative approach.

## 2. Theoretical background

For decades, tourism development has been mostly focused on the economic well-being maximization (Özgit & Zhandildina, 2021), often neglecting the environmental and socio-cultural well-being of the host environments. Such an approach has resulted in various negative impacts on the tourist destination, of which environmental degradation stands out (Krce Miočić et al., 2016). Consequently, the policy makers are becoming more aware that tourism should be developed in a sustainable manner. The sustainable tourism development minimizes environmental and socio-cultural negative impacts on a tourist destination and host communities, while commensurately maximizes economic benefits (Dabphet, 2013). The sustainable tourism development has been adopted as an approach vital to tourism policy development and tourism planning in many tourist destinations because it fosters the implementation of an approach that is more balanced with respect to economic, socio-cultural, and environmental aspects of a tourist destination (Özgit & Zhandildina, 2021). However, to achieve tourist destination sustainability, sustainability aspects namely its environmental, socio-cultural, and economic dimensions, need to be included in the process of tourism planning.

A tourism planning process encompasses a decision-making process that is detailed and based on essential features related to a tourist destination development; and it especially considers different factors like zoning, transport, environment, etc. (Wan, 2013). Tourism planning is vital for tourist destination development because those tourist destinations that allow tourism development to occur without the planning often have different problems, possible increased costs of conflict resolution, and even problems with decrease in competitiveness of their destinations (Yuksel et al., 1999). In Inskeep's (1991) study (as cited in Theerapappisit, 2012), good planning is highlighted as a key to developing tourism in a sustainable manner; this includes effective development based on continuous tourism resources management and development related to the specific features of an area's environment, economy, and society. Accordingly, different stakeholders should to be involved in tourism planning process to achieve sustainable tourism development, which is especially highlighted by Murphy (1983, 1985, 1988), the pioneer of research on a community-based approach to tourism planning.

Stakeholders in the travel industry can be various experts, a group, or an individual who can affect or is affected in the process the tourism development (Bramwell, 2010; Byrd, 2007; Özgit & Zhandildina, 2021). A literature review on the stakeholders' role in sustainable tourism development planning raised a question of how to clearly define, identify and involve tourism stakeholders (Byrd, 2007). For this reason, it is important to first identify who the stakeholders are and then define how to include them. There are different ways how tourism stakeholders could be involved in sustainable tourism planning and development. Sánchez et al. (2021) suggested several techniques that could be applied with the aim of including stakeholders in tourism planning and development initiatives, like public hearings, surveys, focus group (FG), working groups, implementation studies, etc. Although there are different and often confusing and opposing techniques that can be used to include stakeholders, their inclusion in sustainable tourism planning is necessary.

Different types of stakeholders should be included in the tourism planning process and their involvement is considered stakeholder participation. The concept of stakeholders' participation was

defined by Haywood (1988) and it refers to “a process of involving all stakeholders in such way that decision-making is shared” (as cited in Okazaki, 2008, p. 511). Three types of local stakeholders' participation were identified (Martins, 2018; Shafieisabet & Haratifard, 2020; Tosun, 2006):

- Coercive participation—local stakeholders do not influence the tourism planning and development process;
- Induced participation—governments do consult the local stakeholders in regard to tourism planning and development, but local stakeholders are not included during the whole decision-making process; and
- Spontaneous participation—local stakeholders, through participation in the decision-making process, can make decisions and manage the development process, and this approach could be considered a “bottom-up” approach, in contrast to the first two approaches, who are both “top-down” and are characterized by having none or limited control (van Breugel, 2013).

However, recently, additional attention has been placed on involving the local stakeholders in developing policies and planning sustainable tourism development in tourist destinations (Lindström & Larson, 2016). In the last four decades, different researchers have pointed out that stakeholders' participation in tourism policy-making empowered the local-level democracy needed for tourism development to become sustainable (Bramwell, 2010; Ciro et al., 2019; Gori et al., 2021; Hatipoglu et al., 2016). Basically, there are two main approaches to sustainable tourism planning: top-down and bottom-up.

