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## Collaborative Tourism Development

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## Introduction

Collaborative partnerships between universities, communities and tourism businesses can be used to enhance workforce development, while meeting human capacity needs in rural, and remote communities. The formation of collaborative partnerships contributes to the solutions of societal problems (Stone, 2015, p.169). In 2019, Vancouver Island University and Jolinaiko Eco Tours collaborated with the Village of Atsiekpoe to assess and improve their existing tourism products. For this research project, the tourism products were evaluated, using Pine and Gilmore's experiential product design framework (Gilmore & Pine, 1998), as tourists are willing to pay more to participate, then to watch others.

## Methods

In order to conduct evaluations of the existing tourism products, researchers participated in the three-signature experiences offered to visitors: a) village walk, b) fishing on the Volta River, and c) basket weaving. Researchers also interviewed members of the community, who are featured in the experiences and local tour guides. These interviews assisted researchers to understand the community's view on tourism and what they want to achieve through the further implementation of tourism products and experiences. A qualitative product analysis was conducted in order to attain the results.

## Results

Using the Pine and Gilmore Model as a framework for understanding, the experiences were evaluated and the results found were: a) cultural authenticity, b) adaptation to more experiential tourism products, and c) continued collaboration between Vancouver Island University, Jolinaiko Eco Tours and the Village of Atsiekpoe. The tourism products offered in Atsiekpoe were culturally authentic; however, the connection between the activities and authenticity were not being expressed to the visitors. The experiences were not fabricated to appeal to visitors, they were part of the resident's daily lives, which in turn made them sustainable and culturally genuine, but fascinating to tourists.

The evaluation revealed that the community had tourism products that were largely based off an observation model. With minor design alterations, products could become more experiential. Some of the outputs of the environmental scan were to implement social media platforms in order for the community to control and share their narrative. Social media also creates opportunities for collaboration between communities and their partners, residents and visitors.

## Conclusion

"Collaboration is a key principle in community-based tourism approaches in most developing countries" (Stone, 2015, p.166). This was essential when conducting an experiential evaluation of Atsiekpoe's existing tourism products. Through the collaboration between Vancouver Island University, Jolinaiko Eco Tours and Atsiekpoe, it was realized that the existing tourism products were both authentic and culturally sustainable. With small adjustments, the activities could become more experiential in nature. As a result of this project, there will be continued collaboration between Vancouver Island University, Jolinaiko Eco Tours and the community of Atsiekpoe.