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Tourism as a Tool for Poverty Alleviation: A Critical Analysis of 'Pro-Poor Tourism' and Implications for Sustainability

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Abstract

Forecasts of high tourism growth in developing nations, where widespread poverty exists, has led to considerable interest in tourism as a tool for poverty alleviation. Powerful bureaucratic and business alliances have been forged to expand this programme. International development agencies are also turning to tourism as a way of alleviating poverty. This is sometimes termed 'pro-poor tourism' (PPT). Distinguished from other forms of 'alternative tourisms' such as ecotourism and community-based tourism, the stakeholders involved in this enterprise are no less divided. Ideological divisions manifest themselves in the political struggle over how tourism in developing countries should unfold. This paper identifies the different sustainability positions of prominent pro-poor tourism stakeholders and considers the implications for meeting pro-poor and sustainability objectives. Generally, tourism is too often regarded a

panacea without an attendant recognition that, like any other industrial activity, tourism is highly political. As a global industry, tourism operates within a neo-liberal market economy which presents severe challenges to meeting pro-poor and sustainable development objectives. This paper therefore recommends a fundamental re-evaluation of tourism's pro-poor potential in the absence of significant commitment to directly address structural inequities which exacerbate poverty and constrain pro-poor attempts.

Keywords:

pro-poor tourism

poverty alleviation

sustainability

political economy of tourism development

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