The top-down approach implies “the implementation of policies where decision-makers are at a higher level of hierarchy and those implementing at lower levels” (Rozite et al., 2020, p. 744). It is often criticized because policy makers mainly ignore local stakeholders' interests and opinions (Byrd, 2007), therefore, it is considered ineffective in the long term (Gori et al., 2021). It resembles coercive participation identified by Martins (2018) and Shafieisabet and Haratifard (2020). On the other hand, the bottom-up approach considers participation as coordinated local action in tourism development that undertakes bottom-up actions and not just participation in decisions (Ciro et al., 2019). Gori et al. (2021) suggest that the bottom-up approach is a more appropriate approach to tourism planning and development because this approach sets a convention for local communities to determine their own goals and carry out decisions about their resources (Müller et al., 2020).

In Dalal-Clayton and Bass (2002) study (as cited in Seyhan & Russo, 2020, p. 270), it is stated that “a bottom-up decision-making process requires local groups to be initiated with little involvement from different level government agencies in the development of key ideas, with local groups representing the ‘bottom’ process, while their decisions affect regulations and policies ‘up-wise’”. However, even though a bottom-up approach involves the inclusion of all the interested stakeholders in sustainable tourism development, to address issues regarding development of policy tools and instruments, those policies and instruments did not necessarily achieve envisioned goals at the strategic level (Boukas & Ziakas, 2016; Rozite et al., 2020).

The research on bottom-up participation in tourism planning and development started in 1980s (Kauppila et al., 2009). It is mostly focused on sustainable tourism (Ruhanen, 2013; Shafieisabet & Haratifard, 2020), community-based tourism (Del Chiappa et al., 2018; Gutierrez, 2019; Kamarudin, 2013; Reggers et al., 2016; Sakata & Prideaux, 2013), heritage tourism (Jamhawi & Hajahjah, 2017), coastal tourism (Marzuki et al., 2012; Ullah et al., 2018), and tourism of protected areas (Jamal & Stronza, 2009). Additionally, studies center on the potential benefits of stakeholders' bottom-up approach in tourism planning (Ullah et al., 2018). According to Del Chiappa et al. (2018), the bottom-

up approach is also considered in the context of residents' perceptions and attitudes toward tourism development. Furthermore, Hatipoglu et al. (2016) identified various local stakeholders participation barriers regarding the tourism planning process. Additionally, Wanner and Pröbstl-Haider (2019) identified different participative bottom-up approach benefits and barriers by using the results of Hartley and Wood (2005) and Tosun (2000). Lastly, Ali et al. (2017) identified two main bottom-up participation approach issues in tourism destination development: (1) the identification and assessment of aspects that shape stakeholders' attitudes toward tourism development and (2) the tourism development impacts on the stakeholders at a destination. However, there is a lack of research regarding the identification of bottom-up approach enablers and barriers.

### 3. Methodology

Though in general, participation of stakeholders is highly encouraged in tourism development, there is an absence of research about the bottom-up approach in tourism settings. In this study, a FG was organized to investigate the local stakeholders' experiences with a participative approach to tourism planning, namely focusing on bottom-up initiatives. The first step in organizing the FG was to determine potential stakeholders. Four types of stakeholders were identified as crucial ones: business operators, policy makers, researchers, and non-governmental organizations (NGO). For the purpose of assembling the FG, ten potential stakeholders were contacted. All the ten stakeholders expressed interest to participate in seminars related to sustainable tourism strategies in connection with natural heritage organized from 9th to 10th June 2021 at National Park Brijuni (Istria County, Croatia). The aim of this FG was to get insights regarding the application of the bottom-up approach for different perspectives. Therefore, three business operators, three policy makers, two researchers, and two NGOs were contacted. Since FG discussion took place on 10th June 2021, a total of seven stakeholders were able to participate in this discussion. The structure of the FG included two business operators (a hotel manager and an assistant in the planning department), two policy makers (a tourist board representative and a public authority representative), two researchers and one NGO representative (Table 1). The participants were mostly women, between 36 and 52 years of age.

**Table 1.** Responders' characteristics

Participant	Gender	Age	Type of stakeholder
1	Female	37	Business operator
2	Male	57	Policy maker
3	Female	35	Policy maker
4	Male	47	Business operator
5	Female	50	Researcher
6	Female	52	Researcher
7	Female	36	NGO representative

To include a participant in the FG, previous experience with participation in tourism planning initiatives, namely those using bottom-up approach, was required. This experience comprised either organizing different initiatives (like clean-up initiatives) and/or gathering information required for planning purposes. Prior to the FG discussion, participants were informed about the discussion. FG discussion lasted approximately 45 minutes. With their permission, the participant responses were recorded using a camera, and their responses were transcribed after the discussion.

