Host-Guest Encounters
in Community-Based Tourism

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Abstract

The negative impacts of tourism have been focus of a number of publications and research projects over the last decades. Besides economic and environmental repercussions, social issues are regularly picked up when it comes to tourism in less developed countries. While colonial times have seen an end, the notion of colonialism (or rather post-colonialism) is still an issue in tourism research, especially when it comes to the encounter between what we call host and guest (Smith, 1989) or ‘self’ and ‘Other’ (Said, 1978). This encounter is regularly regarded as empty (MacCannell, 1992), marked by voyeurism and ‘the tourist gaze’ (Urry, 2002) as well as unequal power relations between host (i.e. the exploiter) and guest (i.e. the suppressed). While there may be a theoretical justification for those concepts, there are only few cases providing empirical data and hence connecting theory and practice. Especially in alternative forms of tourism (such as community-based tourism) where the community, hence the local population, should have more say those theories might not be applicable.

Therefore, this research draws a connection between community-based tourism and host-guest encounters. By means of a case study in a village in Northern Thailand, the nature of the host-guest encounter should be discussed to question the applicability of the theories presented above. It is argued that generalisations on tourism encounters in less developed countries (in this case Thailand) are difficult to be drawn and that a number of factors influence the interaction between host and guest.

References