The data were analyzed using a process of theoretical thematic analysis because the thoughts and opinions of stakeholders were analyzed and coded by focusing on different

barriers and enablers of implementing bottom-up initiatives. The analysis was conducted from a critical-realist perspective and it included six phases (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke, 2021). The transcribed data were initially read and reread for familiarization purposes. These codes were reviewed and sorted into meaningful themes and all the data relating to each theme were collected together. The conversation with FG participants was conducted in the Croatian language; it was transcribed in the Croatian language as well, but the statements used for the purpose of presenting the results were translated into English.

#### 4. Results and discussion

A participative approach in tourism development envisions inclusion of different stakeholders in tourism decision making activities. The participants were told to tell their experiences in the implementation of a participative approach for tourism planning purposes and to mainly focus on various enablers and barriers related to the participative approach, as well as to the bottom-up approach initiatives. Five participants mentioned a specific initiative, while two participants were vague when describing their experiences.

A total of six initiatives were mentioned and described (Table 2). All of these initiatives were not directly linked to tourism development. However they all support it because they directly support the development of tourism destination offer. Although these initiatives were based on participative approach, most of them could not be considered bottom-up initiatives. This suggests that participants, although familiar with participation, do not make differences between bottom-up, intermediate, and top-down approaches. In fact, only shoreline clean-up initiative could be considered as an initiative.

**Table 2.** List and description of initiatives

Initiative	Initiator	Main characteristic
Shoreline clean-up (local beaches)	Local business entity	This initiative included small number of interested local inhabitants and received low support from local public authority
Hydropower plant construction	National governing body	Due to low stakeholder interest, stakeholders were mostly included at the finalization stage
Scientific-educational center construction	Local public authority	Local authority included local community so that local community needs were met
National park management plan	Local public entity	Stakeholders were consulted for the purpose of drafting a management plan
Endangered animals rescue	Local public entity	Local inhabitants were asked to report different sightings and issues regarding certain endangered animals
Waste management center construction	NGO	Encouraging local inhabitants' participation in public discussion and spreading information about the project
Waste reduction and recycling	Local public authority	Obligatory requirement for stakeholders to use environmentally friendly tableware for serving food during gastronomy events

As a part of their experience with the implementation of participative approach, the participants mentioned several different facilitators that helped them with the implementation (Table 3). They stressed out the importance of media, education, awareness of local community, and different motivation factors that drive individuals to act. Different groups of participants mentioned different types of enablers.

**Table 3.** Identified enablers of implementing bottom-up initiatives by stakeholder type

Enablers	Business entity	Policy maker	Researcher	NGO
Education (informal) and raising awareness	✓			
Experiences of catastrophes				✓
Media coverage	✓			
Feeling of personal responsibility	✓			
Aspiration to improve tourism offer	✓	✓		
Feeling like you did a good deed	✓			
Working in the public interest			✓	
Local community enthusiasm to participate in decision-making process			✓	
Aspiration to include the local community in decision-making process				✓

On the other hand, the participants delineated various barriers they have confronted during this process (Table 4). These barriers included different issues starting with the problems of how to select appropriate stakeholders to various problems that happened during participative approach implementation. However, additionally, issues emerged during FG discussion that raised questions about of stakeholders' perceptions of a participative approach. Although different groups of participants mentioned different types of barriers, all the four groups agreed that conflict management was crucial for participative approach implementation.

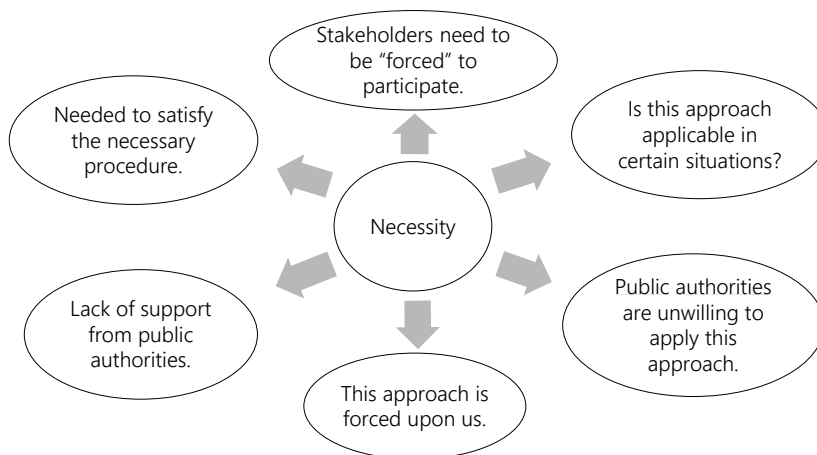
**Table 4.** Identified barriers of implementing bottom-up initiatives by stakeholder type

Barriers	Business entity	Policy maker	Researcher	NGO
How to identify relevant stakeholders	✓	✓		
There are no stakeholders' representatives/too many stakeholders (in the same category)				
How and when to include stakeholders		✓		✓
Is participative approach (and bottom-up) applicable to certain situations			✓	✓
Stakeholders need to be "forced" to participate		✓		
How to finance initiatives				✓
How to communicate with (talk to) stakeholders				✓
People applying this approach need education				✓
Participative approach (bottom-up) is forced upon us	✓	✓		
Negative perception of activists (NGOs)	✓			✓
Public authorities are unwilling to apply this approach			✓	✓
Lack of interest and response from stakeholders		✓		✓
Absence of interest from media	✓	✓		
Absence of support from public authorities	✓			
How to handle conflicts among stakeholders	✓	✓	✓	✓
Needed to satisfy necessary procedure				✓

Based on the enablers and barriers mentioned by the participants, four themes emerged (Figures 1–4). They were entitled as: the necessity of a participative approach for planning purposes, stakeholders' motivation, appropriate stakeholders' selection, and correct application of a participative approach. The main idea behind the first theme was the question of necessity

of this approach (Figure 1). Our participants questioned usefulness of stakeholders' participation when immediate action is required as in case of certain ecological interventions:

- FG6: "Participative approach, yes, but not always. I do not understand why everybody has the right to an opinion when we need to protect our environment. A surgeon does not ask me how to perform an operation. If there are certain ecological problems, ecologists' opinions are those that matter. A participative approach can make ecological interventions difficult and sometimes there is no time to act."
- FG7: "In certain cases, it is difficult to decide when participation is required and who needs to make those decisions."



**Figure 1.** Necessity of participative approach for planning purposes.

This idea was supported with the opinion that stakeholders' participation is not always the best model to apply. However, they were of the opinion that there is no other better solution and that public authorities were not always willing to include stakeholders. Furthermore, they stated that sometimes public authorities just do the bare minimum only to satisfy the necessary procedure:

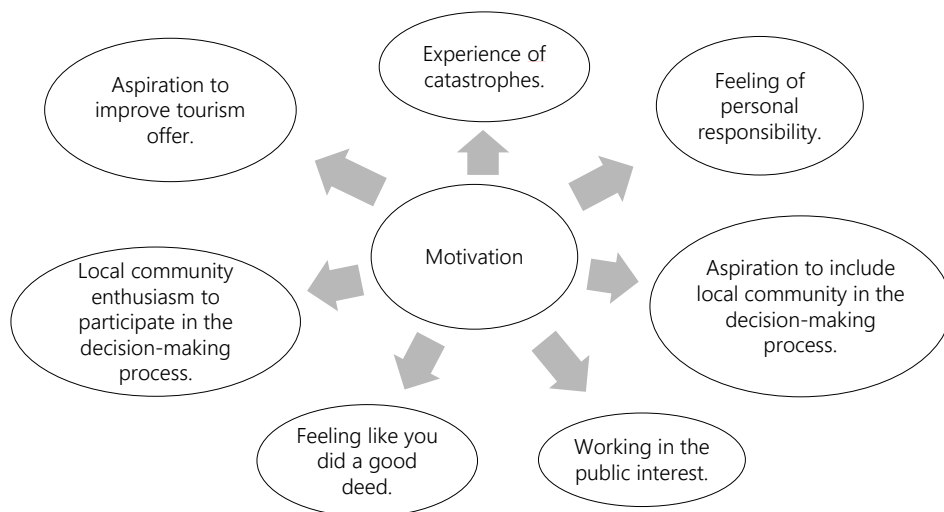
- FG2: "When we talk about public interest, there is no other model. This model is difficult for those who need to apply it, because it can prolong the process and cause higher costs and that is why it is often criticized."
- FG7: "So, I am aware of the situation that happened a few years ago when our local community, namely citizens, wanted to be included in a certain initiative, but our public authority was not willing to include them. Our town representatives just did not want to include the local community."
- FG5: "This situation happened in 2007 when our regional public authority participated in a project financed by EU. Participation was required so that the project could get certain number of points. This participation was planned through the organization of public hearing, but potential stakeholders were not notified."

If entities responsible for (tourism) development start questioning the necessity of stakeholders' participation in different planning activities, it may lead to a number of issues

with local stakeholders. On the other hand, the implementation of a participative approach is likely to prolong the decision-making process, it is more time consuming, and it could generate additional costs. These facts need to be considered in various (tourism) development initiatives rather than ignore and not include stakeholders.

Issues mentioned in the first theme could be considered as barriers when participation approach is required. However, our participants mentioned different motivations that drive them during the implementation of (tourism-related) initiatives that require stakeholders' participation (Figure 2). Those motives are usually the feeling of personal responsibility, feeling like you did a good deed, and the desire to improve society:

- FG4: "A fisherman who caught a protected shark contacted us about it. We took it and decided to release it back into the sea. This was all over the news, so a few days later another fisherman did the same."



**Figure 2.** Stakeholders' motivation.

- FG1: "We want to be included because we want to improve our society and business. We have a responsibility toward our guests and nature."
- FG3: "We want to encourage our restaurants to promote local foods. That is why we try to include various stakeholders when organizing different gastronomy events."
- FG3: "We want to include those features that our local community needs, so we will organize different consultation workshops with our stakeholders to get their opinions."
- FG7: "Local inhabitants were not informed about this major life-changing initiative that was about to happen, so we decided to take action and inform them about it as well as encourage them to participate."

One participant mentioned that previous experience with certain ecological disaster is related to motivation and inclusion of stakeholders in the planning activities, while another raised a question if we can "force" stakeholders to participate:



- FG7: "This has not happened to us yet, but it did happen in other countries. I am talking about ecological disasters. If such a thing happens to us, then we will know what we had and lost."
- FG3: "If our stakeholders want to participate in the events that we organize, we require that they do not use disposable plastic tableware. We are willing to provide certain financial support, help them find suppliers and help during negotiations."

However, while certain motivators may encourage stakeholders' participation in (tourism) development, one must consider that economic gain could be an issue:

- FG7: "Business entities think about money they will gain from their guests. If the guests do not come, they know that they will lose money. But, they still have not lost support they get from our environment."

When it comes to stakeholders' motivation, they can be an excellent enabler of stakeholders' participation. However, they can also be considered as a certain barrier especially if different stakeholders' groups have conflicting motivations.

Selection of appropriate stakeholders is the first step when applying a participative approach to (tourism-related) development initiatives (Figure 3). The issues about this part of the process were grouped into one theme because this step may cause issues later if appropriate stakeholders are not included. Our participants expressed several problems they have encountered during this stage. The first problem is how to identify stakeholders:

- FG2: "Identification of stakeholders is a vital step. If we exclude someone, they will have bad attitude about our initiative and that can have bad consequences for our initiative. So, we have to identify and include all stakeholders, but the question is how to accomplish that."

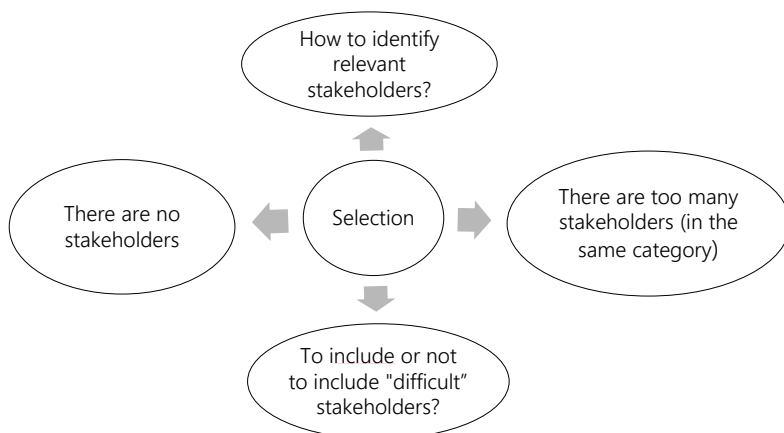


Figure 3. Appropriate stakeholders' selection.

When our participants tried to identify all stakeholders, they faced two different, but related issues. The first was a question of what if there were no stakeholders they could include in the decision-making process, while the second was what if there were too many stakeholders to include:

- FG4: "Let's say we are preparing a management plan and we need to include stakeholders. But the problem emerges when there are no people living on this location."

- FG4: "Our society is still not aware of the importance of participation and the role NGOs have in this, so we do not have civil society organizations. If your stakeholders are private accommodation renters, you cannot ask all of them to participate."

The last issue that our participants mentioned was if they should include "difficult" stakeholders. Under "difficult" stakeholders, they were thinking about stakeholders that would not support their initiative and might cause them problems in the future.

- FG4: "We often have negative perceptions of NGOs because we think of them as activists. Some of them are, but not all. However, they try to correct unacceptable behavior of our public authorities."
- FG7: "After the experts have presented their study, there was a huge disagreement between them and the local community. Since we have encouraged local community to come and listen to this presentation, those experts asked me why I had told people about their initiative and that meeting."

This first step, identification of stakeholders, directs the following steps, namely the involvement of stakeholders in (tourism-related) development initiatives. However, their involvement in the decision-making process brings different problems as well, so they were summarized through our last theme (Figure 4). Our participants mentioned many issues that need to be defined in order to successfully include stakeholders. Those issues were interrelated and included elements like communication, awareness, and management. The participants pointed out the problem of communication process with the stakeholders as the main obstacle in the participative approach. This communication issues included problems from how to gather stakeholders' opinions to how to encourage them to participate:

- FG4: "It is impossible to hear every stakeholder or to get opinion from all of them. We cannot include all private accommodation renters. If we, for example, use questionnaires instead of getting their opinions, we will get answers to our questions. Also, people are not willing to fill in questionnaires, but they prefer to express their opinion in their own words."

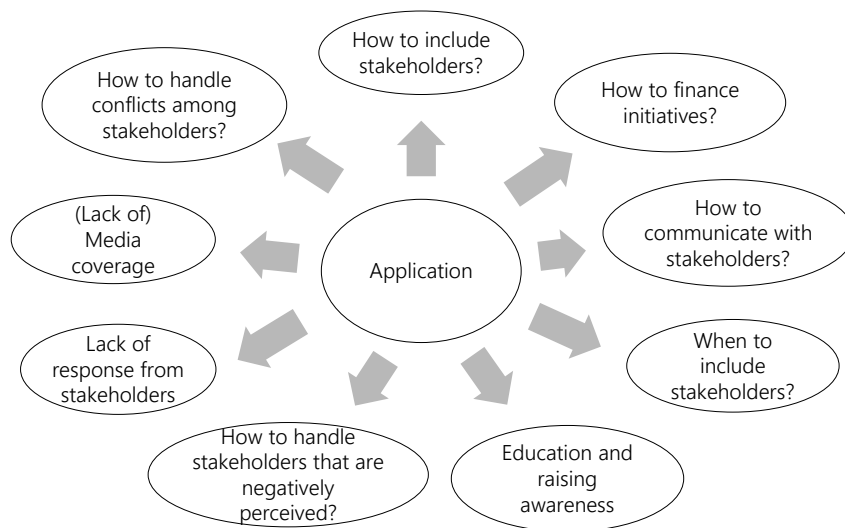


Figure 4. Correct application of a participative (namely bottom-up) approach.

- FG7: "Communication does not include sending one e-mail containing questions and already proposed answers. It takes time and skill to communicate successfully with stakeholders."

Participants stressed that stakeholders often show disinterest, mostly because they lack knowledge about the discussed issue or they were unaware of the importance of the issue. Therefore, they suggested that it could be beneficial to educate them in order to raise their awareness about issues and initiatives you want to include them in:

- FG4: "We need to educate people about certain matters. I am not talking about some kind of formal education. I am talking about media campaigns."
- FG1: "Organization of different educational workshops would be nice. I believe that public authorities should organize workshops to encourage people to participate in the (tourism) decision-making process."

The awareness of the local community may be raised through media influence. However, only few positive examples were mentioned. Participants pointed out that media often presented news in sensational style of reporting, consequently presenting certain initiatives as negative to achieve higher readability rates. Therefore, our participants expressed that people managing initiatives need to possess good communication skills and must learn how to communicate with the media:

- FG1: "Our shoreline cleaning initiative was not promoted through media, so only a small number of individuals were included."
- FG4: "Education does not include lecturers, but communication through media is what matters. It is important to find a newspaper reporter who is willing to cover our initiative and then we can get participation in (tourism) planning initiatives."

Good communication leads to the raised level of stakeholders' awareness on certain matters, and this brings us to the last two issues mentioned by our participants, namely how to manage stakeholders and when to include them. Our participants considered that stakeholders should be included from the beginning if we decide that participation is required for our initiative:

- FG2: "Stakeholders should be included from the start. If they are included in later stages, this could cause different problems and it could even stop the project itself."

Additionally, they pointed out the importance of conflict management skills and conflict management plan. This was highlighted as a prerequisite for handling different stakeholders or dealing with "difficult" stakeholders:

- FG4: "If a stakeholder expresses their opinion, this opinion will be noted but will not necessary be included, especially if their opinion is not in accordance with a certain law or is directly violating another stakeholder group."
- FG2: "We need to include all stakeholders, but we have to be aware that not all of them will agree on a certain matter. Sometimes you just have to make certain compromises to stakeholders. You also need to consider the solution that is best for the community in general."

Our findings suggest that there is no "manual" on how to correctly apply a participative approach to different initiatives that support tourism development, but our results suggest several key questions and activities that are vital for the successful implementation of a participative approach (Figure 5). The first step is its application in tourism planning process initiatives. This approach is not appropriate for solving all issues that arise in tourism destinations. To successfully implement a participative approach for tourism development purposes, organizers need to have a positive attitude about this approach. If the attitude is negative, different activities to change that attitude are needed. Next step in the

implementation of this approach is to identify and select all relevant stakeholders. Our findings pointed out two issues in this process; the first issue was not being able to find any stakeholders, while the second issue was a situation of identifying too many stakeholders. If organizers are unable to identify any stakeholders located in the nearby area (as in case of remote islands or isolated areas), they could, for example, spread their search to include a wider area or focus on different stakeholders that can be indirectly affected or can indirectly affect tourism development. In case the organizers identify too many stakeholders, the first step should be to categorize them and then to identify the key representatives. In this process, organizers should be aware of the fact that there should be a certain balance among the groups of stakeholders. The last step should be the development of conflict management plan and communication plan.

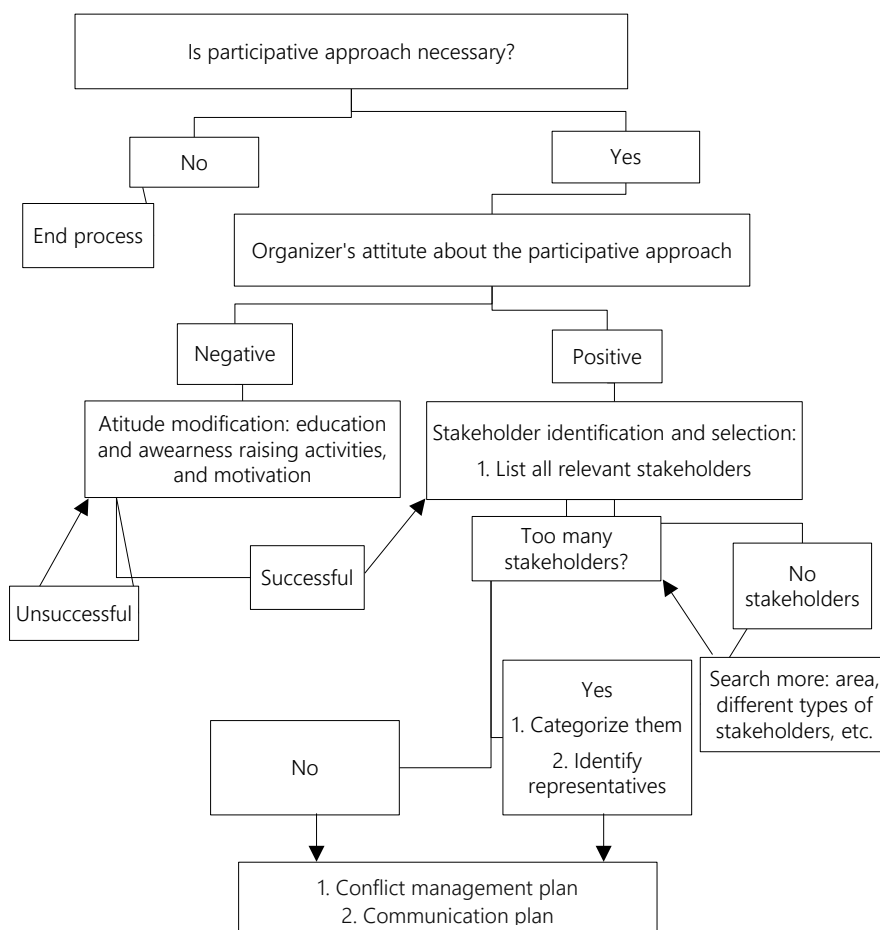


Figure 5. Framework on how to implement participative approach.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper surveyed the mechanism behind the participative approach to tourism development. Stakeholders' participation was considered as key in sustainable tourism development, because it includes opinions and perspectives of the local community. Decisions related to tourism planning are often created top-down because they are made by experts. However, they could be perceived negatively by the local community and therefore they may have negative impacts on different initiatives related to tourism development.

The goal of this paper was to examine and present the findings about the local stakeholders' experiences with participation in (tourism-related) initiatives that support tourism development of the local community. Tourism development research suggests that the application of participative approach is required to achieve sustainability and that bottom-up approach could be a better solution, because the decision-making process is introduced by local stakeholders and this process reflects the opinions that could be used to set up goals and decisions about future local resources. Although the FG participants were all familiar with participation, our findings suggest that the participants do not differentiate among different approaches, namely they did not differentiate between top-down and bottom-up approaches. A question about why stakeholders' participation is necessary and when it is necessary emerged during the discussion.

The main uncertainty the participants mentioned was related to crisis management and interventions. The issue especially revolved around the question of when the intervention was needed immediately. Additionally, the problem was to define which situation is so urgent that immediate intervention is required. A participative approach to tourism development initiatives could make the decision-making process more difficult and may cause additional costs, but they are aware of the fact that currently there are no alternative models. However, in case of ecological crisis, this model may not be an appropriate solution. In addition, local stakeholders may feel excluded. The participation approach requires additional knowledge, skills, and time of those who apply it. Therefore, decision-making entities might decide to ignore it, but this act can cause issues in the future.

Motivation is a vital element that may help with participative approach implementation, because it drives both stakeholders and entities who are conducting those initiative to apply participation. However, when initiatives are organized by intermediators, they could feel the need "to force" people to participate. Therefore, the main question raised was if we can "force" stakeholders to participate. Previous experiences of different crises could also be a strong motivation that encourage people to share their knowledge to prevent future crisis. On the other hand, economic gain, as a motivator could be a sort of a barrier for certain (tourism-related) initiatives that support sustainable tourism development. If a participative approach was included in (tourism-related) initiatives, it usually consisted of two main phases: planning phase, where appropriate stakeholders were identified, and the implementation phase. In the planning phase, the initiator faces two crucial questions: who and when to include. It is vital to include the appropriate stakeholders and the answer to the question who the appropriate stakeholder is depends on the initiative purpose. Our results suggest that there is no formula/manual on how to apply participation. Communication, stakeholder's awareness and knowledge, and good management skill are important for success.

This paper suggests that perceptions and motivation of stakeholders and tourism development creators are important enablers of a participative approach. However, there are

certain limitations of this research. The data presented in this paper were based on the statements collected during FG discussion. Therefore, future research could try to gather more information about this issue applying other types of qualitative and quantitative research techniques. The FG consisted of mostly local stakeholders and, for that reason, this research could be replicated in different countries and regions worldwide. The FG participants included participants with previous experience in tourism planning participation initiatives but participants were from different stakeholder groups which could have resulted in different opinions about certain issues discussed. Future research could focus exclusively on examining the opinions of only one group of stakeholders at a time. The main question of this research was related to the experience regarding stakeholders' participation in tourism planning, originally placing the emphasis on bottom-up approach experiences. However, the discussion among participants was mostly centered on stakeholders' participation experiences in general. Future research could try to narrow those experiences using top-down and bottom-up approaches.

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